

**DECOLONISING THE FIGURE OF SOPHIE: A FANONIAN ANALYSIS OF
MARY SIBANDE'S CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTWORKS**

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SUMMARY PAGE

Thesis title:

Decolonising the figure of Sophie: A Fanonian analysis of Mary Sibande's contemporary visual artworks

Summary:

My study is a theoretical intervention of the South African contemporary visual art of Mary Sibande. It focuses on the figure of Sophie representing the maid in three series; namely, *Sophie-Elsie*, *Sophie-Merica*, and *Sophie-Velucia*. The study applies Frantz Fanon's thought to the understanding of the figure of Sophie while emphasising the themes of naming, the human subject, and presence-absence. The theoretical framework of this thesis is a decolonial epistemic theory, which is used as a lens to understand Fanon's political thoughts. I argue that the themes of naming, human subject, and presence-absence are inherent in Fanon's thought. These thematic areas give a better understanding of the existential questions of the figure of Sophie in the anti-black Manichean world. It is important to unpack the figure of Sophie as a Manichean figure who represents the crossing of two different worlds – the white world and the black world, Africa and Europe. The study highlights the importance and relevance of reviving Fanon's thought concerning decolonial contemporary African art and establishing other tools of interpretation necessary to understand decolonial aestheSis. The thrust of this thesis is to deploy decolonial epistemic theory as a theoretical framework to the Fanonian understanding of the figure of the three Sophies that embody the modern/colonial predicament of the figure of the maid and blackness.

List of key terms:

Blackness; Decolonial aestheSis; Decoloniality; Fanon (Frantz); Maid; Fanonian decolonial theory; Modernity/coloniality; Ontology; Sibande (Mary); Sophie.

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PREFACE

When I looked at Mary Sibande's contemporary visual artworks, I saw my mother. I felt a personal connection with the figure of *Sophie*. I began to recognise the importance of understanding how the old colonial and apartheid systems still affect the present, which prompted me to conduct this study on the figure of *Sophie*. The basis for this analysis originally stemmed from my passion for developing tools to decolonise contemporary African art.

As South Africa embraces the Fourth Industrial Revolution toward the future to catch up with the globalising world while trying to come to terms with the post-apartheid present, negotiating new spaces and identities, there is a greater need to uncover and understand the colonial strategies that are resurfacing and being maintained. The big question is: How will these hidden colonial strategies be identified in the modern post-colonial world?

Not only is it my passion to analyse visual artworks, but also to develop decolonial tools to break down colonial barriers for a decolonial new meaning to be born for future generations. My goal is straightforward: To understand contemporary African art from a decolonial perspective or, stated differently, to decolonise African contemporary visual art. To do this, I will apply a decolonial epistemic theory and incorporate Frantz Fanon's thought, determine how to apply these thoughts, and discuss the pitfalls of coloniality as presented in Sibande's contemporary visual art.

The logic underlying the figure of *Sophie* is deeply emphasised: If one understands the "what", the "how" becomes much clearer. By decolonising the figure of *Sophie*, I locate *Sophie* as a "what" to understand the "how". Many of the themes I discussed apply to the understanding of the lived existence of the African colonised being; therefore, the study should also benefit any colonised

beings who are attempting to read an artwork that depicts their lived experiences.

Decolonising the figure of *Sophie* is necessary because, to borrow the words of Sibande, “if people are not raised by a domestic worker then their mother or auntie has worked as one. Therefore, Sophie always hits home when she always evokes the familiar” (Sibande in Meekison 2014). The lived experience of a black person in South Africa revolves around being brought up by parents who worked as kitchen girls or gardening boys, while the lived experience of a white person revolves around being served by these maids and gardening boys.

I will further establish the principles of what it means to exist as a black colonised being in a world that still signals colonial traits: how *Sophie* was developed by the colonial system; how Sibande used it to create something positive; and how it can only end on an aesthetic level unless the current anti-black world collapses. In this study, I am not interested in why Sibande chose silk instead of cotton or what the figure appears to be doing, but rather why specifically she is named *Sophie*, why specifically she is a maid, and why she wears that Victorian dress.

Art always embodies a mimetic function, and it can also be realist. However, in this intervention, art should reflect on the conditions that created the figure of *Sophie*. In this study, I explain what cannot be seen and provide an understanding that is beyond the visible artworks. Fanon’s work reveals how the colonial system created the figure of *Sophie* in a similar way that Sibande created her body of work. The tone of Fanon’s work might jump out of the study mostly because his tone reflects the harsh reality, which allows us to see the truth of what is happening under colonial logic.

However, this study situates the figure of *Sophie* as decolonial aestheSis because Sibande moves beyond the tone of what happened and uses that

tension to create a positive tension. To make us understand coloniality anew, I map the decolonial aestheSis of the positive tension that transcends the extremities of the colonial system that Fanon identified and that Sibande is still preoccupied with.

To study the figure of *Sophie* is to study black existence and black lived experience concerning white supremacy and white privilege. The maid concerns subject matter that has been engaged or has appeared in artworks of a few South African contemporary visual artists, namely Ernest Cole, Steven Cohen, Penny Siopis, Jane Alexandre, and Zanele Muholi. However, none have undertaken it as the centre of the subject matter of their *oeuvre* as Mary Sibande. Sibande's approach to the representation of the maid seems to visually portray Fanon's conception of sociogenesis, which means the black lived experience as it was structurally, socially and racially developed to develop the so-called Negro – or black person to be politically correct. This study represents a black existential critique in the anti-black world. It questions the colonial structures in South African art history, history of the apartheid system, dispossession, marginalisation, and death.

Sibande's contemporary visual artworks provide a critique of racial structures, coloniality, race-class domination and the ontological position of the figure of the maid during apartheid and in post-apartheid South Africa. The figure of *Sophie* represents the idea of a historical problem that still haunts the post-colonial present. As a historical problem of the present, the figure of *Sophie* is a residue of the colonial system of dehumanisation, which was created by Western hegemony to colonise and marginalise the black body, which are still evident today.

Since the world has been colonised and Westernised, the figure of the maid has been positioned in conditions of dehumanisation. This means existing in complexities and contradictions, in-between double lives of the colonial past

and present, in limbo. In the modern/colonial world, the maid as represented by the figure of *Sophie* exists within structural colonial systems that still maintain Western hegemony, questioning its logic, questioning its existence and keeping it in the periphery. This includes the art world: its politics, economy and location are a space of exclusion, discrimination and power tensions that play a big role in collecting, appreciating and understanding art. The art world responds to European aesthetics sensibilities; it is a sensitive and inconsistent space for the colonised being because it can only see the sublime beauty and pleasure without being preoccupied with questions about the politics of being, existence, and self-creation.

Sibande's work touches on various issues and depicts the figure of *Sophie* in different positions of assuming the position of the madam; however, this study focuses on how *Sophie* signifies sociogenesis as the black lived experience under the Fanonian thematics of naming and coloniality of knowledge, the human subject and coloniality of being, and presence-absence and coloniality of power.

Decolonising the figure of *Sophie* is an attempt to understand the sociogenesis of *Sophie* to provide a new understanding of these artworks as a critique of the modernity/coloniality that allows the figure of the maid to delink from colonial institutionalisation. This is achieved by applying the three pillars of decoloniality through theoretical thematic analyses. The pillars are coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being and coloniality of power. The figure of *Sophie* is a metaphor for an invented existence, a stolen life and a human subject whose life is shaped and changed by racial and social constructed factors. Fanon and *Sophie* correlate because both are black in the anti-black world and because the questions that Fanon has been preoccupied with have been about *Sophie*'s existence throughout history.

To speak about the figure of *Sophie* is to speak about something that has already happened – or rather history. Hence, Fanon is still relevant today because the being of the figure of *Sophie* as the figure of the maid is reducible to what she did or did not do. In a similar way, Fanon wrote about being reduced into something you are not. *Sophie* is in the white household to do something – whether it is cleaning or cooking; what is done to her does not matter. What matters most is what she must do. Her humanity does not prevail in the space that she is in but in the work that she does. Her being comes through instructions: *Sophie* do this ... *Sophie* do this ... *Sophie* do this ... In other words, *Sophie* clean the dishes, *Sophie* wash the clothes, *Sophie* feed and walk the dog. She does not come under training, but commandment. Or, John wash the car ... John water the garden ... John empty the bin ... Because *Sophie* is John. It is the act of doing that determines her fate because if she does not do, she will be dismissed. She must be obedient to the madam. There is no relation but only a chain of commands. “*Sophie* do this” means whatever the madam wants needs to get done. Thus, the figure of *Sophie* is just an object in the eyes of the madam. In other words, the Victorian dress does not make *Sophie* a human, she remains an object. If there was a leap, *Sophie* would be human. But, *Sophie* is a keeper of another family while hers falls apart.

Modernity is a project of exclusion and traumatic experiences that reduced the figure of *Sophie* to an object. As an object, the Victorian dress does not provide an ontological leap because the figure of *Sophie* is an intergenerational historical problem that is still problematic in the present with no ontological resistance. She can resist as far as she is an object, but she cannot resist as a human being because of colonial systems that are hidden behind modernity.

The dress that *Sophie* wears comes from the wardrobe of the madam; therefore, *Sophie* is living life in stolen moments. What is seen is the aesthetic embodiment; it is only in the realm of imagination, or what Robin G Kelley (2002) terms “freedom dreams”. Aesthetically, the figure of *Sophie* is a

performative aspect of the freedom of dreams because, in reality, the figure of *Sophie* does not wear a Victorian dress but an apron and headscarf. Even the texture of the apron and headscarf is not silk as silk is an expensive fabric. Silk attracts dust easily and *Sophie's* work is to clean the house of the madam; she must clean the mess and keep the house clean.

According to Stokstad and Cothren (2011:xxix), “there are many ways to study or appreciate works of art. Art history represents one specific approach, with its own goals and its own methods of assessment and interpretation”. Hence, this study takes the form of a theoretical engagement of *Sophie* as the figure of the unthought. Gardner (2011:3) argues that “a central aim of art history is to determine the original context of artworks. Art historians seek to achieve a full understanding not only of why these ‘persisting events’ of human history look the way they do but also of why the artistic events happened at all”. Thus, the role of theoretical intervention in this study is not only concerned with the originality of the context of artworks, but it also reflects on the significance of context and its implications to the existential conditions of the figure of the maid. What was known previously as fine art has evolved into what is known today as contemporary art and so has writing about it. Art is no longer limited within the borders of the canvas, sculptures, and printmaking as what was known as fine art, it requires different ways of studying and analysing.

Although the aesthetic embodiment of *Sophie* is not appealing visually, it is appealing to intergenerational trauma, which Fanon refers to as the “lived experience of the black” (Fanon [1952] 2008). Fanon's *oeuvre* calls our attention to this intergenerational trauma. Today, the relevance of Fanon is more troubling than when Fanon existed; it is the bane of this existence. Fanon spoke about things that are still happening today, it still speaks about the strength of intergenerational trauma and the infrastructure of colonialism.

These fundamental questions do not have answers because they are still being

investigated by a forensic community of decolonial thinkers and Afrocentric thinkers/doers, whose ethical act is that of serious investigation, and this study is in that tradition. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge the following people:

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- I would like to thank God again, thank you for the blessings.
- This study, which falls under the fugitive work the forensic team called ADERN, is a commitment as inspired by Fanon's prayer, "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!"

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND

Mary Sibande's visual artwork is autobiographical and draws inspiration from her family history of three generations of women who worked as maids for white people during apartheid in South Africa. *Sophie* is an ongoing sculptural representation of Sibande's alter ego, which deals with issues of identity, class, race, blackness, labour, and gender as well as politics of space. *Sophie* exists in-between the past and present and can be identified by her bright blue exaggerated Victorian dress, a white headscarf, and a small white apron. The position in which *Sophie* is created and symbolically operates resonates with my understating and the political thoughts of Frantz Fanon who provides a solid conceptual foundation and decolonial framework for this study. Fanon's work is a critical assessment of the master-slave relation, psychology of the colonised, racism and dehumanisation of the black body in the colonial world.

The figure of *Sophie* is a *longue durée* of colonialism who still haunts the present. Therefore, considering post-1994 and the idea of a new South Africa, *Sophie* is not a thing of the past. She can only be a thing of the past if the current world ceases to be what it is because South Africa is structurally still a white privilege and black disposition state.

Sophie keeps the house of the madam clean while hers is ignored, she builds the house of the madam while hers falls apart, she takes care of and raises the madam's children while hers are left wondering. For the madam to exist, there must be *Sophie* – the madam's existence is contingent upon *Sophie's* violated existence.

The protocols of readings and writing to be deployed here are not preoccupied with the figure of the domestic worker, but the maid. The figure of *Sophie* falls

outside the category of the worker because she is a maid. This view raises the power relations to account for ontology. If the figure of *Sophie* were to be a domestic worker, the discourse of rights could have been parallel to her. So, the discourse of rights gets suspended in so far as *Sophie's* being is concerned. However, that is immaterial because what is of the essence here is the ontological question in the realm of decolonial aestheSis from the perspective of blackness.

I want people to see how *Sophie* was developed by the colonial system, how Sibande used it to create something positive, and how it can only end at the aesthetic level unless the current anti-black world collapses. As a decolonial artist and academic in the post-apartheid South African contemporary art field, I want to take art that was made from the negative tension of coloniality and bring it into the light of understanding, why it was made from that negative tension, and why it becomes decolonial aestheSis.

The importance of studying the figure of *Sophie* stems from the hidden structures of racism and coloniality that are still at play in today's modern world. These structures remain anonymous, unopposed and none-situated; they make the European invented version of life the only way of existing. This made it natural to see the black body enduring in disadvantaged conditions, dying prematurely and struggling to make a living. It made it appear as if God created two different versions of life: one for white people and one for black people. Therefore, Fanon ([1952] 2008:83) called it the "Manichean concept of the world", which is the European invented version of existence where life functions differently and things have different meanings. Life, being, existence, work (job), success and access hold different meanings to black and white people.

The life of *Sophie* holds a different meaning to the white madam and the maid, because the meaning that she generates depends on the meaning of their lived experiences. For instance, encountering the figure of *Sophie* would mean something different to a white viewer than to a black viewer; it would evoke

different sets of memories and emotions depending on their different lived experiences, which are shaped by their relationships with the world.

The purpose of this study is to employ close thematic analysis of three of Sibande's visual artworks, thereby arguing that Fanon's concepts of naming, human subject and presence-absence are effective for understanding the figure of *Sophie* as a visual portrait of sociogenesis – the black lived experience. This study contends that although *Sophie* is a powerful representation of the black female in the post-colony, her reduction to a maid allows us to determine how history affects the present and future.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study addresses the problem regarding Fanon's articulation of the concepts of naming, human subject, and presence-absence nexus. These concepts are relevant to enable a process of rethinking and understanding the figure of *Sophie* in Mary Sibande's visual artworks from a decolonial perspective. In part, this entails rethinking the political life of a black maid as it is explored in contemporary visual art using Fanonian lenses. The study investigates whether Fanon's thought in the post-apartheid contemporary visual art discourse are indeed fundamental for understanding the aforementioned issues.

Furthermore, the study investigates how coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being, and coloniality of power built on Fanon's work and elaborated decolonial perspectives on the maid-and-madam relation of no relation and the South African visual art discourse. The study also entails a decolonial interpretation of the terms in which post-apartheid South African realities and historical encounters are explored in visual art. This is concerning the Fanonian meaning of naming, human subject and presence-absence since. Taken together, these issues reflect the positionality of the figure of *Sophie* as a complex figure of

unfulfilled Fanonian dreams that are still located in complex racial problems that perpetuate the black condition.

1.2.1 Research questions

The main research question that underpins this study is as follows: How relevant is Fanon's thought to the decolonial understanding of Mary Sibande's contemporary visual artworks? The three sub-questions that support this question are structured in the following way:

- What does *Sophie-Elsie* signify about naming?
- What does *Sophie-Merica* signify about the human subject?
- What does *Sophie-Velucia* signify about presence-absence?

1.2.2 Research objectives

The objectives of this study are three-fold:

- To explore Fanon's thematic of naming, human subject and presence-absence in relation to the figure of *Sophie*.
- To examine the figure of *Sophie* as decolonial aestheSis by deploying Fanon's thought in a decolonial way.
- To understand how Fanon enables us to think about decolonial aestheSis in the contemporary world.

1.2.3 Research limitations

Mary Sibande is an internationally acclaimed South African contemporary visual artist whose portfolio is too big to warrant one study. This study is written from a theoretical point of view and will not result in an exhibition. The study focuses on *Sophie* in selected visual artworks as a representation of maids as seen from a decolonial perspective through a Fanonian lens. Through *Sophie* as a foundation, Sibande's thinking and ideas are examined closely as they

have a bearing on her understanding and experience with the figure of the maid, its being and subjection. However, the selected artworks subscribe to varying dialogues regarding post-modern, post-colonial and alter-modern discourses (Bhabha 1994; Said [1978] 2003; Spivak 1988), which are situated as decolonial aestheSis in this study. Furthermore, a scope of Fanonian study is very broad with different perspectives and applications, but for this study, I focus on the three thematics from the position of a decolonial epistemic theory.

In the first and pertinent frame, Sibande mostly creates visual artworks based on a black female figure named *Sophie* who is a portrayal of black maids in South Africa in general and in her family in particular. *Sophie* is based on the experience of the three generations of women in Sibande's family who were maids.

The second frame is that this research is neither a biographical study of Sibande nor *Sophie*, but rather a study of the relevant themes about the research question of the study. Thus, the figure of *Sophie* is not only approached or only reduced to visual representation, but it is also approached as ontological text and themes.

The third and last frame is that Sibande continues to create and explore *Sophie*, and that others might be interested in different interpretations. Therefore, the continuation of *Sophie* in Sibande's artworks might impose and project contradictions to the aims and objectives of this study. However, this makes the study a unique contribution as it is examined under the Fanonian lens and from a decolonial epistemic theory. According to this perspective, *Sophie* is decolonial aestheSis. However, the figure of *Sophie* is not only decolonial aestheSis because it deals with black existence, but it is also the themes and in the way that blackness is portrayed that qualifies her as such.

1.2.4 Research rationale

This research is relevant at three levels, which stems from the position that continuous critical analyses of contemporary visual artworks are necessary for society to unlearn the European invented existence. Firstly, it is relevant because I engage the political thought of Fanon within a decolonial epistemic theory to understand Sibande's visual artworks. Although many studies explored Fanon's thought and legacy, very few, such as Maldonado-Torres, Mignolo, Grosfoguel, and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, have engaged him under decolonial thought. Nobody has engaged his thought from a decolonial aestheSis perspective as instructed by Mignolo. The purpose of this research draws from Mignolo's call that Fanon's conception of the black lived experience as sociogenesis is relevant: not only to describe the black lived experience, but also to be lenses with which decolonial aestheSis strategies are applied to the understanding of the colonial creation of the figure of *Sophie*. Mignolo illustrates this relevance of Fanon's thought in decolonial aestheSis discourse in the following statement:

Within the global dimension of the senses, for all living organisms and for every living human body, there is one dimension that is of interest for decolonial thinkers and doers (as mentioned before): the sense-experiences that Frantz Fanon identified as sociogenesis: I am who I am because of the gaze of the other, and that other, is a White other. Sociogenesis is a decolonial concept that evidences the colonial wound; the type of experience Fanon is describing in the experience of the racialized subject, the wounded subject, because racialization is always a classification and a ranking, and that classification is not embedded in "nature" but is man-made (Mignolo in Gaztambide-Fernández 2014:201).

This study is a response to Mignolo's call for taking Fanon's thought as a strong interlocutor for analysing contemporary visual artworks, specifically decolonial aestheSis. However, what Fanon describes as sociogenesis is approached and divided under the Fanonian thematics of the naming, human subject, and presence-absence nexus. A decolonial approach to these thematics provides enough understanding of the black lived experience of the figure of *Sophie* as

described by Fanon. The figure of *Sophie* as the representation of the maid is the embodiment of the colonial wound, a problem of racial history and a result of the European invention of existence.

Secondly, the research is relevant because very few have engaged Fanon's thought regarding the understanding of art in general and the figure of *Sophie* in particular. Therefore, a gap exists in the literature as most studies focus only on locating Fanon's thought and *Sophie* mostly as post-colonial discourse. Furthermore, the question addressed in this study is how Fanon approached the existential question of the racialised black body in an anti-black world, and how this is represented visually by the figure of *Sophie*. This study applies Fanon's political thoughts and makes us grapple with the concepts of naming, human subject, and presence-absence *qua* decolonial epistemic theory in the understanding of the black existence in the figure of *Sophie*.

Thirdly, the research is relevant because it builds upon the proposition of Fanon as a decolonial philosopher who interprets decolonial aestheSis. More importantly, this study contributes to the understanding of Fanon's thought as a lens to interpret decolonial aestheSis strategies in the figure of *Sophie*.

Therefore, this research is relevant and inspired by the need to position Fanon's thought as decolonial lenses that can enable a new interpretation of the European invented conception of existence and concepts in existence. Decolonial perspective as a new paradigm shift is an open frame of knowledge from the periphery under which different thinkers can be adopted to undertake a decolonial project. In this research, Fanon's thought are located under the decolonial perspective umbrella to analyse the figure of *Sophie*. There is still a gap for other scholars to research the decolonial perspective and other thinkers to the reading of contemporary visual artworks that comment on blackness. Hence, I strongly believe that this study will be considered a strong foundational engagement in both Decolonial Studies and Visual Arts.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature on the subject of domestic work, the figure of the maid, maid and madam, maid and master as well as the figure of the maid and the modern world is vastly increasing, from academic research to activist movements that are responding to the feminist call of placing “domestic work” in the “spotlight” (Brites 2013:424) of public critique (Hirata & Kergoat 2007; Rosaldo & Lamphere 1979). By critique, I mean to interrogate this complex field of domestic work with its social, economic and political implications on women in general and black women in particular, as well as its meaning to the black body and the white body in the global modern world. As such, various scholars have engaged the field of domestic work in relation to different themes including migration, economy, race, ethnicity, postcolonial theory, gender, borders and child upbringing in different parts of the world (Anderson 2000; Colen 1995; Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2007; Poblete & Tizziani 2013, Solís 2009), as it is also shown by Brites’ survey titled Domestic work: issues, literature and politics (2013). Brites’ survey focuses on domestic work in Brazil, or rather it is initiated from this viewpoint, it offers a global view and status quo on the growing literature and politics of domestic work. According to Brites (2013:428), in “2011, the International Labour Organisation – ILO registered that, in developing countries, 1.3% of the women were occupied in domestic employment: in Asia, this index was 1.2%; in Africa, 1.4%; rising to 5.6% in the Middle East; and 7.6% in Latin America, featuring exponential growth”. From these statistics two elements that shape most research on domestic work as a “predominantly female activity and the result of an intersection of inequalities” (Brites 2013:428) have been deduced. However, the growing research on domestic work reveals more perspectives that can offer an understanding of the modern world as well as the figure of the domestic worker—the maid. The argument is no longer implying that only black women occupy the role of being a maid who act as a servant subjected to servitude for

the white madam. Being at this scene of thingification as a black subject meant being a prop in someone else's performance as this is evident in western art in the artworks of Edouard Manet's painting *Olympia* (1863) and *Children in the Tuileries Gardens* (1861-2), *Portrait of a Woman in a Blue Turban* by Eugène Delacroix, in Jan Steen *Dutch* (1626-1679), in Jan Verkolje, "*Johan de la Faille*," (1674), in *Elizabeth Murray, Lady Tollemache, Later Countess of Dysart and Duchess of Lauderdale with a Black Servant* (1651) by Peter Lely (1618-1680).

The figure of the maid exists in different geographical regions, various academic fields, and thematic spheres, including the relation to the themes such domestic work in relation to Marxist theory "surplus-value", of value and surplus-value (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2007:201, Costa 1972), as well as women and work Heleieth Saffiotti 1979 (Brites 2013). Ávila (2009) investigated the relation of being paid and unpaid as a domestic worker and how this contributed to the understanding of domestic work today. As such, Durin (2006) and Montemayor (2008) deal with domestic work and indigenous women in Mexico, Rollins (1990) and Colen (1995) conducted work on black maids in USA and politics of inequality as argued by Milkman, Reese and Roth (1998). Delving in the field of domestic work and the rights of the maid from the position of Bolivia is Quezada (2013) and from the position of Argentina it is Tizziani (2011) who "have recalled the union histories in conservative entities and they bear a strong disciplinary nature, whether in political terms or worker training" (Brites 2013:432). The figure of the maid is a displaced figure as such it is an ontological migrant who is not covered by any form of law in the world, and if the maid is covered by any labour law or union structures, that only means those structures and union are new. It is only until in recent times that the institution of domestic work is recognised by some few laws as a work that contributes to the economy, even if it is at the value of the life of the maid. This is derived from the following statement about domestic work and labour law.

The way the domestic workers union is regarded is not exactly a view constructed on studies of about the union movement in Brazil, but rather a view that identifies in the ex-associations and in the unions a movement of re-resistance and resistance of the domestic workers. Furthermore, we face this movement of re-resistance and resistance as a producer of knowledge. (Bernardino-Costa 2017:63).

The domestic workspace is a space of constant contestation and resistance, in as much as it is a space of remembering and forgetting. It is an institutionalised space that has become a scene of thingification in which black subjects become erased as human being and be reproduced as property of whiteness and objects of white desire. Thus, the “contemporary challenges of reproduction in postindustrial societies broaden the circle of discussions and place domestic work as the central point to understand the work ontologically and epistemologically not only of the woman, as Solís (2009) would have it, but society as a whole” (Brites 2013:445). Domestic work has become an institution that interconnects societies with its families, politics, and culture. It is a past that continues to haunt the contemporary modern world that borders on antiblackness. As such, “[d]omestic work, which is deeply entrenched and characterised by decades of unfair and exploitative conduct, has run its own historical course and has been labelled as one of the most neglected sectors of the country’s labour force”, structures of law and human register (Cock 1980b; Namukwambi & Shindondola-Mote 2010; Preston-Whyte 1982; Tonkin 2010). As a neglected wound and haunting past, domestic work is haunting because it is linked to coloniality, apartheid and slavery. What is common to domestic work is its relation between the maid and the madam, maid and master, and madam and master.

Regarding the figure of the maid, Sun (2009:57) looks at the idea of domestic workers in Post-Mao China by exploring “some of the crucial ways in which a controlling gaze is facilitated and naturalised by the visualisation of place and

space". For Sun, the figure of the maid is an embodiment of many political layers as a figure of no agency and space as well as body politics. On the other hand, the maid-and-madam relation is a historical relation of non-relation that has been scrutinised with critical eyes from various perspectives. The aspect of non-relation stems from there being no normal human relationships between the maid and madam except for their positions as servant and madam. In her novel *The Madams*, published in November 2006, Zukiswa Wanner (2006) introduces and explores the idea of the black madam and a white maid in a South African context, which is an oxymoron from the Fanonian perspective. As Biko ([1978] 2004:20) argued, "basically the South African white community of [madam] is homogenous. It is a community of people who sit to enjoy a privileged position that they do not deserve, are aware of this, and therefore spend their time trying to justify why they are doing so". This justification stamps only one logical truth – that there is only one madam, and she is white. The maid-and-madam relation is also explored in a cartoon called *Madam and Eve*, which deals with global and local political satires and relations of servitude.

The lasting importance of domestic workers in post-apartheid South Africa is poignantly demonstrated by a character called Eve Sisulu who, more than three hundred years after Krotoa-Eva's death, was to become the main character in an often hilariously funny and politically relevant cartoon strip. The concept of Eve and her Madam was born when American Stephen Francis together with his South African-born wife visited his in-laws in Alberton in Gauteng. Francis was fascinated by the dynamics between his mother-in-law and her maid Grace. The 'yelling and complaining of both parties' sparked an idea, and in the early 1990s he joined forces with two pioneers of satire in South Africa, historian Harry Dugmore and graphic artist Rico Schacherl (Jansen 2019:2).

As such, the *Madam and Eve* relation and domestic work has become a topic of interests that keeps appearing in different epistemic spaces.

Post-apartheid South Africa is characterised by ongoing endeavours to establish equality for all citizens, including marginalised employees. Despite 25 years of democracy, South African society remains one of the world's most unequal societies (Meiring, Kannemeyer, & Potgieter 2018). This inequality is partly evidenced in the ongoing over-representation of women, particularly black women, in low level and unskilled occupations, including that of domestic work (De Villiers, & Taylor, M. (2019).

The review of this study proves the lack of literature that interprets and positions Sophie as decolonial aesthetic to critique this over-representation. In the historical context of South Africa, the domestic work as an institution of servitude begun "[s]hortly after their arrival at the Cape in 1652, Maria and Jan van Riebeeck, the Dutch 'founding father' of South Africa, employed a Khoi girl [Krotoa] to take care of their children" (Jansen 2019:1). As such, the crossing of the old and new different worlds is embodied within the domestic work institution as it was and still is the case in South Africa.

The fact that Krotoa was both the first black nanny to work for a white family at the Cape and an important go-between figure, made me realise that the millions of black women who have worked in white households through the centuries since then are in their own ways also intermediaries, pivotal figures in the interracial South African contact zone. Like Krotoa, they are 'outsiders within'; people with an exceptional knowledge of both black and white culture" (Jansen 2019:1).

It is being in this in-between world that most South African visual artists depicted and interrogated in their artworks in pre-apartheid and post-apartheid such as, Irma Stern *Maid and Uniform* (1955), Hugo Naude *On the steps, Groote Schuur* (Circa early twentieth century), Dorothy Kay *Cookie*, Annie Mavata (1956), Penny Siopis *Tula* (1994), Jane Alexander *Pastoral Scene* (1995), Zanele Muholi's series '*Massa and Minah*' (2008), Steve Cohen *Cradle of Humankind* (2012) and *Maid in South Africa* (2005) and Willie Bester

Domestic Worker in Red Dress (2010). These artists are also discussed in Irene Ensle Bronner's PhD thesis titled *Representations of domestic workers in post-apartheid South African art practice 2016*, that contributes to the same conversation Ena Jansen's *Like family: domestic workers in South African history and literature 2019*. Marais and Van Wyk (2015) contribute to this by expressing that domestic work merit acknowledgment as noteworthy supporters to, and enablers inside, the world economy. This material together with the voices of the maids, through interviews, biographies, and artistic representations contribute to the same growing literature on domestic work in South Africa. Pre-democracy inquire about divisions in domestic work in South Africa has highlighted the components that contributed towards sentiments of persecution experienced and related to long hours worked, low compensation and racial imbalance (Cock 1980b; Gaitskell *et al.* 1983). More ater, considerations have investigated the effect of least wage enactment within the household work division (Blaauw & Bothma 2010; Dinkelman & Ranchhod 2012), encounters inside the household work relationship (Bosch & McLeod 2015; Galvaan *et al.* 2015) and variables impacting the choice for proceeded work within the household work segment (Marais & Van Wyk 2015). These recent studies contributed to an in-depth understanding of the state of the figure of the maid encountered in the workspace, and the components that shape the nature of this maid and madam encounter.

The case of South African domestic work is not a unique situation because the same structure of the same colonial institution of disempowerment and suspicion of the maid in the workplace (Donald & Mahlatji 2006) is evident in other countries. This colonial institution is centred around the common figure of the maid whom without the institution of domestic work suffers. The ill-treatment, violence and rape that the figure of the maid receives, in which she does not receive the comfort she is creating for the madam and her family to such an extent she does not enjoy the food she cooks not even its leftovers

(Galvaan *et al.* 2015). On the other hand, the idea of open communication and fair relation between the maid and madam is something that is explored through interviews, conversations and with participants (Marais 2016).

There are many readings and understandings of Sophie as the maid and of the madam relation. Sibande has her own understanding of Sophie as her own artistic creation and its position as the historical representation of her family. According to Sibande:

Sophie's story, what she is, that she has multiple stories to tell, as she has ... she is layered with stories of how she became a maid and where's she coming from and why is she a maid, she did not choose to become a maid you know, it's because she was limited as a Black woman, her individual story is multiplied into the story of many women who are similar to her all sharing her race (Sibande in Khan 2015:224).

Sophie is explained further in an artist statement released by Sibande (2013). Scheffer, Stevens and Du Preez (2017) contend that "Sibande's portrayal of Sophie, where she is continually engaged in fantasy and articulates trauma at the site of the body, is consistent with hysterical representation". Corrigan (2009:1) argues that "within the heart of white South Africa, domestic workers have been the ultimate victims of a skewed social and political system thus their occupation embodies the vexed racial dynamics in this country". In one of the interviews, Zyomuya (2010:1) "speaks to visual artist ... Sibande about freedom, politics and alter egos".

The nature of the thematic lenses that have been used to interpret and understand Sophie positions Sibande's work within the post-colonialism, post-modernism, and post-structuralism realm. This is evident from the way Sophie dresses because Sibande uses clothing as a means of expression to create ambiguity of the dress. As noted by Corrigan (2010c:1), "Sophie's dress is the most expressive element of her art and the fiberglass sculptures appear like

mannequins". Sophie is not just covered in clothes, rather her clothes are a combination of a Victorian dress and maid's uniform.

For Dodd (2010), Sophie represents hybridised qualities as suggested by "the Victorian postmodern [dress]" that evoke "counter-archival imaginings". Concerning these qualities, Nuttal (2013) focuses on "Sibande's fiberglass figures as exploring a new language for destabilising the racialisation of skin, one that sees skin as protective cladding, not as the site of wounding". These hybridised qualities of Sophie are emphasised by her skin colour, the Victorian dress and the uniform that she must wear as a maid since "the uniform is seen as acting as a material exercise of discretionary and disciplinary power of inscription" (Naidu 2009:128). Meaning the uniform acts as a "postcolonial masquerading" (Khan 2015) technique, which pushes Sophie to the position of being simply a body for servitude and submissive inclinations. Therefore, the Victorian dress and the uniform deeply signify the attached objects of discipline and subjection (Naidu 2009). It is these many layers that lead to most white writers of Sibande's work to rather refer to Sophie as a domestic worker than a maid.

It becomes evident that Sophie could never be understood in the eyes of the white subject because "the use of the black body by white artists was itself a contentious issue" (Barson & Gorschlüter 2010:21) of perpetuating misrepresentation and appropriation. There is enough literature about the figure of the maid; however, what is important to notice is that Sophie is complicated by Sibande because of her many layers (see Hamilton 2009; Light xxi; Wanner 2006). These different interpretations, which come with social and political implications that influence the way Sophie is seen and treated, position her in a state of transition and demand. However, Sophie is not only found as a cleaner in the spaces of the madam, she also appears in many galleries and museum collections as an "important acquisition that captures the imagination and fills a hole in the collection" (Brown 2011; Jolly 2013). In this regard, Kruger

remarks on Sophie as a figure in transitioning as she argues, “there is both a thematic and formal transition occurring” (Kruger 2013:1). This moment of transition is further emphasised by Krouse (2013:1) as he remarks that “Sibande is moving on from a familiar character in her oeuvre and, by exploring a historical event, is digging for deeper meaning”. In this moment of transitioning, Mabandu (2011:1) argues that “Sibande has been thinking about breaking free of her iconic image – the black superwoman in blue and green gowns”. Sibande has been interviewed many times, featured in many academic theses, which are still growing in numbers, and articles and blog posts are still being written from various perspectives (see Corrigan 2009; Khan 2015; Meekison 2014; Thurman 2014). The growing literature on Sophie suggests that the issues of the figure of the maid still need a critical eye to dig deeper to understand the political and racial implications that are at play in the construction of the maid. However, despite the growing literature on Sophie from the various perspectives, this study focuses on Sophie-Elsie, Sophie-Merica, and Sophie-Velucia as decolonial aestheSis. These three figures of Sophie have not received any critical attention; thus, this study interprets them from Fanon’s political thoughts and decolonial epistemic theory as decolonial aestheSis. To understand Sibande’s visual artworks as decolonial aestheSis is to understand the figure of the maid as a problem of history in the present.

1.4 RESEARCH METHOD

Upon reflecting on the problem of blackness and blackness as a problem for research it became apparent that there is still a gap for research methodologies that can enable researchers to research and write about the black lived experience. Specifically, black researchers who want to write about blackness as a live experience that can offer critical and intellectual tools and concepts for the understanding of subjectivity and being of the black subject in the modern world. Thus, it becomes clear there is a difference between writing about blackness and writing blackness. For this reason and the objectives of

this study I adopted a qualitative methodological approach, “thematic analyses” (Alhojailan 2012; Boyatzis 1998; Javadi & Zarea 2016) because of its difference from various approaches including content analyses (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bonda 2013). This study is preoccupied with the process of fleshing out themes to engage in a relationship between visual art and theory about blackness. Understood from different thematic positions blackness has been a zone of life and death, and as such different themes can be applied to read its meaning. This meaning of blackness is teased out by Sibande’s representation of the figure of Sophie and Fanon’s thought. In this study, thematic analyses merges the two by applying decolonial epistemic theory to develop a theoretical framework of this study. The theoretical framework of this study is foregrounded on three themes, namely, naming, human subject, and presence-absence. After being distilled to frame a theoretical lens, these themes were further unpacked in the empirical chapters where the figure of Sophie was analysed. Thematic analyses provide a conceptual scaffolding and thematic grid that framed the whole layout of the study. By deploying thematic analyses, it influenced the layout of the study, where firstly thematic concepts must be distilled, secondly, applied to the interpretation of the figure of Sophie, and thirdly deduced to findings. The theme of naming was used to thematize Sophie-Elsie in chapter 3, human subject to thematize Sophie-Merica in Chapter 4 and the theme of presence-absence to thematize Sophie-Velucia in Chapter 5. The figure of Sophie was concluded as the representation and example that led us towards decolonial aestheSis as the conclusion in Chapter 6. Thematic analyses were suitable for this study because it framed the “necessary modification or adjustment based on the views emerging during the course of the study” (Creswell 2009:65). A thematic analysis as a methodological approach of this study allowed for a thematic grid and conceptual scaffolding that weaved themes in a horizontal and vertical thematic equation. This thematic equation was deployed in the horizontal and vertical format as follows: Sophie-Elsie + naming + coloniality of knowledge, Sophie-

Merica + human-subject + coloniality of being, and Sophie-Velucia + presence-absence + coloniality of power which are = decolonial aestheSis. Thematic analyses are suitable for this study because it allowed three elements to come together to tell a story of one subject—blackness. 1 being the figure of Sophie, 2 being Fanonian thought and 3 being decolonial epistemic theory. These three elements enabled for a decolonial engagement of Sophie and Fanon’s thought. Thematic analyses proved to be like any other research methodological approach that is captured by western colonial epistemic ideology, in this study it was fused with a decolonial methodological approach, ‘analytic negation’. This fusion of methodological approaches meant that blackness as an invisible zone of the ontological invisible human beings can be made visible through themes, art objects and theory.

It is for these reasons that the research methodology to conduct this Fanonian analysis consists of two methods, namely, “thematic analyses” and “analytic negation” (Mignolo in Gaztambide-Fernández 2014:202). From this methodological fusion, blackness is a theme under which black people are seen and located. Thematic analyses are suitable because it falls under qualitative research methodology and the figure of Sophie “encompasses many dimensions and layers” (Leedy & Ormrod 2005: 133) that were unpacked using three themes. Fanon defined the social development of a black colonised person as it is predestined by colonial systems under colonial and racial themes as sociogeny. Thematic analyses as a methodology reveals characteristics that are suitable for the purpose of this study as it deals with the lived experiences of the black body in an open manner. There were various methods under a thematic analyses that could have been selected, but the study deploys “theoretical thematic analysis” (Joffe & Yardley 2003; Meier, Boivin & Meier 2006). Theoretical thematic analyses was deployed because this study analyses Fanonian themes, namely naming, human subject and presence-absence. Therefore, as a methodological approach, thematic

theoretical analyses allowed an analysis of themes based on the position of the figure of the maid. Thematic analysis is suitable because it does not come with prescriptions and methods but rather “pays greater attention to the qualitative aspects of the material analysed” (Joffe & Yardley 2003:56), which later gives a deeper understanding of the figure of Sophie. It is a methodology that focuses on analysing and examining themes as well as theory. This study is about themes and concepts that are linked to particular patterns that resonate with Fanonian thought and Sophie, which requires an interpretation as decolonial aestheSis.

This study is embedded in the contextual relationship between visual artworks and text about the lived experience of the figure of the maid that signifies decolonial aestheSis. Sibande’s produced her visual artworks in the post-apartheid era in South Africa, whereas Fanon produced his text during the colonial era in Algeria, France in 1952 and 1961, but both demonstrate and constructs decolonial aestheSis strategies. Sibande and Fanon are geographically and historically apart from each other: the one person is a visual artist, the other a writer. Therefore, the combination of their ideas portray the lived black experience of the figure of the maid from multiple perspectives. Fanon’s thematics was deployed concerning Sophie to affirm his relevance to decolonial aestheSis in South Africa post-1994 contemporary art discourse. The study analyses themes by merging the Fanonian concepts of naming, human subject and presence-absence with the understanding of Sophie. These are entrenched in a text that is embedded in language. Fanon ([1952] 2008:1) states that he “ascribe[s] a basic importance to the phenomenon of language. That is why I find it necessary, to begin with, this subject, which should provide us with one of the elements in the coloured man’s comprehension of the dimension of the other. For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other”.

Thematic analysis is used since this study is aimed at identifying themes that are embedded in textual and visual language that provide the figure of Sophie's comprehension of the self about the white subject by deploying decolonial aesthetic strategies. Thematic analysis is suitable for this study because of its ability "to uncover patterns of meaning in information [sic] accounts of experience" McLeod (2011:145-147). This is illustrated in the following ways: Firstly, I extract the themes of naming, human subject and presence-absence from Fanon's thought and from various publications on decolonial epistemic theory. A thematic analysis allows for a new way of studying and interpreting themes, which makes it suitable for the purpose of this study. Secondly, I apply these themes to the visual analysis of Sophie in the series of Sophie-Elsie, Sophie-Merica and Sophie-Velucia while filtering themes that do not relate to the focus of this study using Fanon's concepts as a lens. Thematic analysis is a suitable method because it is necessary to analyse selected themes that are in Fanonian thoughts and in the figure of Sophie.

Since my intention is to theorise about the figure of Sophie, I did not conduct an interview with Sibande about the works I selected. I want Sophie to speak for herself and I want to see what the figure of Sophie means from a Fanonian perspective. However, because thematic analysis on its own is not adequate for the purpose of this research study, "analectic negation" is deployed in collaboration as a "decolonial methodology" (Mignolo in Gaztambide-Fernández 2014:203). According to Mignolo, decolonial methodology analytic negation:

[I]s, not the dialect negation of the thesis, antithesis, synthesis, but the geo and body-political negation. The analectic negation comes from memories, sensibilities, skills, knowledge, that was "there" before the imperial contact with European education. Once European education intervened, whatever creation and conceptualization of creativity was there became trapped in the category of, for example, art and folklore. The analectic negation tells you first that art

and folklore are two Western concepts, not two differentiated ontologies (Mignolo in Gaztambide-Fernández 2014:202).

Thematic analyses proved to have limits of its own – its approach to data analysis does not stretch as far as allowing the themes to speak properly and in critical detail about black lived experience. Besides, analytic negation proved to be a strong combination with thematic analysis because it enabled the themes that were derived from Fanon’s thought to speak about the black lived experience as represented by the figure of Sophie. Analytic negation as a decolonial method allowed the themes of naming, human subject, and presence-absence not only to be derived from Fanon’s thought, but it also employed these themes to the figure of Sophie. It further allowed the use of memory from the perspective of the lived black experience. In other words, the thematics of naming, human subject, and presence-absence were not only applied from the Fanonian point of view, but their meaning and effect on the person’s being and ontology were also considered. In such, it is useful to examine how Fanon and Sibande articulate naming, human subject, and presence-absence in the post-colonial era through the lens of analytic negation.

1.5 OUTLINE

This study consists of six chapters that unpack the thematics that bears relevance to the understanding of *Sophie* as stated in the Research Objections section.

Chapter 1 provided background and the relevance of what the study entails, which was unpacked under the following subheadings: problem statement, research question, research objectives, research limitations, research rationale, literature review, research method. The chapter concluded with an outline of the study.

Chapter 2 explores Fanon's thought on the concepts of naming, human subject and presence-absence concerning three pillars of decolonial epistemic theory, namely coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being, and coloniality of power. Fanon's thematics are used to explore and conceptualise the effects of coloniality on the lived experience of the black body. Combining the decolonial perspective with Fanon's thought results in the development of a theoretical framework that allows me to analyse *Sophie*, namely, Fanonian decolonial theory. Fanonian decolonial theory enables a decolonial analysis of the figure of *Sophie* and the art that is produced from blackness as a critique of modernity and its hidden effects.

Chapter 3 focuses on the analysis of *Sophie-Elsie* from the Fanonian concept of naming, which plays a big part in determining who *Sophie-Elsie* is and what it means to exist in an anti-black world as the figure of the maid. This chapter explores how in the essence of naming as a colonial logic, *Sophie-Elise* is absent as a human being and is subjected to tools of dispossession as the figure of the maid. This chapter examines how naming manifests as a tool of reducing the figure of the maid to an object, and how *Sophie-Elsie* signifies colonial history and decolonial aesthetic strategies of coloniality of knowledge.

Chapter 4 analyses *Sophie-Merica* from a Fanonian conception of the human subject. The concept of the human subject is examined as it is defined by the colonial tools of domestication. This chapter examines the thematic of the human subject about domestication, based on structural violence in which 'symbolic' and 'epistemic' violence function at a level that is not physical. From the Fanonian perspective, this chapter scrutinises how the notion of the human subject signifies domestication in the house of the madam as institutional space, and how *Sophie* signifies decolonial aesthetic.

Chapter 5 analyses *Sophie-Velucia* from the Fanonian concept of presence-absence. The issue of presence-absence is examined as something that is signified and embodied by the Victorian dress. Fanon refers to the Victorian

dress as a 'white mask'; it is a metaphor for whiteness and the European epistemology that have been used as a blueprint to construct the modern/colonial world. From a Fanonian perspective, this chapter considers what it means for *Sophie-Velucia* as a black body to wear the Victorian dress, and how the dress signifies decolonial aestheSis.

Chapter 6 concludes the study and provides some recommendations to further possible studies on decolonial aestheSis.

CHAPTER 2

Decolonial Epistemic Theory: A Fanonian Thought

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I apply a decolonial epistemic theory as a theoretical framework to understand Fanon's thought. Fanon's thought are relevant for accounting the understanding of the black body in an anti-black world as a figure who emerged in a world scared by coloniality. The thematics of naming, human subject and presence-absence are inherent in Fanon's thought. These are examined in this chapter and applied in chapters that follow. I explore these Fanonian themes in relation to the three decolonial epistemic pillars, namely coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being and coloniality of power in three ways.

Firstly, I deploy coloniality of knowledge and use Fanon's concept of naming. I discuss how European names given by white masters reduced the black body to property of the white subject by transforming it from *subject* into *object*. Secondly, I deploy coloniality of knowledge and use Fanon's concept of the human subject. Here, I discuss how the European definition of human subject denies the black body as a human subject, and how the life of the black body is chosen for in absentia. Thirdly, I deploy coloniality of power and use Fanon's concept of presence-absence. Here, I discuss how the white subject embodies ontological presence while the black body elicits presence-absence. The focus of my argument is to demonstrate that presence-absence is fundamentally the result of the hidden logic of colonialism, the continuous anti-black world or modernity, that the existence of a black subject is questioned even today. I wish to explore the relation between these themes in this chapter; more specifically, their significance when applied to the black body from a decolonial perspective.

2.2 COLONIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE: FANON ON NAMING

Naming signifies coloniality of knowledge because it is a weapon of subjection grounded on racism and oppression. Naming is defined by European colonial logic that rewrites the black body to the category of namelessness, rootlessness and unbelonging. It reduces the black body to property and to a figure who exists in anonymity. Coloniality of knowledge constructs naming as authority and power that alter the identity of the black body. Fanon articulates:

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in other objects. Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye (Fanon [1952] 2008:82).

Fanon reveals that the coloniality of knowledge defines naming as a moment of turning the black body into a state of objecthood. To be labelled and named black, savage, monkey and non-human is the result of naming that transforms the black body into non-being. The coloniality of knowledge proves that to be named as a black body is to be erased – it is to be taken out of the world and be restored back again. Thus, creating blackness as a condition is defined by the coloniality of knowledge; it is justified by positioning the black body as an object and the white subject as a human who can own this object. In this sense, the black body is trapped in a loop of an ontological black hole as an object amongst other objects.

Existence in the world holds different experiences because the black body is ontologically named to be a slave and the white subject to be a master. The black body is only seen as being socially uplifted and civilised when named by a white culture, by being taken out of its ontological sphere and being restored in the non-ontological sphere – in blackness. From Fanon's position, naming is

also something hostile because of the power it possesses. Naming holds the same effects as the look of a child (the white gaze/racial gaze) as a hostile relationship that is carried on by generations and generations of whiteness through looking and naming. In the regard of the hostility of being looked at and named, Fanon was looked and named as he articulates:

“Look at the nigger! ... Mama, a Negro! ... Hell, he’s getting mad ... Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilized as we ...” My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it’s cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother’s arms: “Mama, the nigger’s going to eat me up” (Fanon [1952] 2008:85-86).

After being looked, Fanon was named, which propelled him far from whiteness and his own identity as the mystified figure. When the black body is named, it is separated from the white subject and justified as a mystical figure without identity. The black body was named using colonial and Christian names because the white subject could not pronounce the names of black people.

Bringing the black body closer to whiteness is not by any means trying to make the black body white as whiteness is fundamentally for the white subject. The intention is to keep the black body closer to whiteness only as a property of whiteness that can be used for cheap labour. Fanon was looked at and called a Negro; hence, the black body remains in a state of anonymity, rootlessness and non-belonging. This is an absurdity of naming that “illustrates the complexity of categorisation in South African” (Johnson 2011), which separates the owner from the object. This categorisation exhibits many colonial traits for the black body, which proves that the owner-and-object asymmetrical relation will never be experienced by the white subject.

In “the wider social situation” (Gibson 2003:46), it is essential “to begin with a description of the generic colonial situation” (JanMohamed 1983:2). When the

child screamed out in fear and reacted to looking by calling Fanon a Negro, it reduced Fanon to a black body, which is seen as more dangerous than an animal. This holds true even if Fanon ([1952] 2008:99) can argue that, “the white man was wrong, I was not a primitive, not even a half-man, I belonged to a race that had already been working in gold and silver two thousand years ago”.

The white subject looked at the black body and saw nothing but a strange thing that lacked any possibility of having a proper identity. In this encounter of estrangement, the white subject named the black body and rendered it as a figure of obscurity and moved it out of its being. The black body experiences the world in strange ways because it is named through the eyes of the white subject as a mystified body. Hence, in the eyes of whiteness, “it is always the Negro teacher, the Negro doctor” not just simply a teacher or a doctor (Fanon [1952] 2008:88). By assuming a profession, the black body enters a borrowed space. In art and other fields of knowledge, the black body is always located behind a white subject who is supposed to baptise it and qualify it as a property of the system.

By being named, the black body is positioned closer and further away from the white subject. As Fanon (1958 [2008]:102) articulates, “and so it is not I who make meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me”. Fanon reveals to us that naming can take two folds: naming as identification and naming as mystification. In other words, to name equals to identity; or to name equals to mystification. Writing from the position of blackness, Fanon encountered a different world; one that excluded him. Naming, therefore, is a tool of Manicheanism that splits the human subject into definitions, categories, taxonomies, and ideological conceptions. Naming in this Manichean context of the world is a tool of exclusion and concealing; it excludes the black body from the humanity and conceals its identity by giving it a racialised identity of the black.

It is important to note, however, that names form a big part of our language and culture that form our identities, which become the mediator between the world and the body. A world without names is a world without language – a world without language is a void and a world of non-existence. The black body is positioned in a world of no language, a world of non-existence, because naming is the benefit of language. However, concerning names Derrida tells us:

[N]o racism without a language. The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words but rather that they have to have a word. Even though it offers the excuse of blood, color, birth – or, rather, because it uses this naturalist and sometimes creationist discourse – racism always betrays the perversion of a man, the “talking animal”. It institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes (Derrida 1985:292).

Derrida reveals that naming gives meaning to the world and that racist names form a racist world; in other words, the ability to name is a position of power and naming has the power to create. Naming those who were unnamed brings them to visibility by naming them to life. However, according to Stratton (1999: 80), naming is “one feature of the frenzy of the visible layers in the new making-visible of the social, and the stimulatory transformation of its contents into spectacle”. Out of nothingness, it creates something, like an artist giving meaning to her or his found object by upgrading it to the level of aesthetical meaning. It is argued here that, in an abstract sense, we live in names or words.

Naming reduced the black body by turning it into many things that are qualified by coloniality of knowledge. The black body is always given European names for the sake of making things easy for the white subject to call, but it also reduced it to an animal, a criminal, a thing. However, contrary to this reducing aspect of naming the black body, it expands the white subject to a position of a sovereign subject who is closer to be God. Naming expands the ontology of the white subject by positioning it in an unquestionable position that gives it authority to the rituals of naming and owning others. According to Schechner ([1988] 2003:138), “any ritual can be lifted from its original setting and

performed as theatre – just as any everyday life event can be”; meaning naming the black body becomes a form of a ritual of whiteness that can be deployed to reduce the black body as flesh. “In that sense, before the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh’, that zero degree of social conceptualisation that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography” (Spillers 1987:67). The ritual of naming can be a tool for ontological reconfiguration that renders the black body as only a flesh that contains evil. The black body is only reduced to flesh that covers the body of the figure because it is not regarded as a human body but the flesh of a black thing.

Through this ritual of naming, the black body is “as a sign of moral inferiority, black individuals [who] become interchangeable units of an evil group” (JanMohamed 1983:269). Naming as a colonial ritual renders the black body to flesh by positioning it to the “locus of confounded identities” (Spillers 1987:65). From Fanon’s observation, the black body is named to have no authority and power while it is located at the receiving end of being named arbitrarily. The black body has proven to be long-standing and durable and it “presupposes the element of coloniality” (Quijano 2008:181). Ontologically, it raises some scandalous questions to have the black body at the receiving end of coloniality of knowledge as something that does not hold any power and will to exist: to exist is to name, and to name is to exist. However, naming should be approached differently as the black body becomes an embodiment of something created aesthetically. The black body becomes “an aesthetic of repetition and it is precisely this aesthetic that underlies the logic of the serial whole and its relationship to the fragment” (Ndalianis 2004:69). And, this whole is colonialism and racism. This does not allow the black body to rename itself by reflecting and questioning its lived black experience by not conforming to the aestheSis of colonial imagination. Therefore, it is essential to state that naming is the authoritative position through which the white subject assumed

the position of being more human than the other. The capacity to name is regarded as a defining factor that keeps the black body in an existential limit.

Naming rendered the black body non-existent to a different position than the white subject because the white subject is not affected by the coloniality of knowledge and their existence is not questioned. If the black body is affected by the coloniality of knowledge, it is often perceived or presented as not being robbed of people's rights, as nothing illegal or violating any form of human rights. It is not surprising, therefore, that this intervention positions the coloniser as the one who knows how to civilise the black body as it knows what the black body is and what it wants. The ontological position of the black body is hell, which is informed by the coloniality of knowledge that justifies the "colonial situation" (Fanon [1961] 1990:73, Grosfoguel 2007:220). It is through the prisms of naming in visual art that blackness was affirmed to the "zone of nonbeing" (Fanon [1952] 2008), which can be affirmed to the zone of being. It must be made clear that the zone of being is not the one that is deprived by Western colonial logic; it took a different position as seen from the black body named.

The naming that confronts the black body is that they are not named as humans, but are named as black – a thing, void, and embodiment of evilness. This positions them to be objects and animals who are at the margins of the configuration of the human subject as the black body is defined by modernity and its colonial logic. According to Blankenberg:

Throughout the history of the modern world system, its economic and political peripheries have consistently faced the charge of either a lack of modernity or a "lag" in achieving it. The need to rethink modernity and to question its uniqueness has therefore often been the result of being defined along the lines of this deficit as "less than", "not yet", or simply "non"-modern (Blankenberg 2016:369).

The black body is named by the mere logic of racism and coloniality of knowledge; the politics of naming are not informed by humanity as far as the

black body is concerned. Colonial logic means that naming puts the black body outside humanity and gives the white subject a right to exercise dominion over the black body. It should be understood that “this common liberty is a consequence of [white] man’s nature” (Rousseau 2012:7). Therefore, naming directed towards the black body is subliminally constructed for the reason that it serves the coloniality of knowledge and distorts the existence of black people. The denial of the black body’s existence is the very form of logic that claims to stand on the moral ground of humanity. When the black body is located outside humanity, its presence does not apply, meaning that the black body cannot be reconciled with humanity, but rather its darker side of suffering and death. The black body is entangled in the formation of the coloniality of knowledge, which can lead the black body to the position of renaming and recreating itself. Through naming, there will be no end or fixed reality, but the continuous demand for ontological affirmation.

This ontological affirmation cannot be made by the mere gesture of letting the “subaltern speak” (Spivak 1988) or by bringing forth previously hidden and marginalised narratives of the black body. The recognition that is needed by the black body is free from recognition and colonial logic of “races” (Mamdani 2007). In this case, the ontological recognition made by the black body is grounded on the question: who or what is a human at the level of naming; to what is the power of naming at the level of signification and ontology? They render the figure of the black body insignificant to the level of irrelevance and push it to the margins and entrapment using language. For the black body to be significant, they need to name themselves to produce counter-history. The history is evidence of the negativity naming embodies because of “colonial histories and millenary struggles ... [that] confront the social, political, epistemic, racialized and existential effects of these histories” (Walsh 2007:231). Naming is not just naming for the sake of naming; it is naming that reverses colonial logic.

To name is to will; to will is to exist. The power to name is possessed by the white subject who can name the black body anything they desire. By naming the black body, the white subject gets to live life the way they want; however, black people are still suspended between life and death as an ontological slumber through technologies of naming and coloniality of knowledge. This still binds the black body below the ontological status of a human being as it maintains the precarious side of modernity and its camouflaged gory logic of white supremacy that can give and take life at will based on politics (Agamben 1998). Therefore, by calling for naming that comes from the self, the black body calls for counter-history and liberation of the human from the death of oppression, for naming that speaks of the black body as a state of recognition and not as a state of oppression. For black people to be recognised ontologically, they should not be recognised by name given by a white subject because their ontological status should be named in their terms.

In Fanonian thought, naming is a tool to reveal and conceal, erase and immortalise. The aspect of naming is a political and social reconfiguration tool of the history and knowledge of the black body, which is an endless loop of an existential crisis that keeps the black body subjected to names, definitions, and categories. There are no men in isolation – everyone is connected to everything or something at the level of subjugation. One is located in some form of socio-political name, definition, and category. However, naming does not only operate at the socio-political level, but also operates at the level of the coloniality of knowledge. Naming is supposed to be a grammar of articulation and mediation between people of different cultures. Biko ([1978] 2004:24) argues that naming is “a game at which the ... [white madam] have become masters is that of deliberate evasiveness. The question often comes up: ‘What can I do?’”. Although naming in a racialised context evokes different effects, meaning and consequences, if observed deeply, names are more like a statue of a dog that is chasing its tail. Being named by the white subject as the other

signifies the fact that “identities are partly produced in the gaze of the ‘Other’” (Stratton 1999:16-17). Naming as politics has resulted in naming being a political act. The black body is caught up in what I term a ‘schizophrenic reality’ between the realm of being named and unnamed.

In reaction to the coloniality of knowledge, the black register is based on what the black body is named rather than what it is. Being named ‘black’ is a trap that is designed to keep the black body in a constant state of negation and namelessness. Being named black becomes a name without a name. The limits of racialised naming positions the black body in a state of constant ontological temporality, and to be temporary is to exist within a given amount of time; it is to live a “stolen life” (Moten 2018a:xii) on borrowed time.

The life of the black body is stolen by being named as an object; in other words, it can only exercise subjectivity freely at the level of dreams and performative gestures. Therefore, being black in blackness for the black body is to be “blurred with the enthusiasm of surreal presence in real time” (Moten 2018a:ix). In a surreal time, the black body is trapped in fantasies and playful gestures while sleeping or working hard to be like the white subject. It is as if, the black body “is trying to get something done before time runs out” (Schechner [1988] 2003:9). At face value, naming might not seem so deep and violating against the human subject, but when engaged from a position of coloniality of knowledge, naming is not just a weapon of exclusion but fundamentally a subliminal hand of subjection. It is a fundamental hand of subjection in a sense that it is a hand that suffocates the black body with names congested of attributes of coloniality of knowledge.

The name given to a person when they are born has a deep and sentimental meaning. This given name signifies something great in life or a moment in the life of the parents or life in general as it affects the family. Their name becomes a time capsule and information or cultural carries with great significance, as a signifier of the agency. If naming is such an important aspect of the human

identity and it can have negative implications that portray the black body as a non-human, it is then worth to examine it under a racialised context in “most commonplace and compelling forms of such identities, namely religion, nation, class, gender, race, and civilization” (Cannadine 2013:3).

The ontological position of being a white subject gives the power to name and the privilege to be human. The question of paradox arises when the white subject possesses the power to name as a human subject itself. Clearly for the black body in an anti-black world, naming will always be a tool of marginalisation that is based on the coloniality of knowledge. It is in this question that the black body who as a victim of naming is closed outside the human subject under the wrath of coloniality of knowledge. Hence, the question of the human subject is discussed in the following section.

2.3 COLONIALITY OF BEING: FANON ON THE HUMAN SUBJECT

One of the colonial questions that has been underestimated is the question of who or what the human subject is. Thus, as defined by the Eurocentric register, part of being human is considered to have history, make art and be able to think in westernised ways. The human subject “is what brings society into being” as Fanon ([1952] 2008:1) articulates, which is part of a larger community that shares the same values. If the human subject is what brings society together, it is interesting to think about what kind of a human a society builds, especially a racist and oppressive society. According to the European definition of the human subject, to be a human being is to be white and being human is a political question of ontology. The human subject is left only for the white subject to tell a European narrative of the world, where the black body is ontologically a “nonbeing” (Fanon [1952] 2008:82). It is, therefore, important to admit and note the ontological distinction between the black body as a figure (non-human) and the white body as a subject (human). The black body is located in the zone of the non-human as flesh. Flesh is just meat with no bones,

and meat with no bones lack structure. Bone structure is what gives character and definition to what something should look like and what it is: it is to be identified as something.

Fanon wrestles with the question of what it means to be human as a black person in a racist colonial world and what it means to be flesh. The racist colonial world positioned the black body behind the wall of the human subject while living no language to articulate the colonial structures that resulted from the coloniality of being. For many decades, the black body has been interpreting and making sense of existence in the world through the eyes of the colonial master. According to Fanon ([1952] 2008:1), “the black is not a man”, meaning the black body is not human; therefore, it is located outside the European human subject as something that the project of modernity needs. In the empire, for the to be a human subject there must be a non-human flesh. In this regard, Spillers (1987:65) has the following to say, “my country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented”. The human register is epistemologically and ontologically a conceptual constellation and elements that constitute being a human being in a racist colonial world.

Fanon ([1952] 2008:82) states that the black body is “sealed into that crushing objecthood ... [to] turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was liberation, running over [the] body suddenly abraded into nonbeing”. Fanon articulates how the black body is crushed and sealed into the level of nobody by the supremacy of the white gaze. The black body is not a figure in its own accord, but according to the racist gaze of white supremacy where the subject resides. As a thing with no possibility of being human, the black body is rendered invisible as pointed out by Fanon:

[R]unning over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye (Fanon [1952] 2008:82).

The burden of non-being is inscribed onto the black body to position it as an outsider in the register of the human subject. The actions, arrogance, and look of the white subject does not see the black body as a human subject. According to Fanon ([1952] 2008:83), “overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself”. These frames border on the notion of being human and of being non-human. The black body is in a different position where the ontological atmosphere is toxic to the body to the level of disfiguring the body beyond generations. It is as if animals and objects have more ontological validation than the black body.

The black body is in the space of Manichean delirium where “the body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty” (Fanon [1952] 2008:83). The black body is a figure of conflicted feelings and experiences of schizophrenic alternative reality as “a shadow” (Sibande in Khan 2015:226). It exists between the self and the white subject. Fanon shows us how the black body was turned into a shadow of the human subject in the following way.

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up (Fanon [1952] 2008:86).

The fear of the young boy shows what the black body is according to the white gaze, which is an outsider in the category of the human subject. When the boy shouts to his mother, “Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up”, it shows that by his appearance Fanon is already outside the category the human subject, ontological to be a thing amongst things. Being outside the category of the human subject, the black body is “defined by catalogues of deficits and series of lacks, lacking history, lacking writing, lacking souls, lacking civilisation, lacking responsibility, lacking development, lacking human rights and lacking

democracy” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:4-5). Furthermore, the black body lacks aesthetic sensibilities; therefore, it lacks the right to be a human subject.

The black body is positioned outside the category of the human subject as a non-being, including the making and reading of its artistic expressions and historical position. The black body has been positioned as a figure who does not deserve to be part of the society of humans as human beings. As a non-human figure, the black body has been looked at, used to labour, and has distorted ontology and erased its history for the pleasures and benefits of the white subjects; “their attention was a liberation” (Fanon [1952] 2008:82), which points out that the black body has no ontology without the look of the white subject. The attention of the white subject is like a look of a master and slave; the look of a white subject versus the look of a black body. The look of a black body “is fundamentally a decolonial humanistic expression that is opposed to the paradigm of war linked to coloniality” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016:35) and the look of whiteness that justifies the black body as something outside the category of the human subject.

Fanonian thought is a theory of expressing humanistic conditions from the periphery with a “disapproving attitude and stance on cultural identity and consciousness” (Harris 2005:210) that comes with the European category of the human subject. It is, therefore, fundamentally important to investigate the aspect of the human subject as a point of reference and departure while mapping the conceptual road map of the Fanonian thought of this topic. The Fanonian thought comes from the zone of no ontology, it comes from his conception of the human subject that is set to illustrate what it means to exist from the position of non-existence; how to speak from the position of speechlessness; how to think in the positionality of thoughtlessness; how the position of death becomes the affirmation of a new life; and how the seen becomes the unseen.

The experience of being seen and unseen as a human subject is the predicament that the black body is trapped in, which Fanon ([1952] 2008) refers to as “the fact of blackness”. The fact about blackness is that it is the category of the ontological non-human subject that continues to be reproduced by colonial systems, which suggests that there is a huge difference between the white subject and the black body. According to Malik (2000:156), “the differences between Western and non-Western cultures are rationalised through non-Western peoples being defined as the ‘others’, distinguishing solely through their antagonism to the dominant image of the self”.

The Fanonian human subject is aware of this fabricated logic of difference that can act as a “tactical maneuver to expand both the public and aesthetic spheres to create conditions for an ethical engagement with a difference” (Van Niekerk 2007:1). Writing from the position of the non-human is to be aware of this grammar of non-being. Fanon diagnosed the colonial world as a place that projects Manichean delirium over the black body as a non-human subject. Fanon experienced Manichean delirium when a white child did not see him as a human but just a “Dirty nigger!” (Fanon [1952] 2008:82). Fanon experiences the aggressive power of the racist look of the subject who changed his being into non-being. He speaks of the look that has the power to change the world and that defines who the human subject is. The white gaze is a powerful look of creation as well as destruction. The white subject uses the look to create the world. The definition the white subject as a human and the black body as a non-human operates on the level of coloniality of vision and coloniality of language.

Coloniality of vision and language are based on seeing is disbelieving and seeing is ruling. As much as the white gaze can see that the black body is a human because of biological body attributes, it rather creates another version of the human subject that does not recognise it. The white subject can choose to believe or not believe what it is seeing. The black body, therefore, embodies

the disrupted ontology and identity as it has been articulated by Fanon. The black body as the non-human subject appeared in the world and pervaded with the will to locate a significance in things, its soul loaded with the desire to achieve the meaning of the world, and afterward, it was an object amidst different objects (Fanon [1952] 2008:82).

The black body is in a position of being altered into a state of thingification. The look of the white subject is the look of bad faith and pretentiousness; it defines the black body as a non-human subject. Fanon writes that the black body came with the will to find meaning in the relationship with another thing in the world as a human subject. This relationship is not a relationship of having authority over others and other things in creation, but it is a relationship that intends to grow humanity, it provides the human subject with ontological identity.

As a non-human subject, the black body is turned into a thing by the European episteme that positions it in a space of pain and loss. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:34), “the life in the informal settlements (shacks) in South Africa provides a good picture of a hellish life as an underworld, coloniality of being where human beings live in electrically unearthed shacks, unprotected from lightning”. As a non-human subject, the black body is a different object in its state of objecthood. Other objects were objects in their state of original objecthood, but a black body is a converted object. In that, Fanon argues that “the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man” (Fanon [1952] 2008:83) as a non-human subject. The look of the white subject is not only the look that creates the human subject, but it also destroys it. By being destroyed by the look of whiteness, the black body “constitutes the second category of being, which emerged as the ‘Other’ within Western thought and colonial encounters” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:18). It is in this way of seeing that we can look past the humanness of the black body to justify its ontological position outside the human subject. The white gaze is an unwarranted look of freedom of existence; it pushed blackness to the level of the void.

The white gaze is the racist look of difference, in that, it is a look of hate, disgust, death, denial, damnation, and surveillance over the black body. The white gaze of difference is a look of reduction in that it reduces the lived experience of the black body to a lack of history and reduces the human ability of the black body to an animal and a thing. Writing himself into being from the position of the black body, Fanon resonates or falls victim to the white gaze and the paradox of perception in the racist look of difference. The human subject defined by the white gaze is problematic in that it positions the so-called Others, that is, the non-white people as objects that can be named and unnamed, objects of curiosity and knowledge, which means that the black body only has meaning under the scope of the white gaze.

To be defined a non-human subject is to be in blackness. Perhaps it may appear on inquiry that blackness is in some degree painful by their natural operation, independent of any associations whatsoever. I must observe that the ideas of darkness and blackness are much the same; they differ only in that blackness is a more confined idea (Burke [1958] 2008:143). Blackness as an idea also manifests through the white gaze of subjection over the black body as the non-human subject. The white gaze is the look of taste and “taste belongs to the imagination” (Burke [1958] 2008:22). Through this look, the black body and its objection become entangled with the piercing look of nothingness and it becomes nothing. The white gaze, therefore, seems to hold the ability to grant life and take life at will in the black body. Sometimes the white gaze does not have to take life physically, but it can strip the presence of life in the black body by disfiguring its ontology. In simple terms, blackness is the result of the white gaze, which is a look of death and an eraser.

For Fanon to exist as a black person is to be in the “zone of non-being” (Fanon [1952] 2008:82), the zone of the erased from the category of the human subject. To exist as a human is to have an ontological infrastructure as a human. Therefore, the subject is a signifier of existence and the black body is

a signifier of non-existence. The question of the human subject is disrupted when the black body claims existence. The black body becomes a site of existence that is seen ontologically when the unseen becomes seen again. To see the unseen is like seeing the dead – it is a spooky experience for the white subject as well as for the figure. The spooky experience and the spookiness of the unseen being seen are well portrayed from the position of the white subject. The black body as the site of non-existence and non-humanness can be qualified with Fanon's prayer: "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (Fanon [1952] 2008:181). To question is to have the ability to think and question the conditions that position the black body in the category of non-existence and as a non-human subject. To question as a black body is to theorise about existence, but outside of existence. By questioning we realise that the systems of living and oppression do not apply in the same way to the black body as to the white subject. There is no accountability for the black body as a non-human subject.

The look of the black body as a non-human subject is that which is being looked at and looks back at the white subject to make it "feel the shock of being seen" (Sartre 1951:13). The shock of being seen is not as haunting as the shock of being unseen. To see the self but not be seen by others evokes feelings of existing in a ghostly and spooky dimension. The spooky dimension of blackness keeps the black body in a state of invisibility and non-existence. In the case of blackness, according to Burke ([1958] 2008:145), "blackness is but partial darkness, and therefore it derives some its powers from being mixed and surrounded with colored bodies. In its nature, it cannot be considered as a color. Black bodies, reflecting none, or but a few rays, about sight, are but like so many vacant spaces dispersed among the objects we view". To be non-existent as a non-human subject is to be ontologically absent while being physically present. The physical presence does not constitute being human

and being seen by other humans as human, but it could open which is seen as present to many studies and associations that can render a different ontology.

The white gaze is shocked when the Fanonian gaze looks back because it is not expected to. However, according to Burke ([1958] 2008:145), “when the eye lights on one of these vacuities, after having been kept in some degree of tension by the play of the adjacent colors upon it, it suddenly falls into a relaxation; out of which it as suddenly recovers by a conclusive spring”. To look back is to see that you were being looked at. The aspect of what you look like and who you are comes at play on the black body as a fundamental binary of the existential exclusion. In reaction to the colonial project, the black project is based on what the black body looks like rather than what it is – a human being. To look like something does not mean that one is that thing; to look like something depends on the positionality of the looker and how the looker wants to view what it is looking at. After the gaze comes association, after association comes subjection in the case of the black body, and after subjection comes its damnation.

In this regard, race not only tells what the black body outside the category of the human subject looks like, but most importantly it also prescribes how it must be looked at. JanMohamed defines race in the following way:

[R]ace as pivotal to the relations in a colonial society to provide a phenomenologically accurate description of the colonial experience and to avoid two types of distortions. One view misrepresents reality by pretending that racial differences are unimportant in colonial society and this need to embarrass or concern us; while the other view distorts the world by perceiving everything in terms of class conflict and this becomes callous to the complexity of lived human experience (JanMohamed 1983:7-8).

Race, which is an artificial concept created by white people to dehumanise black people, is qualified from the white gaze that fails to recognise the black body as a human body as its base. To deal with the black body is to deal with white invented issues. As Fanon says, “the black man’s Soul is the white man’s invention” (Fanon [1952] 2008). Under this white man’s logic of invention, the

black body is delinquent in the scale of being and delirium in ontology; thus, the black condition comes with no vocabulary and the concepts of race help articulate the black body as something that is present and absent as a human subject.

2.4 COLONIALITY OF POWER: FANON ON PRESENCE-ABSENCE

The first two thematics of this study carved a conceptual position for the theme of presence-absence in the racist anti-black world. For the black body, presence-absence means multiple appearances and disappearances based on the race factor and coloniality of power. The presence-absence referred to here is beyond the physical appearance – it means both the physical appearance and the ontological appearance “in the presence of the white man” (Fanon [1952] 2008:25).

The race factor divides the world into a Manichean structure to “occupied space” (Fanon [1952] 2008:82) as something present and absent. The black body occupies a strange space in the world, a space whose presence rejects the presence of black bodies. The white subject occupies a different existence by imposing its presence in various ways such as being present in law, publishing, art, and education to list four. The black body exists “far off ... [its] own presence” (Fanon [1958] 2008:85), which culminates to its presence-absence as a non-human subject. Presence-absence for the black body evokes many different experiences of being absent while being present. For Fanon, the notion of presence carries some colonial traits, which due to coloniality of power, render the presence of the black body as absence. This manifests in two different kinds of presence, namely presence and presence-absence. As a colonial subject, Fanon articulates the dichotomy of presence-absence in the following way.

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored ... The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is

cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up (Fanon [1952] 2008:86).

Fanon describes how the aggressive white presence denies the presence of the black body as pure presence. His description tells us that according to the white gaze, represented by the little boy, there are three kinds of presence. The first is presence of the white subject, which is complete because it is the presence of the only human subject. The second is presence of the non-human, which represents the animals, the environment, other objects and beings that are not a black body. The third is the presence-absence of the Negro, which is a presence of something different that is worth less than the two kinds of presence.

The Negro presence-absence is pinned to the black body rather than the human presence. It is as if no more than one presence can occupy the same space at the same time because the white subject carries its own presence that is unquestionable while the black body carries its own limited presence-absence. Hence, wherever the presence of whiteness sees the black body, it gives it a name and association. As a Negro, this presence-absence of the black body pushed Fanon ([1952] 2008:87) to say, "I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my appearance". In other words, the presence-absence of the black body is a precarious presence given by the white subject. The presence-absence of the black body is overdetermined by whiteness; meaning any tool and technique to complete the infrastructure of whiteness must be assumed. For the black body, due to its appearance as the embodiment of blackness, its presence is absence. If to be black is to be overdetermined from without, it means existence for the black body is reconfigured for the sake of the white subject.

Judging from this precarious presence-absence, the black body can be said to suffer from what I term a schizo-racial schema, which splits the black body into two. However, this is not the split of “double-consciousness” (Du Bois [1903] 2016) but a split of double presence. This is a result of the fundamental ontological question: “What does it mean to suffer?” (Wilderson 2008:100) because different presences evoke different types of suffering. It can be answered simply: to suffer is to have the presence-absence of “the black man in his blackness” (Fanon [1952] 2008:3). Thus, the presence-absence of the black body is the embodiment and a symbol of suffering which “is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty” (Fanon [1952] 2008:83). Being present as a human being pushes the black body to engage in an endless state of looking for self-affirmation and self-presence in a post-colonial anti-black world.

The presence-absence of the black body in the world suggests a strange interaction and ontological development of uncertainties that are qualified by “denegrification” (Fanon [1952] 2001:83), which alludes to the absence of the black body. In denegrification, existence is a matter of survival in which the black body dies a slow death. It is a process of separation of the black body not just with itself but with life, because to be a black body is to be in the zone of death.

Bodily experience in an anti-black world comes with the responsibility of being present, seeing, being seen, and staying alive. Fanon ([1952] 2008:84) writes, “I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors”, which means to be alive in the black body is to assume responsibility and conflicts, which are alien to the white body. In existence, the black body is “in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him” (Fanon [1952] 2008:83). It is locked in a constant struggle between presence and absence because the black body in an anti-black world is delirious at distinguishing which moment its absence comes into being through the

presence of the white subject because “in the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema” (Fanon [1952] 2008:83).

The modern world is a white world that is not designed to allow the black body to develop as a human subject in an anti-black context. Therefore, being present as a black body is to be a stranger in the world. As a stranger in the world Fanon ([1952] 2008:97) writes, “between the world and me a relation of coexistence was established”, but this coexistence is not made for the black body as it embodies different experiences to the white subject. The black body is a stranger in the world; it is in the unknown world. This world does not know the presence of the black body as it knows the one of white subjects because it only has a grammar of existence for the white subject. Fanon experienced this presence-absence. He writes, “as a slow composition of myself as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world” (Fanon [1952] 2008:83). For Fanon, the presence-absence of the black body in the world is not a matter of free-willed existence, but it is rather a survival existence already defined for black people.

Presence-absence in blackness means for the “Negro to whiten himself and thus to throw off the burden of that corporeal malediction” (Fanon [1952] 2008: 84). The anti-black world is an auto-machine that operates as a factory that whitewashes everything including other human beings who are not white. The presence-absence of the black body in the world is a presence of existing “on the world”. It differs from the presence of the white subject, which is the presence of existing “in the world”; the world populated by coloniality of power. Being “in” and being “on” the world embody different levels of presence. Being “on” the world means you can be removed anytime while being “in” the world means you can move anywhere you want at any time; therefore, it is a position

of being a global citizen. In order for the black body to be able to move in the world, it must lose its blackness and become a subject who exists in whiteness because blackness is a place no one would like to remain in ontologically. The presence-absence of the black in whiteness is not the same as being white and having presence in whiteness. Presence in whiteness is to be as civilised as the white subject, for presence-absence in blackness is a curse and burden for the white subject to civilise this uncivilised thing. The point is that blackness as a “void of Presence, cannot embody value, and void of perceptivity, cannot bestow value. Blacks cannot be. Their mode of becoming the being of the NO” (Wilderson 2008:98). To be civilised is to exist in a “corporeal schema” (Fanon [1958] 2008:83) as a mode of becoming the being of the “yes” in which is to exist a complete life in a position of not needing any ontological development from the world.

To affirm the presence-absence of the black body as moving in the world, Fanon (1958 [2008]:84) argues that “below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historical racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by ... other, [but by] the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories”. Fanon argues that being on the world for the black body is different from the white subject and to be the black body is to exist in a predetermined life. This practice is a strong colonial tool of rendering the presence of the black body through the coloniality of power in books, scholarship, science, and philosophy as the production of truth and knowledge (Haraway 1988; Hinsley 1981:87; Lutz 2007; Stepan 1993; Stocking 1987).

The existential entry for the black body is predetermined by the white subject over the coloniality of power that keeps power structures invested to maintain white supremacy. To qualify this, Fanon ([1952] 2008:84) writes, “assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema”, under which Fanon developed what he called the

“historico-racial schema”, which has to do with the subjugation of the black body under the colonality of power. It should be noted that the power dialectic between the world and the black body is still closed ontologically even though the historico-racial schema is open.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:34) further asserts the presence-absence by stating that, “under colonialism, colonized Africans endured hellish life experiences informed by existing radicalized hierarchies of power that prevented any mutually respectful relationship between black colonized Africans and white colonizers”. In dealing with the colonality of power, Baldwin (1998) deals with the experience of being the first black body to stay in a Swiss village where his presence was absence. Being present as the black body renders the double presence of being present and absent at the same time. This caused Baldwin to write about the presence-absence as a black body in the Eurocentric presence:

The cathedral at Chartres, I have said, says something to the people of this village which it cannot say to me; but it is important to understand that this cathedral says something to me which it cannot say to them. Perhaps they are struck by the power of the spires, the glory of the windows; but they have known God, after all, longer than I have known him, and in a different way, and I am terrified by the slippery bottomless well to be found in the crypt, down which heretics were hurled to death, and by the obscene, inescapable gargoyles jutting out of the stone and seeming to say that God and the devil can never be divorced (Baldwin 1998:165).

According to Baldwin, the black body is a strange phenomenon in the world but without the phenomenology of presence. Baldwin captures his experience of being absent in presence with no grammar of articulating why he felt the way he did and why he was treated the way he was treated. In the architecture of building and space, he saw the meaning of its presence to the white villagers. It did not have the same presence to him as he was the first black body to appear in the Swiss village. The villagers’ presence was not tainted by the presence-absence of black people until Baldwin showed his face in the village.

The villagers did not know Baldwin, or they were aware of Negroes but had not seen one before. Of course, Baldwin came from a world that recognises the encounter between the white subject and the black body. Baldwin knew the effects of racism, its experience as “a way of maintaining biological differences among people” (Nuttall & Mbembe 2008:43). He knew the presence that the white subject has that he as the black body lacked. Although he knew what a racial insult was, the villagers only knew one presence of their white world with the grammar of white articulation and its presence.

Regarding the operating apparatus of racism as presence, Aldridge (1992:1) says, “racism depends upon a collective mindset [*sic*] and behavioral syndrome to systematically deny people of color any kind of persisting equality except that of being equally exposed to racism”. Fanon, in a similar manner as Baldwin, writes from the position of being a stranger in a white world. The world is paved with Eurocentric presence that “the West assumes it is a hermetically sealed cultural entity ... the task is to find transcultural permeability as a means of resolving cultural and political dilemmas ... rather than the static edifice of anthropological culture” (Mirzoeff 1999:25-26). It is covered in the carpet and furniture of the empire. The black body exists in a constant state of seeking its presence-absence in the world, its “consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness” (Fanon [1952] 2008:83). The more the black body seeks its presence, the more it becomes absent; the more it pays attention to the white body, the more it gets lost and disappears.

The presence-absence of the black body in an anti-black world is always entangled with navigating in a world constructed from the paradigm of estrangement apparatus. Through this paradigm, the black body constantly struggles to be recognised in an anti-black world (Wilderson 2008:98). Its body loses its ‘corporeal schema’ through estrangement that erases the black body’s ontological presence, which is the data or history the body has collected. A body’s ontological presence defines it and gives it an identity. A ‘corporeal

schema' is important as it can unify the body with the world or divide the body with the world and self. In some spiritual discourses and dialogues about reaching enlightenment, it is good to create a gap and detach from the world. The element of detaching from the world involves perceiving being attached to life through material things. Fanon ([1961] 1990) calls for the black body to distance itself from the presence of the colonial racial world of the white subject.

In this sense, Buber's theory of relation fails to account for the black body because, according to Buber (1937:4), "when a primary word is spoken the speaker enters the word and takes his stand in it ... when Thou is spoken, the speaker has nothing for his object. For where there is a thing, there is another thing. It is bounded by others: It exists only through being bounded by others". It is clear that Buber's relational account speaks of the master and the world, not the slave and the world. The master can choose to be one with the world or to be separated from it. To be separated from the world is to view it from the positionality of extraction and exploitation. The position of the master is always determined by the values of the master as the master is the only one who can be present and who has the infrastructure to have ontological presence. If the master speaks, the master will be heard, whereas if the slave speaks, it is deafness that seems to be present because of the slave's presence-absence as the black body.

The dialectic seems to be non-dialectical because for a fair and free existential condition that could culminate in the assertion of ontology, the "dialectic required the constant adoption of positions" (Fanon [1952] 2008:33). Shifting positions in life results in the evidence that someone existed, and it builds on people's memories and lived experiences. Fanon argues for the dialectic to be open and recognise the presence of a colonised subject, that is, the relation between the black body and the world needs to be open. But Fanon knows as the black body he is dispositioned in the world without presence. This means

that the black body finds no relation to the world other than being dispositioned and ontologically dispossessed.

Thus, my unreason was countered with reason, my reason with “real reason”. Every hand was a losing hand for me. I analyzed my heredity. I made a complete audit of my ailment. I wanted to be typically Negro—it was no longer possible. I wanted to be white—that was a joke. And, when I tried, on the level of ideas and intellectual activity, to reclaim my negritude, it was snatched away from me. The proof was presented that my effort was only a term in the dialectic (Fanon [1952] 2008:101).

Fanon shows us that the freedom of the black body and its recognition as a human being with ontology is something that can only be spoken about; however, is impractical and impossible in the presence of white logic. This will require all humans to be viewed and respected equally to deserve the life all humans deserve, which is impossible according to Cartesian colonial logic that wants to maintain white supremacy. This experience follows the black body even in today’s professional spaces and academic institutions.

The difference comes on the level of ontological presence-absence – the black body is divided into a worker and a servant. A worker deals only with matters of exploitation and presence while the figure of the servant deals with matters of subjection and presence-absence. Presence-absence in blackness and “both it is corporeal and libidinal integrity is through the various strategies through which Blackness is the abyss into which Humanness can never fall; but it disavows this knowledge intellectually in an attempt to identify that which cannot be identified” (Wilderson 2008:105). In the belly of blackness in the “abyss of Black life” (Wilderson 2008:103), the presence-absence of the black body encounters the “prophecy of our collective [ontological] death” (Wilderson 2008:97) in blackness as a racialised existence. In the presence-absence, the black body is fated “WHEN” (When will I be arrested? When will I be shunned? When will I be a threat?), the black “homeland” and the black “continent” on which it sits is a map of “WHEN” will I not be an ontological problem (Wilderson 2008:99), “WHEN” will I be present and have a presence as a human being

amongst other humans rather than be located amongst things as absent? Wilderson's intervention raises an interesting point of differentiating between the worker and the servant, and presence and presence-absence during the post-apartheid epoch. It does, however, suggest that the presence of the apartheid system is not over as is emphasised by "the use of the prefix, post ... ultimately served simply to lump together multiple versions of that after" (Bourriaud 2009:17). It should be noted that in blackness, the worker and the servant are the same as the black body who is present but is absent.

The white subject can think for others; therefore, he possesses a presence to make history by having a language that articulates others as absent. However, the black body is "embedded in anti-black racism and the problematic presence of the black's subject" (Gordon 2007:5) by thinking them as less. The white subject positions itself as the giver and taker of this presence. Hence, people without a presence are people who have not lived or people who have experienced some form of "restlessness, groundlessness, rootlessness, instability and displacement" (Kasibe 2008:79).

Nonetheless, its people who have never been present and will never have their ontological presence in the anti-black world unless it collapses. Even a newborn baby has a presence that is embedded in their parent's presence as it will carry their blood and names. In an "inborn complex, to assert ... [itself] as a BLACK MAN" (Fanon [1952] 2008:87), the black colonised subject must rethink its presence-absence. People without presence are still in a stage of being thought about and having their existence articulated through the grammar of coloniality of power; they are only present in the thought of the white subject, which affirms its presence. If the black body has no presence, it means that it only exists in the thinking of the white subject as it is the one who is present. The black body is also present in the mind of the white subject as a product of its colonial imagination with no grammar of being present. Therefore, the presence of the black body is ontologically absent.

2.5 CONCLUSION

To understand the black body, this chapter outlined Fanon's concepts of naming, the human subject, and the presence-absence. Fanonian thoughts as a theory proved to be able to expose colonial issues that affect the existential condition of the black body. It can reclaim the ontological position of the black body that has been reconfigured by an anti-black world to a state of being non-existent. This chapter drew from Fanon's political underpinnings to explicate his thoughts in relation to the decolonial epistemic theory. It was necessary to clarify Fanon's conceptions for this study because it allows an understanding of how to interpret the black body.

The thematic of naming and the coloniality of knowledge proved that naming reduced the black body to the property of the white madam. It shows how the black body and the coloniality of knowledge were substituted with European names that changed the identity of black people. The thematic of the human subject and the coloniality of being proved that the black body is placed outside the human register by being named a Negro. In other words, their being is questioned, their essence is distorted, and their ontological significance is reconfigured. The third and last thematic is presence-absence and coloniality of power. It was proved that the presence of the black body means absence. In other words, the black body is physically present in the house of the white subject only through servitude and oppression, but ontologically it is absent. This ontological absenteeism is grounded on European definitions as a basis of coloniality. In this chapter, therefore, Fanonian thoughts was applied to prepare for the reading of contemporary art of Mary Sibande in the following empirical chapters.



Fig. 1: Mary Sibande, Sophie-Elsie (2009). Fibreglass, resin, fabric and steel.

CHAPTER 3

Sophie-Elsie and Naming

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2, Section 2.2, discussed Fanon's thematic of naming in relation to coloniality of knowledge, which is applied to the analysis of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* (2009) (fig 1) in this chapter. *Sophie-Elsie* is Sibande's depiction of her maternal great-grandmother, which proves naming to be a political tool of subjection and thingification. *Sophie-Elsie's* real name was Tsheledi Fanedi until her white master changed it to Elsie. It shows how the first generation of women in Sibande's family became subjugated to the darker side of being named maids. Although the thematic of naming cannot be seen visually, it nevertheless has the ability to create another world, and history is visible to *Sophie-Elsie's* transformed existence.

In this chapter, I explore the meaning of transformation from Tsheledi Fanedi to Elsie. I map out the politics of naming from the Fanonian lens at four levels. The first level relates to the notion of naming as a colonial logic. Here I explore how the conception of naming became a naturalised principle that made it easy to rename Tsheledi Fanedi to *Sophie*. At the second level, in relation to naming as a colonial prefix, I discuss how blackness precedes being as a result of naming the black body 'black'. At the third level, in relation to naming as an abyss based on thingification of the black body, I explore how naming becomes a black hole that destroys any possible ontological values. And lastly, at the fourth level, I explore the notion of naming as mythification. In this part I discuss how naming transformed *Sophie-Elsie* into a mythical figure. These contextual points are deployed in relation to naming as a colonial apparatus that informs the subjection of maids. In this chapter I explore how the name that was given by her white master transformed *Sophie-Elsie* from an ontological subject into a colonial subject.

3.2 NAMING AS A COLONIAL LOGIC

Sophie-Elsie signifies the first woman of three generations who became maids. *Sophie-Elsie* inspired Mary Sibande to capture her family experience as a “new formal language that revolutionised the history” (Klopper 2006:34) of generational colonial subjectivity as a subject matter in her artworks. By revolutionising this history grounded on naming as a colonial logic, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* was born. Sibande asserts that:

We began by talking about her aspiration and desires as a black woman living in a small town in those days. And on how limited she was, not only as a black body but as a black female body in apartheid South Africa ... my grandmother told me a story. Her mother, who was also a maid, she had two Sesotho names, she was originally from Lesotho. Her names were Tsheledi Fanedi, but then her masters couldn't remember or pronounce her names, so they renamed her “Elsie”. She died as Elsie. So, I wanted a name [*Sophie*] that would actually kind of resonate with that idea of a name being forced on one and the transformation of her identity from that moment, it should be a name that should be remembered (Sibande in Khan 2015:223).

Instead of existing in the world as Tsheledi Fanedi, *Sophie-Elsie* finds no meaning but rather realises that she is subjected to a new form of meaning as a “hybrid African construct” (Haupt & Binder 2004). Naming as the apparatus of the colonial logic provides a life. To be named for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is to be subjected and transformed into “the black ... [maid that] wants to be white” (Fanon [1952] 2008:83). Hence, *Sophie* is always depicted as resisting the underpinning logic of her colonial name, where she is imagining herself assuming the position of the white madam. Fanon writes about coming to the world to find meaning, but he found no meaning as a black body, instead, he was named to living a life that was already designed and chosen for him by the imperial man.

The name given to a maid by the madam suggests a position of death. Sibande stated that *Sophie-Elsie* “was dead before I [*Sophie-Elsie*] even started” (Sibande in Corrigan 2010b). Of the four sculptures that Sibande created and exhibited in her first exhibition, *Long Live the Dead Queen*, the figure of *Sophie-*

Elsie resembles the Queen the most when judging by her dress. In her constant search for meaning in the world as a dead Queen, “either way ... [the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is] locked into infernal circle” (Fanon [1952] 2008:88); therefore, she remains in this ontological loop because her new name was found for her. The name *Sophie-Elsie* as colonial “meaning-giving acts of constitution” (Rabil 1967:xiv) comes with colonial modes of performance. Meaning to be named an animal or a maid one is to be expected to act like one. For the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, naming precedes being and her being collapses after naming. The purpose of naming is to give meaning to things so that they have a sense of identity and belonging because meaning adds to the ontology of something or someone.

In creating the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, Sibande argues that it started by “envisioning a female figure in my head that later became a maid” (quoted in Khan 2015:221) named *Sophie*. However, although through naming the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* lacks the meaning of the self, she gains the meaning of the world “as self-evident as that of furniture, needing no mention besides perhaps as proof of the owner’s status” (Jansen 2019:5). With naming as a colonial logic, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* became “defined by catalogues of deficits and series of lacks, lacking history, lacking writing, lacking souls, lacking civilisation, lacking responsibility, lacking development, lacking human rights and lacking democracy” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:4-5). The lack of meaning introduces the lack of ontology, which brings her to the position of non-existence. Her non-existence as the figure of the maid is emphasised further by “the lack of disability and unemployment insurance, maternity benefits and paid sick leave mean[ing] that they are an extremely insecure group of workers. They are vulnerable to instant dismissal by their employers who often fail to observe the common law provisions” (Cock 1989:6).

To understand naming as a colonial tool, it must be divided into two categories: naming for meaning and naming for subjection. Naming for meaning comes

with an ontological inscription that is designed to uplift the ontological register. However, to name something or someone does not qualify a better understanding as Sibande states:

A lot of people think they understand what Sophie is about because she is a maid and then they stop (at any possibilities of seeing her as anything else). I want to create layers so that people have to unpack further [signs of subjection]. I don't want to give a lot away instantly. I wanted to create another dialogue around Sophie (Sibande in Corrigan 2010a).

Naming for subjection comes with an element of taming for domestication by dismissing any possibilities of seeing *Sophie* as a human being. The figure of *Sophie-Elsie's* is suspended between naming as an ontological inscription and naming as an inscription subjection. Fanon ([1952] 2008:88) argues, "as long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others" names. In other words, as long as *Sophie-Elsie* remains Tsheledi Famedi, she will have no occupation except being a maid and her identity will disappear. The existential condition that comes with naming the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is dependence and a metaphor. By assuming a colonial name, *Sophie-Elsie* becomes a metaphor of colonialism and the circle of servitude that they will be exposed to for three generations. Even in his approach, "Fanon discusses both blackness and abjection largely by implication, or through the deployment of metaphorical figures" (Darieck 2010:22). Looking at the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as being metaphorical of the black body in an anti-black world, the issue of naming comes into interference with subjectivity and self-knowledge. Her subjectivity and self-knowledge become modes of entrapment through the logical apparatus of naming as the construction of whiteness.

Yancy (2012:108) argues that, "the construction of whiteness functioned epistemologically and ontologically as a prism through which the Other was constructed and rendered subhuman". It becomes clear that racialised naming disables ontology where the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is concerned. Her new name

renders her subhuman. It is clear that for *Sophie-Elsie*, naming falls under the category of naming and labelling an object in the white subject's possession such as broomsticks and mops: *Sophie* is not expected to get tired from work or even contest the amount of salary if it is not satisfying.

Naming for subjection comes from the position of the master not being prepared to learn to pronounce *Sophie-Elsie*'s real Sesotho name, namely Tsheledi Fanedi (Khan 2015). Instead, the master chooses to ignore the significance of her real name and renames her in a name they can easily pronounce and remember, namely Elsie. Cock (1989:5) asserts that "the conquest of blacks and appropriation of their land is the basis of this subordination", which is achieved by altering names of black people. *Sophie-Elsie*'s subjectivity is distant from her being because the name she is given means nothing to her. Sometimes the names given to maids are names that they cannot even spell, write or relate to, because their subjectivity is renamed and transformed. As a result of this namelessness, "the black being had to struggle to free and rescue itself from a situation of nothingness into objection" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:179); hence, the depiction of *Sophie* by Sibande. The name given to *Sophie-Elsie* situates her within the process of "thingification" (Césaire [1972] 2001), which pushes her out of the position of the subject into the position of the object. She is transformed into an object of labour.

According to Spillers (1987:65), "the names by which ... [*Sophie-Elsie* given] render an example of signifying property plus". By being renamed Elsie, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* loses knowledge of herself as a subject and gains knowledge of colonial subjection that renders her subjectivity as a property of the madam. She is transformed from a subject to an object as an extension of the body of the madam to do the hard, dirty household work. Even in the post-apartheid and post-colonial setting, *Sophie-Elsie* remains *Sophie-Elsie* as Sibande asserts: "I didn't want to move *Sophie* away from being a maid. As much as she is moving forward she is also going back" (Sibande in Corrigan

2010b). The ontological paradox that faces *Sophie-Elsie* in her everyday life is to live what Agamben (1998) calls a “bare life” that is suspended at will and with impurity. Naming as a colonial apparatus is linked to coloniality of knowledge and its subjection manifested even on the level of generations and generations in the black condition as Sibande further asserts, “*Sophie* is me” (Mabandu 2009).

The narrative of *Sophie-Elsie* as a shadow of racist structures triggered Sibande to depict her family experience as subject matter in her artworks. To tell this narrative, Sibande uses her own body to cast *Sophie*'s sculptures: the face, the arms and texture of the skin belong to her body as the artist. She argues, “I started casting myself, using my body to make *Sophie* and then *Sophie* emerged from the rubber mould” (Sibande in Khan 2015:224). *Sophie* is not just Sibande at the practical level, Sibande is also *Sophie* because she is black. It is proper to rephrase Sibande's statement and say: “*Sophie* is in me”.

Thus, the problem is not being a maid, the problem is being black in the shadow of ontological blackness. The collective shadow of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is a formation of all the inferior traits of a marked maid. Since the maid's shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself continuously in Sibande's family narrative. *Sophie* is not just Sibande because of the above reasons and the family narrative, metaphorically speaking, *Sophie* is in everyone existing in South Africa. “The lives of practically all South Africans have been touched by the institution of paid domestic work: either because of the *presence* of an often motherly carer and cleaner, or by the *absence* of a mother who does paid housework for others” (Jansen 2019: 2). Hence, the proper statement is “*Sophie* is in me”. Sibande characterises the process of delinking from the chain of servitude as a maid by creating *Sophie-Ntombikayise*.

Sophie-Ntombikayise “represents Sibande herself, and signifies not only Sibande’s rupture at the genealogy of servitude but also presents itself as a gesture of her appreciation to her mother for giving birth to her and bringing her up in this world” (Goniwe 2013:26). The figure of *Sophie-Ntombikayise* indicates the process of “delinking that leads to decolonial epistemic shift and brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding” (Mignolo 2007a:453). *Sophie-Ntombikayise* embodies the delinking of the circle of servitude. Each *Sophie* had hope in that they could somehow intermeditate on behalf of the name given by the madam to them as maids because “brooms and floor mops belonged in black hands” (Jansen 2019:23). However, the colonial logic of naming is subjection that turned Sibande’s parents into maids, which managed to spread as far as three generations starting from *Sophie-Elsie* to *Sophie-Velucia*. Sibande managed to symbolically dodge this colonial genealogy of naming as subjection by naming the fourth *Sophie-Ntombikayise*, which is her real name. Nevertheless, the way the colonial apparatus of naming operates is that Sibande is *Sophie-Elsie* and *Sophie-Merica* as well as *Sophie-Ntombikayise*, as confirmed by Sibande’s statement “Sophie is me”.

Sibande chose the name *Sophie* to name her family pain. Hooks (1989:32) argues that, “naming pain without transformation and resistance is not helpful”. In an attempt to transform this pain, Sibande named herself the figure who represents *Sophie-Ntombikayise* although, according to Hooks, it might not be enough to solve the politics of subjection by naming. Renaming does not transcend the lineage of servitude but only ends at the symbolical level. This means that even if Sibande named herself differently under the colonial logic, she remains nothing but a black body. On this symbolic level, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* allowed Sibande to recreate the reality she is contesting as she claims, “Sophie is me. She is my alter ego” in that sense, “I wanted to put myself among these women, these maids. I am making a work out of their work”

(Sibande in Corrigan 2010b). Nevertheless, for the figure of *Sophie-Ntombikayise* “to complete the story, there is a need to shift the locus of enunciation from the centre of the empire to the zone of ‘colonial difference’: zones of indigenous peoples and colonized subjects who experienced the dark side of modernity” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:8). However, the existential locus for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is to be located within colonial subjection that keeps her entangled in the “black-white relation” (Fanon [1952] 2008:3) of non-relation. The subjectivity of the black-white relation of non-relation only ends at the symbolical level of naming to erase as reflected in *Sophie-Elsie*, *Sophie-Merica* and *Sophie-Velucia* as figures who are reduced to work as property. In engaging the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, it is a critical and important moment as Sibande asserts that:

I think it’s the common South African story of Sophie, like we all are related to Sophie. If she’s not your mother, she’s your domestic worker. If she’s not your domestic, she’s your aunt, she’s everybody. She’s all around, I think people relate to her existence and to what she embodies. And especially looking into our history as South Africans, in post-apartheid South Africa, uhm, I think she has played an important role (Sibande in Khan 2015:222).

In the black community, we all have an ancestor who was a slave, maid, gardener and a farmer; hence, Sibande might have delinked as *Sophie-Ntombikayise*, but the anti-black world continues to exist. But even if the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is given a so-called Christian name, ontologically she remains outside the frame of whiteness and the register of being human. Meaning, the names given to the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* do not qualify her as white in order to gain benefits of white privilege. She remains black – a black body. The black body can feel the process of being tamed and domesticated through naming and coloniality of knowledge.

Naming was not the only tool the master used to institutionalise the enslavement of maids as maids are people with no value beside servitude. Cock (1989:5) further asserts that, “various measures of racial domination [and naming] serve to maintain blacks in a subordinate position” as slaves of

whiteness. However, if the madam enslaves the figure of the maid, it also becomes “slaves against nature” (Rousseau 2012:10) in the sense that to dehumanise others, one must undergo a process of self-dehumanisation that allows inhuman treatment of the black body. Under South African law during apartheid, it was compulsory for a newborn black child to be given a Christian name. A given name was meant to enable white people to call the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* making it easier to ask *Sophie* to work. But it is through colonial subjection as articulated by Fanon that:

The black man cannot take pleasure in his insularity. For him there is only one way out, and it leads into the white world. Whence his constant preoccupation with attracting the attention of the white man, his concern with being powerful like the white man, his determined effort to acquire protective qualities—that is, the proportion of being or having that enters into the composition of an ego (Fanon [1952] 2008:36).

Sibande explores similar power dynamics that are present in naming in one of her works titled *The Reign* (2010), in which *Sophie* is riding a black stallion. In this artwork, “Sophie straddles a rearing stallion with her dress streaming behind her. Increasingly heroic and imposing, Sophie moves closer to true emancipation as she matures as a character [*sic*]” (Stielau 2004). Sibande positioned *Sophie* on the horse as a way of symbolically taking the power from the white man and uplifting *Sophie-Elsie* to the level of the master. However, even though *Sophie-Elsie* is named by the white subject, she is not lifted to the level of the white subject. It is the master who rides the horse, whether on the slave plantation, as a police officer, or as a hero of war and colonial victories. The horse has been used as a symbol of power and as a sign of discovery as seen through the monuments marking colonial legacies in the South African landscape. These monuments were constructed while the colonial government was in power as a way of giving South Africa a European character by using European names. In this sense, naming becomes the apparatus for colonial logic.

Creation of these monuments and “the settler’s town” was a creation of the colony, which “for the settler, is a daily invitation not to ‘go native’” (Fanon [1961] 1990:30) and not to forget the rightfulness of his culture. The settlers in the remote outposts, the pioneering adventures, are aware of this when they say that, “without wine and the radio, we should already have become Arabized” (Fanon 1965:73-72). The settler has invested well in his objective by creating the world according to his own culture and names, which explains the structure of the Manichean society where the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* works and that divides her. Cock (1989:4) argues that “in a very real sense the institution of domestic service is a microcosm of the exploitation and inequality on which the entire social order is based”. This explains some deep concerns in relation to the native who becomes westernised throughout the project of modernity and naming. The darker side of ontology is that “the dominated society never participates in this world of signs” (Fanon 1965:72). Throughout the project of constructing the world according to European naming, the settler has shown the fear of losing whiteness over blackness many times. According to Plaatjie ([1916] 2007:21), the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as “the South African native found ... [herself], not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of ... [her] birth”.

For a European to own land and build the European name in South Africa, Fanon (1965:71) argues, “[I]s of course to participate in the eternal round of Western petty-*bourgeois* ownership, which extends from the radio to the villa, including the car and the refrigerator. It also gives him the feeling that colonial society is a living and palpitating reality, with its festivities, its traditions eager to establish themselves, its progress, its taking root”. Some names, architecture and culture of towns in South Africa have the face of Europe as museums of European imagination, such as “ancient cities like Beijing and Hangzhou—in a country that possesses a very old civilization and society—feel nothing like museums. In modern Chinese cities where vestiges of the past exist, they tend to be peripheral rather than central” (Enwezor 2003:599). The

face of Europe symbolises a foot in the door of modernity, which normally shows how one city is more developed than another, thus moving away from the “peripheral vision” (Sun 2009:57). However, in this peripheral sight, “there is no such person in South Africa as a white squatter” (Plaatjie [1916] 2007:51). The unsettling of the face of Europe as seen in Baldwin (1998) evokes the experience of black body alienation and estrangement, which positions the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as a stranger in the world.

This unsettling positionality of *Sophie*'s estrangement is visible from the furious black stallion that she straddles. The stallion metaphorically symbolises the sadistic power of the white institution and the “white mask” (Fanon [1952] 2008) that does not sit well with the black body. Instead of taking *Sophie* to where she wants to go, the stallion attempts to throw her off like the colonial name given to her. We do not know whether the stallion is throwing *Sophie* off or whether it is rearing. Many statues and monuments of colonial legacy have incorporated a horse as a symbol of power, status and victory. The name given to *Sophie* further symbolises the precarious power given to her by the Western names. The statement made by incorporating a horse in a statue, painting or monument is that the name of the white subject holds an important significance and power.

Naming is similar to the horse that *Sophie* is trying to control. It represents “the ‘truth’ of the oppressor, formerly rejected as an absolute lie, now countered by another, an acted truth” (Fanon 1965:76). Akin to colonial names, the horse becomes a symbol of white supremacy and white objection that locates the white subject in the centre of modernity and the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* in the periphery. Placing *Sophie* on top of the horse in a pose like in *The Reign* (2010) is an attempt to push *Sophie* to the position of whiteness because in the eyes of whiteness, *Sophie* is like a horse with restricted movements.

In a similar way, giving *Sophie* a Western name is an attempt to position her as a horse that lacks movement. The presence that *Sophie-Velucia* holds is

reminiscent of “identity documents and policy of ‘orderly’ urbanisation inscribed in apartheid laws such as the Group Areas Act, the Land Act, the Trespass Act and the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, together operate to severely restrict freedom of movement among the black population” (Cock 1989:5). However, Fanon ([1952] 2008:36) has some reservations about *Sophie* assuming the position of the white subject because it is “beyond the reach of the Mayotte Capécias of all nations”.

Even if *Sophie* could be named Elsie as a way of baptising her into the white family, she will always remain the black sheep of the family. Alternatively, even if *Sophie* chooses to see herself as assimilated to the white family she will remain a maid, a stranger. In other words, “the [white] family is, if you will, the first model for political societies; [where] the ruler is the image of the [white] father ...” (Rousseau 2012:9) as the master of the world. Thus, by being named the maid, it means ontologically that *Sophie* is not part of the human family, but is the white family’s property. In an anti-black world, “it is customary ... [as an African figure] to dream of a form of salvation that consists of magically turning white” (Fanon [1952] 2008:30) just like the figure of *Sophie* is dreaming in all of Sibande’s work. As described by Stielau, *Sophie* always has:

Her eyes closed as if she daydreams, suggesting that she is perhaps not entirely confined. In the artist’s words, [Sophie’s] identity is intrinsically bound by these markers that she is a maid, but her imagination is her escape ... If she opened her eyes, it would be back to work—cleaning this, dusting that. Her dress would become an ordinary maid’s uniform (Stielau 2004).

For the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* to be given the name of a white subject, is to exist only at the level of dreams; it is not reality. On the level of dreams and imagination, *Sophie* performs all the tasks that belong to the madam as the mother of the house. However, for Sibande:

Sophie is praying in a different realm, that is why her eyes are always closed, that's when her constant reality warps and she can escape and exist in wonderland. Like whatever she's dreaming of, it isn't real, it's a dream and, she herself is a construction made from many parts, she's not real, but, it can only be a dream or a wish and can never be a reality. That's how the blue came about with two ideas, the worker who is hopeful of getting out of her uniform who dreams of better things (Sibande in Khan 2015:224).

The figure of Sophie could be dressed in a Victorian dress, renamed to Elsie, Merica and Velucia, and even date a white man, but all this could mean nothing. Even if *Sophie* "loves a white man to whom she submits in everything. He is her lord. She asks nothing, demands nothing, except a bit of whiteness in her life" (Fanon [1952] 2008:29). But acquiring whiteness through her name comes with subjection. To possess whiteness for a white subject is to be complete while for *Sophie-Elsie* to acquire whiteness through naming is to be incomplete and engage in a state of constant pursuit. Hence, even if *Sophie* could receive a European name, she would remain incomplete and nameless.

The name *Sophie-Elsie* is given as symbol of white domination that pushes her to dream that she could be white and take the position of madam. For her, naming ends at the symbolic level because her eyes are closed while she dreams, which "was her own way of turning whites into blacks" (Fanon [1952] 2008:31). Turning white people black would mean to assume the European name as a real name, which calls for ontological authorisation as a white human subject. However, if *Sophie-Elsie's* eyes are always closed, it means she is never awake to tell us her dreams.

Alternatively, she could be performing her dreams while her eyes are closed, which means she is never aware that her subjectivity is erased ontologically. The name she is given is always a white name, which does not correspond with her reality because she is not living a white life. Hence, although *Sophie-Elsie* is given a white name, she is always caught "with her eyes closed, she is denying her reality but dwells in a fantasy world, and in so doing constructs a reality of her own" (Sibande in Khan 2015:225). Being unconscious of the

colonial subjection means being blind to the effect of being renamed *Sophie-Elsie*. Naming for her means to live as a fragment of the colonial dream. Fanon ([1952] 2008:32) writes that, "... [*Sophie*] has told us nothing about her dreams. That would have made it easier to reach her unconscious. Instead of recognising her absolute blackness, she proceeds to turn it into an accident. She learns that her grandmother was ... [also a maid]".

To close one's eyes can only be done on the basis of temporality, because the moment *Sophie* opens her eyes, she is back to the anti-black reality. It is as if she continues to cling to the white imagination that white naming could change her reality. White naming has indeed changed her reality because she is living in a white fantasy as the property of a madam.

Naming for the madam suggests a "search for other possible knowledges and worlds" (Walsh 2007) where the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* does not challenge being a problem, but assimilates a white imago. Hewitt (1997:34) says, "the submission to ... [naming] highlights the private nature of self-awareness, while also providing a way to feel a connection with an external cause of sensation". The way for *Sophie* to assume the white imago is to assume the position that comes with white naming by dreaming of performing the role of the madam. For *Sophie* and others who find comfort in naming, "there is a *grand* modernity in all its European manifestations in reason and progress, and, on the other, is what could be called *petit* modernity, which represents the export kind, a sort of quotation, which some would go so far as to designate a mimic modernity through its various European references" (Enwezor 2003: 596).

In the same way as *Sophie*, chooses to close his eyes towards naming as hybridity of modernity because it "informs the political space of its enunciation" (Bhabha 1994:43), but "the point, however, is not where you reside but where you dwell" (Mignolo 2011:cxiii). Where one dwells is where one's subjectivity is entangled and shaped by the surroundings and things that come with naming.

The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is located on the darker side of naming; therefore, her name is entangled as a thing that keeps her in the darkness of modernity. Meaning, *Sophie* can choose to see the imaginative side of naming by escaping into a dreamlike state.

Through this logic of whiteness, the objection and knowledge of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* are based on the name prescribed for her to remain ontologically blinded. The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is only supposed to assume knowledge that positions her in the colonial “‘code’ or ‘grammar’ of imperialism” (Nandy 1989). The name *Sophie* acts as a code that provides some elements of entry in the subjectivity of whiteness, which is regarded as the subjectivity of the absolute human. The code operates in a different logic, for instance, an “educated black have difficulty finding jobs but you will never see an educated white jobless” (Cock 1989:92). Subjectivity in blackness means being black is to carry a special name of always lacking something and coming second or last. According to colonial logic of naming, to be black is to be the last in everything; it is to be the last in ontology, knowledge production and civilisation. This notion has also been the core vision and mission of the project of modernisation and modernity/coloniality that assumes that all black people’s places are underdeveloped and uncivilised and therefore need the aid of a European name.

In *The Reign* (2010), *Sophie* is positioned on top of a horse as if her name has changed her to assume the master’s position in the plantation. The title of the artwork is significant regarding the existential position of *Sophie*, which is that of constantly looking for an opportunity to take the position of the white subject. The name given to *Sophie-Elsie* suggests only reigning as the madam. The white madam remains lord over *Sophie* and *Sophie* remains a servant. The idea of *Sophie* reigning to take the master and madam’s positions comes with her names because “the black man wants to be white” (Fanon [1952] 2002:32). Meaning, naming is a constant fight of chasing between the white subject and the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* and maintaining existential the position of being

human. Reigning as a black body is an oxymoron because *Sophie-Elsie* is already named as one who is positioned below the register of the white subject. Not only did the white subject set its own standard, but it also set a standard that keeps *Sophie-Elsie* on the darker side of naming: powerless and nameless without ontology.

It is evident that *Sophie-Elsie* seeks a position of power because as colonised people, Grosfoguel argues:

We went from the sixteenth century characterization of “people without writing” to the eighteenth and nineteenth century characteri[s]ation of “people without history” to the twentieth century “characteri[s]ation of “people without development” and more recently, to the early twenty-first century of “people without democracy” (Grosfoguel 2007:214).

Although *Sophie* is placed as a monumental figure by riding the black stallion, she remains a person without a name. The idea of the monumental figure has to do with naming and building sculptures to honour a particular figure or monumentalise a historical event. This idea of erecting statues that represent colonial legacies and victory was introduced by the empire during the construction of the colony, which. The colony’s construction should not be mistaken with modernity as a project of creating the empire as it is not about modernity but coloniality hidden behind the name of modernity. The construction of the empire is the major project that is set to construct a habitat for the sovereign subject under the name of development and progress. Thus, Walsh (2007:229) states that, “colonialism ended with independence [from apartheid in the case of South Africa], coloniality is a model of power that continues” to build the name of the white subject. It involves naming and renaming to give the global world a European face. However, as much as *Sophie* can take the position of the master on top of the horse and appear to be this monumental figure of sovereign status, she remains a monument without name. The idea of the monument is a colonial idea, the idea of

whiteness, and the idea that is fundamental and embodied in the ontology of white supremacy to keep the name of the empire purely white.

Sibande has reflected this violation of the black body and the reconfiguration from its subjection by renaming the figures of *Sophie-Elsie*, *Sophie-Merica* and *Sophie-Velucia*. The naming of *Sophie-Elsie* signifies many socio-political implications that suggest a shift of the black ontology from reality and “this reality is easily missed if the genealogy of the modern world order is analysed from the centre of the empire” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:7). *Sophie* on top of the stallion imagines her way to the centre of the empire to shift the geography of her tainted name away from the periphery.

Assuming the position of the master, *Sophie* rides a black stallion with her eyes shut as she escapes into her usual dream state “in which the most ridiculous ideas proliferated at random” (Fanon [1952] 2008:29). In Fanon’s view, giving the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* a white name is a ridiculous act because she would never be white. For *Sophie* to assume the position of a queen is fortuitous because no matter what white name she assumes, and “whatever she does she will always be a maid” (Sibande in Corrigan 2010b). To assume a level of whiteness is impossible for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* because it only ends on symbolic and material levels. Behind the white name on the symbolic and material level, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* can assume a level of meaning and ontology that is precarious. Through naming the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* into whiteness is to gain the material status of the white subject and “there you have Hegel’s subjective certainty made flesh” (Fanon [1952] 2008:30). Through this behaviour, it becomes clear that technologies of naming are pinned to the definition and logic of the white subject and coloniality of knowledge as a colonial logic of naming.

3.3 NAMING AND THE COLONIAL PREFIX

Naming as the colonial prefix signifies that before Tsheledi Fanedi is anything else in life, she is black or simply a Negro. Therefore, before the black body can assume any ontological or professional position, it must be remembered that it is located outside life. Naming as the colonial prefix for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* positions her as a marked woman as articulated by Spillers (1987:65): “let’s face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name”. As a marked woman, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* signifies being a maid, which is a position occupied socially and professionally by mostly black people, specifically uneducated black women in South Africa.

To be marked by being named as a domestic worker and be given a name such as *Sophie-Elsie*, signifies some form of colonial prefix qualified by coloniality of knowledge. Coloniality of knowledge in this regard operates at the level of the colonial prefix. A prefix in simple terms is something that comes before something, as in the case of *Sophie-Elsie* coming before the madam and doing the duties she was supposed to do. Regarding the black body having to deploy some form of a colonial prefix before the name of their profession, Fanon says:

It was always the Negro teacher, the Negro doctor; brittle as I was becoming, I shivered at the slightest pretext. I knew, for instance, that if the physician made a mistake it would be the end of him and of all those who came after him. What could one expect, after all, from a Negro physician? As long as everything went well, he was praised to the skies, but look out, no nonsense, under any conditions! The black physician can never be sure how close he is to disgrace (Fanon [1952] 2008:88-89).

In a similar case, *Sophie-Elsie’s* profession or work preceded her being. Fanon’s illustrative text reveals how naming as an apparatus of colonial prefix signifies an ontological difference that stands to prove how the black body could never be seen as professional. Meaning black people cannot simply be doctors, lawyers, artists or scientists, to list a few. It is always a black doctor, a black lawyer, a black artist, the first black scientist or even the first black female

to be something. Because of the colonial prefix, the black body is simply a Negro; hence, their profession is never good enough on its own and the name 'black' must always be prefixed. According to Smith, it stems from the fact that black people as:

Colonized peoples have been compelled to define what it means to be human because there is a deep understanding of what it has meant to be considered not fully human, to be savage. The difficulties of such a process, however, have been bound inextricably to constructions of colonial relations around the binary of colonizer and colonized. These two categories are not just a simple opposition but consist of several relations, some more clearly appositional than others (Smith 1999:26).

In order to work, workers do not have to change their names to forcefully take the position of worker: to be a worker is to be white and to be a maid or a slave is to be black. However, for *Sophie-Elsie* as the black body it means not just losing and changing her name, but it also being forced to lose her essence of being, her family ties as well as her name. This means the black body is always suspected in any given field where they must assume a professional position.

It is clear that as the figure of the maid, before *Sophie-Elsie* can be anything else she, she must be black with "multiple originals" (Ndalianis 2004:80) that are predetermined by the colonial prefix. In an anti-black world, black as a colonial prefix is associated with some form of falling behind. This means being a stranger. As articulated by Cole (2016:6), "to be a stranger is to be looked at, but to be black is to be looked at especially". To fall behind in blackness means that the black body is never good enough to be a professor, doctor, artist, president and writer without the prefix black or Negro. Sometimes naming as a colonial prefix goes as far as the using the word 'first' as a prefix. For example, the first black professor, the first black woman, or the first black board member or owner.

The figure of *Sophie* is forced to work under conditions that reject her real name because "losing their job could well mean forced removals to the teeming rural slums of the 'homelands'" (Cock 1989:5). The name Elsie distances and

positions her under “these undecipherable markings on the captive body [that] render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin” (Spillers 1987:67). This anti-ontological prefix called black does not only distance and domesticate the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, but it also provides a distanced form of subjection that creates parallels between the category of worker and maid. Meaning, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is confined and defined by the politics of the first maid in the family as if she was setting the foundation. Naming for the worker recognises a body while it embodies something different for the maid, a flesh. In regard to naming to distinguish between worker and maid, Spillers has the following to say:

But I would make a distinction in this case between “body” and “flesh” and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the “body” there is the “flesh,” that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography (Spillers 1987:67).

The figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, as much as she is named with a white name of the white body, is a flesh that is subject to the reflexes of colonial iconography. This iconography inspired Sibande to construct an image of *Sophie* based on her image. Sibande stipulates: “I thought of me coming from these, these generation of women who were maids from my great great-grandmother up to my mother and then came me” (Sibande in Khan 2015:226). The name *Sophie* and its subjection imposed over the black body as flesh reflect the colonial imagination and myth-making that created peasantry an accepted social class for the zone below the worker, which is normally occupied by a black body. However, it is important to note that Spillers (1987) suggests that the notion of the body and flesh exposes the worker-maid paradox for subject-position. The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as a *black body* embodies something outside the subject-position; therefore, it is correct to understand the black body as a figure and never a subject. Even if *Sophie* is named Elsie, she socially and ontologically remains a black body.

Being named Elsie in the black body, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* remains flesh as stated by Gordon (1996:78): “overdetermination saturates consciousness in the flesh with the quality of being a thing, a form of being-in-itself. With such weight, the black body is confronted by the lived experience of its absence. A binary world is imposed upon it that functions as a constant source of evasion”.

Being named for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* signifies her as the figure of the maid in the white household that pretends to accept *Sophie* as part of the white family, which is something that has “potential political core at the heart of play” (Miklitsch 1998:114). The name *Sophie-Elsie* becomes a code for her to enter the white space as the maid. As much as *Sophie-Elsie* can be given a white name, keep the house of the madam clean, and be allowed to stay in the backyard, she is still absent. Nandy (1989) refers to *Sophie-Elsie*’s name as the “code” or “grammar” of imperialism, meaning the name *Sophie-Elsie* as a code justifies the grammar of white supremacy.

The more *Sophie-Elsie* cleans the house and keeps it shining by wiping, the more she wipes herself off, and the more she erases her presence. The presence of *Sophie-Elsie* can only be seen during her absence when the house of the madam is clean and smells good. This is until the madam shouts, “*Sophie!* Walk the dog” or “*Sophie!* Make me some tea”. However, under the white name the maid “*feels* the distinction between the post-emancipation subject and the postcolonial subject, but it is unable (or unwilling) to *be elaborated* by the grammar of accumulation and fungibility, rather than the grammar of exploitation and alienation” (Wilderson 2008:104).

To be named a domestic worker instead of a maid is to appear to exist in the position that is post-bondage and post-liberation as a human with rights whose contract is based on the level of no exploitation. This means there is a difference between a domestic worker as a worker and a maid as a servant. Wilderson further argues that:

The worker/capitalist relation can no longer be perceived as an antagonism because were it to be “solved” (were it to cease to exist as a relation, after the victory of the proletariat), the world would still be subsumed by the slave relation: an antagonism not between the position of the worker and that of the boss, but between the Human and the Black (Wilderson 2008:104).

The worker/capitalist relation positions the worker in the world as a human, which signifies domestication of anything outside the white human register. To be named a worker, is to be a body or a subject in the case of the white body as a sovereign subject, a worker who is free. Naming as a colonial prefix for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* suggests that there are no rights and access to authority to rights as articulated by Foucault:

This subjection is not only obtained by the instrument of violence or ideology; it can also be direct, physical, pitting force against force, bearing on mental elements, and yet without involving violence; it may be calculated, organized, technically thought out; it may be subtle, make use neither of weapons nor of terror and yet remaining of a physical order (Foucault [1977] 1997:26).

Naming as subjection leads to a different distinction between the worker and maid. For the subject of the worker, subjection is open and free; any forms of dehumanising subjection do not bind it as the colonial prefix as the black body. The worker can easily take the position of the master while the maid will always remain in the position of slave. The organising apparatus that informs the institution of employment, which defines the relation of the employer and the employee, is fully grounded on coloniality of knowledge as the colonial prefix. After the end of slavery plantations, slaves were not released to be recognised as humans, but they were recognised as black people (Wilderson 2008). To be named as black or black body means most recognition granted to a white subject as a human collapses and new form of recognition seems to manifest and surface as colonial prefix. This then qualifies the bold assumption that work in general was originally created for a subject who has a white body. Hence, to work is a form of luxury because the white subject works according to their talent and their desired professions in comparison to the black body who is forced to take any type of job just to put food on the table. The black body is

forced to take jobs that have nothing to do with their desired profession and talent. Only a few black bodies can do so, but they are always forced to constantly prove their capability and assume the prefix black or first. The question of who is named a worker and who is named a slave is a question Sibande has been engaging as naming changed her family ontology.

In regard to naming as a colonial prefix, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* “express[es] the conflicts and uncertainties, and in doing so, ... [she] embod[i]es the transformational power of story-telling itself, revealing stories as activators of change” (Warner 2002:210). *Sophie-Elsie*’s name expresses a different reality as a maid than that of a worker. The difference between a worker and a maid is, therefore, slightly thin. From the Liberal point of view, it can be argued that even white people work or become maids. Meaning, it is not only black people who are maids or even face exploitation. However, the naming is explored in a racialised context of an anti-black world, because “in South Africa most white household employ servants” (Cock 1989:1) under the name of domestic worker or helper. In a racialised context, everything ethical and moral seems to collapse to unlawful lawfulness. Hence, *Sophie-Elsie* as a black body and the white subject can both be named workers or domestic workers but the benefits under the name of the law and labour policies will always treat and receive them differently. The black body is always positioned at the receiving end of law. The white subject goes to work every day while the black body remains behind to clean the madam’s house because “the world cannot accommodate a black (need) relation at the level of bodies—objection” (Wilderson 2008:98). Even if *Sophie-Elsie* could be named domestic worker, domestic helper or caregiver, she would remain a maid or, put simply, a servant in the white madam’s house until death. This is to say, on the level of social contract as a maid *Sophie-Elsie* can be called other names that appear to uplift her to the level of the human subject.

However, according to Sartre ([1957] 2003:70), “the human being is not only the being by whom *néglativités* are disclosed in the world; he is also the one who can take negative attitudes with respect to himself”. Being named as a maid, *Sophie-Elsie* is placed in a position of taking negative attitude as a black body who is kept outside the human register and outside the space as a cleaner. These negative attitudes of naming towards the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* become normalised and naturalised as a universal attitude that form a strong foundation of an anti-black world as a colonial prefix to the extent that “the name [Elsie] even appeared on her gravestone” (Sibande in Corrigan 2015:155). From birth till death, being named meant *Sophie-Elsie* having her body marked and her grave engraved with her new name of colonial inscription. The naturalisation of these negative attitudes towards *Sophie-Elsie* forces her to internalise them as absolute and normal attitudes until her death. This means naming as a colonial prefix for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* suggests “a spiral process by which the self comes ever more deeply into itself by comprehending the limits of being a self in a world” (Klemm 1983:17). Naming for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* evokes a different outlook towards the black experience. Sartre ([1957] 2003:71) argues that “one determined attitude which is essential to human reality and which is such that consciousness instead of directing its negation outward turns it toward itself. This attitude, it seems to me, is bad faith (*mauvaise foi*)”. Naming as a colonial prefix for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* evokes bad faith to the madam because her name allows her to enter the white space and locates her as a domestic worker rather than just a maid or a slave to be more specific.

By naming as a colonial prefix, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* “is a biographically derived but hypothetical figure who delineates a narrative of her family’s aspirations ... [she] is a domestic worker, a black super-woman figure who escapes her subaltern condition through fantasy” (Mabandu 2009). Colonial prefix is to give someone the name *Sophie-Elsie* as if she would never

remember that she had a name before and should wear the new name as a badge of honour as it brings her closer to whiteness. Fanon ([1952] 2008) states that the black man wants to be white because whiteness brings the black body closer to becoming a human subject. Therefore, the colonial prefix dissolves when the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is “allowed to “float on cloud nine”” (Sibande in Mabandu 2009). That is the place where “they have no sorrow, no suffering and they are not maids” (Mabandu 2009). Thus, to exist for the black body is to be contingent on dreams and performative gestures, which only operate at the temporary and symbolic level.

Cock (1989:1) asserts this by stating that “their oppression is expressed in many domestic servants’ sense of being slaves, of living wasted lives which they are powerless to change. (I have been a slave all my life’. ‘We are slaves in our own country’) Other Africans also experience their working lives as a form of [bondage]”. As a maid, *Sophie-Elsie* is a slave that falls under the category of things that are named to make the life of the ‘human’ easier such as tools, technology and other functional property. Not unlike the tools you find in the white man’s garage and storeroom, *Sophie* stays in a small room outside the main house of the madam. The architecture of apartheid in South Africa authorised that “suburbs and houses were even built with the expectation that the average middle-class white family would have a live-in black maid and would therefore need servant’s quarters in the backyard” (Jansen 2019:2). Based on naming as a colonial prefix, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as a maid is kept in the backyard with the tools she uses to keep the house of the madam clean and shining.

The white subject chooses to live in bad faith, which takes away the short-term empathic pain and the ability to see the black body as a human, but therefore suffers from long-term ontological warfare. Living in bad faith, the white subject chooses to believe there is nothing wrong with the institution of whiteness because it is easier to domesticate the black body. Naming as a colonial prefix

makes it easier to ignore the black body because it is much harder work to know and remember. Smith further asserts this by stating:

Knowledge was also there to be discovered, extracted, appropriated and distributed. Processes for enabling these things to occur became organized and systematic. They not only informed the field of study referred to by Said as “Orientalism” but other disciplines of knowledge and “regimes of truth”. It is through these disciplines that the indigenous world has been represented to the West and it is through these disciplines that indigenous peoples often research for the fragments of ourselves which were taken, catalogued, studied and stored (Smith 1999:58-59).

As reflected by Smith, based on naming as knowledge that qualifies the colonial prefix, it is easier for the white madam to catalogue *Sophie-Elsie* because the name *Sophie* “is such a common name with maids” (Sibande in Corrigan 2015). By deploying naming as a colonial prefix, the white subject closes all other options for *Sophie* to get closer to the human register. The standard of naming the human, naming the non-human, and what it means to be human, have different implications in a racialised context and in an anti-black world. For *Sophie-Elsie* as a black body to be a breadwinner and successful means constantly “they are go-between figures” (Jansen 2019:viii). They are the figures whose subjectivity allows us to see what is happening in both worlds – the zone of being and the zone of non-being. In this regard, Foucault is correct in his remarks:

A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation. So, it is not necessary to use force to constrain the convict to good behaviour, the madman to calm, the worker to work, the schoolboy to application, the patient to the observation of the regulations. Bentham was surprised that panoptic institutions could be so light: there were no more bars, no more chains, no more heavy locks; all that was needed was that the separations should be clear, and the openings well arranged. The heaviness of the old “houses of security”, with their fortress-like architecture, could be replaced by the simple, economic geometry of a “house of certainty”. The efficiency of power, its constraining force have, in a sense, passed over to the other side – to the side of its surface of application. He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (Foucault [1977] 1997:202-203).

Sophie-Elsie is a master's copy of colonial subjection; the one who will not be original even if she is super-visible. The master created the name *Sophie-Elsie* as a copy to substitute or cover the black body and tame it so to speak behind colonial prefixes. The figure of *Sophie* here does not just refer to the alter ego of Sibande but also to the ontological signification that the figure of *Sophie* represents in the position of what it means to be a human as a black body in an anti-black world. The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* signifies the act of substituting names with European names while anchoring modes of coloniality for generations and generations of the black family. According to Sibande, "the idea of *Sophie* or what *Sophie* is, she stems from my grandmother's stories, from my great, great-grandmother's stories [*Sophie-Elsie*]. I wanted to stay true to the work or what *Sophie* personified" (Sibande in Khan 2015:222).

The master cannot pronounce the original name of his slave or maid unless their names are reduced to European names. These names, therefore, signify a form of baptism that is grounded on colonial prefixes to be elevated to the white heaven. The black body is, according to the white gaze, ugly, primitive, dirty, savage and violent. The most fundamental questions in this regard begin to surface: How can that which is uncivil be civilised? How can that which is violent and encompass danger be trusted to clean the master's house and look after the madam's children? How can that which is not human look after that which is human? How can a beast be tamed or domesticated?

These questions are unsettling when raised from the existential position of the one who is named a maid. Smith (1999:27) further asserts that, "to put it simply, indigenous peoples as commodities were transported to and fro across the empire". The notion of domestication is not just limited to the house as a building of the madam, but it is extended to the 'empire' as the house of the imperial man. The black body is, therefore, ontologically trapped in a house that is not his or hers because the black body is not human. The contemporary art as a space of conversations and reflections on lived experiences through

artworks is an embodiment of technologies that are designed to name the empire. It is relevant to quote Smith to name the white subject inside the 'empire' and keep the black body at an ontological distance:

One of the concepts through which Western ideas about the individual and community, about time and space, knowledge and research, imperialism and colonialism can be drawn together is the concept of distance. The individual can be distanced, or separated, from the physical environment, the community. Through the controls over me and space the individual can also operate at a distance from the universe. Both imperial and color rule were systems of rule which stretched from the centre outwards to places which were far and distant. Distance again separated the individuals in power from the subjects they governed (Smith 1999:55).

In the realm of naming the body for domestication, the meaning of what it means to be human is in question for *Sophie-Elsie* as long as she is a maid. For the body to be domesticated, it must be named and enslaved by being subjected to colonial prefixes. Of course, according to whiteness, the one who is a slave is the one who is closed out of the human register as an animal – a non-human. The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* signifies Said's ([1978] 2003) notion of "positional superiority" that justifies the black body to be only an object. The name *Sophie-Elsie* signifies the fact that "to be black is to be already interfered with, violated by, a whiteness that comes from inside out. A whiteness that not only distrusts but hates" (Marriott 2000:79). To be named black signifies that the subjection of the black body is already positioned in the concept of the world as we know it, as the empire.

The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is the embodiment of naming as subjection, subjugation and subjectivity. What *Sophie* knows of herself as *Sophie* is subject to the Eurocentric naming system and colonial prefixes. Naming as "coloniality of knowledge denotes a complex process of development of global imperial technologies of subjugation taking the form of translating and re-writing other cultures, other knowledges, and other ways of being, and presuming commensurability through Western rationality" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:33). The black body as signified by the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is erased and rewritten

in translations of whiteness. The black body is, therefore, always subject to anti-black colonial technologies to keep the black body in the peripheries of knowledge, power and being. Hence, contemporary art is one of the technologies of colonial logic that has been used to perpetuate the logic of the imperial man and to keep the image of the 'empire' as the colonial institution. This is further qualified by Smith when she asserts that:

As Fanon and later writers such as Nandy have claimed, imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world. It was a process of systematic fragmentation which can still be seen in the disciplinary carve up of the indigenous world: bones, mummies and skulls to the museums, art work to private collectors, languages to linguistics, "customs" to anthropologists, beliefs and behaviors to psychologists. To discover how fragmented this process was one needs only to stand in a museum, a library, a bookshop, and ask where indigenous peoples are located. Fragmentation is not a phenomenon of postmodernism as many might claim. For indigenous people's fragmentation has been the consequence of imperialism (Smith 1999: 29).

Sophie-Elsie is named and made into a fragmented figure who is positioned between the worker and the maid as a matter of being distanced and fragmented from her own being as well as the human register. The name *Sophie-Elsie* comes from the position of bad faith as Fanon provides us with lenses that locate how the white subject sees no other option but to dehumanise the black body in order to be human. Assuming the position that comes with naming, Sartre ([1957] 2003) argues that this happens at workplaces as he gives an example of a waiter who takes the position of waiter as seriously as the absolute role that is his destiny and definer of being. By denaming and renaming *Sophie-Elsie*, Sartre defines her as a maid who tells herself that she is just a maid and it is her destiny in life. This attitude towards herself culminates to coloniality of being. The figure of *Sophie-Elise* is domesticated through naming as subjection that positions her in the realm of having no choices as she tells herself she is uneducated; therefore, she needs the job and the money even if it compromises her being as a human being.

Even one of the maids that Cock interviewed argued that “the whites are sitting on our heads, so we are inferior” (Cock 1989:90). Meaning, the name *Sophie-Elsie* as a colonial prefix allows for the white subject specifically the madam to sit on top of *Sophie’s* shoulders as property. Hence, at the level of being named the colonial prefix signifies coloniality of knowledge: before the black body *can* be anything, it is a Negro.

3.4 NAMING AND THE ABYSS

Naming as an abyss is grounded on placing *Sophie-Elsie* in a void. An abyss is depth or a void; it can suggest a state of being in limbo as a floating signifier. Naming as a fact of an abyss for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* means to be on the threshold of liminality as something that means nothing. Naming as a fact of an abyss is approached here from the register of blackness and how Fanon articulates it as placelessness; a zone of non-being. According to Fanon ([1952] 2008:2), “there is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell”. Naming for *Sophie-Elsie* as a maid means to be inside the abyss as the figure of non-existence – a figure of the zone of placelessness. For the very fact of blackness is to be named inside the abyss of non-existence as an ontological stray being. If there is non-existence from the position of naming the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, the ontological stray being is located in Fanon’s view in the position of non-being. In relation to this ontological amputation of *Sophie-Elsie* as an ontological stray being in the abyss, Fanon ([1952] 2008:82) writes: “but just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye”. The name Elsie became an ontological chemical solution that was fixed by a colonial dye to Tsheledi Fanedi’s existence. The abyss here is the zone of non-being that Fanon articulates to understand naming as the fact of the ontological stray

being. It is what embodies blackness, and it is embodied by blackness to operate as the black hole that swallows *Sophie-Elsie* into the zone of non-being.

Naming as an abyss is the domain of housing that has nothing to do with whiteness as it is about the living hell of *Sophie-Elsie*, the non-human who is the ontological stray being. Naming and blackness are at the centre of the abyss and should be engaged and critiqued as it qualifies naming as a fact of non-being. In this regard, Yountae (2017:97) indicates that, “the existential impasse of the black person lies, for Fanon, in the fact that his or her existence unfolds in the ‘zone of nonbeing’, a state of perpetual curse”. The abyss is not whiteness; it is the death domain of *Sophie-Elsie* who occupies the position of non-existence just by virtue of being named a maid. For Elsie to be named is to be transformed. In this regard, Fanon ([1952] 2008:153) writes, “in effect, what happens is this: As I begin to recognise that the Negro is the symbol of ... [the abyss], I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro” located inside the zone of non-being by being named black.

Fanon’s black thought and critique allow for an understanding of an abyss as a position of non-grammar, non-articulation, which can be engaged from within. Naming as a fact of an abyss is non-existence and alienation of ontological critique. Naming as a fact of an abyss for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is grounded on “the Europeanisation of the world” (Headley 2008). Naming as an abyss is a politically constructed site that constitutes those who are powerless in terms of their colonial formation; who are ontologically absent. Naming inside the abyss, in blackness, the ontology of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is not worth looking after, thus it is ontologically located at the periphery of modernity. It is a given that inside the abyss, the name of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*’s renders her invisible and makes the white subject come into existence. Meaning, the zone of non-ontology is colonially constructed and politically supported by the

zone of ontology. There is no endangered life inside the abyss because there is no life in blackness.

The critique of the abyss that is located from blackness in an anti-black world is located from the thought of Fanon as the lens through which an abyss is theorised. It is from this position that naming in blackness is located as the abyss and the abyss as blackness. While in the abyss, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is not allowed to see what is outside the abyss because it is considered that only those who can think can exist outside the abyss. To think, therefore, is to exist outside the abyss. The abyss, as Fanon critiques it, is a reality that is no reality or existence – that which is non-existence and visibility that embodies invisibility. This incoherence is the constitution of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* being non-human. Fanon comes with grammar of articulating what happens inside the abyss. In this regard, Yountae has the following to say:

By drawing on multiple aspects of the colonial experience, including not only psychic and sociocultural dimensions but also the economic and in particular the political struggles of the colonial subject, Fanon dramatizes successfully the deathlike experience of the being inhabiting the colonial abyss (Yountae 2017:95).

The abyss is a politically constructed qualification of blackness as a void. Naming the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* inside the abyss creates the ontological distance that makes it impossible for it as the *black body* to uncover. As Fanon ([1952] 2008:18) articulates, “I do not know; but I say that he who looks into my eyes for anything but a perpetual question will have to lose his sight; neither recognition nor hate. And if I cry out, it will not be a black cry. No, from the point of view adopted here, there is no black problem”. Being named black inside the abyss is the problem. The problem with being black is ontologically being a problem for the white subject in the world. Therefore, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* becomes a reminder of what it means to be a symbol of hell on earth and what the white subject should make sure never to be. Fanon writes from this position

of lived experience as an embodiment of hell and the figure of the abyss in an anti-black world. The notion of naming as an abyss, just like the notion of looking, has been engaged and introduced on various levels by different scholars but not in the racialised context of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*. Thus, the name Elsie is a void. The white subject enjoys the position of looking and therefore sees through a racialised lens that is subjective while located outside an abyss.

Sophie-Elsie as the figure of an abyss does not enjoy the same life as the madam; she takes the position of being looked at and, therefore, experiences life in a racialised context, which is much more dehumanising. Of *Sophie-Elsie* as the figure of the abyss in an anti-black world, Fanon ([1952] 2008:18) writes, "... [she] looks for appeasement, for permission in the white man's eyes". In the racialised context of an anti-black world as an abyss, *Sophie-Elsie* is not just located in this abyss, it is the abyss which the white subject must not gaze. According to Yountae (2017:3), "the self is the result of an incessant dialectical tension and movement raises important philosophical and ethical questions about the place of the 'other' in the constitution of the self". Blackness, therefore, becomes an ontological stain in human essence. In this view, naming in blackness ontologically became a state of bondage in the abyss. But before the concept of 'black' entered the human register, bondage was a different arrangement that did not border on subjection, control and permanent arrangement of dehumanisation.

Naming as a fact of the abyss, therefore, became a legitimate banality of the dehumanisation and violence against being black. Being black became a crime against the fact of being. Consequently, to be black is to be linked ontologically to bondage in a fundamental way. This, therefore, massively destructs the process of life affirmation for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*. The core logic of the system is to keep the *black body* enslaved through blackness as a tool of subjection. However, according to Marriott (2000:79), "to be black is to be

already interfered with, violated by, a whiteness that comes from inside out. A whiteness that not only distrusts but hates". The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is the magnet of hatred and in relation "with the Hegelian dialectic, we realized that while the abyss elicits the urgency of a political objection in the dialectical journey of becoming and transformation, it also elicits a sense of ethics and responsibility that evokes the trace of the other lying at the threshold of the passage in the subject's journey" (Yountae 2017:84). In other words, for Sartre, if the waiter could cry, he would be heard and his condition and the outlook of the world could be changed. Even if the white subject could gaze into the abyss long enough, it would never be in the abyss because it could always cry for help or be protected by the colonial infrastructure and institutions that are set to keep the white subject out of the abyss.

Naming as an abyss is an existential domestication of the black body through Eurocentric subjection that is explored as fundamental line of separation. It is through the embodiment of these divisions that Spillers (1987:67) argues that the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* "is subject to hieroglyphics of the flesh", which Fanon further refers to as the "Manichean structure" (Fanon [1952] 2008). Hence, Fanon ([1952] 2008:31) argues that the madam and the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* "represent the two poles of a world, two poles in perpetual conflict: a genuinely Manichean concept of the world; the word has been spoken, it must be remembered—white or black, that is the question". By naming in the Manichean structure of the world, the *black body* is placed on the other side of the fence. Fanon wrestles with the fence dividing human flesh because the Manichean structural position of the black body is that of being *Sophie-Elsie*. The name *Sophie-Elsie* becomes a passcode to enter the Manichean village without being interrogated or suspected. By being *Sophie-Elsie*, it reflects some colonial genealogy of being named by whiteness in the abyss. In regard to South Africa as an abyss that was constructed from the apartheid system, Sibande asserts that:

In South Africa, if you're a Black child you have to have two names – a home name in your mother tongue, which describes your cultural or tribal group, whatever background you're from, if you're Zulu, you'll have a Zulu name. And uhm, you are obliged to have a Christian name and then that name you'll use it at school (Sibande in Khan 2015:223).

The politics of naming and what it means to be named are reflected very vividly in the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* who even died as a maid. These names uttered inside the abyss show that you are a maid, a cleaner, a security guard, a baptised black and a trusted civilised black. The name *Sophie-Elsie* is what it means to be closer to becoming a human for a black body, which is what Fanon ([1952] 2008:82) refers to as a position “sealed into that crushing objecthood”. To be sealed and crushed into an object means for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* to be the embodiment of the abyss. Fundamentally, what does it really mean when talking about the abyss? If the abyss has been portrayed as a gap or a void that houses some form of dark force of evil that separate man from God, what does it mean in a racialised context to separate human from non-human? It means that the ontological gap and void that houses some forms of colonial evil forces create an abyss where the ontology of *Sophie-Elsie* is swallowed.

For Fanon ([1952] 2008:25), the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is the figure of the abyss because, “to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The ... Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is” as a way of gazing at the abyss. The language that the colonial system gives *Sophie-Elsie* as a black figure is a language of enslavement that evokes the “feelings of an amorphous futile existence” (Lasch 1991:36-37). English is only a language on a universal level, yet it introduces elements of exclusion.

During the construction of the modern world, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* was shifted outside the ontological place and was forced to think and see the world through English and Afrikaans. This means that *Sophie-Elsie* constantly views

the world between the English and Afrikaans languages as an abyss. According to Yountae:

For the abyss does not signify a mere lack of meaning. It signifies something more material. In this regard, the abyss is not synonymous with finitude. It is rather a paradox. It puts you face to face with finitude, but this passageway to infinitude, an absence (or lack) that can possibly lead to replenishment (Yountae 2017:2).

It is clear that the fundamental paradox is that blackness as non-being equates ontologically to an abyss that is created because of modernity. “This is Glissant’s founding thought. The abyss is an irretrievable sense of loss. The Middle Passage has no representation. Rather, the Middle Passage is simultaneously the evacuation of meaning ...” (Drabinski 2019:x). In the abyss of blackness, the figure of *Sophie* loses the meaning of her name, but gains the name given to her by the madam. In this way, *Sophie*’s “[e]xperience of the abyss lies inside and outside the abyss” (Glissant 1990 [1997]:7); hence, *Sophie* remains *Sophie* even if she can dream of wearing the madam’s clothes while keeping her duties. Glissant’s notion of the abyss tells us why domestic workers can never be seen as a human being at the same level as the madam, even if she is named, which is why “they are ‘like family’ – like, but never quite” (Jansen 2019:1). Being in the position of “like, but never quite” at the centre of the abyss, which is blackness, *Sophie* is also outside both families—the black family and the white family. In the sensible discourse espoused by the notion of the “Middle Passage” (Glissant 1990 [1997]:xvii), the figure of *Sophie* is in the embodiment of the abyss and what happens inside and outside the abyss as modernity.

Modernity as finitude has been critiqued by many scholars from different positions and perspectives. It is still rare to see a critique launched against a system by the beneficiary of the same system even if this system means subjection of others. The position of the ontologically dispossessed, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, is positioned as fuel for the flames of fire inside the abyss. Cole

(2016:15) argues that “this fantasy about disposability of black life is a constant in ... history” and is still present in post-apartheid South Africa. The flames of the fire in the abyss is a symbol of hell that the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is constantly arrested in-between English and Afrikaans. As a black body, it does not matter where you are in the world: if you are black you are in a “hellish condition” (Gordon 2007). This hellish condition led the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* to think from where it is absent as Mignolo puts it in the following remark:

[T]he anchor of decolonial epistemologies shall be “I am where I think” and better yet “I am where I do and think,” as they become synonymous. What that means is not that you “think where you are,” which is common sense, but that you constitute yourself (“I am”) in the place you think. And that place is not, in my argument, a room or office at the library, but the “place” that has been configured by the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo 2011c xvi).

If it is in the anchor of naming to constitute the self as a colonial figure, it raises the question: What has been constituting the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* in all these decades of development of modernity? The answer is English and Afrikaans. The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* has been dislocated and swallowed as an abyss by English and Afrikaans. The abyss is a site of thinking for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*; hence, she is always dreaming about taking the madam’s place. The self that is constituted by the colonial matrix of power is a self which is a colonial rather than a cultural invention of the constitution of self. It then becomes clear that in an anti-black world, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is reconfigured into its ontological state by English and Afrikaans as the apparatus of an abyss as the “depth of meaninglessness” (Yountae 2017:1). *Sophie-Elsie* is the figure of an abyss whose embodiment is meaninglessness. By being named ontologically in an abyss in English and Afrikaans, there is no meaning for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*. As a result, any form of subjection is justified because the languages do not hold any justice set to end it, but to regulate it.

Even if people hold names from these languages, they remain poor – as animals – wild, uncivilised and generally non-human. According to Yountae (2017:4), “the word abyssal here has pessimistic overtones suggesting an

unbridgeable gap, for Santos is describing a separation of the social reality of the West from the global South in which whatever lies on 'the other side of the line' is deemed non-existent and radically excluded". The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* can be named Elsie, but she still exists on the other side of English and Afrikaans lines. Even if you are named inside the abyss in English or Afrikaans, you are still seen as non-human and there is nothing you can do about it. Inside the abyss, everything *Sophie-Elsie* does that is human is taken as utterance of a mechanical man or simply a gesture of mimicry. Naming as the fact of the abyss is to exist in a world between English and Afrikaans, which is further explained by Yountae as a void in the following remark:

Void is close to *nothing*, the state of having no part, share, or quantity of thing. If *nothing* points to the null state of existence, whether a person or a thing/matter, void presumes a previously occupied or filled state, if not an expectation of presence. While *nothing* can be free of value and affect, void may imply a sense of intense frustration caused by an unexpected or unforeseeable emptiness (Yountae 2017:9).

By deploying Yountae's two concepts of the void and nothingness, we can distinguish between what it means to be in a world between English and Afrikaans and what it means to embody the abyss. Being the embodiment of the abyss is to be in hell in an anti-black world as the one who has no part of the English and Afrikaans culture. It is a hopeless exercise being black in the abyss and trying to leave the abyss because the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* becomes the abyss due to her inability to go beyond the abyss.

If we look deep in the notion of the abyss, beyond Nietzsche's thought, which spoke from the position of the subject about the subject, blackness as Fanon articulates is hell, which is extremely difficult for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* to transcend. Fanon shows there should be possibilities of a new identity being born, but because the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* in an anti-black world is in the zone of non-being, it is the embodiment of the abyss.

In this regard, everything the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* does or say is looked at in a different way and listened to with deaf ears as if imitating human actions out of lunatic gestures that raises suspicious attitude. Under naming as an abyss, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* has a difficult time trying to explain herself as being human, because there are no rules as to what one must do when pushed back inside the abyss and denied ontology. There is no clear road to ontology – this is found likewise in the shacks, poor job conditions, hobos on the streets, psychiatric wards and prison cells that are housing the black body.

The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* does not know what and how to do anything inside the abyss as everything she does is not taken seriously or as a real thing except when cleaning the house of the madam. Whatever happens with the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* inside the abyss is regarded as not happening. And even when the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* screams inside the abyss, it becomes a beckoning of nothingness.

As the figure of the abyss *Sophie-Elsie* performs as a “black super-woman figure who escapes her subaltern condition through fantasy” (Mabandu 2019). This is informed by what Maldonado-Torres refers to as “phenomenology of the cry” (Maldonado-Torres 2008). *Sophie’s* performative gestures as a white subject can only end at a symbolic and imaginary level because *Sophie-Elsie* is not just located in the abyss – she is the abyss. As stated by Schechner ([1988] 2003:xix), “[*Sophie-Elsie’s*] performance is an illusion of an illusion and, as such, might be considered more ‘truthful’, more ‘real’ than ordinary experience”.

The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* can be deployed as a symbol of a rebellious character who does not want to conform to the colonial social norm and be “... a human being who transcends the limits of his own body and becomes what he desires to be and not what his society would force him to be” (Vergine 2000:22). Her gestures suggest the positions she wishes to occupy as they are the positions of people with ontology. Even though *Sophie-Elsie* is named in

English or Afrikaans, she closes her eyes as if she does not want to see the pestilence of the space she is working on because it is the abyss. These gestures that *Sophie-Elsie* performs symbolise the cry for ontological entry that is qualified by Fanon's thought, which lead to modes of self-writing as a site "where an authentic upheaval can be born" (Fanon [1952] 2008:2). This form of cry from the belly of the abyss challenges the conceptualisation and contextualisation of the abyss; it brings it down to an end. The abyss ending means the end to the *black body* as non-existence and black subjection as hell.

Under naming as an abyss, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* acquires existence from the discursive phenomenology of the cry while she is inside the belly of the abyss to such an extent that she is the embodiment of English and Afrikaans inside the abyss. Thus, being named is to constantly be a victim of what I can term the ecstasy of the abyss. This ecstasy of the abyss is the state of delirium that *Sophie* found her existence in. *Sophie-Elsie* as an embodiment of blackness, the figure of the abyss, that which interpolated through non-existence is the black imago that falls inside the depths of the abyss.

What lies inside the belly of the abyss remains a mystery as one can never be too sure what will come from the abyss. According to Yountae (2017:87-88), "decolonizing the abyss or thinking it in the politicised space shaped by neocolonial globalization eventually provides us with a broader or better, deeper definition of the abyss, reconceptualized and repoliticized upon the base of the concrete historical context". Naming as a fact of an abyss can produce a slave or a non-human. There is no subjection of the white subject because it is human, but the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is always subjected. *Sophie* as the figure of the maid in the abyss is reduced to a thing, a tool, a monster, as the figure of the abyss lacks any form of ontological reservoir.

However, with *Sophie-Elsie*, the situation is different because for *Sophie-Elsie* as the maid, to work is to be a servant. And this is ontologically embedded in her by naming unlike Sartre's waiter who has options of being a servant or

being a worker. Sartre's analogy of the waiter is grounded on the position of the fear of alienation from the role the subject takes to work as the result of the age of industrialisation. During this age, the idea of the worker was created solely for the white subject while slaves were on plantations. Being subjected to naming as an abyss for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, Cock (1989:6) argues, "unlike other African workers [or white workers and workers in general], domestic workers are situated in a legal vacuum within this coercive structure. They are not protected by any legislation; there are no laws stipulating the minimum wages, hours of work or other conditions of service". But because of the need to make more capital and save the health of the subject under working conditions through coloniality, the category of slave was created. *Sophie-Elsie* exists and works as a maid inside the abyss as the figure of the abyss under the category of the new slave inside the house of the madam as a new plantation. Hence, even if *Sophie-Elise* dreams about being white and takes the different roles of the white subject, she will remain black under the category of the new slave as her naming remains a fact of the abyss.

3.5 NAMING AND MYTHIFICATION

Being named Elsie transformed Tsheledi Fanedi into a mythical figure because the politics of naming present mythification. Naming holds the power to mythicise the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* (2009) (fig 1). Mythification means to be made a myth as someone or rather something that exists but does not exist; something that signifies something else but itself. It signifies an end to a means rather than signifying the means. Mythification in this sense amongst many things embodies the negative side of naming, which is qualified by coloniality of knowledge.

Judging from the positionality of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, naming created a mythical figure of the maid based on the look of difference. The look of difference determines who is named human and who is named non-human. It

is through the waiter that Sartre captures how the look of difference comes into play to mythicise *Sophie-Elsie* as a maid. By being denamed and renamed as *Sophie-Elsie* and being referred to as a domestic worker, she is mythicised and placed to be the embodiment of “theft of history ... the take-over of history by the West” (Goody 2006:1). It is the reconfiguration of the identity of black people “according to what happened on the provincial scale of Europe” and “then imposed upon the rest of the world” (Goody 2006:1).

By being given a new name that links *Sophie-Elsie* to the property of whiteness, she qualifies to enter any white suburbs to work for the madam. By being mythicised with the name *Sophie-Elsie* as a badge of whiteness, she becomes nothing else but a commodity and the property of whiteness who is there to be named and used at the madam and master’s will.

Naming as mythification and politics of “this oppression is institutionalized to a degree that warrants discussion in terms of two systems: one of racial domestication and one of sexual domination” (Cock 1989:5). Naming the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* warrants any form of domestication and abuse from the master as her name suggests being human for her is a mythical thing. By judging the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, Cock (1989) does not seem to acknowledge this institutionalised oppression, which is racial domestication and subjection.

However, Sibande says the black tarmac in the installation reflects the ‘racial limitations’ in society – these women are like a “shadow that lingers in history” (Mabandu 2014). It is a known fact that a shadow is a reflection of something big that covers the light to create a shadow of something. In a similar sense, a myth is a shadow of something else than the myth itself. In a deeper observation, dreams are shadows of reality, and thus, “the subject of the dream is the dreamer” (Morrison [1992] 1993:17).

The figure of *Sophie* in Sibande’s work is always depicted with her eyes closed in a dream state. This means that, according to Morrison, the subject of a myth

is a myth itself. Therefore, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is a mythicised figure of dehumanisation. It is important to note that there is a fundamental difference between exploitation and dehumanisation in a racialised context. Dehumanisation in a racialised context means to exist in non-existence as a myth. To exist as the figure of the maid in blackness is to exist in mythification. Sartre illustrated existing in mythification in the following way:

His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight-rope-walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually reestablishes by a light movement of the arm and hand. All his behavior seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other, his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms, he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things (Sartre 1957 [2003]:101-102).

The Sartrean waiter signifies mythification that is defined by the work environment and relationships. Sartre shows mythification through a waiter who assumes his position as natural and tells himself that he is just a waiter and there is nothing else he could possibly be. It would not be a surprise if Sartre based his analogy on observing a white waiter whose ontological significance is totally different than the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*. A bold assumption is that the waiter Sartre is referencing is white and the occupation that he does is not his, but should be for someone below a certain social level as the institution of slavery already existed. Sartre as a French existential philosopher advocates the right to exist as a human being and not survive as a human-animal-being. The existential right that Sartre illustrates with the narrative of the waiter is that of a white worker who has choices as a worker and at work. *Sophie-Elsie* who is named and mythicised as a maid does not have choices as stated by Cock in one of her interviews:

She is 38 years old and has worked for the same employer for eight years. She has not had holidays during that period. She is given the occasional day off “to

attend a funeral". She dreads the holidays season because then her employer's married daughter and her three small children come to stay, which means a good deal of extra work. She is devoted to her husband, and is extremely anxious that her meaning seems to be breaking up (Cock 1989:16).

Naming as mythification holds elements of dread and evokes desolation as the mode of existing for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*. A human being with choices would consider a different line of employment, which could be the means of keeping her family together rather than breaking it apart. However, because *Sophie-Elsie* is named differently, her right to choose is jeopardised; therefore, she lives a life in mythification as a myth of the non-human. Naming as mythification for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* means she is deprived of the rights that come with the existential choices Sartre refers to. This was obviously not the case for *Sophie-Elsie* as the black body, because "the Black body has been confiscated" (Yancy 2008:1). Therefore, if a black body was the waiter that Sartre talks about, it would have resonated more with the notion of good faith. Or even better, maybe Sartre was not going to notice the alienation that he was concerned about as he chose not to notice what happened at the slave plantation. That is, for *Sophie-Elsie* being mythicised as a waiter or waitress rather, would be doing what she is naturally set to do, namely, to be a servant of the white subject from the moment of creation. But because Sartre witnessed a site that he thought that if it continued it would also mean the death and bondage of the Cartesian subject through the capitalist system of working and industrialisation.

The white subject in Sartre's analogy is "thus the being of consciousness, since this being is in itself in order to nihilate itself in for-itself, remains contingent; that is, it is not the role of consciousness either to give being to itself or to receive it from others" (Sartre 1957 [2003]:81). It is being that comes with whiteness as the absolute name that gives and takes life. Sartre realised mythification in alienation that comes with that level of a job in which the Cartesian waiter cannot live a happy life as a human being. In fear of mythification of the white subject, Sartre come to realise that the waiter has a

different name than *Sophie-Elsie*, and that name is whiteness. Under the name of whiteness, he did not have to keep the role of the waiter as the only absolutely role for him in the world because he is not a figure of mythification.

Under naming as mythification, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* does not have the same choices since she is created twofold: first, as God's creation like all creations in the world; second, being a creation of a Cartesian subject such as all colonial institutions and the rest of the modern world. Therefore, naming as the existential mythification led Yancy (2008:1) to state: "from the perspective of whiteness, I am, contrary to the existentialist credo, an essence ('Blackness') that precedes my existence". For Yancy, naming as mythification precedes the existence of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*. From the base of naming as mythification, *Sophie-Elsie* is not as free and protected by the world as the white subject. According to Hegel ([1955] 2004), naming under capitalism involved a notion of the lord and bondsman through industrialisation and modernisation; according to Fanon, it meant master and slave; lastly; according to the modern world, it means employer and employee. However, these relations are always grounded on what I term the racist-Manichean relation as captured by Fanon, which always names the *black body* as the embodiment of mythification. As someone who experiences naming as mythification, similar to Fanon, Yancy is correct to further remark that:

The Black body has been historically marked, disciplined, and scripted and mentally, psychologically, and morally invested in to ensure both white supremacy and the illusory construction of the white subject as a self-contained substance whose existence does not depend upon the construction of the Black qua inferior (Yancy 2008:1).

According to Yancy (2008), whiteness depends on naming as mythification. Whiteness depends on naming to mark and discipline the *black body* to position the black body to ontological mythification. For the white body, it is only natural to be human and to take the position of the master and madam because its naming holds a different experience than in an anti-black world. In fact, its

naming is not mythification but rather the creator of an anti-black world as mythification. Without the white madam, *Sophie-Elsie* would not exist in mythification. The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is socially and politically named and positioned to always occupy the position of a bondsman, slave and employee as a natural order of this mythification. It should be acknowledged that although there are white subjects who occupy these positions, they occupy these positions as workers. It should be noted there is a fundamental difference between work and a job. Being named and mythicised as *Sophie-Elsie* made it highly racial and ontologically impossible to occupy the position of a lord, master and employer or as a worker. This is since the naming of the maid, “stills ... [*Sophie-Elsie* to] encounter with the world in order for ... [her] to become a being in the world” (Quick 2004:95) who is not mythicised. *Sophie-Elsie* does not receive the same level of recognition that is simply granted to the white subject as a right from birth. *Sophie-Elsie* is not recognised as a human being because her name has been confiscated and mythicised. This is further illustrated by Yancy when he states that:

This ... [mythification] occurred in the form of the past brutal enslavement of Black bodies, the cruel and sadistic lynching of Black bodies, the sexual molestation of Black bodies ... the literal breeding of Black bodies for white exploitation, and the unethical experimentation on Black bodies ... (Yancy 2008:1).

Naming for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is a mythical conception as reflected by “the complex historical entanglement of indigenous and colonial concepts” (Hamilton 1998:3-4) that embodies politics of naming as mythification as reflected by Yancy in the above statement. According to Nuttal (2009:3), “colonial politics entailed the uneven mixing and reformulation of local and imperial concerns” to make reconciliation between the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* and whiteness impractical, which is the source of naming as mythification. For these reasons amongst many, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* must remain a non-human thing for the construction of the empire to be possible. This raises some curiosity grounded on the fundamental question: What would the construction

of the modern world do or be without this “Black imago in the white imaginary” (Yancy 2008:4) as a nourishment that the modern/colonial world came so far to cultivate, and that without which whiteness would perish?

Thus, without the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, the colonial world and the institution of whiteness would fall. In other words, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is a cog in the colonial universal machine (Moten 2018b). The mystification of a right to rights for *Sophie* as a black body, as stated by Yancy (2008:21), is largely linked to “everyday level of social construction, which includes the disproportionate incarceration of young Black bodies, and the construction of Black women’s bodies as promiscuous by nature, reckless, and “purposely havi[ing] more and more children to manipulate taxpayers into giving them more money””. Therefore, in the eyes of the colonial world, the gestures that *Sophie* mimics only “serves in a way as the conclusion of a vast delusion, [that] prods one’s brain” (Fanon [1952] 2008:29) to delusional poetics of blackness that renders blackness as being in nothingness. For *Sophie-Elsie* to take the position of the madam is to be like a white subject, however, only at the level of mimicry and mystification. Sibande argues that elements of mimicking the madam are presented:

In *Sophie*’s dresses, well actually it’s not her own dresses, it’s actually the dresses she saw in the Madam’s wardrobe but then again she wanted to make them bigger. So it’s that idea of copying or doing what the Madam is doing and it’s the same thing with us. We’re forever trying to catch up to White people, forever trying to prove to ourselves that actually I am human, I’m a good Black (Sibande in Khan 2015:227).

Sibande captures the mythification of naming in the ontological rat race of catching up with whiteness. Of course the madam is regarded as the only human being because the only human is the white subject whereas the rest exists in the realm of non-human, which is in the realm of the mystified ontology. This mystification led Fanon ([1952] 2008:30) to remark: “We shall see why love is beyond the reach of the Mayotte Capécias of all nations. For the beloved should not allow me to turn my infantile fantasies into reality: On

the contrary, he should help me to go beyond them". In this regard, Fanon refers to love that transcends beyond the physical and the flesh that is ontologically received from the other as a human. This love is the love of the human – not of black or white. It is love that transcends mythification.

This is love that allows other humans to be really who they are without feeling forced to compromise and change because of how others see and mythicise them. Fanon ([1952] 2008:28) further asserts that, "And, if as Sartre has appeared to formulate a description of love as frustration, his *Being and Nothingness* amounting only to an analysis of dishonesty and inauthenticity" that clouds the existential relation of the person into mythification. For Sartre, the love of who the human is, is beyond and different from the love of what we do in the world. Sartre perceived the waiter to be deeply in love with the role and the duties of being a waiter rather than with the experience of being human. Sartre is concerned with the worker as the human subject, which since his time of writing has been the white subject who does not experience naming as mythification. Sartre is not concerned with being and nothingness of the human by challenging being in nothingness of other humans, which is created by whiteness and its power of mythification.

Hence, *Sophie's* identity and her naming are interlinked with the space that she cleans most of the days of her life, which is the house of the madam. Sibande (in Khan 2015:225) states that because of naming as mythification, "... you don't know if she's outside or inside, the space she is in has become ambiguous. I was toying with the idea that she is neither/nor. She's neither outdoors, nor indoors, she's nowhere". *Sophie* is unnamed and renamed but not as a means of recognising her as a worker or as a human, but rather as a way of mythicising her as a thing amongst others who look just like her. *Sophie* has been transformed into a myth rather than a human. For Césaire ([1972] 2001), this is an act that embodies "colonisation = thingification" in the state of the colonial equation. The state of naming as mythification pushed the figure of

Sophie-Elsie beyond the “abyssal line” (Santos 2007), which presents the impossibility of meeting points and co-recognition of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* and the white subject.

For Santos (2007:2), naming as mythification suggests a “non-existence, invisibility, non-dialectic absence” that really applies to *Sophie-Elsie* as an embodiment of the mythicised figure. That is, to exist beyond the abyssal line for *Sophie* means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being as a human. The *black body* is perceived as an embodiment of damnation that is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the colonially accepted conception of the human is, which is absence. According to Maldonado-Torres (2007:253), “the absence of rationality is articulated in modernity with the idea of the absence of being in others. Misanthropic scepticism and racism work together with ontological exclusion” as a result of naming as mythification. Thus, the waiter Sartre refers to can choose to come out of the duty and step into ontology as an option. But *Sophie-Elsie* is out of place, meaning she does not have much of an option to choose between work and ontology, existing and mythification. In *Sophie*’s non-existential position, things are much different – most laws collapse and are replaced with new laws that are magnetic to the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as death. In her non-existential position, *Sophie* does not work but serves, or is enslaved to be more precise.

Most rights collapse where the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as a maid is concerned because she is not a worker but a mythicised figure of a maid. The racist logic and its infrastructure of white supremacy are not constructed to recognise the figure of the maid as a human being. Thus, even the post-apartheid labour law “did not take into account the working conditions of vulnerable workers within either the formal or informal employment sectors” (Meyiwa 2012:54). Meyiwa treats maids as mythified figures. To name her a domestic worker is not the same as simply naming a worker or a helper.

Furthermore, a white worker is not the same as a black worker as they experience a different side of naming. Since the articulation of capitalism, the white body has benefitted from the working system while the black body has been located on the dirty side as a commodity. This can be seen even to the concern with capitalism and the working system, its cause of alienation, suffering and exploitation of the subject.

This study emphasises that there is a fundamental difference between the white body as a subject and the black flesh as a figure; a nobody. The notion of difference is approached from many different positionalities by various authors, for “difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality, rather than binary opposition and exclusion” (Hutcheon 1999:66) as in the case of blackness. But because the black body in its blackness is stripped off its humanness and reduced to flesh and myth, it becomes just a figure. For this reason, the experience of being in a biological and physical body in the world does not and will never exact or evoke the same feelings and experience between the white subject and *Sophie-Elsie* as a mythicised figure. So, what appears to be the concern of the consequences of the capitalist system that does not stretch as far as the absence of the choice for the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is to be a mythicised figure. This results in misanthropic scepticism and racism of the white imaginary.

If all rights collapse where *Sophie-Elsie* as a mythicised figure is concerned, it means *Sophie-Elsie* only exists and can only perform as far as the level of the imaginary. Naming as a colonial tool of mythification pushes Hall and Sealy (2001:56) to ask ontological questions about the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as a black woman, such as: “Who is the black woman? What does she want? Is she one or many things? Has she something we could call ‘an identity’, which remains ‘given’ beneath all the shifting appearances? Or is her identity *always* a performance, a masquerade?”. However, *Sophie-Elsie’s* enactment only ends at the level of being mythical and staged like in theatre and film

productions because in blackness, identities and “performances are make-believe” (Schechner [1988] 2003: xviii).

The white subject, such as the Sartrean waiter, is spoiled for choices to the extent that after work they can do something else or can quit their jobs without being worried of finding another job soon. On the other hand, *Sophie-Elsie* as the mythified figure is not allowed to leave work and cannot just come at certain hours and go home after work. As a figure of mythification, it is as if she is not even expected to have a home and family like the white subject because she is named differently. If *Sophie-Elsie* has all these things in the colonial imagination and fantasy where she indulges herself most in – as a settler in the white subject space – it is only an act of the theatre and mythification. Whatever *Sophie-Elsie* has and does which is beyond her ontological and social boundaries, she is only mimicking a white subject, which is the only human. This is easily emphasised by the common statement that says “monkey sees, monkey do”. If this mimicry is mistaken for reality, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as the maid is reminded of her place through the apron, her name and her headscarf as technologies of “disciplinary power” (Foucault [1977] 1997:138) that qualifies her naming as mythification. Most of the time, this mimicry is confused with human rights: the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is constantly and violently reminded that she has no rights as a mythicised figure. The names *Elsie*, *Merica* and *Velucia* are markers that expose *Sophie* to the relationship that is mythified, a kind of “relations of power invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it ... to emit signs” (Foucault [1977] 1997:25). As a result of naming as mythification, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* can be tortured and forced to do extra work because she is marked as a myth in the human register. This is evident in the shootings of black bodies in Marikana when they insisted on turning a fantasy into reality. Meaning, for a black body to fight for a salary increase is a mythical experience that elicits torture and forces of the state.

The white worker and the Sartrean waiter can resign and stand in their ontology and get better jobs. However, *Sophie-Elsie* is ontologically trapped in the space of, not even work, but of servitude with no ontology. Thus, even if *Sophie-Elsie* could demand or choose to step outside her job, she would be stepping outside her ontology. That means that *Sophie* would be stepping outside herself and go nowhere. *Sophie* serves the madam and stays in a confined space at the backyard of the madam's house where not even her husband or family are allowed to just show up uninvited and without the permission from the madam. Therefore, as a mythicised figure, *Sophie-Elsie* takes the position of a maid as her job whether she likes it or not. But because she is black, there are certain things she can do and there are certain things she is not allowed to do. Living in the madam's yard as a figure of mythification for *Sophie-Elsie* is to exist behind power structures (Quijano 2008), just like during the physical apartheid time in South Africa, which was and is followed by structural apartheid. The physical signage of apartheid has been removed, but not the structural root thereof. *Sophie* is a maid in one of the institutions that are a legacy of apartheid, namely the madam's house in the South African context.

Black people were segregated by the apartheid system that positioned them on the darker side of existence by denying them the full right to be humans. This is the denial of the right to be human – not just a right as a worker because *Sophie* has more at stake than just her job and her servitude at the madam's house. Mbembe (2017:1) states that, “whether in literature, philosophy, the arts, or politics, Black discourse has been dominated by three events: slavery, colonisation, and apartheid. Still today, they imprison the way in which Black discourse expresses itself”. The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is imprisoned by naming through black body mythification. However, a white subject has a choice or at least some protection of right that protects the person at work, in the present and the future. The worker is protected by possessing whiteness, even by the Department of Labour, and receives protection through benefits such as a

retirement fund, medical aid, bonuses and holidays. At least even some of the jobs that are occupied by black people such as being a teller, security guard and police have some benefits and at least some holidays (Archer 2011; De Regt 2009; Dinat & Pederdy 2007).

Sophie-Elsie exists in the positionality of mythicising naming on the “antagonistic identity formation” (Wilderson 2003:225). As a figure of mythification, *Sophie-Elsie* is in the position of ‘at least’. The white subject says that at least she has a roof over her head; at least she gets paid and eats some of the madam’s food; at least she stays in a room with electricity; at least she has a job as most black people are jobless; at least she can feed her family even if her salary is small; and at least she has something to do. However, this position of ‘at least’ is not enough for *Sophie-Elsie* as it does not account for ontology as she is a figure of mythification.

To exist as a figure of mythification provides the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* with half recognition that can only stretch as far as the white subject wants it to. In an anti-black world, the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is like a clean slate. It is a void, darkness, nothingness, and shapelessness until the white subject gives it meaning by shaping it up out of the realm of myth by bringing it back as a figure of mythification. If the white subject wants to see and recognise the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as a maid, a security guard, a monster, a criminal, a suspect or anything that the white subject feels, at least the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is entitled to that. Being a figure of mythification suggests the impression that, “domestic workers and the families who employ them ... used by both groups involves the construction of relations of dependency” (Fanon [1952] 2008:609). The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* needs to work extra hard to occupy the positions that have normally and supposedly been created to be occupied by white subjects only. It stems from naming as mythification: the white subject never thought they would be challenged and defeated in the project of colonisation and apartheid.

Even if *Sophie* could work and clean the house of the madam, her name ontologically means absolutely nothing as she is nothing but a figure of mythification. *Sophie-Elsie's* job, unlike Sartre's waiter, is one with her ontology or the absence thereof because *Sophie-Elsie* cannot resign from her duty as a maid. To deal with the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* is to deal with "how the notion of surface and depth—and the visible and the hidden—is explored and experimented with" (Nuttall 2014:161) under the politics of naming as mythification. But a purpose with no meaning, that is, existence with no significance, means to exist but not to be seen and regarded as existing. Therefore, it is to exist as a myth. Thus, as much as *Sophie-Elsie* exists at least, she does not qualify to be called a worker as the worker at least does not lack the right that *Sophie-Elsie* lacks as the mythicised figure. Even if *Sophie-Elsie* could be referred to as a domestic worker or domestic helper, it only ends on the level of political correctness and myth-making. If *Sophie-Elsie* really was a domestic worker, on an ontological level, she would keep her real name, be entitled to holidays and all the benefits of the worker, as well as be recognised ontologically as a human as a worker. She would be able to step out of her work role and her job and would be able to step into the ontological role as a human separate from the role of the worker. This means that the institution of domestic work would collapse, or that it would not only be black people who occupy it. *Sophie-Elsie* would require a new name from a white subject in order to be able to stand a chance of being human and step outside the role of mythification. This position of naming as mythification led Yancy to remark:

At no point do I either desire to be white or begin to hate my dark skin. And while I recognize the historical power of the white gaze, a perspective that carries the weight of the white racist history and everyday encounter of spoken and unspoken anti-Black racism, I do not see *white* recognition, that is, the white woman's recognition. Though I would prefer that she does not see me in term of the Black imago in the white imaginary, I am not *dependent* upon her recognition. Indeed, to "prefer" that she see me different does not bespeak a form of dependency. Rather, my preference is suggestive of my hope of a radically different world (Yancy 2008:5-6).

For the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* to be human, Yancy suggests that she needs some form of recognition from the white subject as a way of changing the way it sees the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* as a mythicised figure. This would influence the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* afterwards to also see herself as a human and not as a mythicised figure. Yancy captures the experience of being a named figure of mythification as a Black imago in the white subject's recognition in the following remark:

When followed by white security personnel as I walk through department stores, when a white sales person avoids touching my hand, or when a white woman looks with suspicion as I enter the elevator, I feel that in their eyes I am this indistinguishable, amorphous, black seething mass, a token of danger, a threat, a criminal, a burden, a rapacious animal incapable of delayed gratification (Yancy 2008:2).

The figure of *Sophie-Elsie* in its blackness is always recognised under the logic of suspicion and mythification. Thus, the appearance and presence of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* exact discomfort and dishonesty. Being named black in an anti-black world exacts some form of ontological alienation and, even worse, it can exact some form of self-alienation that constitutes the mythification of the black body.

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on engaging Fanon's conception of naming as one of the most important and yet underestimated tools of the coloniality of knowledge. Here the conception of naming has been deployed against the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* to understand how naming acts as a mechanism of constructing the figure of the maid. It is shown that, from the position of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie*, naming becomes a tool of subjection, a tool of non-relation, something in relation to the logic of the colonial master in an anti-black world. As Fanon articulated, in the racialised context of the world, naming becomes the shadow in which the white body positions itself in relation to the rest of the world and other humans who have been labelled as the only human who has the power

and right to name everything. In other words, something does not exist or it is not recognised until it is named by a white subject. Reading the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* from the conception of naming as a colonial tool of entanglement revealed how it would have been impossible to capture the mind and being of the black body for the colonial system.

It is through naming that the subjection of *Sophie-Elsie* is made possible by naming of the non-white as black. To be named black is to be turned into flesh. In Sibande's work we get to see how naming as a tool of domestication and violence has affected the being of an African figure with attempts to keep it in the loop of ontological absence as an ontological stray: a flesh with no register. The power of naming cannot be underestimated and be approached with ignorance. Naming altered the reality of the figure of *Sophie-Elsie* at various levels: It altered her being. It altered her ontology. It altered her relationship with others. It altered how she sees herself and how she is seen by others. It altered her outlook of the world. It gave her a precarious level of whiteness. It dehumanised her. It reduced her to the white subject's property. It altered her into an object. It glossed over the violence that she is exposed to. It tricked her into thinking she is part of a white family. It entangled her in the coloniality of knowledge. It rendered her invisible and brought her into a living hell as a servant. It became a yoke around her neck to keep her in a state of servitude. Eventually it was engraved and stained on her gravestone.



Fig. 2: Mary Sibande, Sophie-Merica (2009). Fibreglass, resin, fabric and steel.

CHAPTER 4

Sophie-Merica and the Human Subject

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2, Section 2.3 discussed Fanon's thematic of the human subject in relation to colonality of being. In this chapter, it is applied to the analysis of *Sophie-Merica* (2009) (fig 2), the depiction of the artist's grandmother. *Sophie-Merica* is a figure of the maid who comes after *Sophie-Elsie* as a domesticated figure who signifies the colonisation of the human subject and reconfiguration of the being and essence of the black person. She represents the institution of domestication that continues to haunt the women in Sibande's family, as such, her purpose is to only serve in the coloniser's house. *Sophie-Merica* portrays the impact of the dehumanisation of the black body as the human subject from the Fanonian perspective at four levels.

At the first level, I conduct a Fanonian study of *Sophie-Merica* to examine domestication and the human subject. Here, I discuss how domestication locks the figure of *Sophie-Merica* outside the category of the human subject. Secondly, I examine the notion of Manichean domestication. Here, I discuss how domestication creates a reality that is divided into two, and in which *Sophie-Merica* is a go-between. Thirdly, I examine the notion of the black body as a domesticated flesh. Here, I discuss how the black body was transformed into flesh as something that lacks any possible ontological value of the body. At the fourth and last level, I examine the notion of domestication as the structure of reality. Here, I discuss how the current reality as the anti-black world is a structural reality whose existence depends on the existence of the black body. In this chapter, *Sophie-Merica* represents the idea that the life of a black person in the modern world is something that is chosen for; it is something that can be taken back because it is given.

4.2 THE FUNDAMENTALS OF DOMESTICATION

The fundamentals of domestication borders on coloniality of being. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:132), “coloniality of being captures the central question of the effects of coloniality on lived experiences of the colonized people that were mediated by the master-slave and colonizer colonized dialectic where violence was naturalized and routinized as a key feature of colonial government” as in the case of South Africa even after apartheid. There are many forms of domestication that are structural and hidden behind the mask of modernity and globalisation, which create an illusion that Europe as the centre is epistemologically greater than Africa as the periphery in the world defined by globalisation. According to Quijano (2000:533), “globalization is the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power” that can feed on domestication of the black body. The fundamentals of domestication mean “radical classifications have been used to deprive certain groups of basic rights, and therefore have an important place in considerations of human suffering” (Farmer 2002:275-276). Domestication operates silently inside the settler’s household as a fundamental factor of dehumanisation that results in the suffering of the black family.

This colonial domestication means the black family is compromised and the black body is even below the zone of non-being (Fanon [1952] 2008). One of the maids interviewed by Cock (1989:20) confirms this by asserting that, “I even have to look after the dog and cats. The employers think about them more than they think about me. It’s not an interesting job. You don’t learn from it. It just makes you tired to think you are going to do the same thing every day. That is why I have all my children at school”. This domestication is violence against the human rights of *Sophie-Merica* who always occupies the level of a maid as an ontological domesticated flesh. The settler’s household refers to homes of white people in the suburbs, gated communities and what Fanon

refers to as the “settler’s town” (Fanon [1952] 2008) where *Sophie-Merica* enters only as a servant. These forms and attitudes of differentiation between the maid and the madam’s spaces provided people like Fanon with enough evidence to examine domestication as a Manichean conception of the world.

The justification of domestication is “in this set-up of intersubjective relations, the colonisers used violence to keep the colonized in a subordinated position, forcing them endure all forms of exploitation and abuses” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:126). This level of violence exacted by servitude over *Sophie-Merica* in the settler’s household is made to appear as if it is a natural and a legal phenomenon. As stated by Cock (1989:4), maids are “denied a negotiated wage, reasonable working hours, family and social life. They are also denied favourable working conditions, respectful treatment and any acknowledgement of the dignity of their labour, as well as specific legal protection and effective bargaining power”. As a domesticated figure, for *Sophie-Merica* the law seems to collapse no matter how violent the relation with the madam is. The settler’s household is a symbol of an institution of domestication, subjection and death to *Sophie-Merica*. The settlers house becomes a “site of a common human vulnerability” (Butler 2004:44), a space of justifiable form of bondage that keeps *Sophie-Merica* domesticated. Therefore, whatever happens to *Sophie-Merica* as a domesticated figure in the house of the madam is considered legal. Cock (1989:4) asserts this domestication by stating that, “lack of educational opportunities and employment alternatives coupled with legislation restricting the movement of black workers, all combined to ‘trap’ black women in domestic service”. *Sophie-Merica* is adopted as a canvas to paint the picture of how domestication destroys the black family. According to Sibande:

When you think about all these people that I just mentioned [*Sophie-Elsie*, *Sophie-Merica* and *Sophie-Velucia*], they were actually humble. Like, how can you work for someone who’s abusing you for years and years, but you continue to work and work hard, you work with “love”, you, you take care of other peoples’ kids and neglect your own. So that’s what my work highlights, I didn’t feel the artwork needed to be hostile (Sibande in Khan 2015:222).

The life of *Sophie-Merica* in the coloniser's house is not much of a life because it is a hostile environment similar to being in prison. As Sibande stated, she did not have to create an artwork that was hostile since the system that produced *Sophie-Merica* was already hostile because "as an occupational group domestic workers are subjected to a level of 'ultra-exploitation'" (Cock 1989:4). As a domesticated figure, the maid sleeps and eat outside the madam's household in the backyard. She sleeps in a small shack outside with tools and other old things the madam does not use. Even the maid's cup and spoons have their own place, which is not with the rest of the madam's cutlery in the kitchen – the one where *Sophie-Merica* washes dishes every day, but where she never eats. In fact, *Sophie-Merica's* cup was often a recycled jam tin.

Domestication makes us understand how, "the concept of coloniality of being locates the roots of violence against Africans and other colonized people within the expansion of Western modernity" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:132) and how it disrupts the notion of the human subject. To have a maid is a norm for the white subject, it is part of the house like a stepladder or a spade. It is something they cannot live without. Placing *Sophie-Merica* in the backyard "captures not only the depersonalisation of black people under colonialism but also the constitution of Africans as racialised subjects whose life was not valued" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011:7). In the modern world and towards reaching the dream of modernity, domestication against *Sophie-Merica* is "no extra-ordinary affair" but "a constitutive feature of the reality of colonized and racialized subjects" (Maldonado-Torres 2007:251) as part of reaching and maintaining the dream of modernity. To understand the purpose of domestication in the making of a domestic worker, it is important to understand the domestication of *Sophie-Merica* as Ndlovu-Gatsheni further points out:

Colonial modernity was accompanied by the proletarianization of Africans who were dispossessed and then forcibly pressed into serving as cheap labour for white-owned farms, industries and mines, thus entering another hell in the cities. The cities and urban centres were racially fragmented into two racial realms, feeding Fanon with the material to provide an informative comparison

between the lives of natives and settlers within the urban colonial society (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:134).

Domestication is not only a physical manifestation but also a structural practice that always disadvantages *Sophie-Merica* and positions her in the periphery. However, it is the changing of *Sophie-Merica's* as a human subject that contributes towards the making of a domestic worker. According to Farmer (2002:261), “most would also agree that insidious assaults on dignity, such as institutionalized racism and sexism, also cause great and unjust injury” to the black family. This constituted the knowledge of the being of the domestic worker through institutionalised domestication and forced removals in their home lands. Domestication is a colonial inherited system that perpetuates white supremacy as a centre of modernity; it is reminder of the institution that built and destroyed the black family.

Farmer (2002:263) further points out that “for many, including most of my patients and informants, life choices are structured by racism, sexism, political violence, and grinding poverty”, which allude as markers for levels of suffering. Domestication as structural violence is interconnected with suffering, poverty and disease. For *Sophie-Merica* by virtue of existence, one is subjected to structural violence from the moment one is born in a black body. Thus, *Sophie-Merica's* life is structured by domestication. In *Sophie-Merica's* quest for identity, Fanon points out, “the black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to reach a human level” (Fanon [1952] 2008:3). In this scenario, the coloniser can become a victim of structural violence by wanting to maintain a particular higher ontological position in the world by domesticating *Sophie-Merica*. Domestication of *Sophie-Merica* is domestication of *Sophie-Velucia* and *Sophie-Elsie*. However, it is important to note, the white man can also be subjected to structural violence by being a slave to the idea of domesticating other humans to reach a human level.

To domesticate and be a master above others and see another human being as not human require various systems of violence to be in place to maintain the master-and-slave ontological gap. There is no other dialectic between the master and slave except for violence and death because “their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together – that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler – was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannon” (Fanon [1961] 1990:28). It is important to note that physical violence is violence that sometimes could be justified and glorified for the sake of building a nation. But structural violence is violence that hides behind domestication, which cannot be justified. Structural violence is not seen as violence but rather as something that is natural and normal; therefore, it needs no justification or suspicion.

Domestication created a Manichean conception of the world that split the world as well as the madam’s house into two through the ethnographic gaze of the world that “genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world” (Morrison [1992] 1993:4). Domestication in the ethnographic gaze of the world for *Sophie-Merica* is to be labelled and segregated. Therefore, a sense of ontological being is lost and replaced with what is in the eyes of the coloniser as a beholder in which *Sophie-Merica* “does not invoke any empirically experienced notion of women” (Pollock 1988:xvii). For the domesticated figure of *Sophie-Merica* to be seen in the settler’s household is for her to be erased to non-existence as the architecture of coloniality of being suggested “ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-option” (Lorde [1984] 2000:124).

According to Cock (1989:35), domestication is manifested in “the way in which residential homes are often built with servants’ quarters at the back, frequently with a separate entrance, creates separate social universes for the two groups”. However, Cock seems to be only concerned with the domestication of the maid at a social level. She is more worried about what she calls divided “social universes” (Cock 1989). However, a more serious concern at the level

of domestication is about the separated ontological universes that coloniality of being has come to create, which result in *Sophie-Merica* as a maid being placed in the backyard. Domestication in this sense is violence.

Žižek theorised violence by examining it in its various faces, but have not focused on the institution of maids on the ontological and domestication level. In relation to this subject of violence, Žižek poses the following questions:

Is there not something suspicious, indeed symptomatic, about this focus on subjective violence—that violence which is enacted by social agents, evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, fanatical crowds? Doesn't it desperately try to distract our attention from true locus of trouble, by obliterating from view other forms of violence and thus actively participating in them? (Žižek 2008:9)

Žižek asks us to be suspicious regarding this form of subliminal violence that is hidden behind what appears to be obvious. When maids walk in and out of the madam's house, it is hardly viewed with any suspicious eyes that should see it as a form of violence. Violence is often announced and identified when the maids or black workers in general go on strike for better pay and working conditions, when they are violating the law. According to Jansen (2019:4), "most white neighborhoods have retained the demographic character of the twentieth century, and to this day black people generally enter them in their capacity as servants, gardeners and cleaners" and this is not seen as violence. Therefore, police and law will come into play to stand against violation of the peace of the madam because the law is white, and it is there to domesticate *Sophie-Merica*. Examples constituting domestication include that "some employers furnish their servants' rooms with a bed and mattress, a chair and table; some provide blankets" (Cock 1989:35). But they never rise or strike against this ill treatment because in the eyes of the madam *Sophie-Merica* is done a huge favour to be working for the madam. This favour is asserted by Cock (1989:37) in the following statement, "clearly residential servants experience a degree of comfort and security in their accommodation which many non-residential servants lacks. They often have access to facilities such

as electricity and hot water which are not provided in most black township houses”.

So, according to the colonial system, it is a blessing that *Sophie-Merica* has this job of working as a maid for the white madam; it is not viewed as domestication. But according to Žižek (2008), “objective violence describes the inherent violence of a system, not only the threat of physical violence but also ‘the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation’”. Žižek makes us think deeper about what appears to be the special benefits that Cock claims residential maids should enjoy and be grateful for. Cock seems to forget, or her white anthropological gaze does not allow her to see, that whether *Sophie-Merica* is residential or stay with her family and travel to get work is the same thing as violence. “As a result, black nannies pushing white toddlers in prams or *abba*-ing them on their backs are still a familiar sight in parks and on pavements in most South Africa’s historically white suburbs” (Jansen 2019:4).

Growing up in front of many faces and phases of violence in all its structural formats is an unconscious participation by default in the townships in South Africa. At birth one is born in violence; for example, going to the market, going to work and going to school could be an adventure that could lead to death or arrest by police. These forms of death exist mostly legally in the townships, or the hood, or the ghetto. Here it is understandable and normal to die at a young age; end up in prison; or get bitten, stabbed, mugged and shot at even by cops while walking, protesting as a worker or student, because to be black is to be a domesticated flesh.

Žižek (2008) categorises the domestication as violence experienced by *Sophie-Merica* into three categories, namely “subjective”, “objective” and “symbolic violence”, which frame the conceptual understanding to locate violence against the figure of the maid. Objective violence is sub-divided into two forms of violence, namely “symbolic violence” and “systemic violence”

(Žižek 2008). According to Žižek (2008:3), “symbolic violence” refers to the “violence embodied in language and its forms” and “systemic violence” refers to “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems”. Domestication is the violence that comes with modernity. Žižek (2008) points out that most importantly it comes through language – violence can be a practice embedded in it.

The language used by the madam is categorised as symbolic violence because it domesticates *Sophie-Merica* as a maid. The maid as alluded in the previous chapter is given a new name by the madam. The maid hardly speaks in her mother tongue and she is always referred to as a girl. According to Žižek (2008), in many ways, the aphorism that the pen is mightier than the sword holds true; language is more divisive than the sword, more destructive. Language is the mechanism of violence and, as the medium of expression and communication, attention must be paid to its effects. *Sophie-Merica* is domesticated by language as a form of violence. Violence influences people’s experiences and perceptions about themselves and the world’s “coloniality of being would make primary reference to the lived experience of colonization and its impact on language” (Maldonado-Torres 2007:242). The fundamentals of domestication are also deeply embedded in language; hence, part of this study focuses on naming and how *Sophie-Merica* was renamed.

Fanon ([1952] 2008) acknowledges the role of language as the source of coloniality of being and domestication. He believes that the figure of the maid can begin to question the coloniser-colonised relation, which he maps in the beginning as an encounter with violence through language. The institution of maids deploys language that conceals the domestication of *Sophie-Merica* to what happens inside the house of the madam. Coloniality of being is manifested through language that conceals this domestication while revealing the colonial reality as the only absolute reality. Words such as domestic worker or helper suggest that the institution is not only some form of plantation, but

also a new form of bondage that is hidden. However, violence and domestication are really concealed behind the language of servitude.

The effects of language as a form of domestication and violence against black languages are important and complex phenomena that have been studied not only on an anthropological level, but also on theoretical and philosophical levels. Wa Thiongo asserts that:

The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty from theft. But the biggest weapon wielded and actual daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves (Wa Thiongo 2005:3).

Domestication forms part of the cultural bomb. Wa Thiongo shows another form of violence against the concept of being of *Sophie-Merica* that is launched against the culture and language of the black people. He reflects that it is no longer simply violence as articulated by Žižek, it is war. A series of forms of violence as articulated by Žižek combined with the cultural bomb as pointed by Wa Thiongo can constitute a "paradigm of war" (Maldonado-Torres 2008) as domestication against *Sophie-Merica*.

Maybe this cultural bomb as referred to by Wa Thiongo is still ticking because *Sophie-Merica* is still domesticated to use European names and is still subjected to institutional violence. Most importantly, the institutionalisation of domestic work is still present South Africa. Domestication will not end yet as stated by "the explosion will not happen today. It is too soon ... or too late" (Fanon [1952] 2008:8) because the institutions that maintain this bomb are interpolated into the new post-apartheid government. For a being to be colonised, it must first be identified under bad faith so that forms of domestication can be applied to erase identity. This brings the concept of domestication as coloniality of being into the discussion. Maldonado-Torres developed a concept of coloniality of being that resonates with ontological

domestication. Coloniality of being is linked to the erasing of black names. Wa Thiong'o (2005) pointed out that it is one of the effects of the cultural bomb that is sustained by Žižek's definition of forms of violence.

This does encompass the violence that is in the naming of *Sophie-Merica* and the violence that could be exacted by *Sophie-Merica's* master or madam; it talks more about 'family violence'. Hence, where the issue of ontological domestication is concerned, "very few address what is perhaps a more important issue: the power that is involved in acts of naming, and the need for any preferred term to be critically analysed, rather than simply accept as reflecting some particular 'truth'. Each name has a history that is ongoing, and often contentious" (Hendry 2013:2). Names are forms of domestication that need to be located and defined properly, but it also relates to naming of forms of violence that are generally regarded as domestic violence. However, the concept of domestication as violence is complex. It includes and excludes other forms of violence happening in a household but which are not regarded as such because it does not take place as abuse between a man and women and children. Most of the time, the concept of domestic violence only implies in common terms that a man abuses women and children. Specifically, a female child who is considered to be exposed to the danger of being raped by a black man. Rape is another form of violence that happens inside and outside the domestic environment.

However, "defining 'domestic violence' is a tricky business. We are surrounded by terms that seek to definitively name the violence that takes place within the private sphere, and there can be confusion about what each term includes and excludes, what it means" (Hendry 2013:2). It should be noted that this form of domesticated violence hidden behind the institution of domestic servitude is not only between a master and slave. There are black people who have maids and there are white people who are also maids and madams to other white people. Foucault ([1977] 1997:187) points out that "disciplinary power, on the other

hand, is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility”.

The aspect of visibility plays a fundamental role in the figure of the maid as *Sophie-Merica* represents all the so-called domestic workers and/or black workers in general. *Sophie-Merica*'s blackness is covered by the uniform she has to wear at work, which makes her more visible. *Sophie-Merica* in the uniform signifies the visibility of the invisibility. It is easy to forget *Sophie-Merica*'s real name and yet it is easier to identify her by the uniform. One of the maids Cock interviewed stated, even “the children are rude. They don't count us as people. They think we belong to their parents” (Cock 1989:54). Their uniform tells us *Sophie-Merica*'s only purpose in the world is to “clean, dust, wash, mop, polish, vacuum, empty bins, and operate machines in some instances, to get the (cleaning) work done” (Naidu 2009:129). While other people are associated with other professions because of their casual work clothes, *Sophie-Merica* has no chance of being mistaken for any other profession: she is just a maid, or a nanny or a girl. She is always in-between.

The politics of the uniform in the realm of domestic servitude are more than just an attempt to cover the workers with the same colour uniform for neatness and beauty in the workplace. It is more than what meets the eye. Uniforms are costumes for schools, restaurants, prisons, hotels, hospitals, security companies and maids. They help to elevate the image of the company and make it visible to its customers for servitude. But uniforms often come with a level of status and respect, and most people wear their uniform with pride. However, one of the maids Cock interviewed asserts that under the uniform, “I have no feelings. I am useful to her, that's all” (Cock 1989:69). Meaning for *Sophie-Merica*, in relation to her Victorian dress, Naidu points out that:

The uniform subjectified the women into being highly visible, conspicuous, and thus plastically malleable to particular behaviours deemed acceptable for work. The uniform also disciplined the women into objects of surveillance by themselves and management at work. And lastly, the single-layered cleaners'

uniform-dress worked against the women's aesthetic sense of being and feeling "pretty". The uniform acted instead to transcribe homogeneity and strip away the complex multi-layers of their personalities inside the work space, further reifying and naturalising their status as cleaners (Naidu 2009:137).

The uniform violated the being of *Sophie-Merica* and allowed her to be exposed to all different forms of subjection and a violation of the right to be seen as a woman. Under the uniform *Sophie-Merica* is not a woman, but an object that can be used at the will of the madam. In a way, the uniform is supposed to tame her sexual appeal so inviting to the master for sexual pleasures because in the colonial/patriarchal world, "only [white] women are supposed to be spectacularised for the male gaze" (Stratton 1999:182). According to Bohan (1996:9), "the culture we live in constructs sexual orientation as a core nuclear essential defining attribute of identity which can be defined by membership to one of two (or at best three) discrete categories".

Sophie-Merica cannot be seen as beautiful; her aesthetic appearance as a woman is not appreciated because her "visibility is a trap" (Foucault [1977] 1997:200). For *Sophie-Merica*, being seen is being disciplined because "in discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection" (Foucault [1977] 1997:187). Visibility by uniform for *Sophie-Merica* means to be unseen as a human who should also have her own house and not be just a cleaner in another woman's house, taking care of another woman's family.

One of the maids Cock interviewed further asserted that, "she thinks I am not fully grown. She treats me like a baby" (Cock [1977] 1997:70). To stay in a house and turn it into a home require many different things. When connected together, it creates an experience of living life not surviving it. The uniform becomes a tool of survival for *Sophie-Merica* like the camouflage of a soldier at war, although it can for instance act as a prison.

Visibility is indeed a prison for the uniformed black body, which is inscribed to the realm of the coloniality of being. Foucault ([1977] 1997:202-203) goes on to say, “he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection”. *Sophie-Merica* as a maid in a uniform becomes a self-surveilling figure. That is, even if the madam is not in the house, the uniform that *Sophie-Merica* wears acts as a spy and keeps an eye on her. It monitors the maid by keeping her in her place. According to Naidu (2009:136), “the dressed bodies are given meaning through their location in specific times and places which have their location in specific times and places which have their own rules of dress and comportment”. The uniform grants *Sophie-Merica* limited freedom to walk or sit on lawns in the white suburbs without being asked any questions or be seen as a threat. Even her name acts as a form of a uniform, which gives *Sophie-Merica* another visibility. A visibility that begins where her invisibility as a being ends.

According to Foucault ([1977] 1997:137) it is because “these methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called 'disciplines’”. During the days of apartheid the idea of servitude including bondage was an open institution based on being a maid or a slave on contract basis. Sometimes one became a ‘slave’ of a family or king for murdering someone, being captured at war, or being a thief.

Foucault ([1977] 1997:184-185) further asserts that, “at the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected”. Institutions that sustain white supremacy border on the maid-and-madam relation, government

buildings, schools, clinics, hospitals, universities, roads, and mining that place the black body under various forms of violence and discipline.

Today the institution of maids and slave is politicised, racialised and institutionalised between maids who always happen to be black and madams who always happen to be white. This seems like some form of ontological punishment that turns the figure of the maid into some form of a dead object that can be punished. Foucault asserts this in the following statement:

But we can surely accept the general proposition that, in our societies, the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain “political economy” of the body: even if they do not make use of violent or bloody punishment, even when they use “lenient” methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the [black] body that is at issue – the [black] body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission (Foucault [1977] 1997:25).

The figure of the maid through institutionalised domestication assumes a position of submission and surrendering. It takes the form of surrendering as surrendering to God for salvation which comes with domestication. The madam and the master assume a godly position in which they do not see their institution as a form of domestication, but as another way of job creation. Their omnipresent position is embedded in *Sophie-Merica*'s uniform as a tool to violate her being. These violations of the black body through categorisation and naming happen inside the madam's house in a way that perpetuates violence.

4.3 THE MANICHEAN DOMESTICATION

According to Fanon ([1961] 1990:29), “the colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies, it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression” that is installed inside the universities, museums and art galleries. *Sophie-Merica* plays a key element as one of the frontiers in the construction of the Manichean world and domestication. The world as the empire has many world(s) of which *Sophie-Merica* is placed in her “proper place” (Woodson 2005:xiii) where “the

Negro, the African, the native, the black, the dirty, was rejected, despised: cursed” (Fanon 1965:26).

Sophie-Merica is a signifier of a divided world as she is the second figure of the maid in Sibande’s representations of three generations of woman who were maids. As the second figure, *Sophie-Merica* comes to signify the divided world, the past and present and the continuation of the domestication of the figure of the maid. As much as *Sophie-Merica* is a dividing line, she qualifies to be in the category mentioned by Fanon above because the white world makes the black body. The dividing line is that which belongs to the other side of the Manichean world, because it is created to protect white supremacy in the Manichean world. The difference between *Sophie-Merica* as a line of division and the frontiers is shown by go-betweens. The go-betweens are a dividing line between being human and non-human, a line that is there to keep the line of the non-human in check. The official instituted go-betweens are a protection and gatekeepers of the divided colonial world.

Fanon speaks against the notion of a maid being loved or in love with the white subject as in the case of Mannoni Cappacia while it still stands behind the go-betweens. *Sophie-Merica* symbolically signifies several topics in the black world, but most importantly a “line of orientation” (Fanon [1951] 2008:31). This line of orientation is the fundamental difference that leads Fanon to call it the Manichean world structure. The orientation of *Sophie-Merica* behind the abyssal line is closed outside the dialectic because the Manichean world is a construct of the dialectic of the master. The dialectic of *Sophie-Merica* as a slave is not supposed to happen yet because, for her, “the explosion will not happen today. It is too soon ... or too late” (Fanon [1951] 2008:1). The explosion of the Manichean world will mean that the dialectic is open for the slave to negotiate with the master. It will open *Sophie-Merica* to the dialectic as a human who deserves to be treated with respect. *Sophie-Merica* signifies that being black is the beginning and the ending that have been already determined.

Therefore, the dialectic is closed. The figure of the maid is an unwelcome guest in the world as a house of the imperial man in that it is ontologically held hostage without a history.

The dividing lines that *Sophie-Merica* embodies are colonial constructs that are fundamentally based on the conception of “colonial difference” (Mignolo 2000). This difference is not natural but it is structurally normalised through various forms of colonial technologies that fundamentally border on race and skin colour. Through political constructed differences pinned on skin colour, “the [figure of *Sophie-Merica*’s] ... body becomes a defenceless target for rape and veneration, and the body, in its material and abstract phase, a resource for metaphor” (Spillers 1987:66) of domestication, which is qualified by those dividing racial attitudes. Scholars from various positions have pinpointed these fundamental dividing racial attitudes in the colonised and coloniser’s “racist/ imperial Manichean misanthropic scepticism” (Maldonado-Torres 2007:245) that keeps *Sophie-Merica* inferior inside the maid’s uniform. The boundaries created by the maid’s uniform maintain the figure of the maid as a servant, savage and an animal located in the same realm as the horses of the master.

These dividing lines are Western boundaries that are set and maintained by what Santos (2007:33) refers to as “abyssal thinking”, which fundamentally qualifies the notion of “impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides” (Santos 2007:33) between the figure of *Sophie-Merica* and the white madam. *Sophie-Merica* only becomes alive when she must serve the master and madam; until then, she is useless as she is nothing. When *Sophie-Merica* wears a uniform, it becomes a symbol of safety in the coloniser’s house because “the uniform is seen as acting as a material exercise of discretionary and disciplinary power of inscription” (Naidu 2009:128) that subjects *Sophie-Merica* to “the hieroglyphic of the flesh” (Spillers 1987). The flesh becomes a starting point for the construction of the Manichean domestication because as stated by Spillers (1987), “the mark must be made on the flesh because that is where ...

[Manichean domestication] start from”, which is to be marked with blackness. In this sense, *Sophie-Merica* is the signifier of the Manichean constructed world as a site of seeing and being seen/unseen. According to Santos:

Modern Western thinking is an abyssal thinking. It consists of a system of visibility and invisibility, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones ... The division is such that “the other side of the line” vanishes as reality becomes non-existent, and is indeed produced as non-existence. Non-existence means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being Santos (2007:33).

Existing beyond the abyssal character of the line means to be captured by the spell of Manichean domestication and to be ontologically absent from society at any level. *Sophie-Merica* can be looked at and not be seen, and acknowledged as seeing another human being but as seeing something else. This shows that as much as *Sophie-Merica* can wear a uniform as a maid, she is still on the other side of the abyssal line.

It becomes clear for *Sophie-Merica* that the more she is in uniform, the more she becomes invisible as a Manicheanism from various forms of violence (JanMohamed 1985). In this regard, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:132) asserts that, “other mechanisms of violence used include direct pillaging of indigenous knowledge of biodiversity; prohibition of use of native languages in public spaces; forcible adoption of Christian names; and destruction of ceremonial sites”. It is the Manicheanism visibility that makes her invisible, and the invisibility of whiteness is made visible by the visibility of blackness. This ritual of invisibility of constructing the Manichean world means transforming and baptising the black body and metamorphosising it, which is the foundation of the maid-and-madam relation of non-relation. Cock (1989:16) states that, “another domestic worker, aged 42, has been a servant all her working life, having started at the age of 12 as a nanny”. This metamorphosis acted upon for *Sophie-Merica* is for a lifetime and it is meant to keep the image of modernity alive as a universal template for the world. For a modern world to be created, there needs to be a primitive world that has to be developed to reach the

modern standard although it is meant to never be reached. However, the illusion of reaching it is what keeps and maintains the colonial logic as the fundamental logic of the universe.

The modern world develops deeper and spreads through systems of dividing and conquering black identities. It borders on elements of Manichean domestication that are an “essential relation to life, death, struggle, triumph, and regeneration” (Bakhtin [1968] 1984:282) that must be remembered. The invisible lines of division are deeply inscribed in black flesh through different racialising markers. The ways that *Sophie-Merica* works, lives, eats and is educated are always influenced by these lines of domestication that are constructed to keep it *Sophie-Merica* as a cog in the capitalist colonial-machine. As a part of the colonial machinery, *Sophie-Merica* has no power except for only having the strength to finish her work that is never finished.

Fanon reveals the picture of the existing powerlessness behind the Manichean domestication that is behind the abyssal line. According to Fanon ([1961] 1990: 29), “in the capitals countries a multitude of moral teachers, counsellors and ‘bewilderers’ separate the exploited from those in power. In the colonial countries, on the contrary the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle-butts and napalm not to budge”. The lines of division expose *Sophie-Merica* to ways of torture, pain and violence towards her sense of being. According to Cock (1989:17), one of the maids she interviewed “describes her employer as ‘a chameleon, [in that] she changes from day to day’. But over, ‘I don’t think she has any feelings for me. She looks down on me and shouts at me in front of her children’”. The Manichean domestication in the white household and in the world in general as an institution of structural violence that traps *Sophie-Merica* signify the presence of something that can be disrespected and used-abused at will.

Sophie-Merica is absent in the world although she is present in the belly of the beast that sustains the Manichean world structure. By existence, the figure of *Sophie-Merica* exists inside the belly of the monster, which is modernity; a monster that is in relation to white supremacy. According to Nietzsche (1990:102), “he who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you”. To be *Sophie-Merica* is to take an eternal gaze to the monster that assumes the position of “returning gaze of Otherness and finds that its mastery, its sameness, is undone. The familiar becomes uncannily transformed, the imitation subverts the identity of that which is being represented and the relation of power begins to vacillate” (Do Mar Castro Varela & Dhawan 2009:323). The house of the madam as an institution of slow death constitutes the abyss and the monster inside the abyss that Nietzsche alludes to.

Sophie-Merica can only get closer to whiteness when she cleans the house of the madam and has her name changed as if she is part of the family. In the abyss, as one of the maids declares, “the whites are sitting on our heads, so we are inferior” (Cock 1989:90). This positionality of inferiority pushes *Sophie-Merica* to the world of fantasy where she gazes at the abyss in order to be consumed by it. *Sophie-Merica* appears to be tired of the abyss. In her imagination, she goes into a trance with her eyes always closed like shamans engaged in self-healing (Eliade 1974; Krippner 2000; Walsh 2007; Winkelman 2002a). In this trance, *Sophie-Merica* dares to gaze at the abyss and allows it to consume her as she takes the different positions of the madam.

Most of the time *Sophie-Merica* positions herself in the shoes of the madam. Living by gazing at the monster is living in Manichean domestication behind the Manichean line as illustrated by Fanon:

The settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans

swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. The settler's feet are never visible, except perhaps in the sea; but there you're never close enough to see them. His feet are protected by strong shoes although the streets of his town are clean and even, with no holes or stones. The settler's town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; its belly is always full of good things. The settlers' town is a town of white people, of foreigners (Fanon [1961] 1990:3-5).

Sophie-Merica is situated and contained with an empty belly on the other side of Manichean domestication, behind the abyssal line. Fanon articulates *Sophie-Merica's* reality behind the abyssal line. However:

The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs (Fanon [1961] 1990:3-5).

Fanon explains the positions of *Sophie-Merica* and the white madam as existing in different spaces, but "they are in contestation for space, presence and attention" (Goniwe 2013:32). The spaces that Fanon illustrates are distinctly different from each other. The space of the madam, the settler, is the space for the human: a space for life to exist while the space for *Sophie-Merica*, the native, is the space for death, pain and disappearance. The Manichean concept of the world accounts for the structural conception of space and "how an emerging elite existing at the cusp of a society in transition, may be following in the footsteps of the colonial authority" (Corrigall 2015:157). This form of space does not only mean colonial authority, but it is also a location of *Sophie-Merica* as an object. In this way, the figure of the maid is positioned structurally while it is not there; it is not located in the space. Therefore, the black body suffers through delirium because the "experience of self has been over-determined by external definitions of our identity which are racist and sexist" (Abrahams 2001:71). The maid's psychology and embodiment are not only ontologically corrupted, but it is also excluded. This exclusion is fundamental.

The Manichean delirium is access of exclusion; therefore, Sophie's position means being superfluous in space. *Sophie-Merica* is not in space; she is not in space because she is nothing. *Sophie-Merica* operates in the realm of disrupted subjectivity. Her objection is challenged through her location as an object between existence and non-existence.

It is a scandalous question to think what *Sophie-Merica* signifies in the space of Manichean domestication. *Sophie-Merica* signifies the black body as an objectified thing whose humanity is questioned. This ambiguity Nuttal (2013: 427) argues, "Sophie appears to float between and above buildings, unfixed, disproportionate to her world, dislodged from the surface of the city".

As discussed previously, the names of black subjects are often substituted with English names, which makes it easier for the master and madam to label and call *Sophie-Merica*. *Sophie-Merica* is suspended between existence and non-existence as her name and the name of her family become lost in the Manichean world, including her persona as a human. *Sophie-Merica* becomes part of the property owned by the master like the broom and feather duster she uses. The settler dresses and even eats with his dog but does not see *Sophie-Merica* as human in her or his human form. This embodies the thingification of *Sophie-Merica* as an outsourced thing.

The domestication of the figure of the maid through naming and renaming is explained as the fundamental difference between what Fanon refers to as a white camp and black camp. According to Fanon (1951 [2008]:31), these camps "represent the two poles of a world, two poles in perpetual conflict: a genuinely Manichean concept of the world; the word has been spoken, it must be remembered—white or black, that is the question". The question of a white or black world creates a Manichean delirium for the figure of the maid for the white subject knows which world it lives in – a life world. According to Bhabha (1994:11), "this results in redrawing the domestic space as the space of normalising, pastoralising, and individuating techniques of modern power and

police: the personal-is-the political; the world-in-the-home”. However, for *Sophie-Merica*, the distinction of existing in only one of the worlds is not ontologically possible.

Foucault ([1977] 1997:171-178) explains that the house of the madam as “the camp is the diagram of a power that acts by means of general visibility. For a long time, this model of the camp or at least its underlying principle was found in urban development, in the construction of working-class housing estates, hospitals, asylums, prisons, schools: the spatial ‘nesting’ of hierarchized surveillance”. Foucault maps how the house of the madam constitutes what he defines as a camp that is used due to its power dynamics as a new modern world and power structure to domesticate *Sophie-Merica*. The power dynamics constituent of the construction of a Manichean domestication manifest as forms of division of colonial markers; namely gender, class, and race, which motivate “what exists at the intersection, such as violence against women of color” (Quijano 2000:193). However, as Munro (2012:i, xiv) describes it, “questions of sexuality, gender and race have long been a crucial component in South Africa’s vexed post-imperial history ... Indeed, the idea of ‘race’ itself was developed through narratives about sexual differences”.

Sophie-Merica is the symbol that reflects that the modern world is still constructing other versions of Manichean worlds within the Manichean domestication. However, the new gated communities, suburbs, estates, high-fenced walls, hostels and flats that are being constructed constitute this Manichean domestication. Their domestication is that of exclusion.

This ontological scandal is activated by the structure of the Manichean subject that is located “in-between ground where the questioning work materializes itself and resists its status as mere object of consumption” (Minh-ha 1991:113) for *Sophie-Merica*. A Manichean subject lives in division and is suspended in-between the zone of death and the zone of life by “simply dancing together in celebration of their split or connection” (Goniwe 2013:32). *Sophie-Merica* is a

Manichean symbol because she lives in the state of constant split and connection that Goniwe alluded to. The white subject is ontologically a master; therefore, his position is fixed and cannot be questioned. While *Sophie-Merica* takes the position of being this signifier of the Manichean world, the white subject is the benefactor and the master of the Manichean world. The white households, suburbs, gated communities, and all the spaces that belong to the white subjects are institutions of torture and structural bondage for *Sophie-Merica*. These spaces become institutions of Manichean domestication.

Sophie-Merica is both a cleaner and an animal as the Manichean figure. As the signifier of the white household as the Manichean institution of ontological eraser, *Sophie-Merica* cleans the space that created her as a slave. Cock (1989:27) asserts that, “they are with a uniform by their employers, through sometimes this was only an apron. It is not uncommon for this to constitute the domestic servant’s Christmas present”. The more *Sophie-Merica* goes to work, the more she constructs her being in nothingness. *Sophie-Merica* keeps digging her own grave under the apron as logic of structural bondage that operates under the Manichean state.

According to white logic: to be human is to be a master and owner of property. Therefore, the figure of the maid as a slave cannot have the benefits of white privilege because it is not human. While *Sophie-Merica* is a signifier of the Manichean domestication, the white subject is the signifier of white privilege. Domestication is an apparatus that operates in the state of white privilege where “[c]olonial society appears as the Manichean one, whose superstructure is its structure” (Gibson 2001:107). To see privilege, you need to see or have those who are outside of it. *Sophie-Merica* is the provider and sustainer of white privilege.

Sophie-Merica becomes a shovel that is used to dig her own grave, which “functions as the currency, the medium of exchange, for the entire colonialist discursive system” (JanMohamed 1985:64). The Manichean domestication is

a suicidal state for *Sophie-Merica* because she knows the house of the master is hell and that hell burns. But forced by their reality, which is fake, they still go. *Sophie-Merica* exists ontologically in the state of Manichean ambivalence that operates at the level of the Manichean delirium that embodies Manichean ambiguity. It can be transformed from being a mere savage and animal into a civilised savage and animal with a purpose of cleaning as a gift from the madam. Hence, sometimes “servants were given leftovers from the employers table. One said: I’m just a rubbish tin to them” (Cock 1989:27). Although the name Sophie signifies some access to get closer to whiteness, it also allows *Sophie-Merica* access to the white man’s space to some extent, although she still does not qualify for white privilege. Thus, no form of baptism could ever make *Sophie-Merica* exist outside the Manichean limbo as Biko stated, “in oppression the ... [figure of Sophie-Merica is] experiencing a situation from which they are unable to escape at any given moment” (Biko [1978] 2004:24). Therefore, the ambiguity in *Sophie-Merica*’s existential experience becomes a campus that she uses to navigate within the Manichean domestication universe.

With this state of Manichean ambivalence, *Sophie-Merica* is made to see the world in division and limitations, whereas the white subject as the master sees the world as one space of his own empire. This point is emphasised by Hardt and Negri (2000:3) when they state, “the problematic of Empire is determined in the first place by simple fact: that there is world order. This order is expressed as a juridical formation. Our initial task, then is to grasp the constitution of the order being formed today”. The Manichean structure reflects the ontological construction of *Sophie-Merica*. The figure of the maid is a racialised figure in a sense that she must be black and that she must work for a white household. In the space of the white madam as a household, something must happen to her to become a maid as she must be domesticated. And when she is domesticated, she cannot live in the household of the madam but must live

outside. She stays there without staying there. It must be understood that this is a violent invention as it is articulated by Fanon in the following remark:

The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession--all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, "They want to take our place." It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place (Fanon [1961] 1990:3-5).

These things affect only the figure of the maid and do not affect the white subject in the same way. Each level of subjection leads *Sophie-Merica* to live not as a human, madam or even the master. In an anti-black world, the figure of the maid is reduced to the name Sophie, which signifies one who is not a human, but a maid. Behind the abyssal line in the Manichean constructed world, the master's pet is more human than *Sophie-Merica*. Therefore, this requires for *Sophie-Merica* to deploy and develop a "philosophy of liberation" and thus, "a philosophy of liberation must always begin by presenting the historico-ideological genesis of what it attempts to think through, giving priority to its spatial, worldly setting" (Dussel 1985).

Sophie-Merica is the subject of the imperial formula in its own category and space. *Sophie-Merica's* uniform is distinctive from the madam's appearance, for the madam is a human, a master's wife. *Sophie-Merica's* uniform places her in a different category than her madam. The uniform gives society a particular attitude towards *Sophie-Merica* as stated by Ntombela (2012:142), "they look down upon you if you wear the maid's uniform. Even employers look down on you. I think the reason is that it is a job for uneducated people". The uniform covers *Sophie-Merica* like a shield to downgrade her and make her less attractive as a woman. Thus, *Sophie-Merica* is not sexually arousing to the master because her sensual appeal is hidden behind an apron. However, according to Cock (1989:79) "there is the possibility that female domestic workers are open to sexual exploitation". The apron is a signifier of category

and racism, because “race is not essential but rather socially constructed and culturally imposed” (Kane 2007:360). Therefore, the white subject has privileges that the figure of the maid does not have, which is based on the logic of racism. For Quijano (2000:533), the Eurocentric notion of race is “a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism”. According to the imperial register, the white subject is created to own the world, to be the master over other people, and to produce knowledge for others and about other people. The purpose of the apron and headscarf is to remind *Sophie-Merica* that her role is to serve, and take care of herself to keep serving the madam.

For *Sophie-Merica* to communicate is to clean and keep cleaning the house of the madam while she does not have a house of her own. According to Wright (1989:397), “the maid comes and goes daily, wearing her uniform, bringing her mop, brushes, bucket, broom — her paraphernalia, to speak with the text — prepared to install order in the scene of their encounter, namely the master’s bedroom and bathroom”. The house that *Sophie-Merica* cleans every day is not hers but belongs to the master and the madam. *Sophie-Merica* is in the madam’s house without being there. The house of the madam becomes an institution for allowing the visibility of the Manichean construction to manifest. This means that *Sophie-Merica* becomes trapped in Manichean violence that is moralised and naturalised but, most importantly, racialised. According to Fanon ([1961] 1990:31), the “colonial world is a Manichaeian world” of violence that understands *Sophie-Merica* as a tool and a thing or just a worker. But a worker is even a better word because workers are treated as humans. Workers even have better rights as provided by the Department of Labour. The labour law only protects workers, but there are no laws for maids and farmers that are equal to the law the white subject receives. There is no one law for all workers to be entitled to. The Manichean violence operates at a level where *Sophie-*

Merica is not educated to the same level as the white madam; therefore, she is forced to work long hours with less salary (Ally 2008; Hickson & Strous 1993). This is based on the notion that the life of the figure of the maid is less expensive than the white figure. The figure of the maid constantly has to prove her or his position as a person worthy to get the job. That is if they manage to study, escape the circle of being maids like Mary Sibande, stay out of prison and not do what is expected of the so-called 'Negro'.

Behind the fences of white households with their high walls and 24/7 neighbourhood watch lies an institution of silent violence. A slow death is emphasised: the death of 'being' – not in a physical sense, but in an ontological sense. To die is for the spirit or the soul to be separated from the body and become invisible. *Sophie-Merica* in the house of the madam as the institute of death is separated from who she is. Her name is changed, her way of life is changed, and her looks are changed. *Sophie-Merica* lives in a dream, which may be why she always has her eyes closed. For instance, she will never own the house that she cleans; therefore, to her it is only a dream. To wake *Sophie-Merica* from "phenomenological and ontological slumber" (Maldonado-Torres 2007), requires the Manichean world to fall and remove the apron and headscarf that create this colonial division.

4.4 THE DOMESTICATED FLESH

For *Sophie-Merica* being in the anti-black world as a domesticated flesh, "is of course the moment of 'being for others', of which Hegel speaks, but every ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society" (Fanon [1952] 2008:82). The primal question of attaining ontology has nothing to do with *Sophie-Merica*. Thus, to exist as a racialised being is to exist for the other. To exist as *Sophie-Merica* as a racialised being is to exist for the white madam. This means for the madam, because her body is a human body and not just flesh, even if she is othered, she does not lose her ontological standard. The

situation is different for the racialised being because when *Sophie-Merica* is othered, she is reduced to flesh with no possibility of ontological standard. As articulated by Fanon ([1961] 1990:32), *Sophie-Merica* is ontologically “declared insensible to ethics ... [she] represent not only the absence of values but also the negation of values ... [she is] the corrosive element ... [cleaning] all that comes near them”. *Sophie-Merica* remains an ontological fugitive from the magnetic colonial traps that are set in motion to erase the ontological values of maids.

Sophie-Merica as a domestic worker is a racialised being who is located outside of reality. By virtue of being inside the white skin, the white subject is able to attain ontology even in a colonial setting. If as according to Fanon ([1952] 2008:4), “Man is what brings society into being”, it is interesting to see what those who were deemed as outside of man as non-humans bring into being without being. Man normally refers to mankind as a universal concept that encompasses all human beings. However, the notion of ‘all’ raises some fundamental concerns because not all people are considered human. To be human and to be a person are two fundamental different things for maids because “politics have coloured them differently from other racial groups” (Sono 1993:58). The white madam is human and benefits from the modern system of the world as a human from white privilege. However, *Sophie-Merica* as a racialised being is absent in the world for she does not count as human. The absenteeism of the racialised being is constructed through the pigmentation of the figure of the maid. For blackness to be, the black figure needs to be erased by the virtue of whiteness.

Blackness is a condition that constitutes the subjection of *Sophie-Merica* in relation to the white madam as a matter of racial arrangements. As a human, *Sophie-Merica* in her black skin puts on a black mask that is created by the logic of white reality. *Sophie-Merica* and her position of domestication constitutes this mask and subjection that is imposed by whiteness and “it all

depends on how you choose your metaphors” (Mill 2013:32). *Sophie-Merica* inside the black skin is a metaphor of being absent in the anti-black world. Subjection of the domesticated flesh in the anti-black world made Fanon come to grips with the abstraction of *Sophie-Merica* as the embodiment of black flesh. *Sophie-Merica*’s presence as domesticated flesh is, according to Fanon ([1952] 2008:83), “surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty”. It is at the level of uncertainty that should be placed into the everyday life of a racialised flesh. Everything remains in the same standard of no standard as long as *Sophie-Merica* exists as the figure of the maid. To be racialised is to be subjected to forms of erasure. Fanon ([1952] 2008:84) argues that *Sophie-Merica*’s “corporeal schema crumbled” as a racialised being and is reduced to flesh that can be extracted by the modern capitalist world at any form of violence or cost.

The colonial logic not only reduces *Sophie-Merica* to a domesticated flesh but also reduces her absolute presence to a maid and positions her to do what the madam and master want her to do. Her absolute ontological absence and uniform indicate that she will always remain beneath the master and madam. *Sophie-Merica*’s subjection as a racialised being is entangled under the “hieroglyphics of the flesh” (Spillers 1987:67). It is the black flesh that determines reduction, subjection and colonial representation of the figure of the maid. *Sophie-Merica* symbolically and metaphorically constitutes the ontological position of the figure of the maid as a servant only as reflected by Fanonian concepts. The racialised flesh in blackness is trapped in the loop of an ontological black hole. According to Hegel’s master-and-slave dialect, ontologically the racialised flesh is created to be a slave and the white subject is created to be a master in the human register.

This ontological disruption embodied by *Sophie-Merica* is reflected by Fanon’s ([1952] 2008:82) words: “I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others.

Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing". Indeed, to be a racialised flesh is to be a flesh that depends on recognition from others as a human without liberation. The skin of whiteness embodies a passport for the white "subject" to be a global "citizen" (Mamdani 1996) by white supremacy, that is, "a global power covering the whole planet" (Quijano 2007:168).

Yancy argues that the madam is so used to the benefits of white supremacy that she forgets what the cost is. Yancy (2008:22) asserts that the white madam "is one of the 'walking dead', unaware of how the feeling of her white bodily upsurge and expansiveness is purchased at expense of my Black body". In other words, racialising the flesh or the skin of whiteness creates different experiences. From the experience of the madam, whiteness is able "to impose its colonial dominance over all the regions and populations of the planet, incorporating them into its world system and its specific model of power" (Quijano 2000:540). It is fundamentally important to note that the racialisation of the skin of whiteness created the racialisation of the black flesh. The creation of the white madam or the white subject created the figure of the maid.

It is clear that *Sophie-Merica* as a racialised figure is not human. Fanon is clear about the intimate violence that brutalises *Sophie-Merica* and positions her as a non-living thing; a racialised flesh as it is the property of the white subject. *Sophie-Merica* is the body who has no place of belonging or ontology; it is the body whose sense of belonging finds belonging by belonging to a madam as a maid. *Sophie-Merica* finds her existence by moving from job to job working for white people in the suburbs. Without these jobs, *Sophie-Merica* ceases to exist. She is a figure "that belongs in neither black nor white spaces but is a product of both" (Kasibe 2008:81). Yet, with these jobs and/or because of these jobs, *Sophie-Merica* ceases to exist or belongs. The analysis of the racialised flesh is fundamentally imported to locate *Sophie-Merica* as an absent figure who does not belong. *Sophie-Merica* is a site where the darker side of racialisation

is exercised and where it makes the structural violence of whiteness visible. As racialised flesh, *Sophie-Merica* bears no significance as a human by virtue of being black – *Sophie-Merica* is an embodiment of the unhistorical. Meaning, for *Sophie-Merica* there is no history as her life has no life in the house of the madam because she lives a moment of slow death in a world of death. It is this ontological blueprint from heaven that positions the figure of the maid as a receiver of the most violence and suffering in the world. It can be argued that all people die, all people suffer, all people can work, and all people are alive as long as they are still breathing, as well as all people are human. However, it is fundamentally important to understand and not to confuse or ignore the meaning and implication of all these all in a racialised context.

This means delving deep with the question of the racialised being who experiences the world at the level of ontological disappearance; the racialised being who determines the level of subjection towards *Sophie-Merica* inside the house of the madam. In this vein, Sharpley-Whiting affirms:

The disappearance of Africa would constitute not the disappearance of viable human life, but merely dent the world's (i.e. the Occident as this world is conceived) supply of raw materials. It is assumed that contributions in the higher forms of art and culture are non-existent. And the "objects" that inhabit that land mass, the Africans, are ultimately worthless, as they lack inventiveness; blacks serve absolutely no earthly purpose (Sharpley-Whiting 1999:60).

The subjection that *Sophie-Merica* experiences comes from the previous generation and can only be prolonged and judged by the master and the madam, and not by the moral question. Without looking deeper in the meaning and origin of ethics, the notion of moral is more relevant in the context of the racialised flesh in the anti-black world as in relation to *Sophie-Merica*. It is clear that no justice would account for the "various forms of violence perpetrated by employers and their families" (Pan & Yang 2016:87) that *Sophie-Merica* is subjected to in the house of the master and madam.

The suspension of morals over racialised flesh confirms that *Sophie-Merica* is nothing but flesh. As a result, “she wants to flaunt what she has, but the problem is that she doesn’t have anything. This is just a dream. [She is just] ... dressing up as Sophie and then dressing down” (Sibande in Zyomuya 2010). If to exist is a given, then to be present is to be human in the world. In a sense, being human is inseparable from presence. To be human, one has to exist, and for one to exist, there must be presence. However, the mutual colonial definition of the racialised/domesticated flesh as existence and being has created a division that allows for the creation and definition of a new non-human without presence. The westernised definition of presence that constitutes being human in the world has to do with the mastery of manipulation of ontology and ways of life as the creation of the anti-black world.

The white madam constitutes the presence of a human as an absolute human as opposed to *Sophie-Merica* who like all “domestic workers are in a legal vacuum” (Cock 1989). As racialised flesh, *Sophie-Merica* is not protected as much as other workers by laws; she is not even constitutionally protected, which makes it easier for the madam or master to indulge her any way they want. Being present in the anti-black world, therefore, is transcendental of the absence that *Sophie-Merica* embodies through the absence of ontology. The black skin of *Sophie-Merica* seems to cover the ontology unseen by the eye of the white subject and eventually through her own eyes.

To wrestle with the question regarding what it means to be present in the world as a human is to also wrestle with the question of what is human in relation to the racialised flesh. However, there are various questions one could ask in relation to the notion of being in the anti-black-world. In relation to the above posed question, it is important to claim that the figure of the maid as a racialised flesh has no relational ontological capacity to the world. There are colonial institutions and systems in place that are structurally positioned to fully support the racialisation and dehumanisation of black flesh. It has to be understood that

the racialised flesh has nothing to do with the white subject and its skin of white supremacy. The racialised flesh and the white skin provide a clear fate on who lives and who survives; who has longevity and who dies young; and who is a worker and who is a slave. To counter this existing racial condition of *Sophie-Merica*, there must be a sound understanding of the structures of domestication (Hooks 1996). The only way to unmask these structures of domestication is to have the “new self-invention and alternative habits of being” (Hooks 1996:15) as the racialised flesh *Sophie-Merica* is not present as a human in the world.

According to Lefebvre ([1974] 1991:137), “the animating principle of such a ... [flesh], its presence, is neither visible nor legible as such, nor is it the object of any discourse, for it re-produces itself within those who use the space in question, in their lived experience”. However, this racialised flesh is always questioned and buried. What comes out then is the question of being absent as a nonhuman and the question of the racialised flesh in relation to the settler. What does it mean for *Sophie-Merica* to exist and live from the position of racialised flesh?

Racialised flesh created the paradox of settler and native, which makes us wonder: When does a coloniser become a native? Racialised flesh is outside the realm of the human subject. The question that preoccupies the racialised flesh has to do with being reduced to nothingness – objecthood and death. The meaning and span of life differ between the white subject (human) and the racialised flesh (black body). This ontological dilemma is drawn from *Sophie-Merica* as she is located inside the house of the madam as the white institution of structural violence and naturalised subjection of the figure of the maid.

The logic of the colonial system, which creates the “native-settler” (Mamdani 1996:12-18) from black bodies as the body who is good for nothing but being a servant to the white subject. This qualifies the figure of the maid as a body of non-being. The survival of *Sophie-Merica* depends on the kindness of the madam and the will of the master because *Sophie-Merica* is not living life, but

is surviving life. After all, the madam and the master are humans; therefore, it only makes sense that the life of those who are not human should depend on the hands of those who are human. Both the master and the madam have the authority to rule over everything that is not human in the world: “his first law is to attend to his own survival; his first care is owed to himself and, once he reaches the age of reason, as sole judge of the means appropriate for survival he thereby become his own master” (Rousseau 2012:7).

The white madam, unlike *Sophie-Merica*, “does not experience the body as something outside itself” (Manganyi 1973:30). Meaning, ways of being present as a human in the world for *Sophie-Merica* is not the positionality of the white subject. Instead, the positionality of being human for the white subject has to do with *Sophie-Merica* being a non-human – a maid to be exact. From the position of the figure of the maid, it is not the same as seeing from the position of the white subject as the figure of the maid is absent in the world. It does not see and recognise the racialised flesh because the world has to do with how the figure of the maid is rendered absent through racialised flesh. The construction of the human has to do with the racialised flesh and the black question revolves around finding a place in the world, and finding a place means being reduced into flesh.

It is clear that the question of life in relation to the racialised flesh is not relevant or applicable as a “system of values using both the racism of the body and racism of the mind” (Hook 1986:128). It is from this position that there is nothing that has to do with life in the zone of non-being. Thus, it is always frowned upon when the figure of the maid fights for better life and better ways of living. This suggests that “the feminist perspective on gender politics in relation to domestic violence has to be re-evaluated in order to clarify how patriarchal power influences daily family relations through direct and indirect strategies” (Pan & Yang 2016:87). The human standard is a standard for the white subject in which the figure of the maid is deprived of being recognised by this standard.

That is, to be black is to be non-standard because as a black body, you have no standard at all. It is the positionality of *Sophie-Merica* as inscribed by the racialised flesh as the position of having no position: a standard of no standard. In other words, *Sophie-Merica* as racialised flesh embodies being positioned outside the standard: a being that is outside being; a human that is outside the register of being human. A human can be seen or approached as a flesh from two positions: the position of a racialised flesh and the position of a biological flesh. The standard of the racialised flesh differs from the standard of the biological flesh as the biological flesh has potential to be human or has ontological possibilities, while the racialised flesh is in a position that lacks these ontological historical benefits.

In “metaphysical narratives of the abyss” (Yountae 2017:3), it is this unhistorical that alienates *Sophie-Merica* from the human register and positions her in relation to the white subject as a racialised flesh – an unbelonging nothing. The racialised flesh lives a death life because it is structured according to the metaphysical narratives of the abyss as a thing with no narrative. To be structurally positioned as a black body, means to live a life that has more elements of death than life, which is a death life.

The metaphysical narratives of the abyss position the house of the madam as an abyss that eats and haunts the figure of the maid. However, the narrative of the abyss from black positionality positions the figure of the maid inside the abyss and as the embodiment of the abyss. In other words, the racialised flesh embodies the metaphysical narratives of the black abyss as the abyss because “such stories are usually accompanied by teleological accounts of theologies that regard evil and suffering as a necessity. It is from this perspective that the early church apologetic Irenaeus viewed suffering and evil as part of the process of growth to maturity in God, and the world as the ‘vale of soul-making’” (Yountae 2017:2).

Such stories, which qualify and gloss over the subjection of the figure of the maid as a racialised flesh, show that to be black is to engage in a constant naturalised and normalised struggle. The death life that the racialised being experiences is justified as part of the ontological blueprint of *Sophie-Merica*. According to Yountae (2017:95), “by drawing on multiple aspects of the colonial experience, including not only psychic and sociocultural dimensions but also the economic and particular the political struggles of the colonial subject, Fanon dramatizes successfully the deathlike experience of the being inhabiting the colonial abyss”. For *Sophie-Merica*, being the habitat of the colonial abyss, it becomes a norm for the racialised flesh to struggle and endure pain as something that comes from God to shape the character of a person.

The racialised flesh is not only exposed to suffering as a form of evil that we are supposed to overcome to build inner strength, but there is also suffering that is positioned structurally through colonisation of the racialised flesh. Coloniality is embedded in the skin of the black people as a tool to racialise it and turn it into a flesh. There is a fundamental political and ontological difference between flesh and skin, the worker and a maid. It is clear that the flesh is embodied by the figure of the maid and the skin is embodied by the white subject.

It is only through the category of the figure of the maid as a racialised flesh that coloniality precedes being. Thus, the being of the white subject renders the figure of the maid absent since the racialisation of the flesh is a centre of modernity. By racialising *Sophie-Merica*, the madam and the master do not see any immoral act with the institution of maids. Inside the institution of whiteness, *Sophie-Merica*, the racialised flesh, is ontologically where “whites were allowed a great degree of latitude in regard to uses of the enslaved” (Hartman 1997: 23). To be the racialised flesh, is to be a site of exploitation, suffering, violence, death and enslavement. While the racialised flesh does not enjoy the benefits, the white subject enjoys the racialised flesh. By racialising the colour black as

the colour of negativity and darkness, racialised/domesticated figures such as maids, gardeners, taxi drivers, security guards, bricklayers and ontological hobos were created from the figure of the maid.

According to Mill (2013:32),

In terms of actual electromagnetic radiation—any physicist will be happy to inform us that white light already includes all the colors of the visible spectrum, while blackness turns out to be not really a color at all, but the *absence* of all light and color. So it would seem that any metaphors drawn from this realm already conceptually foredoom the enterprise. Whiteness is light; whiteness is all-encompassing; whiteness is the universal.

Sophie-Merica signifies the racialisation of the white subject as the trope of the eraser. Racialised whiteness is responsible for creating the world as the 'empire' of whiteness by erasing other subjects by blackening them into figures. Racialisation of whiteness covered *Sophie-Merica* with an apron and a headscarf as symbols of a social position that she must occupy as a racialised flesh. *Sophie-Merica* is a symbol and a metaphor of the figure of the maid. Her reality is shaped by the racialisation of whiteness and modernity/coloniality, which is deployed from the Fanonian and decolonial interpretation to locate the ontological position of the figure of the maid as a domesticated flesh who is present yet absent in the world. Racialisation of whiteness maintains a particular status and certain jobs for the white subject as a human. In this sense, Mills asserts that we must:

Consider another way of looking at things, another set of linked metaphors, though still within the realm of the optical: whiteness as glare, whiteness as dazzle, whiteness as blinding ... Whiteness here is constructed not by inclusion of the other colors but by their official exclusion ... whiteness is a willed darkness; whiteness is segregated investigation; whiteness is the particular masquerading as the universal (Mill 2013:32).

Sophie-Merica as the racialised being cannot acquire the ontological standard that the law designates to the white subject. The conditions that *Sophie-Merica* finds herself working under attest to this inhumane structural system that exist inside the house of the white madam and under the skin of a black maid. This

treatment is violent and yet normalised to do nothing but validate the non-existence of *Sophie-Merica* that exists to trap her existence as the figure of the maid. Under the black skin of the racialised/domesticated figure, *Sophie-Merica* is trapped into non-existence and she cannot enjoy the things in the house of the madam the way the madam does.

The normalised violence that is pinned to the life of *Sophie-Merica* is constituted by colonial structures. The racialised being sees itself as a burden in an anti-black world, and also as the figure of being ontologically absent. *Sophie-Merica* as the racialised flesh is reduced to the structure of symbols created by the white subject. In other words, there is mutual reconfiguration of *Sophie-Merica* as a racialised black body. If both the domesticated flesh and the white subject are structurally positioned to subject and reduce the black body to nothingness, then the domesticated flesh is created and shaped by the white world through systematic violence to control the figure of the maid. *Sophie-Merica* inside the white house of the madam is domesticated as a maid who can only afford the absence of presence ontologically as simply a flesh.

4.5 DOMESTICATION AS A STRUCTURE OF REALITY

What is the structure of reality if it is to be understood at the level of domestication from the position of being black or white and having or not having value as a human? Judging by the status of the current colonial logic, it seems natural to qualify that it has everything to do with being human “whether real or imaginary” (Fanon [1952] 2008:138). The fundamental question is: What about *Sophie-Merica* who as a non-human maid is rendered non-existent on the realm of the real but appears only as the fragment of white imaginary of the real? In the colonial reality, *Sophie-Merica* wants to be white (Fanon [1952] 2008). The real encompasses reality and the imaginary encompasses the symbolic; that is, to say the myth and fantasy. To be domesticated in an anti-black world is to exist in an imaginary and fantasy realm. Meaning, that to be

domesticated is to be tamed outside reality and to be positioned where reality and laws seem to cease to exist.

In this reality, Sibande was at liberty to “dream up ensembles that could liberate her from domestic toil. Without the constraints of reality she settles on the antithesis of who she is: a royal figure from the colonial era who embodies the power and opulence absent from her everyday existence” (Corrigall 2015:147). Fanon (1952] 2008) stipulates that in the structure of the domesticating reality, *Sophie-Merica* wants to transcend the imaginary to the real. Maybe this is because “dreams are important for Sibande – she is enacting a long-standing family dream to be more than domestic workers. She captures the history of this dream by echoing her great-grandmother in the piece *Sophie-Merica*, based on the first domestic worker in the family line” (Mabandu 2009). *Sophie-Merica* is domesticated to keep wanting to be white and, as such, she “is a biographically derived but hypothetical figure who delineates a narrative of her family’s aspirations. *Sophie-Merica* is a domestic worker, a black superwoman figure who escapes her subaltern condition through fantasy. That is why she is always represented with her eyes closed” (Mabandu 2009).

It is clear that the paradoxical ontic position of *Sophie-Merica* presents a scandal; more so if the imaginary wants to take the position of the real in the domesticated anti-black world. In this world, *Sophie-Merica* is constantly positioned as “a domestic worker who finds refuge in dreams where she emancipates herself from the ghoulish realism of an ordinary existence, cleaning other people’s homes” (Coudray 2014). It is fundamentally important to realise that it would be difficult to think about the real and imaginary without touching on the notions of what the truth and false realities are as *Sophie-Merica* exists between the two.

For something to be real, it must embody some level of truth that it does exist in space and time. Further, for something to be imaginary, it is to be non-existent and embody some level of invisibility. However, Fanon reveals the

truth from the other side of the truth based on his experience of living and observing the domesticating falsifying reality as a black body. Fanon ([1952] 2008:106) asserts that, “in all truth, in all truth I tell you, my shoulders slipped out of the framework of the world, my feet could no longer feel the touch of the ground. Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned”. Existing in the colonial world has to do with domesticating objection, which is directed only to *Sophie-Merica* as the non-human. There needs to be an account of the structure of the domesticating world.

The structure of the domesticating reality positions *Sophie-Merica* to recline as the damned of the world and as a person who is tamed by the world. The definition of the world in its colonial structure of reality might appear obvious and inclusive; however, it is necessary to understand the world in a racialised context in relation to *Sophie-Merica* as a domesticated figure who has no value. Du Bois argues that *Sophie-Merica* as a domesticated figure exists in another world that is structurally domesticating:

A world which yields ... [her] no true self-consciousness, but only lets ... [her] see ... [herself] through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twines, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois [1903] 2016).

The structure of domesticating reality is the anti-black world. This anti-blackness is grounded on colonial imagination that constructs the black as the real unreal and embodies this logic of double reality at once. In other words, *Sophie-Merica* is located outside this white supremacy and inside the domesticating belt. Thus, reality and whiteness embody the exclusion and alienation of *Sophie-Merica*. Whiteness is reality and this reality in relation to everything and blackness is a reality that encompass; it is reality in itself and for the reality for itself. Reality, therefore, is whiteness. This, as the logic of

subjection, plagues *Sophie-Merica* in the creation of reality of the white world, whiteness as the world, the world above the world. Even if blackness defines itself in relation to the world, it does so through its inferiority complex – the opposite end of whiteness and its white supremacy.

Blackness as the unreal is based on “coloniality of power, in other words, it is not just a question of the Americas for people living in the Americas, but it is the darker side of modernity and the global reach of imperial capitalism” (Mignolo 2007c:159). This unreal is nothing that is found in whiteness because it is the real of the real. If reality is for the white subject, the black is non-existent in the ontological and existential sense. Žižek explores this paradigm of existing on domesticating reality for *Sophie-Merica* at the following three levels.

[T]he Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real are the three fundamental dimensions in which a human being dwells. The Imaginary dimension is our direct lived experience of reality, but also of our dreams and nightmares—it is the domain of appearing, of how things appear to us. The Symbolic dimension is what Lacan calls the “big Other”, the invisible order that structures our experience of reality the complex network of rules and meaning which makes see what we see the way we see it (and what we don’t see the way we don’t see it). The Real, however, is not simply external reality, it is rather, as Lacan put it, “impossible”: something which can rather and directly experienced nor symbolized—like a traumatic encounter of existence violence which disturbs our entire universe of meaning. As such, the Real can only be discerned in its traces, effects or aftershocks (Žižek 2014:119-120).

However, it is crucial to stop and think about the structure of reality in relation to the human and the non-human; the white and black. As reflected by Žižek, in a Lacanian sense, the human borders on the imaginary, symbolic and real. These three Lacanian dimensions of the human become a connection that fits into a racialised existence and that operate at the level of splitting a human.

Under the three Lacanian human dimensions as illustrated by Žižek, it is clear that the white body and the black flesh do not experience reality in the same way. The naturalisation of this split as an ontological foundation creates the figure of the maid as a servant only. If the black flesh is in contrast with the white body, the black flesh is the maker of what is outside reality. To be outside

of reality means to be non-human, which raises some interesting thoughts considering the three Lacanian dimensions of the human grounded on “racial determinism” and “the demand for the display of authenticity and spectacle” (Hassan 1999:217). However, it is impossible to deal with the three Lacanian human dimensions, namely the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, and not consider them in relation to the structure of reality that is normalised, naturalised and institutionalised as racial.

In deciphering the question of being the human Sibande asserts: “you see a lot of rich people in the township wearing a lot of bling. They have 10 rings on their fingers, wear the latest wigs. It’s excessive. It’s as if they don’t know how to stop making themselves more beautiful. You think the more you have the more you are getting there” (Sibande in Corrigan 2015). Even the notion of beauty and ugliness is founded on race as the institution and racism as its organising philosophy of exclusion. However, the philosophy of exclusion seems to exclude a body with a particular colour – the figure of the maid – as flesh.

This institutionalised racism reduces what appears as brown, more bronze or even gold-like skin, which was normally associated with God and the sun. The flesh is not a body, and the body is not flesh. According to Young (2010:4), the “idea of the black body has been and continues to be projected across actual physical bodies”. This of course is at the racialised level of identification, while the flesh and the body could almost mean the same thing in a biological sense.

Fanon ([1961] 1990) stipulates that the colonial world is constructed on the basis of “Manicheism”, which sees and divides the world by skin colour – black and white. The problem with the current colonial reality is that it is structured to keep the figure of the maid as a problem and outside the structure – a colonial world order. It is fundamentally important to realise and acknowledge that there is fundamentally nothing wrong with structure and institution, but only if they are not racist and sexist. In other words, there is no problem with modernity, economy (not capitalism), police, education and law

to list a few. However, the problem lies when these institutions seem to focus their agenda mostly on the black body based on a racial and sexist colonial logic. This means that the problem of being black is not a black problem but a colonial problem qualified through racism and sexism. However, it is “in part, what is at issue is a sense of location or even the desire to possess a place. Apartheid placed everything with a cartographer’s desire for fixity. Everyone was caught up in its fantasy, came to believe that there was a place (apart) for them. Yet, in the question of identity, there can never be the fixity of a place” (Christiansë 2003:376).

Looking at the structure of reality, it appears as the only absolute structure of reality, which is structured. To be structured is to be institutionally positioned through the institution of racism and sexism that produce these two institutions of colonial structured reality for the figure of the maid as the unreal. Therefore, the reality of the figure of the maid is the reality of the non-human. This evokes the question: What does it mean to be a non-human that exists at the level of unreal life? And, what is reality for the black and what is reality for the white? Reality for the figure of the maid is death and reality for the white subject is life. To be black is to be a dead person living. It is through colonised reality that the reality of the figure of the maid is turned into a black condition.

Sophie-Merica is in a condition that calls for “a process in which a radical epistemic shift is taking place” (Mignolo 2007c:158). Thus, blackness is a condition and whiteness is a condition and a supremacy. To be black is to be in black condition and it is to be pushed to the margins of reality. This means the absence of life, which is being survived from the position of blackness. Therefore, those who survive it and seek it, by virtue of their blackness, cannot escape the position of disposition that comes with this colonised reality as they are not white and, therefore, cannot benefit from whiteness. Thus blackness is an absence of life or a death of ontology. It is not the normal matter of blackness as an absence of ontology, but rather that reality is about the death of the

blackened ontology. To be blackened is to be stamped with a mark that affirms the logic of racism and black inferiority.

It is important to note the choice of words such as reduced to flesh rather than transformed or turned to flesh. This is fundamentally important because it is not as if blackened people have no ontology; rather it is through the death of their ontology that being blackened is manifested through various technologies of colonial subjugation. These subjugation technologies naturalise the death of ontology of the blackened flesh “as sign to the disembodiment of signs” (Désert 2016:202).

The positionality of *Sophie-Merica* has been problematic in the realm of reality. Reality is haunting when it comes to the register of the human grounded on white supremacy. *Sophie-Merica* is a symbol reflecting that fundamentally there is a difference between the black condition and white supremacy for blackness is just a way of a condition.

This condition is nothing but a structural racialised reality marked as that which is outside life, white privilege, reasoning and reality itself. It is to be the figure of the unreal; that is to say, a figure who is a figure of the abyss where reality is the abyss in the abyss as the abyss. Reality cannot be possessed in hell or in the black condition to be precise. Thus, it is clear that, through the colonial structuring of reality, reality is racially divided into the zone of the conditioned and the zone of the privileged. The condition zone keeps *Sophie-Merica* outside of reality and locates her in the colonial constructed imaginary reality. The privilege zone keeps privilege only on the side of white people. However, the condition is the result of the privilege. For privilege to exist, there has to be a condition that shows the different dynamics of existing in such different dynamics of the reality of life and death. Thus, the condition equals to death while the privilege ontologically equals to life.

In the zone of the conditioned, life is premature and is structured in ways that keep the lifespan of black people naturally short. This level of shortened lifespan and man-made hardship is politically and racially constructed and introduced as divine challenges that black people should overcome as given by God and as illustrated by the Bible. In this regard, Grosfoguel (2007:214) has the following to say: “we went from the sixteenth century characteri[s]ation of ‘people without writing’ to the eighteenth and nineteenth century characteri[s]ation of ‘people without history’ to the twentieth century characteri[s]ation of ‘people without development’ and more recently, to the early twenty-first century of ‘people without democracy’”.

Therefore, *Sophie-Merica* embodies the condition zone as it is the condition of life in death. If to be human is to be aligned ontologically with the three dimensions that Lacan stipulated, it is worth to examine what it means to be in a black condition in relation to the dimensions of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real as the “center of the present [anti-black] world systems” (Dussel 1985:viii). These three dimensions operate in different meaning and apparatus between the condition zone and the privilege zone to give authority and structure reality as to who lives a healthy long life and who lives a deadly fast and short life, or death to be precise. Thus, *Sophie-Merica* is located in the condition of survival – a life of no value.

To be the figure of *Sophie-Merica*, therefore, is to be positioned outside reality, which prompts Cooper (1988:233) to pose the following Marxist questions: “What are we worth? What do we represent to the world? What is our market value? Are we a positive and additive quantity or a negative factor in the world’s elements?”. The domesticating structure of reality as a condition is a form of exclusion from reality designed to keep the figure of *Sophie-Merica* in a structured condition of a life with no value. To be outside whiteness, therefore, is to be in a position outside many privileges that the madam, which by the virtue of her white skin, is entitled to, political, socially and ontologically.

The ontological density that a white subject has is so white; as such, no black can be white or white that can be black. In an attempt to reach this white destiny, *Sophie-Merica* is depicted with “her eyes are closed, as if in a trance or a grown-up game of blind-man’s bluff. Her arms are stretched out with the tentativeness of someone lost in the dark, but it is a plane of apparently unmitigated whiteness that she is navigating – blinding whiteness all about her, as crisp, clean and untainted as her headscarf and apron” (Dodd 2010:467). In reality, the figure of the maid is the embodiment of flesh without a body. To be black is to remember at all times what it means to be outside the laws of reality. So, blackness has been described as a finger pointed by the white subject to the flesh without a body. But unfortunately, the ideas of being, justice, happiness, life and freedom are just abstract talk where *Sophie-Merica* is concerned.

Blackness has been reduced to three conditions: exclusion, dispossession and institutionalisation. Black people are excluded from the register of knowledge, denied from the human register and institutionalised to be outside the register of power. Therefore, the existence of white supremacy ensures that reality is white. In short, reality is much more white than black. Furthermore, the black condition as the condition of survival is naturalised, normalised and institutionalised as the natural order of reality and things. This is the unreal reality presented to the world as the only reality that cannot be changed or contested. Changing reality comes with a cost of death for *Sophie-Merica* as she cannot change reality.

For *Sophie-Merica* as the embodiment of all black colonised figures, “there is nothing here to touch or hold onto, no familiar recognizable objects to help her feel her way to a known destination. She is in uncharted territory, the empty space of risk and initiation” (Dodd 2010:467). *Sophie-Merica* is located in the fragile space of uncertainty and constantly looks to the past and the present. The colonial logic hidden within the institutions of the state reinforces this reality

that is rooted from the colonised-and-coloniser relation that Fanon (1952 [2008]) speaks about. There is even scientific evidence and epistemological frontiers that support this coloniser-and-colonised reality, which are still rooted in the colonial construction of the world. This evokes the question: What does reality then mean from the positionality of blackened and dispossessed non-humans? It is here that *Sophie-Merica* comes into relevance by being an embodiment of the real.

Fanon writes from this peculiar existential absurdity of the colonial invention that being black is the imaginary of the real, which foreground reality for *Sophie-Merica* as non-reality or non-“event” (Žižek 2014). However, “an ‘Event’ can refer to a devastating natural disaster or to the latest celebrity scandal, the triumph of the people or a brutal political change, an intense experience of a work of art or an intimate decision” (Žižek 2014:1). In addition, Žižek (2014:2) stipulates that “an event at its purest and most minimal: something shocking, out of joint, that appears to happen all of a sudden and interrupts the usual flow of things; something that merges seemingly out of nowhere, without discernible causes, an appearance without solid being as its foundation”. *Sophie-Merica*, from Žižek’s perspective of the event, constitutes something that happened. For something to have happened or to be considered to be happening, means that it has to be recognised from the positionality of something real. Meaning that whether the event is according to Žižek organic or inorganic does not seem to include the black life as the happening. Due to structural reality designed to position the life of *Sophie-Merica* in a particular non-event position, everything negative happening in blackness is not a shock. For something to be shocking, something should have happened unexpectedly, or perhaps was not supposed to happen.

On the other hand, *Sophie-Merica* is located on the darker side of something happening as the event. This is because, “at first approach, an event is thus the effect that seems to exceed its cause – and the space of an event is that

which opens up by the gap that separates an effect from its causes” (Žižek 2014:3). *Sophie-Merica* as located in the black condition of survival is only positioned structurally in the “space of an event” because only the life of a white subject constitutes ontological density, which is the effect beyond the event. Therefore, the white subject can be above the law and above an inhumane action and cannot be held accountable. It is through “global coloniality” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:6) that *Sophie-Merica* is pushed to the space of the non-event where she is entangled by the colonial imagination of the structural reality. Thus, “this reality is easily missed if the genealogy of the modern world order is analysed from the centre of the empire” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:7). Meaning, the structure of reality will be flawless if it is still perceived from the position of whiteness. That is to say, whiteness is a structure of reality that positions the life of the white subject as a life of privilege and the life of *Sophie-Merica* as a condition of survival.

From blackness as the condition of survival, the structure of reality is fundamentally visible because “global coloniality becomes most visible if one shifts geography of reason and geopolitics of knowledge from the centre of the empire into its borders” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:7). Meaning, even the three Lacanian human dimensions, namely the imaginary, the symbolic and the real become clear to mean something different from the position of the non-real; the position of the black flesh. Thus, according to Cock (1989:3):“the converse is equally true in that many black children experience the inequality of apartheid and the anger it generates through some experience of domestic service” for example, Steve Biko first become politicized by observing the exploitation to which his mother was subjected as a domestic worker. Many blacks report experiences of fractured and deprived childhoods because of this institution”.

In the dimension of the imaginary, which is based on ‘our lived experience of reality, but also our dreams and nightmares’, *Sophie-Merica* is politically located seemingly only in a space where “there is no genuine way out” (Gibson

2003:42). As her freedom is unattainable in this reality, *Sophie-Merica* is only free at a symbolic and fantasy level inside her imagination as asserted and qualified by Thurman (2014): “Even though she ostensibly lacks freedom, she has been presented to us over the years as a shape-shifting adventure. She could be a queen, an orchestra conductor, a horse-rider, a superwoman. Perhaps these are simply guises in which Sophie imagines herself”. What Žižek refers to as ‘our lived experience’ citing Lacan, is an expression of exclusion that specifically speaks to the white subject as reality is only constructed for the white madam.

In dealing with this adventurous reality as the other, Sibande deploys imagination and shape-shifting as a way out of this domesticating anti-black structured reality. On the symbolic dimension, as stipulated by Žižek, *Sophie-Merica* is what Lacan calls the “big Other”, the invisible order that structures our experience of reality is a dimension that seems to accommodate only the non-reality of *Sophie-Merica* as her life only ends only at the symbolic level as reflected by *Sophie-Merica*’s “dreamscape” (Meekison 2014). The second dimension is a symbolic level of structural reality that is outside the level of the imaginary because it is the ‘big Other’ who has no lived experience according to the white subject. On the third and last Lacanian human dimension, which is the real dimension, the “‘impossible’: something that can neither be directly experienced nor symbolized” (Žižek 2014:3) is something real only for the white subject. This is because whiteness for *Sophie-Merica* is nothing real; it is something that can never be experienced or symbolised as real. In the three Lacanian human dimensions, it is clear that *Sophie-Merica* can only exist on the symbolic level as a colonial symbol of the unreal.

4.6 CONCLUSION

Under the naked eye, the current world as it is, is natural and normal and cannot be changed. This chapter illustrated how the world is colonially

structured in accordance to the being of the white subject, which includes modes of living, believing, definition of beauty and success, and ways of thinking and relating to the world. However, these things seem to lose their value where *Sophie-Merica* is concerned, which shows how the world is not constructed to accommodate the figure of the maid as a human but rather as a threat. The fact that the modern/colonial world is constructed at the cost of rendering of the figure of the maid non-human through structuralised violence and systematic warfare cannot be underestimated.

The aim of this chapter was to expose dehumanisation that, in contemporary form, can be seen as a system that positions *Sophie-Merica* as a domesticated/dehumanised figure in the structural institution of erasure and subjection. Thus, in the institution of domestic servitude, coloniality of being has structurally positioned *Sophie-Merica* as property who is only there to serve the white subject.

The house of the madam is extended to the entire modern/colonial world as the entire empire. Meaning, in the colonial version of the construction of the world, the figure of the maid is only positioned as a servant. The positioning of the figure of the maid based on the racialised context of the world is that of dehumanisation. This mean this dehumanisation and domestication is hidden behind structural violence that keeps *Sophie-Merica* in an ontological limbo. It locates *Sophie-Merica* in the positionality of being an outsider in the empire.



Fig. 3: Mary Sibande, Sophie-Velucia (2009). Fibreglass, resin, fabric and steel.

CHAPTER 5

Sophie-Velucia and Presence-Absence

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapter 2 in Section 2.4, I deployed Fanon's thematic of presence-absence and coloniality, which is represented by *Sophie-Velucia* (2009) (fig 3), the artist's mother, in this chapter. *Sophie-Velucia* represents the last maid in Sibande's family who is depicted weaving an image of Madam JC Walker while they are in conversation. Sibande metaphorically represents her mother who, as the last maid, had to save the little money she had to take Sibande to school and break the cycle of servitude and domestication. Indeed, Sibande broke the maid cycle and became a successful visual artist. However, in *Sophie-Velucia*, she portrays the impact of the politics of presence-absence and coloniality of power over maids in the madam's house.

In this chapter, I explore what it means for *Sophie-Velucia* to be entangled by the Victorian dress. The notion of presence-absence is signified by the metaphor of the Victorian dress, which will be examined under different concepts as a way to undress and redress *Sophie-Velucia* at four levels.

At the first level, I locate the Victorian dress as an ontological signification in the modern/colonial world. This borders on the different ontological meanings that the Victorian dress has over the white skin and black flesh. At the second level, I locate the Victorian dress as a state of exception. This is based on how *Sophie-Velucia*, as a signifier of the black person in general, is entangled by the Victorian dress as something with no rights. At the third level, I touch on the idea that black Victorian and black madam is an oxymoron. Here, I explore how modernity is not designed for the figure of the maid. Lastly, at the fourth level, I undress the Victorian dress, which is to say rethinking the end of the anti-black world by removing the white mask.

The following sub-sections constitute a conceptual road map to untangle the colonial web of Victorian logic. In this chapter, I discuss how the Victorian dress embodies the presence of the white madam while it represents presence-absence to the figure of *Sophie-Velucia*.

5.2 LOCATING THE VICTORIAN DRESS

In locating the Victorian dress, it is critical to ponder, “the way people clothe themselves, together with the traditions of dress and finery that custom implies, constitutes the most distinctive form of a society’s uniqueness, that is to say the one that is the most immediately perceptible” (Fanon 1965:35). For *Sophie-Velucia* to be dressed in a Victorian dress is an ontological and phenomenological spectacle. Dressing a person in particular attire made with particular fabric, which is connected to a particular culture, makes the person’s identity visible and identifiable. However, in the eyes of the white subject, visibility for *Sophie-Velucia* signifies continuous invisibility and violence, which is grounded on the logic of the Victorian difference and racist attitude. *Sophie-Velucia*, “a domestic worker, is shown weaving a portrait of Madam Walker from a sea of hair. Walker was a black American millionairess [sic] from the 1900s, who made her money [from] hair relaxant products” (Jolly 2013:1).

The Victorian dress is fundamentally different from cultural dress because the Victorian dress is racialised. It is through the Victorian dress that *Sophie-Velucia* was named as a black maid and non-human. Through the dress, technologies of subjection have been contextualised as modes of writing her into a racist inscription. According to Saldívar (2007:339), this is linked to “*pensamiento fronterizo* (border thinking) in ... and realist interpellations of the subject and the politics of unsettling the coloniality of power on a planetary scale”. The Victorian dress does not encourage difference as a motivation for curiosity, and learning other people’s cultures and different solutions to similar human condition problems. The dress introduces difference as a threat that

transforms black bodies into a black “imago” (Fanon [1952] 2008:43). For *Sophie-Velucia* to escape blackness, she must engage in the performative activities of aspiring gestures to resist whiteness.

This is qualified by Sibande when she states, “I was collecting what I thought was a maid’s thoughts and aspirations” (Sibande in Khan 2015:221). Without these gestures of fantasy, *Sophie-Velucia* has only the Victorian dress left or she ceases to exist. For *Sophie-Velucia* to be dressed in a Victorian dress, it “promises of utopian tools for post-human existence whereby new or hybrid mutant identities may be fantasized into being” (Fernbach 2002:60). In other words, in a world that is fully defined and grounded on legacies and logic of coloniality, *Sophie-Velucia* pursues whiteness. However, it is clear that without this chase and the Victorian dress like a veil of whiteness, *Sophie-Velucia* loses identity. To qualify the undressing of the Victorian dress, Fanon (1965:59) argues, “the unveiled body seems to escape, to dissolve. She has an impression of being improperly dressed, even of being naked. She experiences a sense of incompleteness with great intensity. She has the anxious feeling that something is unfinished, and along with this a frightful sensation of disintegrating. The absence of the veil distorts the ... corporal pattern”. However, in this text, Fanon refers to the Islamic veil that women wear to cover their faces. Fanon points out that although the veil has become part of the Islamic cultural and socio-political identity, women feel free and liberated when they unveil. Meaning, when they lose their veil and reveal their faces, they start living life differently than a woman who is still wearing her veil.

In the colonial case, in the colonial relation between *Sophie-Velucia* and the white subject, modernity and whiteness act as a Victorian difference. Modernity and whiteness as a colonial veil cover every other identity and culture by pushing it and shaping it as the veil in the “hold” in which Sharper (2016:69) illustrates the concept of “duality, that doubling of departures and arrivals”. Which means, although slaves were transported to and from different parts of

the world, it is like they never arrived. They left as humans and arrived as objects or slaves who were the property of the master. Being in the Victorian dress as *Sophie-Velucia* signifies being in the hold: it is to exist and speak from the position of “non-communicability” (Wilderson 2003). Due to the fall of language in the hold, *Sophie-Velucia* speaks from the position of the non-speaking, a position of borrowed agency, and she exists from the position of non-existence. In this regard, Fanon asserts that:

But there is also in the European the crystallization of aggressiveness, the strain of a kind of violence before the ... [figure of *Sophie-Velucia* (2009) (fig 3)]. Unveiling this woman is revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for the adventure. Hiding the face is also disguising a secret; it is also creating a world of mystery, of the hidden (Fanon 1965:43).

To undress the Victorian dress, therefore, requires the coloniality of power to articulate new modes of being who are not trapped and are untangled. Hence, Goniwe (2014:15) sustains that, “it is no coincidence that Sophie is a black woman, not simply because of the pitch-black tone of her skin but also of the politicised narrative Sibande invokes in the body of artworks”. In the position of undressing the Victorian dress, the question of how linen reconciles with dust is scandalous. Writing on the topic of the Victorian dress and its relation to the figure of the maid, Gikandi has the following to say:

For the colonized, in particular, the temptation for a retrospective illusion of collective forgetfulness has been great: the Victorian age represents such a powerful reminder of colonial domination and cultural alienation that it is hard to associate it with a discourse of freedom or moral progress. It is much easier to privilege the narrative of decolonization and to read it as the process by which African subjects overcame the colonization of their consciousness than to posit it as the source of the cultural grammar that enabled decolonization. But ... the vocabularies through which generations of Africans at home and abroad used to will a decolonized consciousness into being – to go beyond Victorian culture, as it were – came from a set of beliefs that originated from, and were embedded in, mainstream Victorianism (Gikandi 2000:160).

Fanon (1965) further points out that there is some form of violence that comes from chasing whiteness and putting on the veil, no matter what its form.

Whether the veil is Islamic or the colonial veil is a Victorian dress, Fanon shows that *Sophie-Velucia* is always located at the receiving end of ontological violence, because “their movements are almost entirely limited” (Fanon 1965: 52). Meaning for *Sophie-Velucia*, the Victorian dress is a symbol of violence and a symbol of the veil that covers her identity and being; it limits her movements and disguises her as a secret.

It could be quite intriguing to interrogate what makes the Victorian dress so absolute. Maybe it is because the Victorian dress “marked a theft of the body—a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) serving of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire” (Spillers 1987:67). Or put simply: Why is dressing and undressing so important to the level that it can elevate or conceal its subject, which makes interrogating it a worthy exercise? For Sophie, the black flesh casts a shadow in the maid’s lives and “they face these historical limitations in the silence of their dreams—for instance, their blackness seems to differentiate them from the opulent Victorian evocation of their costumes” (Mabandu 2014).

Dressing something comes with associations that connect what is dressed or who is dressed with what dressing is. Two questions come to mind when thinking deeper about the notion of dressing. What is dressing? And, who is being dressed in the colonial context of madam and maid? As depicted by Sibande, *Sophie-Velucia* has been covered by “the fundamental European lie” (Césaire [1972] 2001:84). The issue of dressing can be connected to culture, fashion, society, and the jobs that people occupy. The issue of Victorian dressing is worth interrogating to determine what role dressing could play in ontological spheres as the marker of ontology or the absence thereof. Dressing, specifically the Victorian dress, has the power to assert a human ontological position, which invites a specific different look.

In the name of the Victorian dress that *Sophie-Velucia* wears, whatever the dress means or signifies cannot be taken for granted or associated with

inferiority or subjection. The Victorian dress, as something absolute here, is scrutinised from the position of blackness, from *Sophie-Velucia's* position of “working in the kitchens” (‘kitchen’ is a term commonly used to describe working as a maid or to describe White suburbs)” (Sibande 2013:223). Looking deeper by way of undressing the Victorian dress from the positionality of blackness is not to look at how the figure of the maid mimics the white subject as the other. Thus, to go beyond the dress to undressing, it is necessary to deal with *Sophie-Velucia's* identity problems under the Victorian dress, “and there is no identity that is without the dialogic relationship to the Other. The Other is not outside, but also inside the Self ... Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself” (Hall [1989] 1991:16). It does not mean looking at the fashion statement of the dress, but rather at its significance to ontology about blackness in a specific context, that is, a white subject context.

The aim here is to take a position and undress the Victorian dress to launch a critique – a different kind of critique about the visibility and power that keep *Sophie-Velucia* in the Victorian dress. However, to be *under* the dress and to *be* the dress are different positions that can be difficult to distinguish if not explored properly. Scrutinising the dress properly borders on three questions. Firstly, what is the Victorian dress in the contemporary world? Secondly, what does the dress mean? And, thirdly, what does the dress signify about the figure of the maid? In the racialised context of the world, all things have a different meaning in the zone of being and the “zone of nonbeing” (Fanon [1952] 2008). These three fundamental questions are important, even in the modern world, and are explored here in relation to *Sophie-Velucia* as the embodiment of blackness in relation to the Victorian dress as the embodiment of whiteness. The Victorian dress plays a fundamentally important role in the politics of dressing and undressing *Sophie-Velucia* in the post-colony.

Colonial differences by technologies push *Sophie-Velucia* below the human register. Animals are dressed in a different cloth than that of the maid in the

house of the madam where even pets have better ontology than the maid. The figure of the maid is differentiated through colonial differences that influence cultural difference, which positions *Sophie-Velucia* as something to be recognised as lesser human than the white subject. However, understanding the underlying factors of undressing the Victorian dress is to understand the “differences such as Western/African and black/white [must] continue to be important for the understanding, and making, of contemporary culture” (Doy 2000:204). That is, objects that are the property of the madam and the master. Therefore, even though *Sophie-Velucia* wears the Victorian dress, she is still a thing amongst things, because “behind the visible, manifest patriarchy, the more significant existence” (Fanon 1965:37). The Victorian dress suggests many different factors including patriarchy, gender, race, class and the idea of the state. It is evident that the Victorian dress reflects how the white master constructed the narcissistic sovereign subject (Barlow & Durand 1999; Hewitt 1997:23; Lasch 1991). However, it should be noted that the pets of the white subject appear to be in a better position than *Sophie-Velucia* because they are protected by the Victorian dress.

Sophie-Velucia as a maid is normally located inside the madam’s house where she is only allowed to leave the house to walk the dog, the madam or the master (if they are old); to go to the shop; or to take the kids to play or for a walk. She barely goes out to visit her own family and her own children. Sibande depicted the dysfunctional black family structure with *Sophie-Velucia* behind the Victorian dress as something that is “polluted with colonial values” (Doy 2000:201).

The effects of the Victorian dress have been experienced by almost every black child after colonisation. Sibande stipulates, “if people are not raised by a domestic worker then their mother or auntie has worked as one. This is why Sophie always hits home, she always evokes the familiar” (Sibande in Meekison 2014). Sibande’s statement is truthful as many black families can

relate to her family narrative. Although *Sophie-Velucia* wears the Victorian dress, she is a child of apartheid who experienced life during colonisation as a product of coloniality. What makes this work fundamentally important is that the figure of *Sophie-Velucia* is someone who is supposed to be unseen and unknown, yet she wears a Victorian dress that makes her stand out. However, *Sophie-Velucia* is allowed to be outside on the streets where the public can only see her because she wears the apron and headscarf that were discussed in the previous chapter.

Upon seeing the Victorian dress that dominates Sophie, most people associated her with a Zion woman in South Africa while few associated her with the figure of a maid. This embodiment of the experience of the Victorian dress allowed Sibande to embody *Sophie-Velucia* as she stipulates, “I wanted to put myself among these women, these maids. I am making a work out of their work” (Sibande in Corrigan 2010b). In this sense, *Sophie-Velucia* suggests something hidden as her original identity is covered by the Victorian dress, which signifies the white mask. This brings the Western idiom of sweeping things under the carpet to the conversation, which means to conceal something that cannot be finished or resolved. The Victorian dress is a mask that covers the unfinished colonial scandal of the racialised black body

For Sibande, creating *Sophie-Velucia* was also to put herself in the same place as her grandmother as well as the thinkers who resist coloniality. In regard to locating the Victorian colonial technologies of dehumanisation as a white mask, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:4) argues “racism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and coloniality as major challenges preventing the emergence of a genuinely postcolonial world. Racism, the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, and neo-colonialism do not only constitute global coloniality as a modern power structure[s]”. However, there are many aspects of the colonial modern world that reveal the white subject and conceal *Sophie-Velucia* as she is deeply located under the darker side of the Victorian dress. The darker side

has to do with the figure of the maid: all things seem to be darker and deserve to be hidden under the carpet of modernity/coloniality. It is in the darker side of being a human being. It is emphasised because by being pushed under the carpet of modernity/coloniality, *Sophie-Velucia* is transformed from being seen and recognised as a human to being reduced to nothing.

This is where and when *Sophie-Velucia* is swept under the carpet of the Victorian dress; therefore, she is hidden as a human under the colonial veil. The racialised context of the Victorian dress requires that Sibande “explores the intersection of coloniality and subjectivity in the domain of philosophy and in the tradition of the concept of ‘being’” (Mignolo 2007b:157), being the colonial veil. Here, the white subject is located outside the modes of the colonial veil. The colonial veil has negative connotations to *Sophie-Velucia* when it comes as a Victorian dress. The Victorian dress is a negative veil of the world that has been used as the absolute context of the world, which is set to dehumanise black people and humanise white people. The white subject is always at the top of the Victorian dress in the zone of the sublime. The humanisation of the white subject through the Victorian dress positions *Sophie-Velucia* in subjection where she is hidden under the Victorian veil. The Victorian dress does not welcome *Sophie-Velucia* in the reception door of ontology; hence, it must remain ontologically in a state of “fugitivity” (Harney & Moten 2013). Although the Victorian dress is tricky, it is intriguing to see the linkages that have the power to connect or disconnect *Sophie-Velucia* from the project of modernity.

Resisting against the Victorian dress, *Sophie-Velucia* can take the position of “de-linking” (Mignolo 2007a) from whiteness and modernity. Although, for *Sophie-Velucia*, refusing the colonial position known as blackness appears to be seeking whiteness or dreaming about assuming a position in whiteness. For Sibande, however, creating *Sophie-Velucia* is an attempt to delink from the genealogy of maids in her family by creating a new trajectory and a new

horizon. In this regard, Mignolo anchors the position Sibande assumes by creating *Sophie-Velucia*, because according to Mignolo:

“... de-linking, civil des-obedience [sic] and a reversal of the way production and distribution of food are conceived are all aspects of decolonization at large. De-linking, once again, implies work at the fringes, at the border between hegemonic and dominant forms of knowledge, of economic practices, of political demands. Using the system but doing something else, moving in different directions” Mignolo (2007a:160).

Thus, *Sophie-Velucia* is a problem under the Victorian dress hidden as a problem to linking, the sublime zone that is equivalent to the zone of being and there is a grotesque zone of non-being. However, the paradox with *Sophie-Velucia* is that she is founded in both zones: although *Sophie-Velucia* is only a keeper of the sublime of the carpet in the house of the madam, she herself is not sublime. No matter how much *Sophie-Velucia* walks on the carpet and keeps it clean, she will never get to the level of its beauty. This raises an interesting yet fundamentally deeper paradigm of the paradox, namely, *Sophie-Velucia* is the producer and the keeper of a clean and beautiful house of the madam, but she herself is not beautiful.

In an anti-black world, *Sophie-Velucia* is a maid. Meaning, blackness is blackness and blackness precedes being. Hence, *Sophie-Velucia* signifies nothing, and her name is not attached to any identity connected to ontological density. According to Fanon (1965:44), “there is not, in the street or on a road, that behavior characterizing a sexual encounter that is described in terms of the glance, of the physical bearing, the muscular tension, the signs of disturbance to which the phenomenology of encounters has accustomed us”. This results in *Sophie-Velucia* under the Victorian dress to be present as a thing that can be used, misused and abused because she is not a woman. This is to say that it is her sense of being a woman, her sense of beauty and being are covered by a colonial veil. Therefore, an encounter with a black woman is not an encounter with a woman, but an encounter with something behind a veil: a thing or an object behind the veil of whiteness grounded on colonial logic as

an operating apparatus to keep *Sophie-Velucia* under the Victorian dress in wishful thinking. And this THING is a MAID. *Sophie-Velucia* as a maid is a THING that signifies a maid as a tool to operate according to the logic and the desires of the madam while she has her desires. However, according to Bataille (1986:39), “desire is usually closely linked with terror, intense pleasure and anguish”. In other words, *Sophie-Velucia* has no attachment to liveability. The attachment that we can understand in relation to *Sophie-Velucia* is that of dependence because *Sophie-Velucia* is that attached to the madam as her property. Then to ask what it means for a thing to wear a Victorian dress is a fundamental question that is problematic for the white subject.

However, at face value, if we look closer at Sibande’s art objects, we see a docile figure – a dead object. We can see and acknowledge the bravery to dare and fantasise to take the position of the madam by mimicking and deploying “intuitive psychology” (Winkelman 2002b:1883). It should be fundamentally understood that the figure of *Sophie-Velucia* is only liberated on an aesthetic, fantasy and symbolic level, including all other registers that provide a different study of *Sophie-Velucia* from a different locus of enunciation. From the locus of enunciation of the figure of the maid it is fascinating to ask: What does it mean to undress that which is naked? It is a simple question but one that fundamentally goes deeper. The paradox that we must come to face is that whether *Sophie-Velucia* wears a dress or not, she is ontologically naked. Therefore, *Sophie-Velucia* is simply a figure who constantly aspires and fantasises about “being elsewhere” (Rushdie 1991:12) because she is already nowhere ontologically. Her nakedness is not just that of nudity and pornography, it is nakedness of life. Although we can discuss different registers, such an agency, beauty, black feminism, transcendence and post-colonial registers, in the context of *Sophie-Velucia*, this argument is grounded on the ontological register.

To undress the Victorian dress requires asking fundamental and ontological deep questions. What is the name of the unnameable? It is *Sophie-Velucia*. *Sophie-Velucia* is her name, through which she was stripped of her ontological signification. Meaning her being as a human is irrelevant. The contemporary modern global colonial world as it is, is one that borders on the absenteeism of the figure of the maid ontologically as a human. *Sophie-Velucia* is only named *Sophie-Velucia* as an identifiable thing. A thing to be used. And the identifiable thing has no identity. However, Mirzoeff (1999:174) argues that, “identity is neither cultural nor natural; in terms of the binary opposition it is a formation in constant flux, drawing on physical, psychical and creative resources to create a sense of self from a range of possibilities that are fractal rather than linear”. According to Fanon ([1952] 2008), it is that which possesses no ontology.

If we only perceive *Sophie-Velucia* as a real figure who has transcended, we engage in subjection and bad faith. Subjection reveals that things are still the same because *Sophie-Velucia* has only transcended on the symbolic and aesthetic levels. Her gestures are only empty under the white gaze and she is reducible to performative politics because the condition that Sibande is responding to and the content that she is engaging with, which is blackness, has not changed. Blackness is still blackness. Dressing *Sophie-Velucia* in a Victorian dress is a strong metaphor that resembles a state of many black people who are wearing the “white mask” as per Fanon ([1952] 2008). To wear a white mask is to be forced by systems and colonial logic that introduced whiteness as the absolute identity. The white mask, therefore, becomes a symbol of being civilised, meaning being westernised. This resonates with many black people who engage in that configuration of politics that we are all in a rainbow nation and that we are all post-colonial.

But the idea of all rejects the position of the nameless because the nameless does not belong. Meaning *Sophie-Velucia* does not belong anywhere else but in “the world community of displaced ... [figures]” (Rushdie 1991:15). *Sophie-*

Velucia can be used by the neighbours, daughters, sons and the in-laws of the madam. The figure of Sophie in this study could also mean a black male who is a gardener. He will be brought to do other things beyond his job description because Sophie has no job description. Therefore, Sophie is not in the register of all and us in the post-colonial world since *Sophie-Velucia* is still entangled in the colonial struggle. This is because *Sophie-Velucia*, as shown by Sibande for three generations, has no name. Meaning her real name and being was lost and hidden. In this regard, Goniwe asserts that:

In her lifespan of seven years, Sophie has been maturing in content and form, becoming richer in meaning and finer aesthetically. She has been a vital character and site in which Sibande negotiates not only her ideas, experiences, identities, and desires but those of others sharing her predicament and emancipatory mission. A monumental figure laden with nuanced details and visually striking in appearance, Sophie is always dressed in elaborate and colourful costumes, modeled in mimetic gestures of different personalities whilst her eyes are closed (Goniwe 2014:7).

It is important to see *Sophie-Velucia* in the Victorian dress from the position of ontological signification. In this process of decolonisation, it is vital to account for the ontological signification of the Victorian dress. This is to say, in the context of undressing the Victorian dress, even if *Sophie-Velucia* could wear the Victorian dress, it does not prevent her from being penetrated by the colonial interpellation. It is the colonial interpellation that says she is a figure of the maid. The idea of a helper, auntie, domestic worker, and assistant or my friend is pretentious because all rights that are normally granted to humans do not exist. That is to say, even if *Sophie-Velucia* could dress in a Victorian dress, she is already undressed. This is because all rights collapse. Even if she is called a domestic worker or whatever in the so-called post-colonial or post-apartheid times, she does not have rights. Not only can rights be withdrawn when *Sophie-Velucia* wears a Victorian dress, which is a white mask, she does not have any rights. Even if black people are overqualified, they will still never be qualified enough. They will always have to catch up, but it will always be too soon, and white people will move out or be suspicious.

This ontological gap is reflected and symbolised in *Sophie-Velucia* where the Victorian dress not only acts as a tool of colonial interpellation but also as what Sharpe (2016:68) calls being “in the hold”. That is to say, a black life is a reflection of “what happens in the hold” (Sharpe 2016:69). In the hold, Sharpe (2016:69) argues, “we inhabit and are inhabited by the hold” and she further shows us that “language falls apart” in the hold. The hold for Sharpe (2016) is “the slave ship, the womb and the coffin, and the long dehumanising project; we continue to feel” in the modern/colonial world. According to the picture Sharpe paints of the hold, *Sophie-Velucia* needs to constantly pursue happiness and life through whiteness, or the Victorian dress or the white mask will all act as a hold.

The Victorian dress acts as a veil to *Sophie-Velucia*, which emphasises the notion that for a black body to exist, it needs to be dressed and covered with a veil that is not theirs. This veil belongs strictly to the white subject because it symbolises the presence of whiteness. Meaning, the world is white and life is also white. According to Grosfoguel (2007:215), “this colonial arrangement is embodied in the “social, economic, political and historical conditions of possibility for a subject to assume the arrogance of becoming God-like””.

For *Sophie-Velucia* to live life is to live a white life; however, this life is no life at all. *Sophie-Velucia* must engage in acts of mimicry by putting on a colonial veil that sets the standard of life for the world. This veil, as alluded previously, is what Fanon ([1952] 2008) referred to as the “white mask”. Through the colonial matrix of power, the white mask has come to be the definer of many standards of living in the world. The standard of whiteness created its standard as the absolute standard. Meaning, blackness exists and is seen through the standard of whiteness as the absolute veil that covers that which is not human and brings it closer to civilisation. Making the less standard, meaning the black subject, the underdeveloped and the dispossessed come closer to the standard. If *Sophie-Velucia* does not live life according to the standard of

whiteness by putting on a veil, that is, by putting on a Victorian dress, she feels completely naked and non-living. Thus, to live as the figure of *Sophie-Velucia* is to constantly live a life behind a veil of whiteness where the Victorian dress is located.

5.3 VICTORIAN DRESS AND STATE OF EXCEPTION

The Victorian dress is a sign of the state of exception that creates *Sophie-Velucia* as a site of subjection because “it is a white man who creates the Negro” (Fanon 1965:47). The very idea of the state of exception creates the environment and logic for the Victorian dress to possess the ontological signification it currently poses: a state of non-ontology. According to Mabandu (2009), “the figure is dressed in a multiplicity of costumes and situated in different scenarios that express modes of liberation from gender, racial and class constraints”. However, because of this state of non-ontology, the Victorian dress does not lead to this liberation. The Victorian dress, as something that is specific here, is reflected from the framework and positionality of the state of exception because it projects certain codes of meaning towards *Sophie-Velucia* whether she wears it or not. By refusing these colonial containers of subjection, *Sophie-Velucia* appears in conversation with Madam CJ Walker. It is as if *Sophie-Velucia* is constructing the face of Madam Walker by making a relief on the wall thereby creating what could appear as being a hieroglyph.

This state of exception must be examined deeper as it claims the totality of speaking for all human, that is, the subject, exploring the relation between the law and government in relation to the subject. Thus, the state of exception dismantles existing forms of life in order to deal with absence of law in blackness. Dealing with the issue of the state of exception is to deal with the legal theory of Carl Schmitt regarding sovereign power, law and biopolitics as it has the ability to go beyond the law in the name of protecting the public.

Agamben (2005) explores how the state of exception is created and is grounded on the ability to go beyond the law and the human, the public and the state, as well as between justice and injustice.

However, for the purpose of locating and understanding the Victorian dress from the position of blackness, the concept of the state of exception is explored in relation to *Sophie-Velucia* and the white subject's racialised relation. This racialised relation is grounded on the absence of law towards *Sophie-Velucia* as it is firmly supported by the overpresence of sovereign law towards the white subject as the absolute human with absolute human rights. Agamben (2005) is concerned and is warning us of the absence of human rights for humans. As he states, "in truth, the state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other" (Agamben 2005:23). This is not just in terms of law and order with their absence of law on human subjects, but also from the position of blackness outside the juridical order.

Thus, "the state of exception is not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather, insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law's threshold or limit concept" (Agamben 2005:4). The state of exception has been adopted as the paradigm and logic of the state government, which Agamben theorises as being inside and outside the juridical system and logic. However, in relation to the state of exception, *Sophie-Velucia* is outside the juridical law and the ontological law as the colonised figure.

The colonized were defined as inferior and obstacles to modernity (in economic, religious or other terms), in many cases justifying the suspension of normal ethical conventions, and so use of violence, to "modernize" colonized peoples and places. African nationalism then reproduced colonial violence and authoritarianism, bequeathing it on postcolonial Africa as a mode of governance (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011:2).

The state of exception for *Sophie-Velucia* borders on coloniality of power that is inflicted by the colonial system. As Maldonado-Torres puts it:

To be sure those who suffer the consequences of such a system are primarily Blacks and indigenous people, as well as all of those who appear as colo[u]red. In short, this system of symbolic representations, the material conditions that occur therein, that are also at the same time derivative and constitutive of such a context, are part of a process that naturali[s]es the non-ethics of war. The sub-ontological difference is the result of such naturali[s]ation (Maldonado-Torres 2007:256).

Therefore, if the state of exception is the embodiment of coloniality of being, it is the naturalisation of the ontological non-ethical war against *Sophie-Velucia* based on colonial symbolic representations. From blackness, the state of exception is ontological absenteeism. *Sophie-Velucia* is deployed to engage ways of rethinking the Victorian dress as the embodiment of the state of exception that foregrounds the non-existence of *Sophie-Velucia* as a shadow. However, Sibande poses what appears to be a fundamental question, “but how do you dress a shadow?” (Sibande in Khan 2015:226). From a different positionality of whiteness, the state of exception simply means fear of alienation of the white subject as a human from human rights, law and justice due to the systematic colonial control by the state government. Although this might be the case for the white subject, for *Sophie-Velucia*, the state of exception means ontological alienation, which is grounded on subjection.

The Victorian dress is a symbol of the state of exception and is grounded on subjection. In this subjection, the Victorian dress act as a tool to cover any erotic significance of the figure of the maid and, “when I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives” (Lorde [1984] 2000:55). Thus, the Victorian dress as the embodiment of the state of exception affirms *Sophie-Velucia*, who does not fit in, as the property of the madam. By being property, *Sophie-Velucia* belongs to the white madam as the

property of whiteness by law. Therefore, whiteness is the embodiment of absolute law and justice.

According to Agamben (2005:1), “if the law employs the exception—that is the suspension of law itself—as its original means of referring to and encompassing life, then a theory of the state of exception is the preliminary condition for any definition of the relation that binds and, at the same time, abandons the living being to law”. The Victorian dress as the state of exception is the absence of law, human rights and justice. The Victorian dress is a form of justice that embodies injustice and anything that has to do with subjection. It is in the midst of this exception that Sibande feels compelled to free *Sophie-Velucia*; hence, she converses with Madam CJ Walker. By deploying the Victorian dress as a metaphor in her work, Sibande asserts that, “I wanted to celebrate them [maids]. I think that they are heroes. It was so hard to put food on the table” (Sibande in Corrigan 2010b) under the state of exception. The inability to get the few basic human needs is colonial justice that is unjust. Therefore, the Victorian dress is unjust justice as the veil of whiteness. It is on this position that the state of exception can be labelled as a weapon of exclusion and subjection. It is a form of ontological alienation that signifies that the ontological insignificance of *Sophie-Velucia* is significant in the eyes of the white subject. Thus, the Victorian dress that *Sophie-Velucia* wears is a symbol of the “state of exception” (Agamben 2005) that excludes her from human significance. This significance of exclusion is insignificance.

Understanding that whiteness is law of black insignificance reveals that the world is white and its law and order are absolutely white. In this regard Agamben (2005:2) asserts, “and perhaps only then will it be possible to answer the question that never ceases to reverberate in the history of Western politics: what it means to act politically?”. To phrase the question from the position of blackness: What does it mean to be acted upon politically? Inside and outside the Victorian dress Sophie embodies what it means to be acted upon. That is,

to be acted upon as an African figure is to be made an African figure; her meaning is erased and she is turned into an object as Fanon ([1952] 2008) illustrated. The Victorian dress as the state of exception is white objection that turns Sophie-Velucia into an object amongst other objects into a state of “objecthood” (Fanon [1952] 2008:82), which is “no-man’s-land between public law and political fact, and between the juridical order and life” (Agamben 2005:1). Under the Victorian dress, *Sophie-Velucia* is even outside the state of exception because it exists in no-man’s land outside of law in the state of objecthood because as the property of the white subject she is politically acted upon. Agamben further asserts that:

The fact is that in both the right of resistance and the state of exception, what is ultimately at issue is the question of the juridical significance of a sphere of action that is in itself extrajudicial. Two theses are at odds here: One asserts that law must coincide with the norm, and the other holds that the sphere of law exceeds the norm. But in the last analysis, the two positions agree in ruling out the existence of a sphere of human action that is entirely removed from law (Agamben 2005:11).

The Victorian dress renders *Sophie-Velucia* invisible and outside the law. The logic of law has always been that black people fit their description and that there is no separation between black and criminal; black and violence; black and poverty; black and primitive; and black and being a “problem” (Du Bois [1903] 2016; Gordon 1995). *Sophie-Velucia* fits the description of being a problem. Hence, she went to the madam’s cupboard and tried on her Victorian dress. *Sophie-Velucia* does not have a Victorian dress as she does not own anything. She is not allowed to own anything in the house of the madam. *Sophie-Velucia* does not fit the description of a being biological human being, but rather fits the description of the colonial non-human being who is subjected to the wrong side of everything, as well as being outside the ontological description.

The white subject is positioned by the Victorian dress whereas the ontological description describes *Sophie-Velucia* as being non-human. Through the Victorian dress, which is coloniality behind the veil, institutions of structural

subjection have been set to place. The Victorian dress is the “darker side of modernity” (Mignolo 2011c to control *Sophie-Velucia*. Fanon ([1952] 2008) argues that black people want to be white. However, even if *Sophie-Velucia* puts on the Victorian dress, she does not fit the description of being a white madam. In an attempt to construct the image of the Victorian dress, Sibande asserts, “I first made the objects that Sophie aspired to owning: beautiful shoes ... They couldn’t be worn, they were completely impractical” (Sibande in Corrigall 2010b). *Sophie-Velucia*’s pitch-black skin already locates her to the position of impracticality, to only fit the description of non-human as the Victorian dress locates her under the description of being the maid rather than being the madam.

The black madam and black police officer is an oxymoron because they both are symbols of what is under the colonial veil. It is “only if the veil covering this ambiguous zone is lifted we will be able to approach an understanding of the stakes involved in the difference—or the supposed difference—between the political and the juridical, and between law and the living being” (Agamben 2005:2). In other words, only when the Victorian dress is undressed from *Sophie-Velucia*, can she begin to distinguish how to be a human subject according to her own standard of being a human in blackness. However, “the quotation of elitism apparent in Sophie’s garments – the allusions to aristocratic ceremonial dress – is not only driven by a desire to deride or challenge it but has been eclipsed by such an insatiable hunger to attain it, that it ironically impedes her liberation” (Corrigall 2015:157). Agamben (2005) argues that even the Victorian dress itself is not seen by the state of exception, it is alienated from the rights of the human who is oppressed by the state. Agamben’s argument fails to speak for *Sophie-Velucia* as she is a person who is closed outside the state of exception. Maybe in deeper analysis, the state of exception created *Sophie-Velucia*; that is, the Victorian dress creates what is not Victorian, and whiteness creates what is not whiteness – blackness. On the

other hand, blackness cannot create whiteness, but black people can aspire to and mimic whiteness. Hence, Sibande had to base *Sophie-Velucia* on her biological mother. Sibande sustains that:

I had to make Sophie real. I wanted to feel her presence. The best person to use as a subject was me. I realised that Sophie was me. I aspire to having all these beautiful things. When I was growing up I didn't have lots of beautiful things that other kids had. It's not that I grew up poor but other kids always seemed to be 10 steps ahead of me (Sibande in Corrigan 2010b).

It is relatively evident that *Sophie-Velucia* comes from the darker side of the Victorian dress as reflected by the maids who were part of Cock's interviews. Cock (1980a:1) states that, "this oppression is expressed in many domestic servant's sense of being slaves, of leading waste lives which they are powerless to change. (I have been a slave all my life; 'We are slaves in our own country') Other Africans also experience their working lives as a form of ... [bondage]".

At the heart of coloniality of power, is the way of living for the figure of the maid in which the state of exception does not make any exceptions. Black people cannot receive any form of exception from the state of exception as Agamben's argument is for some subjects who found themselves located outside the state of exception. Many Western philosophical texts and texts from different fields clearly show that the subject that they engage with is a white subject, meaning a white body. Thus, where the figure of the maid is concerned, logic falls apart, and in the eyes of the madam, even if *Sophie-Velucia* could wear a Victorian dress, "she does not see a dynamic objection, but a sort, something eviscerated of individuality, flattened, and rendered vacuous of genuine human feelings" (Yancy 2008:4). By virtue of being a maid, *Sophie-Velucia* is Sophie, meaning her ontology is flattened into nothingness while she is still inside the Victorian dress. In regard to the Victorian dress that *Sophie-Velucia* wears, Sibande says, "the designs and colour of Sophie's dresses reference uniforms of domestic workers, overalls of labourers, designer dresses of local Zion

Church worshippers' and historical Victorian garments" (Sibande in Khan 2015: 224). The historical Victorian garment is dominant because the viewer sees it first, but it embodies other characteristics of the maid as well. To have a meaningless objection is to live by the faith of a toy in the hands of a baby. This is to say; the faith of *Sophie-Velucia* is totally dependent on the white madam as her saviour.

In this regard, according to Yancy (2008:22), "however, she is one of the 'walking dead', unaware of how the feeling of her white bodily upsurge and expansiveness is purchased at expense of ... [Sophie's] Black body". The huge houses with large fenced walls and yards belong to the subject: the white people, the humans. The colonial logic of the empire located these people on the brighter side of capitalism. Everything else outside the category of whiteness or European is located on the dirty side of capitalism. On the other hand, by understanding the Victorian dress as a state of exception, we realise a racial ontological paradox that shows us that, "the white woman is not simply influenced by racist practices, but she is the vehicle through which such practices get performed and sustained" (Yancy 2008:22).

The modern world as it is, is a racist, anti-black and dangerous world. It is a modern/colonial world that is constructed for the white man by the black man, women and children. Even today, there are hidden places on the globe where some black children and woman are exploited. We know from Sartre's waiter that the difference is in exploiting blackness as a condition and whiteness as a condition.

We often speak of a human condition and touch on specific elements that we share as humans and that connect us beyond our control in that a human condition becomes a shared condition. Everything that structurally encompasses the environment we live in constitute that environment to a condition. In other words, blackness as a condition and whiteness as a condition refer and reflect on the structurally positioned "political field" (Dussel

2006:5). The same is applied to whiteness: whiteness is a condition that is created structurally to position white people as the only human subjects according to racial logic. Thus, the white madam as the white “subject, then becomes present in these fields through functionally situating himself or herself in various ways” (Dussel 2006:5). However, because of the racialised context of the world, many things will not happen the same way for the black condition as the white condition. Exploitation in the white condition simply means the state of exception, and that is alienation of some of the white subject from law. But it is fundamentally different where the black condition is concerned because alienation means subjection.

Regarding the Victorian dress in relation to the notion of the state of exception as engaged by many scholars on issues of the body and politics as well as the interrelation in relation to power, it is fundamentally important to note that the state of exception is always linked to the sovereign figure. This deeper thought about the state of exception – specifically from the position of *Sophie-Velucia* – requires us to consider the notion of biopolitics. *Sophie-Velucia* is in an interconnected and intersectional field between biology and politics in relation to social and political positionality rather than from just some human biological attributes. It attempts to explain how politics affects our life based on our biological capabilities and cultural environment. The fundamental underplaying logic of biopolitics is the effects and the connection it has with power and life over *Sophie-Velucia*. To be precise, this power and life are influenced by politics.

5.4 THE OXYMORON OF THE BLACK VICTORIAN DRESS

While *Sophie-Velucia* represents the third generation of maids in Sibande’s chain of maids in her family narrative, it also carries elements of being an oxymoron. *Sophie-Velucia* is the maid who almost got away. As such, she allows us to think deeply about the concept of the black madam. In a Fanonian

sense, there is no such thing as a black madam because the position of madam is reserved for the white woman only. The idea of a black madam is an oxymoron because, “instead of recognizing her absolute blackness, she proceeds to turn it into an accident” (Fanon [1952] 2008:32). Instead of the black madam accepting her blackness, Fanon sees her as someone who is in denial that the whiteness she is perusing is constructed at the cost of her blackness. Thus, there will be no whiteness without blackness, or there will be no madam without a maid. Therefore, the position of the black madam “is one of the ‘walking dead’, unaware of how the feeling of her ... [Black] bodily upsurge and expansiveness is purchased at expense of ... [her] Black body” (Yancy 2008: 22). As Fanon ([1952] 2008:42-43) points out, both the black and white madam, “regardless of the area I have studied, one thing has struck me: The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation”. Regardless of the ontological area, the figure of *Sophie-Velucia* will always remain a slave of being black. In other words, darkness cannot assume the position of light. The black madam in this instance is an oxymoron in the sense that *Sophie-Velucia* becomes like a dog that is chasing its tail.

About *Sophie-Velucia*, who assumes the position of the white mask, Fanon ([1952] 2008:82) writes, “the Negress feels inferior that she aspires to win admittance into the white world. In this endeavour she will seek the help of a phenomenon that we shall call *affective erethism*”. However, even this *affective erethism* that Fanon suggests does not constitute the ontological signification that *Sophie-Velucia* needs to qualify as a white subject. Since whiteness is a condition rather than just pigmentation, it is something that a figure like *Sophie-Merica* wants to reach through her fantasies and figures such as Mayotte Capécia. But the aim of modernity is to keep *Sophie-Velucia* in a perpetual chase, that is, *Sophie-Velucia* must constantly chase whiteness. She must keep cleaning while she remains dirty. This is because “it is from within that the

Negro will seek admittance to the white sanctuary” (Fanon [1952] 2008:36), which is a position “in which the most ridiculous ideas proliferated at random” (Fanon [1952] 2008:29). Fanon describes the notion of the black madam and a black Victorian as something that Quijano (2008:182) refers to as “a mental category of modernity”. The only logic that will come out is suicidal. In order for *Sophie-Velucia* to assume whiteness as a figure, is to kill the self for there is no whiteness without blackness. Meaning, whiteness and blackness have their own constant relationship.

Capécia had a different mutual relationship with whiteness than the figure of the maid. This relationship is based on a level of uplifting aspirations rather than uplifting ontology. However, Capécia acknowledges not being able to be a black madam by saying, “the fact that I was barred from this society because I was a woman of color; but I could not help being jealous” (Capécia in Fanon [1952] 2008:30). Fanon ([1952] 2008) says that the black wants to be white. Capécia does not seem to believe that her association with whiteness could elevate her ontology. Capécia states, “I felt that I was wearing too much makeup, that I was not properly dressed, that I was not doing André credit, perhaps simply because of the color of my skin” (Capécia in Fanon [1952] 2008:30). The words ‘perhaps’ and ‘simply’ suggest that the question of ontology is not a given for Capécia. The words suggest that it simply is this obvious thing of being black. She went out with André knowing the difference of ontology. Capécia did not see her association with André as the elevation of ontology but as a liberation of love. Fanon locates Capécia as the figure of exception; the figure who takes the position of the subject. A figure of exception is a black ‘madam’, who according to Fuss (1989:xi-xii), “is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the “whatness’ of a given entity”. This whiteness for the madam is whiteness; therefore, there is only one madam in the world

and that is a white madam. The notion of the black madam is an oxymoron with no whatness.

The black madam chases the position of the white madam because “the attitude of the black man toward the white, or toward his own race, often duplicates almost completely a constellation of delirium, frequently bordering on the region of the pathological” (Fanon [1952] 2008:43). As a black body, the black madam and the black maid “recognize their dependence in the existing structure; they reject the legitimacy of the distribution of power and control within the existing structure; and they then adopt a mask of dependence as a way of coping with their situation” (Cock 1980b:86). According to Cock (1980a), the positionality of the black madam is a mask that black women don in order to rise to the hierarchy of capitalism by professionally gaining power as a way of coping and dealing with coloniality of power. However, some targets of coloniality embrace it while others choose to resist it by all means.

Thus, for there to be a black madam in a white mask, there must be a split between the black skin and the white mask. This split goes deeper than the level of the ontological split to the point that the black Victorian and black madam is an oxymoron and superfluous to cling to. In the context of any black woman, (Fanon 1965:44) speaks of “this woman who sees without being seen ...” and that is a black woman no matter what professional or social status she, or black man for that matter, might possess. The black woman and man are black, and they will remain black. According to Fanon (1965:44), to be black is to be seen without being seen; being visible and invisible.

Being Victorian is a visible position that can be seen because in the eye of the white master, “he does not see her. There is even a permanent intention not to perceive the feminine profile, not to pay attention to women” (Fanon 1965:44). Sophie’s Victorian dress is reduced by the apron and headscarf, which are tools the white madam and master use to cover the sensual appeal of Sophie’s body so that she does not tempt the master into any sexual activities. The

colonial system was and is designed not to separate between a black female and black male; they are all the same inside the “uniform or ‘dress’ ... [that] act as more than an abstract object framed by the practical exegetics of work” (Naidu 2009:128). Even when slaves were shipped out of their homeland of Africa, black bodies were not separated. Men and women were packed like animal cargo in congested small spaces.

The Victorian dress created a gap for *Sophie-Velucia* akin to the slave ship that created a gap between the slaves and their homes. In a similar experience, the Victorian dress acts as a sea, which is a symbol of the traumatic experience in the history of blackness. *Sophie-Velucia* as a slave is located in the belly of modernity inside the ship of death, the ship of enslavement, in “the hold” (Sharpe 2016:68). This is to say that for *Sophie-Velucia* to be in the Victorian dress is to be in the hold. To be in the hold is to be under the captain’s feet in the belly of the ship, in the pit where its dark and no human logic or any form of law exists. Only animal instinct remains, because in the blackness as the hold, “we inhabit and are inhabited by the hold” (Sharpe 2016:69). Thus, the ship plays a fundamental symbolic role in the position of blackness as the Victorian dress in the case of *Sophie-Velucia*.

Engaging about the Victorian dress on *Sophie-Velucia* “is crucial at this point that the past be seen as a legitimate point of departure for talking about the challenges of the present and the future” (Ndebele 1994:155). This speaks to the future of those who were shipped and left but never arrived as humans with a particular identity, or ontological significance, but rather as property and tools to legitimise their functionality. Black people had their own cultures and identities. One tool of coloniality is the standardisation of all black people under blackness as the stamp that erases these cultures and identities. In other words, coloniality of power is a ship that transports African figures to modernity as a destination they will never reach.

The ship and the cross would mean the marking of the quarantined zone of blackness. That is, a zone where whiteness ceases to exist except by showing its darker side, which isolates the African figure. The fundamental core thesis of the black Victorian is that a black madam is an oxymoron. To qualify this, Fanon ([1952] 2008:25) argues that, “the black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man, there is only one destiny. And it is white. Long ago the black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at achieving a white existence”. Fanon wrote from his lived experience as a black body in an anti-black world. An anti-black world can only exist on the basis of being anti-black or against blackness, which means to see blackness from the eye that erases blackness. Blackness as the position of erasure is still a location of entangled subjectivity that questions *Sophie-Velucia’s* recognition as a human. Cole (2016:14) further argues that, “simultaneous with these erasures is the unending collection of profit from black labor and black innovation”. Entangled objection continues to position *Sophie-Velucia* as undeserving, which excludes *Sophie-Velucia* from many things.

Many matters constitute ontological signification as a human or a thing. However, a thing can never have ontological signification. No matter how much *Sophie-Velucia* wears a white mask, she can never be white. Due to the way that the world is ruled by the racial apparatus, the white madam will never allow *Sophie-Velucia* to reach out to their whiteness. The madam has a particular ontological infrastructure and access to power. The madam is a wife of the master, the god of the universe.

The black madam only exists in the realm of having ontology that constitutes one as a human. The black madam, by virtue of her blackness, belongs to the realm of not having ontology, which constitutes what “the term Woman signifies” (Pollock 1988:xvii). The absence of ontology in the black body constitutes it as a figure who is fixated to nothingness. The figure is located outside the space of the subject and the object. Objects have the potential to

have ontology and be elevated closer to subjecthood. Dogs experience better hospitality than *Sophie-Velucia* as she is located parallel to the subject and the object. This is because “*Sophie [-Velucia (2009) (fig 3)]* embodies the stories of women, who were denied self-determination but managed to accrue agency in their minds. She takes on a different identity every time” (Sibande in Khan 2015:228).

Fanon seems to locate Capécia in the position of objecthood as something that can have its ontology elevated – a black madam. For Fanon, the idea of a black madam is “a mental category of modernity” (Quijano 2008:182). Capécia’s childhood might have been surrounded by whiteness, but she still remained without ontology to acquire being white. Perhaps Capécia could acquire whiteness, but she could never acquire being white because being white is reserved for the white subject. The white madam as a subject, who is seen as the only human, says “I am white: that is to say I possess beauty and virtue, which have never been black. I am the color of the middaylight” (Fanon [1952] 2008:31).

However, Fanon shows us that in the relation between the subject and the object, the figure is constructed on basis of ontological difference, economical differences and class/gender difference. *Sophie-Velucia* tells a different story. The figure is determined by the subject, but it can never be the black madam even if it can “began to put ... [itself] together” by “joining together different layers of things” (Guattari 1995). The white madam is the only subject who creates both the life of the madam and the life of the black maid. But the figure is a subject which was a subject in its own subjecthood until it went through a process of colonial reconfiguration, which is a process of whitewashing other subjects who exist outside the Euro-North-American definition of the subject, as reflected by *Sophie-Velucia*. This definition of a subject wants to occupy the centre of the world as the centre of the world. The white madam as a human subject is constructed at the cost of erasing other subjects through colonial reconfiguration. Through colonial reconfiguration, the white man recreated and

positioned the white madam as the subject; meaning the one who can think, therefore, the one who is human.

Sophie-Velucia is positioned not as a madam but as an object and a figure on the darker side of the Victorian dress. The Victorian dress positions *Sophie-Velucia* as only a servant of the white madam through systems that camouflage as a giving hand to the poor and underdeveloped. The poor is black because black is poor. The black madam is, therefore, located at the receiving end of the Victorian dress. Thus, the black madam will never occupy the ontological positionality of the white madam. It becomes yet another “one person’s madness is reiterated by another, and a story is born” (Cole 2016:104). Fanon ([1952] 2008) argues that “the black ... [madam] wants to be white” and the reality of the black madam is “vacillating between blackness and whiteness” (Kasibe 2008:81). The black madam as a figure exists in a dimension of confusion and a schizophrenic reality. The white madam as a subject is a master of the universe who exists in the dimension of clarity where everything is clear and straight. The white madam exists in this dimension of the Victorian dress where *Sophie-Velucia* is created and manipulated. For Biko ([1978] 2004:23), “nothing could be more irrelevant and therefore misleading. [Than] those who believe in it are living in a fool’s paradise”. *Sophie-Velucia* lives in a constant search of the Victorian dress. The white madam exists in a position of constant surveillance of the figure of the maid behind the Victorian dress.

But the figure of the maid sometimes does not need a subject to survey her, but surveys herself through the Victorian dress. The black madam is fixed as a figure by the Victorian dress in a state of nothingness that results her to be “as copy is to copy”, a “parodic repetition of ‘the original’” (Butler [1990] 2006:43). The black madam lives a life of having flashbacks, moments from memory, history and narratives of how the figure used to be and how the figure is now.

Fanon ([1952] 2008) provides some suggestions regarding the reality of the black madam as a black body and her relation to the white subject. Fanon

shows us that this relation is parasitic to *Sophie-Velucia* even if she could perceive herself as a madam in a Victorian dress. Capécia sees herself as a subject, a white person; she performs and acts just like a white woman. She wears make up, dates a white man, and visits whites-only places as a black body. She is in search of the Victorian dress; a white mask (Fanon [1952] 2008). But still she does not transform into a subject by wearing the Victorian dress no matter how hard she tries to ignore that she is black. It is not the only obstacle to her metamorphosis. Capécia only morphs into a position of no subject.

Many Southern African housewives, like women elsewhere, have resorted to devaluing and dehumanising fellow women to be able to claim equality with men. A look at gender, domesticity, mobility and citizenship in the region indicates that the world of maids is one of uncertainties, insecurities and acute dehumanisation, even in the midst of abundance and rhetoric of rights and entitlements (Nyamnjoh 2005:181).

But *Sophie-Velucia* transcends the positionality of the figure of damnation into a figure of exception and liberation. The black madam as a figure of exception accepts the colonial imagination, which *Sophie-Velucia* finds herself entangled in, as an alternative reality of no reality. The black madam as a figure of exception accepts the colonial imagination to position herself in a better place than another black body who does not want to accept the colonial imagination and who is regarded as primitive and uncivilised and one who must be modernised. In this regard of progress, Walter Benjamin says:

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (Benjamin 2007:257).

Sadly, *Sophie-Velucia* signifies progress. That is to say, success in the modern world is defined by having a maid to run the household for the madam-boss

who is busy with a career and business affairs. Progress, as captured by Benjamin above, seems to be scaffolded onto the black skin and the black bodies of the figures Sibande creates. According to Dodd:

The skin in particular is, for Sibande, the site where history is contested and fantasies play out, enabling her to express concerns related to stereotypical depictions of women – particularly black women. Sophie's skin is painted a flat, monochromatic black, so she stands out like a dark and static shadow, haunting and daunting all at once. The flatness of this hue transports her out of the realm of the real into the hyper-real terrain of the superhero (Dodd 2010: 469).

Sophie is the blind spot of the ontological colonisation where the figure of exception is identified to look. The figure exists and lives there in a colonial black hole. The position of the black Victorian and black madam articulates the ontological reconfiguration and social death of *Sophie-Velucia* in post-colonial times. The position embraces the sublime and regards anything black as grotesque that pushes “domestic workers [to be] looked [at] ... in life” (Pape 1993:387). It is a position that illustrates the state of Manichean delirium in the black ontological suffering. Manichean delirium from the position of the black madam splits the human body into two categories: The category of the subject and the category of the figure. The position of the black madam illustrates the sublime violation and systematic subjection of the human into a subject and the figure. As much as the subject positions itself on top of the hierarchy near to the human, he is also a human, but one who is human and godly. Often the debate revolves between the subject and the object in the field of philosophy, art and others. In relation to the question of the black Victorian dress that allows the figure of *Sophie-Velucia* to engage in political gestures, Agamben (2005:2) poses a fundamental question: “What does it mean to act politically?”. By dressing in the Victorian dress of the madam, *Sophie-Velucia* is engaging in a political act. The Victorian dress is a position that is reserved for the white madam only. The Victorian dress encompasses and accounts for “what happens in the hold” (Sharpe 2016:69). What happens in the hold in the

position of *Sophie-Velucia* is worth philosophising about to the level of making it human.

The black madam requires us to pay serious attention to the articulation of the colonial reconfiguration process that renders *Sophie-Velucia* speechless. It positions the black madam as a black body in the position of no articulation; therefore, expression is forbidden. To express is to be free, and to be free is to be human: a white madam as a white subject. However, expression is privileged and only for the human as *Sophie-Velucia* “very much of a self-confident and optimistic character” (Oboe 2010:1). The rest of creation can perhaps express itself, but the final expression can be made by a human even over nature, animals and other things in the world. San rock art is evidence of their expression and existence.

The black madam as a black body is located in the realm of non-expression or forbidden expressions where “mutual zombification seems to be the order of the day between maids and madams” (Nyamnjoh 2005:181). The figure of the maid’s expression even as a black madam is silenced and darkened and, therefore, sterilised. The white madam as a white subject has the privilege of expression, which constitutes that the only human is that of the white subject; therefore, affirms a very high level of ontology that no black body can occupy even under the notion of the black madam. The black madam is not taken seriously as a madam, not even by the white madam, because she is a shadow of the white madam; nothing but a reflection. This brings us to the following questions: What does it mean to speak of the black Victorian and the black madam? What does it mean in Fanonian terms to speak of black skin in a white mask?

These questions might appear rhetorical; however, they are fundamentally important to realise that there is no connection between the figure of the maids and being madam.

5.5 UNDRESSING THE VICTORIAN DRESS

Undressing the Victorian dress means the end of an anti-black world by untangling *Sophie-Velucia's* from the "colonial matrix of power" (Mignolo 2011a:8). In this notion of undressing the Victorian to create another world contrary to the current anti-black world, Fanon (1965:47) argues, "it is the Negro who creates negritude". Meaning, it is *Sophie-Velucia* who creates her own liberation and emancipation from the Victorian dress. Sibande captured *Sophie-Velucia* in conversation with Madam CJ Walker. Walker was a self-made millionaire who was the first child to be born into freedom after slavery.

According to Raghaven (2017:45), the Victorian dress embodies "the formation of the colonial matrix of power through religion, economic control and the control of knowledge, precluded non-white people from the *nomos* of humanity itself". Undressing the Victorian dress signifies removing institutions that keep producing the colonial system and its racial structures. Fanon deploys the black body as a point of departure in the quest of undressing the Victorian dress. To think of undressing the Victorian dress is to ask ontological questions that cannot be engaged outside the sphere of being questioned. In this regard, Fanon's attempt to undress the Victorian dress is reflected by his remark, "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (Fanon [1952] 2008:181). Thus, undressing the Victorian dress has to do with posing Fanonian questions from the position where *Sophie-Velucia* uses her body to reimage the end of the coloniality of power by constructing a new image of the self.

In the midst of undressing the Victorian dress, Fanon invests in questions. *Sophie-Velucia* was stamped by the Victorian dress as a thing that is "not just voyeurs but protagonists" (Sassen 2005:25) in an anti-black world. However, Fanon ([1952] 2008) does not order us to question to seek answers, but he rather encourages us to invest in questions that probe the Victorian dress. Behind the Victorian dress, *Sophie-Velucia* as a black body is a figure who is

entangled by coloniality of power through “global coloniality” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013) where she has been positioned in the position of the unthought. By law and colonial logic, the Victorian dress is white in an anti-black world and *Sophie-Velucia* as a black body is a figure who is already in a state of ending. By deploying questions as a tool of ending the Victorian dress, Fanon ([1961] 1990) suggests options for delinking from the colonial matrix of power and its entanglement (see Bhabha 1994; De Kock 2001; Gilroy 1993; Hall 2000; Hofmeyr 2007; Sanders 2002; Titlestad 2004). Fanon ([1952] 2008) argues that it is not a solution to seek recognition as a black body, just like *Sophie-Velucia*'s fantasises about assuming the position of the madam inside the Victorian dress.

This will not be the way toward ending the Victorian dress. To undress the Victorian dress, it must be made clear that aesthetically and contextually, only Sibande can undress *Sophie-Velucia*. However, from the position of this study, *Sophie-Velucia* is the embodiment of more than just aesthetic expressions and mimicked gestures. Under the Victorian dress, *Sophie-Velucia* suggests a site for the ontological crime the white subject committed under the coloniality of power by making *Sophie-Velucia* an embodiment of a colonial fetish (Apter & Pietz 1993; Foster 1993; Miklitsch 1998). In this regard, Fanon ([1952] 2008:2) deeply argues that, “conversely, the black man who wants to turn his race white is as miserable as he who preaches hatred for the whites”. Fanon reminds us that in the process of decolonising and ending *Sophie-Velucia* we must be careful of creating another figure of *Sophie-Velucia* even in the form of the black madam. In other words, we cannot end white coloniality of power with black coloniality of power. Thus, Martinot explained existing under the Victorian dress as coloniality of power in the following way:

We all live within a multiplicity of colonialities; subjected in both body and mind. It is not only our labour, or our sexualities and genders that mark colonial relations; it is not only the wars, the mass murder and death squads organized by imperialist classes, nor the sub-colonies formed by women, African–American communities, or ethnic identities; it is also the hegemonic mind, the

white, or masculinist, or heterosexist, or national chauvinist mind that constitutes and is constituted by coloniality ... We thus face the question of who we are in this mirror. The power of coloniality, as a structure of control, is that it speaks for us so forcefully that we see no recourse but to represent it, to uphold its existence, to ratify its dispensing with ethics and with the sanctity of human life in everything we say and do as labour and resource (Martinot, nd:1).

Undressing the Victorian dress requires a positionality of decolonial turn. Then again, the end of *Sophie-Velucia* could perhaps only be imagined by Sibande as the artist who created *Sophie-Velucia*. This artistic transcendence of *Sophie-Velucia* is acceptable at the individual and aesthetic level, because it could be argued that Sibande is not a maid; therefore, she has transcended her family condition. Of which half is true and half is false: Sibande has transcended her family condition of being a maid, but she has not transcended the black condition of being black. The Victorian dress goes beyond the individual family affair and extends as far as the black condition. Even if “the new Sophie [in purple] marks another stage in Sibande’s artistic quest, taking the old Sophie to a different phase” (Goniwe 2013:26), she is still covered by the Victorian dress. *Sophie-Velucia* will remain under the Victorian dress by virtue of being black; hence, Sibande has not altered the colour of Sophie’s flesh. Therefore, to undress the Victorian dress is to reimagine the end of *Sophie-Velucia*, which is a daunting task that has to be approached with decolonial caution as black artists are “rearing their heads and making their voices heard” (Dhlomo, Bowyer & Breitz 1995:26). As *Sophie-Velucia* can end artistically or ontologically, it would take another decolonial engagement to end the Victorian dress. It is important to shift the current geography of imagination by undressing the Victorian dress as it leads to coloniality of vision and imagination beyond the borders of Eurocentric world view.

The Eurocentric world view is grounded on thinking and seeing differently based on the colonial paradigm of the Victorian dress. Thus, “the decolonial turn is a product of the combination of colonial difference and locus of enunciation” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:25) that stand to undress the Victorian

dress. The decolonial turn is not a turn of turning from the periphery looking back to the centre of the empire for recognition, but rather a turn of undressing the Victorian dress. It is a divorce from seeking recognition from the Victorian dress. If the Victorian dress is where a person is located, that is where she or he will think and exist. The geo-ontological location of a person is fundamentally important in the processes of undressing the Victorian dress, which is a way for *Sophie-Velucia* to avoid 'thrown-ness' or *Geworfenheit* (Bullock, Stallybrass & Trombley 1988, Busch & Gallagher 1992; Heidegger 1962). This brings the idea of the Victorian dress as a signifier of particular versus that is made to be universal to the conversation. *Sophie-Velucia* is a product of a colonial particular that was introduced as the absolute universal truth through systematic and structural entanglement, which is embodied by the Victorian dress. In the case of undressing the Victorian dress, Goniwe says:

It is therefore apt to say "The purple shall govern" revisits and build on Sophie-Ntombikayise by focusing on Sibande's story while relinquishing stories of her domestic mothers. We observe this shift in a terrible beauty is born where Sophie's white apron and bonnet – both markers of domestic servitude – are being undressed or stripped off by the creatures she is giving birth to. Sophie is in her transitional moment, one that could be described as an emancipatory act from subservience and burden of her mothers (Goniwe 2013:26).

Sophie-Velucia is a product of the anti-black world that produced her as "a [Victorian] native ..." (Plaatjie [1916] 2007:21). By giving birth to *Sophie-Ntombikayise*, Sibande undressed the Victorian dress to end the family colonial position of being maids. According to Goniwe (2013:8), "this is a creative way in which Sibande negotiates objection or agency at the same time as she performs fantasies, most of which are impossible to realize in the real world". Due to the coming into power of the white subject as the absolute standard of what it means to be human, black people are subjected to colonial entanglement, which positions them under superiority and domination by the Victorian dress. The real world that Goniwe alludes to is under the Victorian dress, it is "a genuinely Manichean concept of the world ..." (Fanon [1952] 2008:31). That is to say, it is a world constructed based on the split between

the Victorian dress and *Sophie-Velucia*. A world where the colour white dominates other colours of the world.

The white subject coming into power through the Victorian dress as a superior human being over the inferiority of the figure of the maid became a naturalised way of life. As Goniwe (2013:30) stipulates, “Sibande’s present work confronts or is confronted by the dialectical relationship of the self and other, both of which are inextricable constitutive elements of what make the [the Victorian dress to constitute a] subject”. However, Goniwe seems to have the impression that there is a dialectical relationship between *Sophie-Velucia* and the Victorian dress and overlooks the fact that *Sophie-Velucia* exists from the previous generation because there is no dialectic. However, this position is assumed by many artists, curators, scholars and institutions that embrace a post-colonial view of the world while they are still located in the global south, in the periphery of existence. Therefore, Sibande’s work is a confrontation or representation of the “colonial consciousness and its non-dialectical division” (Bhabha in Fanon [1952] 2008:xxxiii). As stipulated by Fanon, which is in contrast to Hegel’s dialectic, there is no dialectic for *Sophie-Velucia* to attain her freedom under the Victorian dress. In other words, the Victorian dress does not constitute the same statement it has over the white body.

Undressing the Victorian dress of *Sophie-Velucia* means to attain her ontological freedom like Madam CJ Walker, which Sibande describes as simply “the ability to do what I want, when I want” (Sibande in Meekison 2014). *Sophie-Velucia*’s Victorian dress signifies the dialectic that suggests that there is an open conversation or room for *Sophie-Velucia* to be free and live life inside the madam’s institution. However, *Sophie-Velucia* has been positioned outside the conversation of freedom and liberation of the self. However, “it was not until Marcus, Elijah Muhammad, Madame CJ Walker, James Brown, and others gave people a national identity to associate themselves with that they became prideful in self” (Kemet 2016) by undressing the Victorian dress. To reimagine

the undressing of the Victorian dress is not to beg to be included in the colonial conversation, but it is rather to attain freedom to find a way of redressing *Sophie-Velucia*. In this study, undressing *Sophie-Velucia*'s Victorian dress is reimagined to take the shape of a decolonial turn. However, this it is not enough for *Sophie-Velucia*, she must reflect how this turn is possible. According to Fanon:

The Negro is not. Any more than the white man. Both must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible. Before it can adopt a positive voice, freedom requires an effort at disalienation. At the beginning of his life a man is always clotted, he is drowned in contingency. The tragedy of the man is that he was once a child (Fanon [1952] 2008:180).

The tragedy of a man as a child can only be detrimental if the child is seen and regarded as an empty shell waiting to be filled with content. Coloniality approached *Sophie-Velucia* as an empty bodily shell with no content waiting to be dressed in the Victorian dress. In this regard, Goniwe (2013:15) asserts that the “three generations of women in Sibande’s family have endured domestic servitude, a genealogy of subservience that Sibande ruptures through the success of her education and professional career, not to mention the reflectively imaginative ways in which she deals with subservience and emancipation in her art”. *Sophie-Velucia*'s emancipation is linked deeply to the death of an anti-black world, and this death is only possible by undressing the Victorian dress. Hence, the end of *Sophie-Velucia* is not regarded here as the end of the figure of the maid as created by Sibande, but rather as the end of the figure of the maid as created by coloniality of power, which is grounded on the decolonial turn. Without this turn of undressing the Victorian dress, Sibande argues: “a lot of people think they understand what Sophie is about because she is a maid and then they stop ... I wanted to create another dialogue around Sophie” (Sibande in Mabandu 2013). Therefore, reimagining the end of *Sophie-Velucia* requires that a decolonial turn is deployed to move beyond the colonial Victorian dress as a veil and its apparatus. Du Bois ([1903] 2016) introduced

Sophie-Velucia as a problem of coloniality that created the figure of the problem in the world, with its humanity constantly being questioned. Without the Victorian dress, its legitimacy as a human is questioned – its legitimacy as a deserving and capable being is always in question.

In this regard, by putting on the Victorian dress, the figure of “Sophie [-*Velucia*, is] in protest ... with herself” (Sibande in Khan 2015:224). To rethink her end is to rethink the undressing of the Victorian dress. It is a reconfiguration of such a world by delinking from the Victorian dress as the colonial entanglement. Mignolo (2009:17) states that, “delinking from webs of imperial knowledge is to form the African subject who is not caught within the “racial matrix of modern/coloni[s]ed world” under the Victorian dress. To locate the end of *Sophie-Velucia* as the end of an anti-black world should not be something that evokes shock. However, it is this shock that Sibande deploys “to relinquish her concern for the narratives of others ... to attend more closely to her own story, to privilege her own desires, experiences and preoccupations” (Thurman 2014). The Victorian dress is white and it stands for whiteness, but it elicits existential entanglement for *Sophie-Velucia*. According to Duffy (2001:219), “this occurs when normal structures of society are broken down; the liminal personae are, at one and the same time, stripped of status and freed from the constraints that come with specific social roles”. The Victorian dress under the coloniality of power operates on the apparatus of taming the mind and keeping the body of *Sophie-Velucia* for servitude of the white subject.

Speaking from a different position of the Victorian dress, Maldonado-Torres has this to say in regard to decolonisation:

Decolonisation itself, the whole discourses around it, is a gift itself, an invitation to engage in dialogue. For decoloni[s]ation, concepts need to be conceived as invitations to dialogue and not as impositions. They are expressions of the availability of the subject to engage in dialogue and the desire for exchange. Decolonisation in this respect aspires to break with monologic modernity (Maldonado-Torres 2007:261).

The world is grounded on the coloniality of power and the Victorian dress that seems to uplift the white subject although it is already uplifted ontologically. *Sophie-Velucia* is located on the darker side of the Victorian dress, in the shadows where it is difficult to see and to be seen. The Victorian dress is a kind of light that only illuminates the white subject and dims *Sophie-Velucia* into blackness and a state of being unable. *Sophie-Velucia* attempts to undress the Victorian dress by communicating with Madam CJ Walker, who is a symbol of freedom for “the next generation”. As stated by Sibande, *Sophie-Ntombikayise* is “the next chapter, in which I speak of my own aspirations, desires, fears, and anxieties of being a woman” (Sibande in Meekison 2014).

Under the Victorian dress, *Sophie-Velucia* becomes unable to think, see, breathe and speak; she is choked with the colonial yoke. However, while reimagining the undressing of the Victorian dress, “the goal of decolonial options is not take over, but to make clear, by thinking and doing, that global futures can no longer be thought of as one global future in which only one option is available; after all, when only one option is available, ‘option’ entirely loses its meaning” (Mignolo 2011c:24). For Mignolo, undressing the Victorian dress means delinking and decolonising by having decolonial options as much as Fanon has the ability to pose questions. Therefore, to reimagine the undressing of the Victorian dress, we need to engage about two things: questions and options.

It is from the position of blackness that questions and options can be deployed as tools of engaging undressing the Victorian dress. In regard to the maid-and-madam relation, Césaire argues:

The ... [madam] proves that coloni[s]ation ... dehumanizes even the most civilized ma; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an *animal*, accustoms himself into an animal (Césaire [1972] 2001:41).

The tendency of seeing others as animal is the fundamental foundation of the Victorian dress that “works on a false premise that ...” (Biko [1978] 2004:23) black people are not human and are not worthy of being dressed in a Victorian dress. The Victorian dress is a metaphor for whiteness, white privilege and being the absolute human over other humans. It is not as if the white subject does not see that *Sophie-Velucia* is human, but it chooses not to see the dress fitting the black body. In this experience of being invisible without the Victorian dress, Fanon ([1952] 2008:129) has the following to say: “in the beginning of my medical studies, after several nauseating sessions in the dissection room, I asked an older hand how I could prevent such reactions. My friend, pretend you’re dissecting a cat, and everything will be all right”. For Fanon, that was clearly the foundation and logical reason that explains how the white subject would choose not to recognise *Sophie-Velucia* as a human being. Dressing in the Victorian dress is to pretend that it is a cat, which constitutes bad faith in which everything that constitute the human right collapses. Regarding undressing the Victorian dress, Goniwe says:

In light of the two Sophies, Sibande is a double, fighting with and for her-*self* in the process of asserting her objection whilst freeing or killing Sophie. It is quite some time now that Sibande has been preparing for the death of Sophie, if not to put her into hibernation in order to allow the advent of her next juncture in a quest to freeing her-*self* from being with/for others to being with/for her-*self*. We also read this departure in the dance of old Sophie and new Sophie ... (Goniwe 2013:32).

As stipulated by Goniwe, *Sophie-Velucia* is trapped under the Victorian dress, which as the Fanonian white mask requires her to live a doubled life. Sibande’s fight is not only at a personal level; it is at the point of unmasking the black condition and prove that a maid is not a domestic worker and that “to be inauthentic is sometimes the best way to be real” (Gilroy 1995:29). To name them domestic workers, helpers, cleaners and nannies is to take a position of political correctness by masking the hostile reality within which they have to work.

Sibande's personal history is a starting point. She uses her family's lived experience as a source of inspiration for her creative endeavours to undress the haunting Victorian dress. By using the metaphor of the Victorian dress Sibande reminds us that, "rather than being a mere tool, then, the body [of Sophie-Velucia] acts as both the site and the language through which positioning is negotiated" (Gqola 2005:3). *Sophie-Velucia* constitutes a mask as Sibande declared that she is the figure of Sophie. The problem with *Sophie-Velucia* is that her body as the absent body and a body that is not a human is stamped to make her a figure; a thing to be used at will by a white person. *Sophie-Velucia* is a woman masked by the Victorian dress. *Sophie-Velucia* is a representation of Sibande's mother who swore to work hard to undress the Victorian dress by taking Sibande to school to get an education. For Sibande's mother, being a maid was a mask that she had to wear to do her work, hence she is depicted in conversation with Madam CJ Walker. Sibande's mother is an embodiment of the "desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity" (Gilroy 1993:19).

It was important for Sibande to engage in the process of undressing the Victorian dress by placing her mother in the same position as figures such as Garvey, Malcom X and Madam Walker as examples of people who undressed the Victorian dress. In the process of undressing the Victorian dress, Ndebele proclaims that:

We are aware of those who are driven by hope, the supposed victors, and those who are driven by fear, the supposed losers. The danger is that a situation such as this can breed the most debilitating ambiguity in which we oscillate between hope and despair with a frequency that induces underdefined bitterness and cynicism. This situation of ambiguity may very well suggest that what we see is a chaotic play of masks: the masks of conciliation or reconciliation whose colourfulness may suggest a fragile essence, the absence of an underlying form. One such mask is the expression "the new South Africa" ... Who, anyway, invented the phrase? Was it the anxious "defeated" or the hopeful 'victors'? Whatever the case might be, at the end of the day we still ask: what exactly is behind each mask? (Ndebele 1994:152)

As a masked woman, *Sophie-Velucia* is the figure of the maid who is already rendered non-human and already in a state of ending behind the Victorian dress. The aim of the Victorian dress is to bring debilitating ambiguity to *Sophie-Velucia* so she can be at the mercy of whiteness and adopt blackness as a doormat at the reception of whiteness. The Victorian dress does not only embody whiteness, but it also represents the madam. Being under the Victorian dress is a traumatic position for *Sophie-Velucia*. Like a newborn being separated from the mother, it is shocking to the being of a person (Hurley 1996; Kristeva 1982; Lechte 1990). *Sophie-Velucia* is not the fabric of the Victorian dress, but she is rather the stain in the European fabric. In other words, *Sophie-Velucia* is positioned behind the Victorian dress to keep chasing the success and good life of the white madam. Thus, the Victorian dress through modernity creates false binaries that embody the relationship between the madam and the maid as an ontological progress. According to the Victorian dress, *Sophie-Velucia* is always the maid, the white subject is always the madam, and Europe is the modern world that the whole world should aspire to.

This Victorian dress is constructed at the cost of *Sophie-Velucia* behind the colonial mask as the element of masking herself as a maid. Therefore, undressing the Victorian dress is to reveal “there is no ontological reality such as modernity or tradition. Modernity and tradition are both Western and modern concepts by means of which ‘West’ and ‘modernity’ became the very definition of the enunciation that invented ‘tradition’ and the ‘Orient’” (Mignolo 2011c:78). Reimagining the undressing of the Victorian dress on the figure of *Sophie-Velucia* can only come from the “existential psychological chronotope connected with human self-identification and exceeding the frame of static mythic and folklore elements” (Tlostanova 2007:406).

As it has been illustrated in this study, *Sophie-Velucia* embodies and signifies the undressing of the Victorian dress in an anti-black world. Sibande’s mother, who is depicted as *Sophie-Velucia* by Sibande, signifies the undressing of the

Victorian dress because she refused to dress Sibande in the same dress. She refused to see Sibande under the entanglement of the apron and headscarf. Fanon said the tragedy of man is that he was a child once, but Sibande became the child who was not dressed in the Victorian dress that affected her grandmothers and mother from childhood till death.

To break this chain of the Victorian dress, Sibande introduced *Sophie-Ntombikayise* after *Sophie-Velucia* as an embodiment of herself. Going beyond *Sophie-Velucia*, Sibande argues, “*Sophie [-Ntombikayise]* is more self-aware now. Sophie can be herself now [and not a maid because] I’ve got my education and I’ve achieved my family dream” (Sibande in Mabandu 2009). In other words, *Sophie-Ntombikayise* is the one who did not wear the Victorian dress but is influenced by the Victorian power and coloniality of power as represented by the apron and headscarf that Sibande chooses to dress her in. Sibande deploys the name Ntombikayise, a Swazi name that represents her rebirth, which is to excise her decolonial turn and undress the Victorian dress because “it’s not about Sophie working for the madam anymore” (Sibande in Ziomuya 2010). The basis from which existing is engaged is from the standpoint of *Sophie-Ntombikayise*, an existential paradox as the embodiment of the anti-black world, because the anti-black world is the Victorian dress. To undress the Victorian dress is to end the white world and its colonial antagonism.

5.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, *Sophie-Velucia* was deployed and analysed in relation to the theme of presence-absence by undressing the Victorian dress in the post-colony. I deployed *Sophie-Velucia* to understand the presence-absence dichotomy by theorising the Victorian dress. The aim was to expose the Victorian dress as the embodiment of the colonial white mask in the modern form that could also be understood as undressing. This means that the Victorian dress acts as a symbol of the coloniality of power that is masked as

a social fashion status for the white madam. The idea is not to ask white people to share their clothes and fashion style with black people, the idea is that white people do not set their clothes and fashion style as the absolute universal fashion standard. In other words, the Western way of life is not the only universal way.

The modern world is constructed on the basis that the figure of the maid chases the life of the white subject as the white subject is the only human. By setting the white subject as the only human through the colonial tools of subjugating, a situation of presence-absence is created. *Sophie-Velucia* does not feel as if she exists until she puts on the Victorian dress to lift her status in the society, just like her white madam. But as illustrated by Fanon, Capécia desired the same recognition from whiteness, but it would never happen in real life but only in her dreams. It will take some time for white people to learn to recognise black people as humans. On the other hand, without the Victorian dress, *Sophie-Velucia* feels present and absent.

It is clear that the Victorian dress and the house of the madam are constructed at the cost of *Sophie-Velucia*. Furthermore, the modern/colonial world is constructed at the expense of black people's lives. In this chapter, the Victorian dress is a metaphor for the white mask that Fanon referred to: It is the whiteness and modern European lifestyle that are grounded on capitalism and consumer cultures. The Victorian dress, therefore, marks the mask of the coloniality of power that is necessary to be deconstructed through decolonial turn. The idea is to keep *Sophie-Velucia* seeking ways to be included – even by trying to wear different colonial masks. Reimagining the end of the undressing of the Victorian dress means and encompasses the end of the modern/colonial world as the future world that everyone must move towards. The Victorian dress is a mask of globalisation that is not for everyone's body to cover, rather it is constructed at the expense of other bodies.

CHAPTER 6

By Way of a Conclusion: Towards Decolonial AestheSis

Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet they murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe. For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience (Fanon [1961] 1990: 251).

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I applied three thematics that I derived from Fanon's thought to understand the existential condition of the figure of the maid in an anti-black world. The thematics are naming, human subject and presence-absence. At the end of this study, I conclude that Fanon's thought are still relevant for understanding the lived experience of the figure of the maid in contemporary society as depicted by the figure of *Sophie*. The study reveals that Fanon's thematics take a decolonial epistemic theory grounded on the notion that coloniality is not over, but it is still hidden in contemporality, which is apparent in *Sophie*.

If coloniality is over and racism is no longer the logic of existence, how is it that the lived experience of the figure of the maid continues to feel its shadows looming in every corner of the contemporary world? How is it that their appearance remains to elicit suspicious attitudes that require their relentless authentications especially as black bodies? How is it that their skin colour is still magnetic to premature death, violence, poverty, joblessness, prison and poor living conditions? How is it that they are the ones that continue to suffer?

To answer these questions, the study demonstrates that Fanonian thought is undeniably a useful lens from which to understand *Sophie* and the lived experience of the figure of the maid under the infrastructure of coloniality. I linked three thematics of a decolonial epistemic theory, namely coloniality of

knowledge, coloniality of being and coloniality of power, with Fanon's conception of naming, human subject and presence-absence. The weaving of Fanon's thematics with a decolonial epistemic theoretical perspective was discussed in Chapter 2 to provide a theoretical framework for the rereading and rethinking of what Sophie in Sibande's work could signify further under the wrath of modernity/coloniality. Here I combined Fanonian thought and decolonial thought to develop the decolonial theory as a theoretical lens that provided me with a new way of looking and seeing what Sophie really is: an embodiment of coloniality. Sophie is a colonial figure – a white man's imagination and invention. Fanon's decolonial theory provided a non-linear approach that culminated in the spiral approach to the study, which meant certain citations, specifically from Fanon, were repeated throughout the study but interpreted differently according to the point each sub-section intended to make.

Lastly, the study applied thematic analysis and analytic negation as a method to examine *Sophie* under certain themes that were weaved together to produce new meaning. The study scrutinised meaning, being, essence, phenomena and the existential question of the figure of the maid whose existence has been questioned. The method allowed for the decolonial theory to be deployed and provided a new understanding of Sophie's being in the anti-black world.

Thematic analysis and analytic negation as a method proved that a Fanonian decolonial study of Sophie does not only assist us in answering the Césairian question, "What fundamentally is colonization?" (Césaire [1972] 2000:32), but it also enabled us to grasp and explain coloniality as trouble long in the making that continues to haunt the present. It helped me to understand the lived experience of the figure of the maid as something that is haunted by the same infrastructure that produced it.

6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

I conducted the study to answer the main research question: How relevant is Fanon's thought to the decolonial understanding of Mary Sibande's contemporary visual artworks?

The three sub-questions that support this question are structured in the following way:

- What does *Sophie-Elsie* signify when looked under a Fanonian theme of naming?
- What does *Sophie-Merica* signify when looked under a Fanonian theme of the human subject?
- What does *Sophie-Velucia* signify when looked under the Fanonian theme of presence-absence?

I investigated each question in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and in Chapter 5 of the study. The following findings provide some tentative answers because the issue of coloniality cannot be answered in one study.

To answer the first question: What does *Sophie-Elsie* signify when looked under a Fanon's conception of naming and coloniality of knowledge? This question revealed that naming as a colonial tool conveys something else than just a name where the figure of the maid is concerned. When naming is understood from the perspective of the coloniality of knowledge, it buries the ontological knowledge of self-concerning the figure of the maid. The empirical interpretation of *Sophie-Elsie* in Chapter 3 revealed that the black body was given English and Christian names because white people could not say or remember their native names. This forgetting and erasing of black names, in the case of Sophie, suggested that she is the property of the white subject and renaming her would make it easy for the madam and master to call her to give her instructions and duties. However, the white subject did not bother to adopt black names so that it would also be easier for Sophie to call and remember

them. This means they keep the names their mother or father gave them that were linked to their culture. It has been made clear that according to colonial logic, only the white subject has the power to name. The power of naming means the power to create ontology or take away the ontological infrastructure. The colonial imagination and colonial representation have its logic grounded on naming based on political, social and economic benefits for the white subject. It has been made clear during the research that Sophie as the embodiment of the figure of the maid suffered from the wrath of naming. Sophie was named not to give her ontology, but to erase her ontology. It is through naming as a colonial technology that *Sophie-Elsie* lost her sense of being.

To answer the second question: What does Sophie-Merica signify when looked under Fanon's thematic of the human subject and coloniality of being? Fanon's notion of the human subject revealed how the figure of the maid is closed out of the register of being a human being. When the thematic of the human subject is understood from the perspective of coloniality of being, it excludes the black body from the human register. The thematics of the coloniality of being and Fanon's conception of the human register were deployed for the empirical study of *Sophie-Merica* in Chapter 4. Here it was revealed that *Sophie-Merica* signified that the figure of the maid is not regarded as a human being and was subjected to dehumanisation and domestication. This dehumanisation was grounded on domestication that suggested that Sophie was dehumanised and tamed to be used as an object for surplus labour. This dehumanisation meant that through structural domestication the white subject does not see black bodies as people who have being, essence and ontology hence they can be used at will. This means all black bodies were dehumanised for surplus labour such as being taxi drivers, bricklayers, security guards, cleaners, nannies and uneducated people. Chapter 4 revealed that these positions were not a heavenly created destiny for the figure of the maid; however, it is a political constructed destiny. To be black like Sophie is a political destiny. The study

reflected that according to the colonial imagination, the black body is structurally positioned as non-human through technologies of structural violence and structural domestication.

To answer the third question: What does *Sophie-Velucia* signify when looked under Fanon's thematic of presence-absence and coloniality of power? Fanon's notion of presence-absence was engaged to reveal how presence constituted absence where the figure of the maid is concerned. When the notion of being present in the world is understood from the perspective of the coloniality of power, it qualifies ontological absence regarding the figure of the maid in the post-colony. The thematics of the coloniality of power and the Fanonian conception of presence was deployed for the empirical interpretation of *Sophie-Velucia* in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 revealed that *Sophie-Velucia* was hidden behind the Victorian dress that acted as a white mask to cover the figure of the maid to the point of being unseen. This means that the figure of the maid is not present in the world based on her being and essence rather than her presence, it is only through the services she must conduct for white people. This includes only being present through demeaning names, labels, and categories that the colonial presence positioned them to – as inferior beings with no history, culture and identity. The Victorian dress that Sophie wears was located as a containing element of interpolation, ontological erasure and a state of exception. This presence-absence dichotomy is kept alive by the Victorian dress that exposes *Sophie-Velucia* as nothing but a maid. The power of the Victorian dress precedes the power of being and the powerlessness of the presence of Sophie precedes her essence as a human being. While exploring the power of the Victorian dress it became clear that for the figure of the maid to wear it as a white mask is an oxymoron and something that is illogical. Therefore, the only way to end whiteness and white supremacy is to undress the Victorian dress that Sophie wears, to take the white mask off over the black skin, to use Fanon's words.

The question of what it means to be present as a human subject was engaged in the theoretical framework of this study to understand white presence about the figure of the maid. The presence of the white subject signifies the presence of human beings because to be white is to be human. It has been highlighted that, through colonial imagination and representation, the figure of the maid is absent in the world. The figure of the maid is politically present and ontologically absent. Sophie is only present as a servant in the house of the white madam. She becomes a keeper of the white house as a cleaner and caretaker. This means her presence is that of being the white madam's property and as such she cannot even dream of owning her own house that looks just like that of the white madam. Although Sophie's presence can only be seen in her name and work, her ontological absenteeism is embedded in her flesh. Meaning Sophie as the embodiment of namelessness in the modern/colonial world is not present as human but as an object amongst things. Between the subject and the object that have been engaged in the Western philosophical canon, the figure of the maid is only a figure; something that can be anything but a human.

Decolonial epistemic theory and Fanonian thought were deployed to formulate a theoretical framework that explains the possibility of why things are the way they are in the world. However, a theory remains an empty gesture if it cannot be applied anywhere outside the borders of pen and paper. By deploying decolonial epistemic theory and Fanonian thought, the study resulted in a Fanonian decolonial theory, because the study was not intended to just deploy decoloniality, it was also aimed at decolonising the figure of Sophie by theorising Sophie from the Fanonian point of view. Fanon writes about the lived experience of the figure of the maid under the colonial logic and representation that Sibande illustrates with Sophie in the three selected artworks. Sophie in Sibande's visual artworks is an illustration of "what Fanon said" to use Gordon's words. The theoretical framework, therefore, was structured on Fanon on naming, Fanon on human subject, and Fanon on presence-absence from a

decolonial perspective. The theoretical framework was structured to deal with what it means to have a name as a human, what it means to be human, and what is a human presence in an anti-black world. Engaging deeper, the question of being human from a Fanonian perspective, it becomes clear that in the eyes of the white subject, Sophie is not seen as a human. Although she possesses biological attributes that constitute a human and separate it from objects and animals; in the gaze of the white logic, she is a maid. However, as a maid, Sophie lacks ontological attributes that should constitute her as a human because the world as the empire and its success are constructed at the cost of the subjection of the figure of the maid. Sophie is not a human subject, but a figure and a thing.

This study is from the position that Sophie wears a white mask, or better yet, her working conditions forces her to assume whiteness. However, for Sophie to assume whiteness is not a matter of being white like the white madam, but to be black. Fanon says that the figure of the maid is a creation of the white man, meaning Sophie will assume the darker side of whiteness. The Victorian dress, therefore, embodies whiteness. What was made clear through this part of the study was that whiteness is not for black bodies and there can be no whiteness without blackness – a white black is a myth. There can never be a black Victorian and there can never be a black madam. Meaning as much as the figure of Sophie chases whiteness wanting to be white as Fanon said, it is impossible for the figure of the maid to achieve whiteness. Whiteness comes in many different forms. Whiteness comes in forms of white beauty, white life, white success, white style and fashion, white music, white intellect, and white right and justice. But unveiling Sophie means that Sophie is not entitled to get these forms of whiteness no matter how hard she tries. These forms of whiteness come as an embodiment of Europe: to possess whiteness is to possess Europe.

Modernity/coloniality is grounded on a European mask with whiteness as its fuel. The empire stands on the shoulders of the world – particularly in arrears – that is occupied by the black body. The study engaged the ontological significance of black and white relations of non-relation. The universalised European face of the world is formulated on the basis that non-European places need to be civilised by being developed. By being developed it means to be modernised, and to be modernised means to be civilised by catching up with the globalising technological world. However, under this pretence of developing and modernising the universal world, the European face of the world appeared to be offered at the cost of dehumanising the figure of the maid.

This existential chasing game, with Europe setting a standard for the world to follow and pretending to take the lead on developing the rest of the world, positions the European colonial imagination as the absolute solution to life. This kind of logic led Fanon to beg the colonised to resign from seeking recognition from the European standard: “come, then comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different. We today can do everything, as long as we do not imitate Europe, so as we are not obsessed with the desire to catch up with Europe” (Fanon [1961] 1990: 251). Fanon deploys the term ‘comrade’ when he pleads for the colonised to turn their backs on Europe. Maybe Fanon realises that it would take some form of revolution as a colonised figure to turn its back to Europe.

Again, Fanon shows us that Europe can claim to offer its hand to resolve some of the problems it created by creating Sophie. The figure of the maid will remain a black body as long she still chases the European standard of life. That is also to say, the ontological insignificance of the figure of the maid is a construction of the European standard of the world. As stated by Fanon, “but if we want humanity to advance a step farther, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent, and we must make discoveries” (Fanon [1963] 1990: 254). The figure of Sophie in this study was

not only deployed as a metaphor for the figure of the maid, female and male, but also as a metaphor of the black life under the colonial negation. Both the black female and black male suffer from the same ontological distortion and erasure. This study reflected that if the world strives for modernity/coloniality, the Manichean logic of the world would continue to persist. The solution in all generations is simple and hard: the ideology of the empire needs to fall. The time for the empire must come to an end as much as time for Europe has ended. The end of Sophie is the end of the anti-black world, a white man's world, which constitutes an investment towards the development of decolonial aestheSis as a mirror of a decolonial human world.

To situate the figure of Sophie as decolonial aestheSis from the Fanonian perspective, I want to offer what I consider to be decolonial aestheSis strategies. I believe these strategies will be helpful to be used as tools to locate, unpack and understand the meaning depicted by decolonial aestheSis. The decolonial aestheSis strategies are listed as follows:

1. It is the art (creative expression) that delink from modern/coloniality and Western hegemony.
2. It provides the subaltern/colonised subjects with tools to be critical, speak and rewrite their ontology.
3. It attempts to answer the fundamental Césairian question.
4. It departs from the black body as a source of decolonial questions.
5. It is the position of the unthought.
6. It allows objects to resist.
7. It is a terrible beauty.
8. It challenges and delinks from coloniality of knowledge: naming.
9. It challenges and delinks from coloniality of being: human subject.

10. It challenges and delinks from coloniality of power: presence-absence.
11. It transcends beyond negative tension to positive tension.
12. It unpacks the hieroglyphics of the flesh.
13. It uncovers the white mask.
14. It is the phenomenology of the cry.
15. It is Aunt Hester's scream.
16. It is a "horrible exhibition".
17. It is preoccupied with questions of ontology, dehumanisation, remembering, rewriting and decolonisation in addition to aesthetic sensibilities of beauty and pleasure.
18. It is preoccupied with being entangled and untangling from modernity/ coloniality by embracing indigeneity.
19. It is preoccupied with the question of sociogenesis as a lived experience of the colonised subject.
20. It is thinking from the hold: "combat breathing", "combative ontology", thinking from the zone of non-being, thinking from the ruins, thinking from the periphery, poetics of blackness and fugitive practice. It is a freedom dream, decolonial opacity and aestheSis of the mess.
21. It is a decolonial turn.

6.3 SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTIONS

The study contributed toward questioning the notion that the white subject positioned itself to be the only human being and concluded the figure of the maid as a non-being. The colonial relation is a relation of non-relation between the figure of the maid and the white subject, which is an issue that has been covered and dealt with from many different positions. This study contributed a Fanonian perspective. Particularly, from the position of this study, blackness is

approached from the position of ontological signification and insignificance using different conceptual markers that point us to the direction of locating this colonial injustice. It is fundamentally important to locate this colonial injustice as it is still hidden in structural systems of today's modern/colonial world.

The modern/colonial world is grounded on the basis that colonisation is over and, therefore, all human beings are equal. This study contributed towards an "appositional" view (Moten 2013). The study further contributed to the South African social and political context, where the end of the apartheid system and involvement of black body to vote for the first time were considered forms of freedom and liberation. The study contributed by providing a different interpretation of the colonial situation based on Fanon. Perhaps, under the notion of pretending it is a cat (Fanon [1952] 2008), which is a cap of bad faith, this could be accepted, however, it is political and social freedom that has been achieved by the black community. It is not the ontological free will. However, this study contributed more towards the discourse of ontological freedom and the ontological liberation of the black body. It is believed here that if ontological freedom and ontological liberation are accomplished by the black community, economic, political, social, intellectual, creative and cultural freedom and liberation can be achieved easily.

Therefore, the study assumed a decolonial epistemic theory, which states that coloniality is assembled by modernity, meaning there is no modernity without coloniality (Mignolo 2011b). The study contributed more to the developing field of decolonial aestheSis, which states that modernity is an anti-black enterprise. Through the course of the study, I have reflected that not only is modernisation anti-black, but the conceptions of naming, human subject and presence-absence are also anti-black. This study contributed from the position that the positionality of a decolonial comrade scholar is not delusional by the tricks of coloniality that are hidden behind the darker side of ontology which is

embedded in the political and economic structural systems that are set to make life easy.

6.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Sophie represents the figure of the maid in Sibande's visual artworks. This rich subject matter cannot be unpacked in one dissertation or even a book. Sibande's *oeuvre* deals with coloniality as trouble long in the making that influenced her family for three generations. It is only right to argue that it still influences Sibande as the fourth generation; hence, she depicts it in her artworks. In her artworks, Sibande deals with the lived experience of the figure of the maid and the effects of coloniality. She deals with the question that troubled Césaire and she deals with the reality that troubled Fanon; a reality that troubled her grandmothers.

The literature review of the study in Chapter 1 shows how much has been written about Sibande's artwork even though it does not capture everything. There have been many different readings and interpretations of Sophie and this Fanonian study contributes to that body of work. However, other terrains still need to be covered in the study of Sophie for future research from a decolonial epistemic theory. For instance:

- Sophie and the problem of the post-colony: coloniality power.
- The black body: racism and coloniality of being.
- Sophie and the 'hieroglyphics of the flesh': coloniality of knowledge.

These are just a few research topics that could be undertaken to understand Sophie from different perspectives. Sophie is a product of the colonial world. To understand Sophie is to understand the conditions that created her as the figure of the maid. Hence, Sibande can argue that she has transcended the family burden of being subjected to be a figure of the maid, but it can also be

argued that she has not transcended the black condition that is a lived experience of the black race in an anti-black world.

The same can be said about Fanon's legacy and his intellectual contribution to the understanding of the lived experience of the figure of the maid in an anti-black world. The logic of the anti-black world is summed up by Césaire's question. As Césaire's student, Fanon wrestled with the question that was posed by Césaire ([1972] 2000:32), that is, "What fundamentally is colonization?". In qualifying this question, Fanon deployed what appears to be an ontological prayer which says, "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (Fanon [1952] 2008). Fanon's prayer shows us that the black body as it is bound in the fog of coloniality becomes the source of Césaire's question. In other words, even Fanon's *oeuvre* comes from the experience of the black body and its subjectivity in the world. For Fanon, coloniality can take and distort everything, it can even create institutions that reconfigure the ontology of the black body. Amid this colonial fog in which everything is hazy, the body is the only thing the figure of the maid has. Therefore, in the quest of understanding existence, it is only right and logical for the figure of Sophie to deploy the body, in other words, to question everything that questions the body. In this regard, Sibande deployed her body to create the cast for Sophie's body to pose ontological questions by positioning her body in the positions of the white body, the body of the madam.

Fanon's prayer is emphasised even more by Sibande's creative process of producing Sophie in which she uses her body as a cast. To produce Sophie, Sibande created a mould using her own body and casted her with fibreglass and silicone, and sometimes with bronze covered by fabric. Therefore, it could be argued that Sophie can be approached from two positions: as a Fanonian artwork and as a Césairian artwork. It is Fanonian because as the representation of the body of the figure of the maid it was created by Sibande to pose questions, and it is Césairian because of the kind of the questions

Sibande is preoccupied with. In this regard, many Fanonian questions could be asked about the Césairian question that future research could engage in the field of visual art and beyond. Fanon's intellectual contribution is something that will continue to provide lenses to assist us in understanding the lived experience of the figure of the maid in the anti-black world.

By the way of concluding this study, it is clear that the figure of the maid has no place in the world because the world is white. Applying decoloniality to these Fanonian conceptions gives an understanding of Mary Sibande's artworks as decolonial aestheSis, because it is art that poses existential questions of the figure of the maid in an anti-black world. Sibande created the figure of Sophie as her alter ego; it is art that delinks from modern/coloniality and Western hegemony to provide the subaltern with tools to be critical, speak and rewrite their ontology as decolonised subjects. It is preoccupied with questions of ontology, dehumanisation, remembering, rewriting and decolonisation.

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