

**Freedom Precedes Liberation**  
**Hannah Arendt, Feminism, Coloniality**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is their own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

This thesis starts with the observation that, in western feminist theory, freedom tends to be assimilated to liberation. I argue that this assimilation is the result of oblivion of freedom in favour of a theory of the subject. When examining different feminist theories from liberal, to Marxist and postmodern traditions, freedom is conceptualised as a theory of the sovereign subject. However, I submit that these subject-centred theories are embedded in coloniality because rooted in what I call an ontology of seizure, which is characterised by a material or symbolic appropriation. In other words, unfreedom is the condition of these western conceptions of freedom. I exemplify this conditional appropriation by the use of the slave metaphor in feminist theory as the privileged heuristic device to theorise the free subject.

In response, my thesis aims to provide a non-subject-centred understanding of freedom as well as a reframing of its relationship with liberation. I suggest analysing freedom from what Frantz Fanon called ‘the zone of nonbeing’, by using a decolonial and a hermeneutic phenomenological approach that I take from Hannah Arendt. I start my investigation from her deconstruction of freedom and her alternative understanding of it as action. Accordingly, and by investigating lived experiences in colonial settings, I suggest that freedom, understood as a political phenomenon has three dimensions. First, it is an embodied ontological resistance that changes the organisation of society, denoting an authentic dialectic between the body and the world. Second, I put that freedom is an *an-archic* mode of organisation characterised by a trialectic between the self, the collective and the world. Third, I suggest that freedom precedes liberation, precisely because liberation is a guiding principle of action. Liberation is an open-ended process and freedom is the non-linear movement that leads to it.



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# Introduction

“When thinking about freedom many people assume that it is something all people naturally want, a desire that has been constant in human history. More than that, there is often an assumption, implicit or explicit, that there is some ‘true’ meaning of freedom that has stayed constant over time.”

Buckle, 2021, p. 2

Since the beginning of Euromodernity, freedom has been an important concept in political theory, if not the ‘central problem of Modernity’ (Höffe, 2020). Indeed, thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Mary Wollstonecraft, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill all have theorised it. However, the content of this concept can be difficult to pinpoint since it has been extended to various domains. Indeed, we commonly talk about free speech, freedom of information, economic freedom, free market, consumer freedom and even marketing freedom. In other words, anything can be referred to as free. From that perspective, freedom has become sort of a model to be applied to different instances and domains. Yet, all these different domains are supplemented with the word ‘freedom’ which would mean that they somehow share a common meaning. In liberal theory, this common understanding of freedom is best understood as the absence of external constraints, or negative liberty in the word of Isaiah Berlin (2002). It is this ‘*freedom from*’ which is taken as a model to follow. Many indices of freedom created by (often libertarian) non-governmental organisations and think tanks have appeared in recent decades. In the publication of the 2021 Human Freedom Index (HFI), the Cato Institute and the Fraser Institute justified the writing and making of this index by the supposedly “power of such measurement to increase understanding about the concept of freedom” (2021, p. 9). In the following paragraphs, the institutes embrace Berlin’s concept of negative liberty (2002) which they defined as “the absence of coercive constraint” (HFI, 2021, p. 10). They promise an increase or another understanding of

the concept of freedom while they ground its measurement in a pre-established concept of freedom. In other words, freedom is taken for granted. Yet, if freedom is taken for granted what is the contribution of those indices in terms of freedom understanding/conceptualisation as they claim? In the words of the authors of the HFI, the originality and contribution lie in the fact that they develop for the first time “a broad measure of human freedom rather than select aspects of it.” (2021, p. 12). They combine what they call economic and personal freedom. However, what is interesting to see is that in those indices, freedom is actually taken for granted and at the same time promised to be theorised. The paradox of freedom is that it is supposedly conceptualised but it is also assumed. Indeed, the HFI claims to conceptualise freedom while they uncritically assume that freedom is as defined by Isaiah Berlin under the scope of negative liberty. Another illustration of that claim is how freedom is attached or can be potentially attached to every other word. We have economic freedom, free market, sexual freedom, religious freedom, and freedom of speech. So is freedom or the word attached to it theorised? Moreover, the HFI also talks about freedom as such or ‘overall/human freedom’, which would encompass all the aforementioned iterations of freedom. In other words, freedom would take its meaning from the word implemented to it. Indeed, economic freedom does not mean the same as religious freedom, yet the theoretical ground seems to be the same. Therefore, one question remains, if freedom is not conceptualised what is theorised in those theories of freedom? One of the hypotheses of that work is that those taken-for-granted theories of freedom are in fact theories of the subject of freedom, of personhood. In other words, the question is not ‘what is freedom?’ but ‘who/what is the subject of freedom?’.

If one looks at the indices of freedom, what is measured is who is more or less free. Indeed, the HFI ranked almost every country in the world. The aim is to measure which State has the freer personhood according to criteria such as the rule of law, security and safety, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, etc. (HFI, 2021, p. 15). To put it differently, the subject of freedom is

measured and conceptualised according to a (western) point of reference. As maintained by the HFI, the freer subject is the western man or woman who lives in a capitalist liberal democracy. The top 10 freer countries are all Western (HFI, 2021, p. 5). In other words, freedom is a status best granted by western liberal democracies, rather than just a value or a principle. This index is interesting because it somehow reaffirms the subject of freedom as conceptualised by Western modern thinkers. It quantifies and measures what was already stated by Locke, Kant and Mill, that the subject of freedom is a western man, and then woman (Hirschman, 2003; Valls, 2005, Stovall, 2021, Anker, 2022). Therefore, freedom is also that journey towards westernisation. This claim leads to the observation that according to those criteria, freedom should be unthinkable and impossible to theorise from elsewhere than the west. Freedom would be dependent on a specific state apparatus and could not be conceptualised out of it. This is also why the sharp separation between negative and positive liberty<sup>1</sup> made by Isaiah Berlin (2002) is not sustainable. According to Claus Dierksmeier, “negative freedom depends upon positive freedom” precisely because the existence of negative liberties “is partially dependent upon certain ‘positive’ liberties (for instance, access to education and training).” (2016, p. 25) Put differently, positive liberties are granted by the State (education, law, health) so one can also enjoy negative liberties. As Dierksmeier argued, in order to negatively protect the object of freedom, such as religion, “certain institutions must (positively) be created.” (2016, p. 25-6) For instance, in France, in order to protect from religious constraints, the 1905 law about secularism was created<sup>2</sup>. As I argued previously, one’s freedom is dependent on the State and is intrinsically dependent on the liberal modern view of the State. Thus, the HFI was not only pointing out the lack of negative liberties in certain countries but the absence of liberal institutions that would guarantee the appropriate subject of freedom to be.

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<sup>1</sup> Positive liberty is a *freedom to*, it is the absence of internal constraint (Berlin, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la séparation des Églises et de l’État. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000508749/>

Accordingly, the right free personhood is manufactured by the western liberal democratic State. Again, freedom is not theorised as such but assumed. Behind the concepts of negative and positive liberty lies a specific apparatus to make a certain view of personhood into being. This theorisation of the subject of freedom can also differ from one country to another. If I follow the above example of secularism, the subject of religious freedom is different in France and in the United Kingdom because their approach to secularism is different. In France, the State does not recognise any religion and the subject is supposed to be neutral to religion in public instances, which is sometimes taken to mean hostile to religion as the debate on the veil testified (Scott, 2007; Al-Saji, 2010). On the other hand, in the United Kingdom, secularism is historically granted by the Toleration Act (1689)<sup>3</sup> and more recently the Equality Act (2010)<sup>4</sup> which establish a model of religious pluralism. Hence, in the name of religious freedom, there are two different theories of the subject. Both countries frame their religious freedom as the absence of constraints and free choice, in both cases, freedom is assumed, but its subject is not. What is freedom is not much the concern, but who/what the subject of freedom is.

Yet, the main question that I aim to ask in this work is simple: what is the meaning of freedom? This general question is not an attempt to provide the unique, real, universal meaning of freedom, but rather to give an alternative understanding of freedom, as a contribution to the literature about this philosophical concept and topic. As one can imagine, this broad question entails several others such as what is wrong with the theories of freedom? Mainly two things. The first part of this thesis is shaped around two main hypotheses that will inform both my critique and my problematisation of freedom. The first hypothesis is that freedom is actually not theorised, or more precisely, that it is occluded by a theory of the subject, as I have started to sketch above. The result is that these theories of freedom I will analyse are subject-centred. They are theories of the ideal

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Toleration-Act-Great-Britain-1689>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

subject/personhood of freedom. The second hypothesis is that those conceptions of freedom are conditioned to appropriation<sup>5</sup>. Basically, freedom is ontologically rooted in what I call an *ontology of seizure*.

To make my point, I have decided to focus on feminist theories of freedom from different traditions. However, why focus on feminist theory if my concern is with freedom and not a feminist theory of freedom? For three main reasons. First, a practical one. Indeed, I cannot, nor do I have the space to investigate all the theories of freedom ever produced in the history of (political) philosophy. Therefore, I want to narrow the focus to Western feminist theories as a starting point of my investigation into the meaning of freedom. Second reason, those Western feminist theories of freedom are supposed to correct/actualise the previous (masculine) theories of freedom that one can trace back to Euromodernity. For instance, a liberal feminist theory of freedom is supposedly an updated version of a falsely neutral, hence masculine, liberal theory of freedom. As a matter of example, Susan Moller Okin's liberal understanding of freedom is an actualised, so also critical, version of the Rawlsian one. I do not say that to diminish the important contribution brought by Okin as well as the originality of her work, yet she inscribed herself in a certain tradition. As much as Rawls inscribed himself in a certain Kantian tradition and so on. In doing so, they reiterate the focus on the subject. Freedom is assumed but its subject is theorised. Third reason which is related to the previous one, I think that Western feminist political theory operates as a magnifying glass of what I believe to be wrong in Western political theories of freedom. It will help me to show that regardless of what has been corrected or actualised by Western feminist theorists there is still something wrong with those theories of freedom, both at the epistemological and ontological levels. Namely, coloniality. As much as "centering settler

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<sup>5</sup> To follow up on the example of religious freedom, Mohamad Amer Meziane showed in his book *Des empires sous la terre. Histoire écologique et raciale de la sécularisation* (2021), how secularism in France was a colonial and imperial enterprise resulting in an appropriation of lands and soil.

colonialism within gender and women's studies [...] exposes the still-existing structure of settler colonialism" (Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, 2013, p. 8), centring the colonality of freedom within Western feminist theories of freedom exposes the still-existing colonial structure of freedom. I will explain this choice to primarily focus on western feminist political theory more in-depth in Chapter I.

Accordingly, this PhD thesis also aims at contributing to decolonial thought by investigating the colonality of freedom. Before going further, let me briefly address the distinction between postcolonial and decolonial thoughts as well as the key concepts of the latter. First of all, postcolonial and decolonial thoughts come from different disciplines, and geographical areas and they address different timeframes. Postcolonial thoughts emerged from the work of Middle Eastern and South Asian diasporic scholars such as Edward Said, or Gayatri C. Spivak, and while these studies address material and socio-economic issues, "there has also been a tendency for [them] to remain firmly in the realm of the cultural." (Bhabra, 2014a, p. 115) Moreover, postcolonial scholars focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as the canonical book *Orientalism* by Edward Said testifies. On the other hand, decolonial thought has mainly emerged from South America with the works of scholars such as Anibal Quijano, Maria Lugones and Enrique Dussel. Their work is "strongly linked to world-systems theory from the outset" (Bhabra, 2014a, p. 115) as their larger timeframe attests. Indeed, 1492 is a foundational date for decolonial thinkers<sup>6</sup>. When it comes to Western influences, postcolonial thinkers are influenced by Marxist and postmodern thinkers such as Jacques Derrida or Michel Foucault. In the case of decolonial thinkers, they were more influenced by phenomenologists such as Emmanuel Levinas or Frantz Fanon<sup>7</sup> as well as Marxism. However, it does not mean that the line between these two traditions is strict and impassable as some references are common. Gurminder K. Bhabra

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<sup>6</sup> See Dussel, 1995 and Maldonado-Torres, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Even if Frantz Fanon can be associated with Caribbean philosophy more than Western philosophy.

highlighted that some scholars have brought these different trajectories together, including herself (2014a, 2014b).

That said, this thesis is committed to a decolonial approach for the conceptual tools that this tradition has constructed as well as for the need to investigate the underside or darker side of modernity (Dussel, 1998; Mignolo, 2011) when reflecting on freedom. More precisely, the distinction between colonisation and coloniality will be heavily used in this work. Briefly, coloniality refers to what remains from the colonial matrix after the decolonisation, after the independence of the ex-colonised countries. The term coloniality (*colonialidad*) was coined by Anibal Quijano (1992) to describe what he called the coloniality of power (*colonialidad de poder*). This concept aims at unveiling not only the living legacies of colonialism but its still existing structure in society as well as in knowledge. From that perspective, other concepts such as the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) or the coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2016) have been coined, but I will discuss this more in-depth in Chapter II. However, there is a gap in the decolonial literature about the coloniality of freedom. As a matter of fact, a quick research on Google Scholar shows only four results for the term ‘coloniality of freedom’, zero for ‘coloniality of liberty’, and zero for the term ‘*colonialidad de la libertad*’. There is the impressive article written by Sylvia Wynter, addressing the coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom (2003), yet she does not provide a specific analysis of freedom but relates it to her critique of humanism. There has been more or less literature on the relationship between freedom, slavery, colonisation, and its legacy (Hesse, 2014; Stovall, 2021; Anker, 2022) but they do not address the ontological and epistemological roots of this concept. By inscribing myself in these already existing works, this thesis aims to fill the existing gap in the anglophone literature about the coloniality of freedom. Nevertheless, this thesis will not provide a systematic analysis of the coloniality of freedom as the ultimate goal is to provide an alternative understanding of freedom, informed by what I think to be the coloniality of freedom, namely freedom being rooted in an ontology of seizure as a material/symbolic appropriation. In

other words, I hypothesise that unfreedom is conditional to the Western concept of freedom and that freedom can be understood alternatively.

Accordingly, I aim to give a phenomenological understanding of freedom by relying on the phenomenology of Frantz Fanon and Hannah Arendt. I will argue that a phenomenological approach to freedom allows me to give a non-subject-centred understanding of freedom, precisely because Arendt's phenomenology is committed to a worldly perspective. Before going further, I will first outline what phenomenology is by briefly presenting the thought of Husserl and Heidegger with whom both Hannah Arendt studied at the University.

Husserl's phenomenology gravitates around the concept of intentionality<sup>8</sup>. In his philosophy, intentionality is "the necessity for consciousness to exist as a consciousness *of something*" (Sartre, 1990, p. 11; my emphasis). Therefore, consciousness has an intentional structure, which means that every act of consciousness has, or is directed towards, an object, the 'of something' of my consciousness. The question of reality is always related to the object I see. What is real is what is the object of my consciousness. Phenomenology is about my lived experience of an object in the world. For instance, Husserl is not interested in why trees are in general according to natural science, but why *this* tree that *I* perceive *is*, thus, what it means to be real for this specific tree that I perceive as an object of my consciousness. In other words, he is concerned with the understanding of the object that is given to my consciousness. Then, the object that I experience is the subject of phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenology is committed to a method that takes the name of the phenomenological reduction, the *ἐποχή* (*epoché*). The principle of this method is to "place in brackets whatever [the natural standpoint] includes respecting the nature of Being: *this*

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<sup>8</sup> Husserl took the concept of *intentionality* from Franz Brentano in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. He changed its meaning as for Brentano intentionality was supposedly marking the difference between psychic and physical experiences. However, Husserl found this distinction too strict because it makes every experience a physical reality. Therefore, with this distinction, reality is always psychical. Husserl first developed his account of intentionality in the *Logical Investigations*.



*entire natural world therefore* which is continually ‘there for us’” (Husserl, 2012, p. 59, his emphasis). However, this bracketing of the world in which we are does not imply to deny this world, but rather, it allows me to disconnect “all sciences which relate to this natural world” (Husserl, 2012, p. 59). The aim of this bracketing is to have access to the things themselves in their givenness. What Husserl found after putting in brackets consciousness is *intentionality*, the ‘of something’ of consciousness, its *structure*. Consequently, “the essential property of Consciousness in its general form is preserved in the modification” (Husserl, 2012, p. 67). This means that before and after the phenomenological reduction, consciousness remains a consciousness of something because it is its essence.

Nevertheless, Heidegger was critical of Husserl because he was still trapped inside metaphysical categories. Heidegger stated that Husserl kept the subject-object distinction “in the form in which Descartes expressed it: *res cogitans-res extensa*.” (Heidegger, 1988, p. 125) In other words, he criticised Husserl for having treated consciousness and its object just as Descartes did, so as a distinction between subject (*res cogitans* which means a thinking thing in the ontology of Descartes) and object (*res extensa* which means an unthinking thing). Thus, Heidegger criticised Husserl because he forgot the question of being as such. Intentionality is a mental state, not the structure of Being. Husserl put the ‘I am’ in brackets to find the structure of consciousness (intentionality), but for Heidegger, he did not consider the question of Being.

In the first paragraphs of *Being and Time* (1968), Martin Heidegger drew the difference between Being and beings. The *beings* are what appear to me, and they have different modes of *Being*. Here, Heidegger is interested in the investigation of the structure, the Being of a specific being, of the *Dasein* (being-there). For him, the opening to the question of Being is possible from the point of view of the *Dasein*, because its fundamental mode of Being is to understand the Being of beings. This is from this point that Heidegger developed his philosophical approach, namely a

hermeneutic<sup>9</sup> phenomenology. Heidegger decided to go further than this Husserlian ‘things-in-themselves’ conception of phenomenology. He argued for another conception of a ‘phenomenon’ as “something that lies hidden [...] but at the same time it is something that belongs to what shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground.” (Heidegger, 1968, p. 59) In other words, the Being of beings. The method to get into the meaning of Being is hermeneutic. More precisely, a hermeneutic of *Dasein* will let us see the Being of *Dasein*.

Heidegger developed a method of deconstruction (*Abbau*) to pursue his hermeneutic phenomenology. In his investigation into the question of Being, he first attempted to deconstruct the history of ontology in metaphysics. The deconstruction aims to track down the way in which the question of Being was prevented in the history of ontology. For Heidegger, the “tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn.” (1968, p. 43) Thus, it makes us forget that there is such a thing as an origin because the meaning of Being is given as self-evident. This is what Heidegger called “an average concept of being<sup>10</sup>” (1988, p. 22). Hence, the task of deconstruction is to de-construct what has been unasked and concealed. The aim is to go back to the primordial experience that gave Being its concept, in other words, to find its “birth certificate” (Heidegger, 1968, p. 44). However, the deconstruction is not negative in the sense of debunking, rather it is a positive task because it aims at a creative appropriation of what has been transmitted but unquestioned. Hence, the past possibilities have to be repeated to be recaptured and to provide another understanding (Heidegger, 1968, p. 44).

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<sup>9</sup> Hermeneutics was first a method of text interpretation in theology, then it takes its modern meaning with Friedrich Schleiermacher as a philosophical approach of text interpretation and was developed further by Wilhelm Dilthey and it gained an existential meaning with Heidegger.

<sup>10</sup> Within the history of philosophy, from Plato “as well as for Aristotle and subsequent thinkers down to Hegel, and all the more so for their successors, all ontological investigations proceed within an average concept of being in general.” (Heidegger, 1988, p. 22)

I have briefly presented Heidegger's methodology because, as some scholars have already argued, Arendt's philosophical approach is highly indebted to his deconstruction (Villa, 1996; Taminiaux, 1997; Hinchman & Hinchman, 1984; Borren, 2010; Loidolt, 2017). However, as Heidegger stressed, "phenomenological method grows and changes due to the progress made precisely with its help into the subject under investigation." (1988, p. 21) Hence, we cannot say that Arendt's approach is strictly copied and pasted from Heidegger because her subject of investigation is not the being, but politics. Yet, it provides an insight that will be helpful to apprehend her phenomenology in Chapter III.

By using a phenomenological approach, this thesis aims to move away from the politico-legal debate on freedom. Rather, I want to understand freedom as a political phenomenon, something that happens when people act together. By uncommonly associating Hannah Arendt and Frantz Fanon together, this thesis aims at proposing an understanding of freedom from what Frantz Fanon called the zone of nonbeing, this "extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born." (2015, p. 8). Hence, this work is one alternative investigation into how freedom could be understood from a different framework and perspective. I do not pretend to provide the right or universal understanding of freedom, only an off-the-beaten-track one. In doing so, I will engage with different traditions such as Continental philosophy, Caribbean philosophy, Africana Philosophy, Black feminism, and the others mentioned above. This thesis also follows in the footsteps of the recent work on decolonial phenomenology by scholars such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) or Lewis Gordon (1995, 2000). However, my decolonial phenomenological approach proposes an Arendtian-Fanonian basis while Maldonado-Torres focused on a Husserlian-Fanonian basis and Gordon a Husserlian-Sartrean-Fanonian basis.

In sum, this work will assess the components upon which freedom rests in Western feminist theory, unveil and problematise its existing foundations, and ultimately provide an alternative understanding of freedom. The structure of this thesis will be divided into two parts. First, problematising the basis of Western feminist theories of freedom, before offering another philosophical approach to freedom. Second, bringing forth my alternative three-dimensional understanding of it. The aim is to significantly contribute to political theories of freedom and to more modestly contribute to Arendtian studies, decolonial thought and phenomenology.

## Thesis Structure

As I have just said, this thesis will be divided into two parts with three chapters per part. The first one is my problematisation of freedom, outlining its epistemological and ontological limits. In response, the second part is my alternative understanding of it. Accordingly, **Chapter I** aims at addressing what I consider to be the assimilation of freedom to liberation in Western feminist theory. This chapter is divided according to three mainstream feminist traditions in Western feminist theory. Namely, liberal feminism with Mary Wollstonecraft and Drucilla Cornell, materialist and radical feminism with Christine Delphy and Kate Millet, and finally postmodern feminism with Judith Butler. On that account, I will identify three forms of freedom. Respectively freedom as personhood, freedom from patriarchy and freedom as identity. However, I will observe that these three theories of freedom are actually not theories of freedom but theories of the subject of freedom. The question asked is ‘whose freedom?’ rather than ‘what is freedom?’. From that observation, I will show that two theories of the collective subject of freedom are outlined. I call the first one the homogenous hypothesis and the second one the heterogeneous hypothesis. The former is based on a homogenous model of unity and the latter on a heterogenous/inclusive model of unity. Basically, Chapter I will help me to show that there is an omission of freedom as a concept

in favour of a theory of its ideal subject. This will help me to set the base of the subject-centred ontology of freedom and to highlight its colonial roots.

Following the previously addressed problem of subject-centred freedom, **Chapter II** will investigate the colonial roots of the homogenous and heterogenous hypotheses and it will offer a first insight into what I think to be the coloniality of freedom. I will show the limits of the feminist theories of freedom that are grounded on the question of the subject as well as their eurocentrism. Moreover, I will introduce the Fanonian zones of nonbeing, arguing that those theories of freedom I criticise are inconceivable from these zones but only from the zone of being. I will highlight the fact that even if western feminist theory is considered a *radical critique* of the maleness of western political and social theory, when it comes to the question of freedom, it is rather a *radical correction* of their maleness. To put it differently, it is a move that aims to correct the subject of freedom, without considering its ontological roots. To make my point, I will analyse the use of the slave metaphor in feminist theory as well as the limits of inclusive models such as the one suggested by Iris Marion Young or the use of intersectionality. Ultimately, I will argue that these theories of freedom are rooted in what I call an *ontology of seizure* as a material/symbolic appropriation and that one needs to investigate the meaning of freedom from the zone of nonbeing to offer an alternative understanding.

To continue what has been done previously, **Chapter III** will offer a central claim for this thesis, the need for a phenomenological approach to freedom. This last chapter of Part I is also transitional. I will first introduce and outline Hannah Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology as a philosophical approach. Following Heidegger, this approach is both deconstructive and creative. However, even if Arendt's insight on imperialism is useful, I will suggest adding a more systematic decolonial perspective to her phenomenology. Accordingly, I will develop a decolonial hermeneutic phenomenology to pursue my investigation into the coloniality of freedom. Whilst

Chapter II started with Western feminist theory to highlight the ontological roots of its theories of freedom, Chapter III will investigate more in-depth the underside of freedom. Basically, I will argue that this ontology of seizure is the result of the constitution of the free individual alongside free property by looking at Grotius and Locke. I will show that in that Western paradigm, unfreedom is the condition of freedom. Ultimately and following the Arendtian phenomenological perspective, I will argue for a worldly and plural perspective on freedom rather than one based on the identity of its ideal subject. In the same move, this will shift the investigation from the zone of being to the zone of nonbeing as a point of departure for the worldly perspective I am advocating.

Chapter III's purpose was to set the methodological and theoretical basis of what could be an alternative understanding of freedom. As I said, this transitional chapter opens the way to the Part II of this work, namely my new understanding of freedom. In this second part, each chapter will focus on a different dimension of my three-dimensional understanding of freedom. First, freedom is an *embodied ontological resistance* (Chapter IV), second, freedom is *an an-archic mode of organisation* (Chapter V), and third, *freedom precedes liberation* (Chapter VI).

**Chapter IV** is important as it will be my main contribution to Arendtian studies<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, against the literature, I will defend that there is a hidden phenomenology of the body in Arendt's work. By looking at the German version of her work<sup>12</sup>, I will highlight her use of the Heideggerian concept of *Befindlichkeit*, around which her phenomenology of the body gravitates. However, because she is concerned with politics rather than Being, I will submit that for her, the body is a condition of politics. Following her claim that "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom" (Arendt, 2016, p. 174), I will hold that the body is a privileged site to investigate the meaning of freedom. Moreover, by associating Arendt's account of the body with Frantz Fanon's phenomenology of

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<sup>11</sup> Some parts of this chapter have already been published as an article in *Human Studies*. See des Portes, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Especially *The Human Condition*, she wrote both the English (1998) and German (1960) version.

the body, I will demonstrate that freedom should be understood from the perspective of a dialectic between the body and the world. To make my point, I will first analyse Fanon's phenomenology of the Algerian Revolution, and especially the figure of *la militante* (the women activist) in his book *L'An V de la révolution algérienne*. Thereafter, I will look at Frederick Douglass's fight with his master Edward Covey. These two lived experiences from the zone of nonbeing will ultimately lead me to argue that freedom is an embodied ontological resistance that displaces the web of relationships, what Arendt calls the in-between, between people. It changes their being disposed in the world with others. It is this question of being-with that will be the concern of the following chapter.

In **Chapter V**, I will focus on collective action, the being-with-others or being-together that I have started to outline in Chapter IV. I will first discuss Hannah Arendt's account of the political and its two main concepts: natality (new beginnings) and plurality (web of relationships). From that perspective, I will hold that her understanding of freedom is *an-archic*, meaning that it is a spontaneous beginning that does not rest on any rule or authority. It is an action that aims at the transformation of society without relying on a program or some preconceived rules to follow. I will follow up by suggesting that freedom is an *an-archic* mode of organisation, meaning that this organisation does not rely on any preconceived theory of the collective subject. To make my point, I will analyse and put together Audre Lorde's account of the Erotic and the activity of marronage. This will help me to understand freedom as an actualisation of plurality and a collective ontological resistance, in our case, against colonial gender norms. This will lead me to understand freedom as a political phenomenon from the perspective of a trialectic between the self, the collective and the world. Ultimately, I will defend that freedom as an *an-archic* mode of organisation is not organised through a theory of the subject but through what Hannah Arendt called guiding political principles. In doing so, I will first outline Arendt's account of principles that I will understand as being both an 'against' and a 'for something'. Then, I will provide an analysis of Black Lives Matter along

those lines by framing it under the concept of solidarity that I take to be an organising political principle.

**Chapter VI**, the last chapter of this thesis, concludes by reframing the relationship between freedom and liberation. This chapter will defend the third dimension of my understanding of freedom, namely that freedom precedes liberation. To make my point, I will first address Hannah Arendt's account of the relationship between freedom and liberation. For her, liberation precedes freedom, however, I will argue that this theorisation is embedded in a strict and non-realistic Before/After temporal divide. In response and following what I have outlined in the previous chapter, namely that principle stands against and for something, I will argue that liberation is a political principle. By discussing Frantz Fanon's account of decolonisation (2002, 2015) and Walter D. Mignolo's and Catherine Walsh's account of decoloniality (2007) I will highlight that liberation stands both against and for something. Ultimately and following my hypothesis that freedom precedes liberation, I will give a non-linear and ongoing meaning to 'precede' by relying on Fanon's account of sociogeny. This will lead me to offer a temporal account to understand freedom as ontological resistance by providing an existential dimension to it. This chapter concludes by suggesting an understanding of freedom as an existential collective ontological resistance.

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To summarise, this thesis contributes to political theories of freedom, decolonial thought and Arendtian studies. My first contribution is to open or widen the path for future analysis about the coloniality of freedom. More precisely, my investigation of this almost non-existent debate, at least framed as such, is to suggest that Western conceptions of freedom are rooted in an ontology of seizure. In response and by discussing a broad range of different philosophical traditions, this thesis strives to provide a decolonial phenomenological perspective on freedom. Rather than



applying an existing methodological framework, this thesis also aims to contribute to the ongoing elaboration of decolonial phenomenology, following the path opened by Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Lewis Gordon. The originality of my phenomenological approach lies in its Arendtian hermeneutic perspective for two reasons. First, Arendt's phenomenology is not yet broadly acknowledged amongst Arendtian scholars and political theory in general. Second, the already existing decolonial phenomenological approaches rely mainly on Husserl and Sartre, and also on Levinas and Heidegger. The originality of Arendt's phenomenology entails the originality of my contribution to the debate about freedom. Some important contributions have already been made to Hannah Arendt's theory of freedom (Zerilli, 2006; Hiruta, 2019), however, those accounts dismiss her phenomenological approach. Her phenomenology allows me to offer a worldly perspective on freedom, or more precisely to understand freedom as a political phenomenon from the perspective of what I call the trialectic of the self, the collective and the world, where each cannot be separated from the others.

**PART I:**  
**Problematizing Freedom**



# Chapter I:

## The Question of Freedom in Feminist Theory

“As beneficiaries of a situation of oppression, the oppressors cannot perceive that if *having* is a condition of *being*, it is a necessary condition of women and men.”

**Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

If I follow Paulo Freire’s statement that one needs *to have* in order *to be*, then one needs *to have freedom* in order *to be free*. Consequently, freedom is first and foremost something to have, in a certain way, an object over which one has control. Indeed, if we look at Isaiah Berlin’s canonical separation between negative and positive liberty, this idea of control, of having, is present. Schematically, negative liberty can be described as *freedom from* and positive liberty as *freedom to*. More precisely, Berlin defined the former as freedom from external barriers and the latter as freedom as self-mastery (2002, p. 178). In other words, negative liberty “denotes the individual’s unchallenged control over his immediate environment” (Thiele, 1994, p. 179) whilst positive liberty “derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master.” (Berlin, 2002, p. 178). In his work, Isaiah Berlin antagonized negative and positive liberty, in favour of the former. Nevertheless, this binary was rejected by scholars and especially feminist theorists as “to correct choice set inequalities among social groups, positive liberties must be provided to them.” (Welch, 2012, p. 75) To put it differently, the frame from which one can become one’s own master must be provided beforehand. An example of it would be the right to abortion, or contraception, which provided to women the control over their reproduction. Therefore, “only when positive liberties target social groups can negative liberty be *gained* by the individual.” (Welch, 2012, p. 76; my emphasis) To follow my example, to *have* the right to abort is to *be free to do it*, and *free from bodily constraints*. This demonstrates two points. First, when it comes to women’s oppression, the

antagonism between negative and positive liberty does not make much sense. Second, freedom is conditioned to the space where it can be gained and enjoyed. For instance, the right to abort creates the legal space where, because there are no external barriers, one is free to abort. Another illustration of these two points can be found in Nancy Hirschman's theory of constructivist liberty. For her, freedom is about choice. However, the question of liberty should be focused on the choosing subjects and their social situation of oppression which has an impact on their choice (Hirschmann, 2003, p. x). For Hirschmann, because the dominant conceptions of freedom failed to recognize the social structures that construct the subject, "the ideal of the subject utilized by most freedom theory-and in turn, the concept of freedom itself-is simplistically overdrawn and deeply problematic." (2003, p. x) Moreover, for Hirschmann, "we must acknowledge the *interaction* of the 'inner' (positive liberty) and 'outer' (negative liberty) and see them as interdependent in meaning and practice, in order to interrogate the social construction of the choosing subject" (2003, p. 14; her emphasis). In other words, her work is committed to an analysis of how patriarchy produces and constrains women's choices. Furthermore, because women's oppression results from a patriarchal context, the means to "*increase* their [women] freedom" (Hirschmann, 2003, p. 206; my emphasis) is to change the social context. What is interesting here is the word 'increase' because it, I think, illustrates a referencing if not foundational point in feminist theories of freedom. My hypothesis here is that there is an oblivion of freedom in feminist theory. More precisely, that freedom as such is not theorised or conceptualised but assumed. Rather, the means to produce freedom are theorised. The distinction here is important, as, in order to produce something, it must already be known, or, at least, theoretically assumed. Indeed, from the beginning of her book, Nancy Hirschmann states that freedom is understood as choice. For her, the question is how to produce a free choice that is on the same level as men's choice, so an *increased* free choice. Therefore, it is assumed that freedom=choice and that freedom has something to do with the sovereignty of the subject. It is about, how to create the conditions for the sovereignty of the subject.

Accordingly, in this first chapter, I want to showcase that in feminist theory, the theories of freedom are in fact theories of the production of freedom, so theories of liberation from patriarchy which aim at answering the question ‘who is the subject of freedom?’, in order to create a subject-centred freedom. To make my point, I will focus on different authors from different traditions of feminist theory. By analysing the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, Drucilla Cornell, Christine Delphy, Kate Millett, and Judith Butler<sup>13</sup>, I will try to highlight that freedom is assimilated to liberation in the sense that, when feminist theorists are concerned with the concept of freedom, they are in fact concerned with liberation resulting in a specific conception of the sovereign subject. My aim is to highlight that feminist theories of freedom are in fact theories of liberation as the creation of a means that is supposed to automatically lead to a preconceived idea of freedom. Freedom is not theorised; it is taken for granted. It is assumed that freedom is, for instance, a synonym for choice, autonomy, or independence. A large part of the theories of freedom are in fact theories of the means to *have* it in order to *be* free. In that sense, freedom is informed by the oppressor-oppressed binary which is respectively illustrated by a state/space of unfreedom and a state/space of freedom. What is theorised is the means to be liberated from the space/state of oppression to join/create the space/state of freedom.

### **The Status of Feminist Theory in this Thesis**

Before starting my investigation into western feminist political theories of freedom, I want to write some remarks about the status of feminist theory in this thesis and about the methodological justification of its status. Feminist political theory is broadly considered to be an important contribution to political theory. Indeed, the major handbooks and encyclopaedias of political

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<sup>13</sup> I chose to focus on these authors because they are, I think, representative of different traditions of feminist theory. Liberal feminism for Wollstonecraft and Cornell, materialist and radical feminism for Delphy and Millett, and postmodern feminism for Butler.

theory/philosophy have their entries on feminism (Dryzek, Honig, Phillips, 2008; Klosko, 2013; Freedman, 2015; Brown, Eckersley, 2020). The contribution of feminism to political theory is multifold, from revisiting the canons from a feminist perspective, to adding new authors to the canons such as Mary Wollstonecraft or Simone de Beauvoir, and to the introduction of new concepts such as gender within the field of political theory. Moreover, feminist theory poses new challenges and problems to political theory such as “a better understanding of why women are still [...] far from equal with men.” (Okin, 1998, p. 117) In other words, feminist political theory is part of the vast field that is political theory, and it has broadened the borders of that field and is also reflective of it. To put it differently, it aims to correct political theory from its sexist biases (Zerilli, 2008, p. 109). This is why diverse traditions of political theory have their feminist counterpart. There is liberal feminism, Marxist and materialist feminism, and postmodern feminism, amongst others. From that perspective, feminist theory both extends and revisits the concepts of political theory such as democracy, citizenship, equality, and of course freedom.

Accordingly, one of the main questions of feminist theory is about the place of women in society both on the epistemic and political levels. Who is the subject of citizenship, for whom and by whom citizenship has been theorized? How do masculine conceptions of freedom and equality reproduce patriarchy? All of these questions frame feminist political theory around the question of the subject of political theory. In (masculine) political theory, the question of the subject was ‘resolved’ by a supposed universalism that covered up its masculine biases. Hence, feminist theory is about uncovering those biases by putting women as a central category. Accordingly, debates in feminist theory have been about the conceptualisation of its subject, women. This conceptualisation raised up different theorisations and controversies such as essentialist vs. anti-essentialist views on women (Capps, 1996; Wong, 1999; Stone, 2004), and the status of difference within the group of women (hooks, 1987, 2000; Collins, 2002; Davis, 2019).

This brief introduction leads me to the status of feminist theory in this thesis. The question is, why do I primarily focus my critique on western feminist theories of freedom and not on western political theory in general? I have provided a preliminary answer to that question in the introduction by invoking the broadness of political theory and the need to make a choice, to discriminate between different traditions of political theory. However, this answer is only partial because such a choice needs to be methodologically justified. This choice is mainly motivated by the importance of the category of the subject and its theorisation in western feminist theory. In doing so, I believe that western feminist theory introduced what could be called ‘an epistemic subjective turn’ to western political theory. Indeed, as I have said previously, canonical concepts of western political theory such as democracy, citizenship and freedom covered up a masculine conceptualisation and assumed a masculine practice. As Genevieve Fraisse showed with the term *démocratie exclusive* (exclusionary democracy) (1995), and Carole Pateman with the term sexual contract (1988), democracy and its correlated concepts/principles were theorised by and for men. Accordingly, a feminist challenge is to think about these concepts for all, whether by including women in these ideals or by revisiting their theoretical grounding. However, I believe that the problem of western feminist theory lies precisely in the partiality of the critique of this theoretical grounding I have just mentioned, and I believe or make the hypothesis that this partiality is the result of the subject-centrism of western feminist theory. In other words, I chose to focus on western feminist theory because I put that the question of western subjectivity is more visible precisely because it does not fully hide behind a supposed universalism. Accordingly, and I will discuss that in Chapter II, I believe that western feminist theory operates as a magnifying glass of the coloniality of western concepts of political theory such as freedom. Indeed, as much as “centering settler colonialism within gender and women’s studies [...] exposes the still-existing structure of settler colonialism” (Arvin, Tuck & Morrill, 2013, p. 8), centring the coloniality of freedom within western feminist theories of freedom exposes the still-existing colonial structure of freedom. In other words, by narrowing political theory to feminist political theory, the still-



existing structure of colonialism in its concept is more visible, precisely because I think that this structure is best expressed with the western feminist focus on the subject. Therefore, in this chapter, I will demonstrate the subject-centrism of western feminist theory by focusing on what I believe to be the problematic identification of freedom with liberation. More precisely, I think that this identification comes from the centring on the subject and results in a theorisation of freedom that is in fact a theory of the subject. This leads to the last justification for my focus on western feminist theory. Namely, I will show that by theorising the subject of freedom instead of theorising freedom, the feminist theories I will analyse use pre-conceived theories of freedom from political theory such as free choice, negative and positive freedom. In other words, the attempt to correct those theories by turning to its subject does not solve the problem of those concepts, which is, for me, its overemphasis on the subject. Ultimately and on the methodological level, this focus on western feminist theory will allow me to demonstrate that freedom should not be theorised on a subjective theoretical ground.

Therefore, this thesis is not about feminist theory as such. This is why, my main aim is not to give a descriptive account of the differences between feminist political theories but rather to form an ideal type<sup>14</sup> (Weber, 2011). In other words, I do not aim to go into the debates about Mary Wollstonecraft's or Judith Butler's philosophy, because this thesis is not about that. Rather I aim to outline recurring questions in western feminism, by providing my interpretation of their theories of freedom. Namely, why freedom coincides with a theory of the subject. In other words, the typology I will draw will help me to guide my hypothesis. From that perspective, western feminist theory allows me to open the door to the problems I want to investigate and to the hypotheses I will make throughout this thesis. I do not aim to contribute or to suggest what is the good/right subject of feminism, but I want to suggest an alternative way of understanding freedom that goes

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<sup>14</sup> For Weber, an ideal type functions as a “comparison [...] to establish [...] divergence or similarities” (2011, p. 43).

beyond the question of its subject. And to make that happen, a certain level of generalisation is needed.

## Freedom as Personhood

In her *Vindication for the Right of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft made a response to the *Émile* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For her, women and men equally possess the capacity of reason, hence, they should be equally educated. By making central this notion of equality, Wollstonecraft introduced a change in feminist theory, passing from the idea of “equal worth” to the one of “equal right” (Bryson, 2003, p. 17). She embraced liberal theory and the vocabulary of law in her own way. In this part, I will analyse the thought of two liberal feminists which are Mary Wollstonecraft and Drucilla Cornell<sup>15</sup>. I will make manifest how their respective theories of freedom are in fact theories of the production of freedom, so of liberation resulting in a universal idea of personhood.

### Mary Wollstonecraft and freedom as independence

In Wollstonecraft’s thought, ‘independence’ is a central principle. Even if it can be seen as a synonym for ‘freedom’, it must be linked to ‘virtue’ and to ‘equality’, as the former represents the independence of mind and the latter civil independence (Wollstonecraft, 2004). Moreover, these two notions are the conditions for people to be free from any arbitrary form of control. In depth, independence can be divided into three characteristics in Wollstonecraft’s thought. First, it is an “egalitarian ideal according to which men and women must necessarily be protected to the same extent in all areas of their lives” (Coffee, 2014, p. 909). This is the condition to create stable social bases for independence. Second, independence is “a flexible ideal that allows for both sexes to

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<sup>15</sup> I classified Cornell amongst the liberal theorists because she heavily relies on John Rawls and put her work within the frame of political liberalism, even if she could be classified as a radical liberal.

interact and participate socially on differentiated terms that reflect their respective outlooks and interests” (Coffee, 2014, p. 909). Finally, there is a third characteristic which helps to keep alongside the two others. It is independence as a “collaborative ideal according to which the social and political terms of freedom [...] must necessarily be established collectively by both women and men in dialogue with each other” (Coffee, 2014, p. 910). In other words, this collaborative ideal keeps in junction equality and difference. Independence is then a relational and inclusive structure. The relational character of this structure is clear when we focus on the relationship between ‘equality’ and ‘virtue’. To put it briefly, there is civil equality because men and women equally have the capacity to use reason, they have virtue. They have the *same personhood* in nature, so they should have the same in civil society.

For Wollstonecraft, the problem of women’s freedom lies in civil governments which tried to prevent the cultivation of reason amongst women, especially by the means of customs. Contra Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued against the education of women in the *Émile*, Wollstonecraft advocated another private and national education which would tend to develop the use of reason for girls and boys. Education is the institutional space where men and women’s virtue, so their personhood, can be developed. She argued for the changing of a system which creates a double standard in society, and which is inclined to naturalise the idea that there is a sex in souls, while for her “the nature of reason must be the same in all” (Wollstonecraft, 2004, p. 69), and it is “the right use of reason alone which makes us independent” (Wollstonecraft, 2004, p. 150). Hence, Wollstonecraft went against the affirmation that there is a sex of virtue to build her argumentation on freedom and equality. In other words, Wollstonecraft’s theory of freedom is about *changing/reforming the space* that allows freedom as reason, so independence of mind. In that sense, her definition of freedom as independence can be understood as a constructivist freedom as defined by Hirschmann. Indeed, Wollstonecraft put the focus on the social situations that create women’s unfreedom, mainly customs and education. Thus, a changing of the social context will

allow women to attain the *universal personhood characterised by virtue*, and then her pre-given conception of freedom as independence. Equal education is the means by which women are to be liberated from customs. More precisely, in Wollstonecraft's thought, there is a right to liberty which is "predicated on me being counted among humankind to which reason is ascribed as an inherent feature" (Halldenius, 2017, p. 103). To put it differently, this right to liberty is predicted by a universal faculty of virtue amongst humankind. But as Wollstonecraft put it, women are "the outlaws of the world" (2007, p. 138), and their capacity for reason is denied because of a gendered view of it that is naturalised. Hence, women's right to liberty is denied because of a system of oppression rooted in a gendered double standard in virtue. As women's faculty of reason is denied, they have duties according to their nature. Accordingly, a hierarchical society that 'enslaves' women is put into practice. In other words, this oppression comes from an unequal power over others, and because her account of freedom is based on an equal relation with others, this freedom is denied.

Now, let's schematically summarise Wollstonecraft's theoretical process. She has a pre-given definition of freedom as independence, civil and in mind, which relies on a universal idea of personhood. From this definition, which works as a compass or as a heuristic tool, she is able to identify the problem of women's oppression, unfreedom, which is a result of customs and unequal education that inevitably led to unequal citizenship. Indeed, in order to evaluate one's unfreedom, one needs a definition of what freedom is. Hence, the problem of women's unfreedom is their social situation, which is not justified by nature because, for Wollstonecraft, men and women both have virtue which is a universal faculty amongst humankind. Therefore, what needs to be done to liberate women from this condition is to change the space which produces unfreedom. To create a universal, equal space for both men and women, where they equally can attain freedom. She urged to "make women rational creatures, and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives, and mother" (Wollstonecraft, 2004, p. 222). The creation of that conditional space for

women's freedom aims at the betterment of society. Indeed, "if [woman] be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; [... and] how can woman be expected to co-operate [...] unless freedom strengthens her reason till she comprehends her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good?" (Wollstonecraft, 2004, p. 4). Thus, Wollstonecraft's theory of freedom is about the production of a space where freedom can be attained resulting in the betterment of society. From that perspective, the problem is that freedom is conditioned to a specific space where it can be attained and nowhere else. As a result, freedom cannot be thought of or conceptualised out of this conditional space. If someone is in a space of unfreedom, freedom cannot be thought of nor attained inside it.

Consequently, freedom is a value in a double sense. It is a heuristic tool for measurement, of evaluation. And it is a value that can be materialised in a defined space only. Independence of mind within the space of education. From this perspective, a theory of freedom will be about the subject of freedom; who is free? And about the means to attain freedom for an unfree subject. Therefore, in both cases, freedom is assumed, pre-given. What is theorised is the means to be a free subject, to attain personhood. The means to be liberated, so to go from the space of unfreedom to the one of freedom, from the space of women as 'out-laws' to the space of women as legal persons. Now I will focus on the theorisation of freedom by Drucilla Cornell for whom, I will argue, the production of a space where freedom and personhood can be attained is even more explicit.

### **Drucilla Cornell and the imaginary domain**

Drucilla Cornell's conception of freedom starts with an insight into John Rawls's veil of ignorance. It represents the "point of view, removed from and not distorted by the particular features and circumstances of the all-encompassing background framework, from which a fair agreement between persons regarded as free and equal can be reached." (Rawls, 2005, p. 23) This original

position is a hypothetical and nonhistorical device of representation that relies on a Kantian conception of personhood where individuals are reasonable, free, and equal beings. From that perspective, freedom is understood as individual rights such as freedom of conscience, speech, etc. (Rawls, 2005)

However, for Drucilla Cornell, the problem of Rawls's ideal theory is that 'personhood' is assumed. That is to say that some people's personhood is negated or denied and especially women and LGBTQ<sup>16</sup> people. Hence, they do not have access to the original position. More precisely, for Cornell, women's personhood is denied because of the established, structural hierarchical conception of sexual difference. For her, "the ideal of the free person must be reconciled with the recognition that we must orient ourselves as sexuate beings." (Cornell, 1998, p. 7) Cornell uses the term 'sexuate being' as she recuses the understanding of "the difference between sex and gender because it fails to see how the sexed body is symbolically constructed." (1998, p. 6) Rather, 'sexuate being' represents "the sexed body of our human being when engaged with a framework by which we orient ourselves" (Cornell, 1998, p. 7). Her conception of freedom is materialised by one's power to draw his/her sexuate being out of the hierarchical conception of sexual difference. In other words, her definition of freedom can be summarised by freedom of personality or one's free choice to choose his/her individuation, illustrated by the Kantian/Rawlsian notion of personhood. Therefore, her aim is to find a way to attain this free personhood, to attain freedom. Hence, we can see that in her work, freedom is pre-defined and not theorised as such. What is theorised is the way to attain this freedom.

For Drucilla Cornell, freedom can only be attained in a space prior to the original position, which she called the imaginary domain (1998, p. 91). This space is the negative condition of Cornell's

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<sup>16</sup> LGBTQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer people.

freedom of personality as it is the space where one can be freed from gender comparison and express their individuation. To put it differently, it is the space of the inalienable right of personality which is “the right of each person to represent his or her sexuality, or [what Cornell calls] *sexuate being*” (Cornell, 1998, p. xi). This is the space where social equality is redefined “so as to serve freedom” (Cornell, 1998, p. xii). To illustrate this space, Cornell used Woolf’s image of the room of one’s own. She argued that “the claim for the room to write is inseparable from the need for the woman writer to represent herself as just that, a writer, rather than, in Woolf’s case, her father’s ever-so-good daughter.” (Cornell, 1998, p. 10) Accordingly, it is the space that allows women’s inclusion in the community because they will be recognized as equal and free persons. Moreover, from this recognition follows “a demand for fair, and thus, equitable treatment whenever and wherever our sexual difference needs to be taken into account”<sup>17</sup> (Cornell, 1998, p. 11). Therefore, in Cornell’s theory, freedom, which is pre-defined, as well as personhood are conditioned to the imaginary domain. Furthermore, this space is itself conditioned to the law. For her, if one wants to attain freedom, one needs the imaginary domain which must be protected by the law. Indeed, the imaginary domain is the space of individuation where individuation is a project “that needs legal, political, ethical and moral recognition if it is to be effectively maintained.” (Cornell, 1998, p. 64) In other words, the law is the means to liberate someone from gender comparison by protecting the imaginary domain as the space of freedom. The problem here is that for Cornell, freedom is conditioned to the liberal conception of rights and of the legal state. What is implicit in her theory is that freedom cannot exist out of liberal democracies, or to be more precise, out of liberal western democracies. Hence, freedom is a western right. Even if Cornell stated that the imaginary domain “does not need a subjective concept of right” (1998, p. 166), this is precisely a statement, and she does not tell how it would work without it. Rather she acknowledges it and

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<sup>17</sup> What she understands here can be illustrated by her account of ‘bodily integrity’ as a minimal condition for individuation. This equitable and fair treatment needs, sometimes, to take ‘sexual difference’ into account, for instance when it comes to abortion. Respecting women’s bodily integrity (and men in the case of transmen but this was not considered by Cornell) is to respect their right to abort, hence sexual difference needs to be taken into account See Cornell, 1995, p. 31-91 and Cornell, 1998, p. 96-130.

follows her argumentation by providing “a specifically feminist reason for advocating subjective rights.” (Cornell, 1998, p. 167)

Moreover, Cornell anticipated the possible critiques for liberal individualism that could be addressed to her work by highlighting the recognition between free persons which implies the possible competition between different people’s free choices. Indeed, with the example of sexual harassment, she argued that “the demand to be free from sexual harassment can [...] be understood as an affirmative power to demand that others harmonize their freedom in the workplace with mine.” (Cornell, 1998, p. 196-7) If a woman is sexually harassed in her workplace, the man/harasser could claim his freedom to ‘give repeated compliments’, let’s say, in the name of free speech. However, this ‘freedom’ would not respect the woman’s freedom of personality because she would not be recognized as a free and equal person. Her personhood would not be recognised because the man would have objectified her. Thus, in that context, Cornell follows Kant’s idea of coercion of one’s freedom to one another. In that case, the man should harmonise his freedom with the woman’s freedom so no harm to anyone’s personhood is caused. We can see how Cornell’s freedom is not simply individualistic and that the idea of coercion is there to maintain and support the precarious sovereignty of the subject who is more likely to be oppressed. However, this harmonisation of freedom raises unanswered questions, such as who defines who coerces and harmonises with whom? What are the criteria? The one whose personhood is the least recognised? How can it be measured? Moreover, those problems relate to the one I identified previously of a notion of freedom conditioned to a specific space. Indeed, if the imaginary domain, once protected by the law, guarantees a space of individuation to everyone, where someone can be freed from gender comparison, then, it poses two problems. First, it assumes that structural oppressions which are global and historical can be overcome by laws that would allow someone to draw their individuation freely. It does not consider the material basis of oppression. To follow Cornell’s example, to have a room of one’s own is the imaginary domain of the writer, but what is



the imaginary domain of the women who clean the room of one's own, the office of one's own, the company of one's own? Furthermore, these women do not even have access to recognition because they are not visible in society (Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2018). Therefore, because this space is mainly focused on 'sexuate being' and their freedom of personality, it does not take into account that, for instance, capitalism produces gender or that race produces gender as well. In other words, the focus on 'sexuation' does not do justice to the complexity and the interrelatedness of the production of gender in connection to race. 'Sexuation' cannot be separated from racialisation, but I will specify this point in the next chapter. The second problem is related to the first one. Because freedom is conditioned to the imaginary domain, it assumes that freedom cannot be thought of or theorised from the standpoint or the space of the oppressed. As Cornell put it, the imaginary domain is the space of the 'as if' (1998, p. 8), then, a space where assumptions "not about what *is*, but about what *ought to be so*" (Appiah, 2019, p. 128-9; his emphasis) are made. In other words, it is a pre-defined notion of freedom that will model the theory, so freedom can only be thought of under that normative model. When it comes to freedom, oppressed people do not have agency because they are part of the 'what is', their agency is only thought of in terms of free choice as the freedom to choose your personality in the space dedicated to it, in the 'what ought to be'.

Finally, Cornell's model of just and fair society based on free and equal persons aims at creating an inclusive society where everyone's right/freedom of individuation is recognized and respected. In other words, where everyone's sovereignty is respected. When it comes to the question of homosexuality, straight people must, for instance, recognise and respect other forms of family. As a result, in her ideal society, homosexuals and heterosexuals recognise each other's freedom of personality since it does not affect theirs. To put it differently, she proposes a reform of heterosexuality that would recognise other forms of sexuality and sexuate beings as free and equal. Moreover, when she discusses homosexuality, one could argue that the examples she gave concern

mainly homonormative<sup>18</sup> families. Indeed, she did not talk about queer subcultures<sup>19</sup> which themselves produce gender identities, and new forms of family, one could argue, out of Cornell's framework of personhood and the imaginary domain as they do not wait for straight people's recognition nor for a legal contract. Therefore, in Cornell's work, homosexuality is discussed from the viewpoint of heterosexuality. Basically, her theory of freedom is, in fact, a theory of liberation by law in order to make the pre-defined notion of freedom more inclusive and to integrate other people into it. She proposes a representational device, the imaginary domain, which puts the emphasis on recognition to enlarge the content of 'personhood', to make it more inclusive.

Throughout the first part of this chapter, I have focused on two liberal thinkers, Wollstonecraft and Cornell. Both of them provided a pre-defined notion of freedom, as independence for the former, and as personality or choice for the latter. In both cases, this freedom works as a heuristic tool to create the ideal space where this freedom can be attained for women by the means of a universal idea of personhood. In Wollstonecraft's case, the space of education is ideally indifferent to gender, since there is no gender in virtue, and it is the space where virtue can flourish equally for men and women. In other words, the masculine space of education assimilates women into it. Thus, her freedom as liberation is assimilationist, which means, a space where "social group differences would have ceased to exist." (Young, 1990, p. 158) On the other hand, Cornell's freedom as liberation relates more to an ideal of diversity where everyone is free to represent their sexuate being as they choose. For Iris Marion Young, these two ideals are "competing paradigms of liberation" (1990, p. 158), however, I think that they more or less produce the same effect. Namely, a somehow homogeneous space of freedom, precisely because the production of a space where freedom can be attained is always exclusive. But I will come to this in the following chapter.

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<sup>18</sup> Homonormativity is a concept to describe the construction of LGBTQ identities that follow heterosexual ideals, norms, and values such as marriage.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of queer subcultures see Bourcier, 2018.

In the next part, I will focus on materialist and radical feminism where the question of the space to attain freedom is present but put in a different way.

## **Freedom from Patriarchy**

Even if Karl Marx was not a feminist theorist, his writings provided “a comprehensive analysis of human history and society” (Bryson, 2003, p. 56) on which some feminist theorists drew their work. His investigation into capitalism and class society allowed some feminist theorists to criticise liberal feminism and to propose a different view on women’s oppression and women’s freedom, especially by basing their analysis on the difference that Marx foregrounded between political emancipation and human emancipation in his text *On the Jewish question*. For Marx, there is an “uncritical confusion of political emancipation with general human emancipation” (2000, p. 150). Political emancipation points out the question of the rights inside the state while human emancipation is questioning the state in its structure. Human emancipation requires a transformation of society while political emancipation is based on the equality of citizens without questioning the state. In other words, it illustrates the distinction between reform and revolution. As Bryson (2003) argues, this distinction can draw the difference between liberal feminism, based on equal rights, and Marxist feminism which aims to transform the economic and social structure on which oppression is based. It implies “that women’s subordination will not be ended when sex ceases to be a political and legal distinction”, then, “from this perspective it is not equal rights that are important” (Bryson, 2003, p. 68). Accordingly, one could submit that Wollstonecraft and Cornell were more concerned with political emancipation. On the other hand, revolution and human emancipation are quite the same, revolution is “the journey [...], the continuous effort of enlarging freedom and community” (Le Baron, 1971, p. 562), as “only in community [...] is personal freedom possible” (Le Baron, 1971, p. 565). Therefore, freedom is to be found in human emancipation/revolution, and by revolution, Marx meant “the communist revolution” (Marx,

2008, p. 25). However, the question I have to answer is about the connection between these Marxian notions and feminist theory. More precisely, how feminist theorists engaged with Marx to outline a theory of freedom. To answer it, I will first analyse the work of the founder of feminist materialism Christine Delphy. Thereafter, I will investigate Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, which emphasises the need of a sexual revolution. The common point between the two is that they define women as subjects according to a definition of patriarchy.

### **Christine Delphy and the liberation from the main enemy**

Unlike Engels who thought that women's oppression was a result of capitalism, Christine Delphy focused on a materialist analysis of women's oppression. For her, there is a patriarchal production mode which dominates the capitalist production mode. Because patriarchy is based on an economic exploitation that concerned only women, it is domestic labour. In other words, the mode of production is gendered, and capitalist society can only work by relying on domestic labour. Accordingly, Christine Delphy based her work on the theoretical need "to find the structural reasons why the abolition of capitalist relations of production as such is not sufficient to free women", and on the political need "to establish the women's movement as an autonomous force" (Delphy, 2016, p. 58). In Delphy's work, the analysis of women's oppression can be resumed by the existence of the family. Moreover, she highlighted the fact that women's labour is unpaid both when it is done in the household and when it is not. She took the example of farmers and showed that women were used as assistants in the farm to do "all the dirty, unpleasant, non-mechanized tasks" like milking (Delphy, 2016, p. 60), in the past and still in the present. This is why she claimed that the unpaid labour of women is institutionalised. Accordingly, women's labour is considered to be outside, excluded from the zone of exchange because, Delphy argues, they are women and not because of what they produce "since their unpaid labour goes towards producing goods and service which (a) reach and are exchanged on the market (in agriculture, crafts and small retail businesses); and (b) are paid for when done outside the family" (Delphy, 2016, p. 67). If the work

is done within the family, it will be unpaid. However, with industrialisation, women's labour cannot be incorporated into production for exchange anymore since these productions are performed outside the family. Thus, "with industrialization, family production became limited to housework" (Delphy, 2016, p. 68). Even with the capacity of women to work outside of the family, their labour-power has been appropriated by their husbands in many ways. The earnings from their labour went into a common budget that was controlled by the husband, and even later when women were allowed to have their own bank account, they still had to fulfil their "family duties". Hence, "what women have been free to do has been to have a double workload in return for a certain amount of economic independence" (Delphy, 2016, p. 68). In other words, marriage is a labour contract that aims at appropriating women's work.

Accordingly, Delphy identified two *independent* modes of production in our society; some goods are produced in 'the industrial mode' while others are produced in 'the family mode'. The former gave rise to "capitalist exploitation" and the latter gave rise to "patriarchal exploitation" (Delphy, 2016, p. 69). The difference between the two is a difference of production. While in the capitalist mode the service is paid on a fixed scale and does not depend on the employer or the employee, in the patriarchal mode, women depend on their husbands and so are the unpaid services they will provide. Moreover, in the capitalist mode, men can improve their own standard of living when their earnings are improved. On the other hand, in the patriarchal mode, "since the benefits which wives receive have no relationship to the services which they provide, it is impossible for married women to improve their own standard of living by improving their service" (Delphy, 2016, p. 70). Thus, women constitute both a class and a caste, respectively "as a group [...] subjected to this relation of production" and "as a category of human beings destined by birth to become members of this class" (Delphy, 2016, p. 71). Then, their *common* oppression resides in marriage and in the appropriation of their labour that is implied by it. Moreover, even if, for Delphy, women within the bourgeoisie cannot be considered as bourgeois because they do not possess the means of

production, women within the proletariat are a “super-exploited caste” (Delphy, 2016, p. 72). Hence, the capitalist mode of production cannot be the only one considered to analyse women’s oppression because women do not belong to the class of their husbands. Consequently, women’s liberation can only be operated through the destruction of the main enemy which is patriarchy.

In her work, Delphy does not discuss much the question of freedom as such. Rather, when it is mentioned, freedom is assumed as free choice, especially when she discusses the question of abortion. Therefore, again, freedom is assumed. However, what is theoretically rich in Delphy’s work is the theory of liberation to attain this freedom. Indeed, for her, this liberation, or this emancipation, is an auto-emancipation. This means an emancipation that is conducted by the women. This is far from Wollstonecraft and Cornell’s models where the space of freedom was mainly produced or protected by law<sup>20</sup>. Delphy argued that feminist movements need to stop denying their agency (2013b). In her thought, this notion of agency is driven by the goal to defeat patriarchy, the patriarchal mode of production and reproduction-which does not mean the abolition of capitalism as the two modes of production are independent. Moreover, this women’s agency is made possible by the knowledge of women’s oppression based on a materialist analysis. In other words, it is “the work of mobilization [which] must emphasize the solidarity of all people oppressed by the same system” (Delphy, 2016, p. 75). From that perspective, her conception of freedom as liberation depends on a Marxist class antagonism model where society is divided between men and women rather than only by the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In other words, she argued that there are two class systems and “it is the relations of production of the domestic mode which produce the two classes ‘men’ and ‘women’: men are the class of exploiters and women are the exploited class.” (Jackson, 1996, p. 95) For Delphy, all women are destined to participate in the patriarchal relations of production because whether they are from the proletariat

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<sup>20</sup> Even if, in her later work, Delphy is not reluctant to the claims of rights. See Delphy, 2013b.

or the bourgeoisie, they belong to the same class, women. Therefore, the materialist analysis is the basis to observe the constitution of another class system. When women are constituted as a class, auto-emancipation is possible, hence, the creation of a space where freedom can be reached.

However, the problem of categorising in social class is the same as it was with Marx's theory. For Pierre Bourdieu, Marx, and the Marxist tradition, to which Delphy could be added, even if she is also critical of it (2013b, p. 118-9), "commits the very same theoreticist fallacy of which Marx himself accused Hegel" (1987, p. 7). Namely, the transposition of a theoretical class to a real class. Indeed, Marx described the formation of a proletarian class through a common consciousness of their material conditions of existence and their alienation. Hence, a *common* condition of oppression is what makes it possible to pursue a common interest. However, "the movement from probability to reality, from theoretical class to practical class, is never given" (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 7). In other words, it represents a theoretical homogenisation of experience as the root of class formation. Yet, as Bourdieu emphasised, "the principle of vision and division of the social world at work in the construction of theoretical classes have to compete, in reality, with other principles, ethnic, racial or national" (1987, p. 7). That is to say that the homogenisation of experience in order to construct the revolutionary subject, here of freedom as liberation, works in theory but not in practice. Indeed, as we saw, Delphy argued that the family is the main and almost the only cause of women's oppression. However, one could argue that her analysis is problematic. Indeed, for her, family is the space of unfreedom as marriage is a labour contract where the husband appropriates his wife's labour. The first problem raised by this description of patriarchy, which is considered as both narrow and totalising by some (Barrett & McIntosh, 1979), is that *de facto*, women who are not married escape oppression, which is obviously not true. As Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh put it, "in focusing too narrowly on the 'exploitative' structure of marriage, Delphy by-passes the historical, social and psychological dimensions of women's oppression" (1979, p. 103). Furthermore, marriage is not representative of the totality of women's familial situation as "in 1898

one French household in four was composed of a single, widowed, divorced or unmarried person” (Segalen & Zonabend, 1996, p. 503). In her text *un féminisme matérialiste est possible* (2013b, pp. 111-152), Delphy rejected this claim and argued that marriage, as an institution, was oppressive even for divorced women. The problem is that she starts with family and, from there, totalise her analysis of women’s oppression. Her model of analysis of this structure does not consider that some family did not fit in the familial model she described. For instance, in the United States, “due to African Americans’ lower economic position in society, their families have developed alternative family forms as mechanisms for survival”<sup>21</sup> (Durant & Loudon, 1986 in Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993, p. 461). Moreover, because Delphy stated the independence of the capitalist mode of production from the patriarchal one, she created an antagonism, and an impossible interrelationship between class, gender and race. In fact, she said that she was in solidarity with every woman whether they are from the bourgeoisie or not. This means that she is also in solidarity with women exploiting other women and she does not acknowledge, for instance, the solidarity of black women with black men over their woman’s employers. Therefore, she does not recognise the antagonism within women as a social category, especially because of the intersection of this category with class or race for example. Indeed, the logic that *a common oppression creates a common interest*, does not take into account women’s diverging interests according to their social and racial situations. If we take the example of class, this division is even more visible today with the rise of neoliberal feminism and the figure of the woman CEO (Rottenberg, 2018) as a model of feminism, which keeps the logic of an independence of capitalism from patriarchy precisely because this figure of the woman CEO presents women’s empowerment *within* the capitalist sphere and mode of production. Therefore, to put the independence of the two modes of production implies that

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<sup>21</sup> It does not mean that there is not gender inequalities in black household, but the familial structure is different. Moreover, black men’s masculinity is different from white men, therefore, a totalising analysis of patriarchy misses the point that patriarchy is also racial. See Curry, 2017 & Patil, 2013.



the space of women's freedom is independent of class and race. In that sense, freedom is, again, conditioned to a specific space that will vary according to the analysis of oppression.

As we saw, Delphy is concerned with women's liberation from patriarchy understood as family. Hence, a space of freedom would be a space where women are free from the patriarchal labour contract structurally which means, according to Delphy, whether they are married or not. The problem with this free/unfree dichotomy is that it creates a totalising theory of freedom based on the totalising analysis of oppression and a totalising construction of its subject. The simultaneity of freedom and unfreedom is not thinkable. The subject of freedom will be necessarily homogeneous as it will depend on a logic of solidarity which relies on the theoretical bet that a common oppression automatically leads to a common interest. Therefore, it relates to Bourdieu's claim that "the movement from probability to reality, from theoretical class to practical class, is never given" (1987, p. 7). Hence, there are two theoretical options. First, some women are materially excluded from this conception of freedom as liberation, so they will not recognise themselves in the 'common oppression=common interests' logic. Second, they are theoretically and falsely assimilated to the construction of the category of women following the logic mentioned above. In other words, everything that does not fit in the theoretical framework is excluded or assimilated. Indeed, Delphy challenged every theoretical frame which put the analysis of patriarchy somewhere else. For instance, she rejected any ideological level of analysis which was not strictly related to any economic dimension, because she considered it to be idealist. And because this analysis of patriarchy is the basis of class formation, if one is not present in the analysis, one is not present in the class system either. In the next part, I will focus on another author, Kate Millett, who also provided an analysis of patriarchy.

## **Kate Millett and sexual freedom**

In her book *Sexual politics*, Kate Millet introduced her conception of patriarchy as being “twofold: male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger” (Millet, 2016, p. 25). She focused on the first point as being the social system on which male domination over females is based. She aimed to highlight that the relationships between the sexes are political as “politics shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangement whereby one group of persons is controlled by another” (Millet, 2016, p. 23). Therefore, she denaturalised sexual difference. Drawing her analysis of sex by analogy to race, she argued that “sex is a status category with political implications” (Millet, 2016, p. 24). Moreover, Millett claimed that patriarchy also has an impact on the sociological and on the psychological, through the categories of ‘temperament’ (psychological), ‘role’ (sociological) and ‘status’ (political). Like in a chain, the temperament entails the role which entails the status. One of the powers of patriarchy is to legitimise this ideology through the idea that the hierarchy between the sexes is natural. However, drawing on Stoller and Money, Millet gave a theory of sex and gender. She argued that “it must be admitted that many of the generally understood distinctions between the sexes in the more significant areas of role and temperament, not to mention status, have in fact essentially cultural, rather than biological, bases” (Millet, 2016, p. 28) because “the temperament distinctions created in patriarchy do not appear to originate in human nature, those of role and status still less” (Millet, 2016, p. 27). For Millett, gender is cultural and stands for the “personality structure in terms of sexual category” (Millet, 2016, p. 29). Moreover, she argued that gender “was learned through ‘early socialization’ as well as ‘adult experience’ in the social environment” (Repo, 2017, p. 80), thus, “patriarchy was upheld by the violence practiced through the socialization of the sexes into roles” (Repo, 2017, p. 79). Then, there is a sort of passive consent to patriarchy, an “interiorization of patriarchal ideology” (Millet, 2016, p. 54) even if patriarchy is also based upon economic exploitations and (sexual) violence.

Moreover, For Millett, the family is the major patriarchal unit, especially because it is the main vehicle of socialisation. However, contrary to Delphy, Millett did not only focus on the economic dimension of the family as a mode of production but also on sexuality. Indeed, as the name of the book suggests, “politics itself, properly understood, is sexual at its core” (MacKinnon, 2016, p. ix). In other words, politics is “a family-centered theory of male power that begins in the male-headed household and ends in society, the ‘phallic state’, and the international order.” (MacKinnon, 2016, p. ix) Therefore, for Millett, patriarchy is a wide phenomenon, if not the primary phenomenon of domination whose “dangers and oppression are not easily done away with. But surely, the very future of freedom requires it-not only for women but *for humanity itself.*” (Millett, 2016, p. xxiii; my emphasis) The freedom mentioned by Millett is a sexual freedom which is a “freedom of choice” (Millett, 2016, p. 136) and which she also associates indistinctively with autonomy and independence. Hence, in her case, freedom is also pre-defined or assumed and her goal is “the *attainment* of a measure of sexual freedom for women” (2016, p. 63; my emphasis). The means to reach this freedom is a sexual revolution whose aim “would be a permissive *single standard of sexual freedom*” (Millett, 2016, p. 62, my emphasis). When Kate Millett refers to a ‘single standard of sexual freedom’, I think that she refers to an ideal of ungendered freedom, which means a freedom where every individual is equal and freed from hierarchical relationships. This argument can also be supported by her goal of “enlarging *human* freedom” (Millett, 2016, p. xxviii; my emphasis). For her, the problem of what she called ‘the first phase of sexual revolution’ which started in 1830 and ended in 1930 is that it did not end in a revolution because its impulse of liberation ended in reforms and civil liberties like suffrage. Also, this revolution lacked a real change in the habits of mind and then on patriarchy as an encompassing structure, because “for a sexual revolution to proceed further it would have required a truly radical social transformation-the alteration of marriage and the family as they had been known throughout history” (Millet, 2016, p. 157). To put it differently, there can be fewer actions of domination and actions of submission under the domination of patriarchy, but the domination of patriarchy still exists as well as actions of

domination and submission. Thus, patriarchy was reformed instead of destroyed. Indeed, the major change that a revolution should bring is “a gathering impetus toward freedom from rank, or prescriptive role, sexual or otherwise” (Millett, 2016, p. 363). Nevertheless, Millet described a counterrevolution period that, sometimes, in the name of sexual freedom tended to assimilate this sexual freedom with a masculine freedom, especially through Freudian theories. Then, a sexual revolution must open to a total liberation “from the sexual-social category and conformity to sexual stereotype” (Millett, 2016, p. 363). In other words, a liberation from sexual difference. In Millet’s view, freedom is an ideal of autonomy, of free choice, that “posits the goal of ‘retir[ing] sex from the harsh realities of politics” (MacKinnon, 2016, p. xiii) by being liberated from gender as what makes the distinction between humans.

However, Millet’s conception of freedom as liberation posits several problems. First, and as Catharine MacKinnon noted, Millet’s “apparent assumption that freeing women sexually will produce no more sexual subordination and will destroy patriarchy seems misplaced, at best optimistic.” (2016, p. xiii) Indeed, as I showed previously, freedom is here considered as an ungendered ideal, it implies a negation, and more precisely the negation of the source of alienation, namely patriarchy. In Millet’s theory, freedom is an ideal that concerns both society (equality) and the individual (freedom). Basically, what does it mean to be free in an equal society. However, “*Sexual Politics* does not theorize equality extensively” (MacKinnon, 2016, p. xvi), or I would add, Millet does not theorise equality positively. In other words, she does not tell us what an equal society is. Rather, her notion of equality is underpinned in her discussion of inequality. In order to explain what it means to be free in an equal society, she described what it means to be unfree in an unequal society. And this is the basis of the construction of women as a subject. Therefore, equality is defined negatively as the absence of the hierarchical differences created by patriarchy. Indeed, the liberation of women’s sexuality will destroy

patriarchy, creating an equality *sine qua non* to sexual freedom or free choice/autonomy (MacKinnon, 2016, p. xvi). What we know about equality and freedom are both defined negatively. A truly free choice can be attained when society will be freed from patriarchy and when society will be equal. As a result, the only thing we know about a free and equal society, is that this version of society will define the individuals since we do not know anything about what an equal society positively means. That is to say, we do not know what its social organisation is but that it will create a freedom for all without any gender distinctions. Freedom is, then, a universal ideal which is also the value from which one can measure the individuals's commonality/equality. Indeed, for Millett, freedom is defined by a 'single standard', therefore, if a *single standard* (2016, p. 62) is for everyone regardless of gender, it is a claim of universality as opposed to one of particularity<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, for Millett, the problem is not sexual freedom or free choice as such, rather it is the unequal reality which is underpinned by the reality of sexual freedom under the rule of patriarchy. Therefore, what is implied in her theory is the hypothetical equal individuals all defined by their common (single standard) freedom "uncorrupted by the crass and exploitative economic bases of traditional sexual alliances" (Millett, 2016, p. 62).

I submit that under her theory of freedom as liberation lies what Georg Simmel called a quantitative or numerical individualism (1971, p. 224), which implies that individuality is characterised by a "singleness [*Einzelheit*]" (Simmel, 1971, p. 224), which means that a single criterion defines personhood. An example of it could be *reason* that serves to define mankind during the Enlightenment-and that Wollstonecraft tried to enlarge to women so it could be truly universal. In Millett's case, I submit that the *single standard* is an *equality* of the capacity to

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<sup>22</sup> It is particularly visible when she speaks of "enlarging human freedom" (Millett, 2016, p. xxviii) or "humanity itself" (Millett, 2016, p. xxiii)

make free choices. Accordingly, individuality is defined by this universal idea of freedom. What is described negatively in Millet's theory of freedom as liberation, is a liberation from patriarchy, hence, a sort of uprooting from the familial structure. The uprooting from what was creating the gender hierarchical distinctions, patriarchy, towards a quantitative individualism. I choose the word 'uprooting' because I think that it symbolizes and illustrates well Millet's freedom as liberation. Indeed, as she argued, sexuality in the family (patriarchy) is the root from which other patriarchal structures are derived. Hence, this uprooting cuts the possibility of derivation of patriarchy to other spheres of life. And it is precisely this 'uprooting' that MacKinnon described as optimistic. However, the problem with a notion of freedom as liberation where liberation means uprooting is that it does not acknowledge the fact that it can also be the source of oppression for certain people. Indeed, for instance, slavery is characterised by the uprooting of the black population from Africa (Michel, 2020). Hence, according to the situation uprooting can also be an oppression. Moreover and as we saw with the discussion of Delphy, family is not lived in the same way by every woman. Indeed, for certain communities, family is also a refuge. Historically, black families "produced another meaning of blackness, one rooted in racial pride and struggle." (Berrey, 2009, p. 66) Furthermore, as Patricia Hill Collins showed, black families were not like the white patriarchal ideal. On the contrary, the family was often the root of a racial resistance that "begins at home" (Berrey, 2009, p. 65). Historically, in the USA, black women and especially mothers were in a tension between oppression, and agency (Collins, 2008, p. 57). Additionally, the experience of slavery pushed black people to create another understanding of family as an extended family that relies on the community, solidarity, fictive kin, and what Patricia Hill Collins called othermothers (2008, p. 192, 205). On top of that, in those families, black women's relationship with work and political economy was quite different from white women, as well as black

daughters' socialisation which differs from the ideal patriarchal white middle-class family (Collins, 2008, p. 57).

In Delphy and Millett's work, we can see that a quantitative individualism lies under their theory of freedom as liberation. Indeed, the subject of the future freedom is homogeneous according to criteria that both define their oppression and their freedom. Hence, we are still in the paradigm of a space of freedom and one of unfreedom which are antagonists and where the fly from oppression to freedom is theorised for those who share the condition of oppression described as patriarchy. The formula I used to summarize Delphy's freedom of liberation, *a common oppression creates common interests* could be augmented with my discussion of Millet's work by *a common oppression creates common interests which create a common universal individuality*. In the next part, I will focus on postmodern feminism with the example of Judith Butler, whose ideals of freedom could be characterised by what Simmel called qualitative individualism (1971, p. 224).

## **Freedom and Identity**

In the last part of this chapter, I will mainly analyse Judith Butler's work in two different ways. First, I intend to use, what is called by some, the first Butler (Bourcier, 2018, p. 665), namely the one of *Gender Trouble*, in order to make my critique of the above-mentioned theories of freedom as liberation more systematic. Basically, my aim is to show that freedom cannot be thought about from the standpoint of the subject. In other words, the right question to ask is not 'who is the subject of freedom?'. Secondly, I will focus on the second Butler with her ontological turn (Charpentier, 2018), where she suggested an ontology of vulnerability at the basis of her work. I

will try to see if this Butlerian proposition could be a way to think about freedom out of identity politics and the problems it bears.

### **Butler and the subjective trap**

Before going straightforward to Judith Butler and especially *Gender Trouble*, I want to introduce analytic categories that will help me to make a more systematic critique of the authors mentioned in the precedent parts of this chapter. My analytic frame is first composed of three categories which are *sameness*, *different* and *différend* (or struggle, dispute). By *sameness*, I mean the commonality of human beings, or more precisely, every theory that is interested to find a commonality between individuals, something that can express their sameness. For instance, it can be the faculty of reason as the common denominator of (hu)mankind in the Enlightenment. By *different*, I mean what separates people from each other whatever it is. In other words, what makes them distinct from each other. By *différend*, I mean what makes people's difference with one another a dispute, a struggle. For example, it can be exemplified by the *différend*, the struggle between men and women, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and so on. The particularity of the *différend* is that the relationship between the two parties is hierarchical. Here, what is interesting to see is that the content of *different* is changed by its articulation with *différend* or *sameness*. When it is articulated with *sameness*, the differences between individuals are not supposed to be relevant to the social organisation of society. It is what can be found in ideals of universality where everyone is equal before the law, regardless of their gender, race, sexuality etc. However, when *different* is articulated with *différend*, hence, the social organisation tends to be organised by relationships of domination such as patriarchy.

As I showed previously, Mary Wollstonecraft and Drucilla Cornell's theories of freedom are directed toward an idea(l) of personhood while Christine Delphy and Kate Millet's are directed against patriarchy. Hence, in both cases, there is an idea of sameness/unity. One that is established



by a universal idea of personhood for the former, and one that is established by a description or definition of patriarchy for the latter. Accordingly, I suggest that,

- (i). For **Wollstonecraft**, the construction of the free subject is characterised by an idea of *sameness*, of unity of human beings that is hermetic to *different* and *différend*. In other words, the idea of reason cannot be articulated with the *different*, because this *difference* in customs, that there a sex in souls, is the cause of the *différend*.
- (ii). For **Cornell**, the free subject is characterised both by *sameness* and *different* but is hermetic to the *différend*. Here, *different* and *différend* are not mutual to each other precisely because the imaginary domain is what enables individuation for everyone and that leads to the *same* personhood where everyone has an equal freedom of personality.
- (iii). In **Delphy's** work, the construction of the subject of freedom as *sameness*, unity, is done according to the *différend*, against patriarchy. Therefore, there is a relationship between *différend* (patriarchy) as constitutive of *sameness* (women) without *different*. The difference nor the *différend* between women is taken into account. Hence, *différend* is in a relationship with *sameness* and not with *different*.
- (iv). For **Millett**, it is a bit like Delphy, however, her definition of patriarchy is less rigid than hers. Hence, again, the *différend* creates the *sameness* which is a unity that could hypothetically be more inclusive of the *different* as she does not give a definition of the content of her idea of an equal society.

Moreover, what this categorisation shows is, first that the idea of the unity of the subject-towards personhood or against patriarchy-is constitutive of the possibility to think about a freedom as liberation for women. Second, we can see two understandings of the unity of the subject emerge that I characterised as 1) *unity as identity or assimilation*, and 2) *unity as inclusion*. The first model of unity is illustrated by Wollstonecraft and Delphy, the second one by Drucilla Cornell and a bit by Millett who could more or less be considered as in between the two models. Moreover, we can see that these models of unity assume different articulations of sameness/different/différend. Indeed, Wollstonecraft and Delphy do not have the same articulation but have the same model of unity. Thus, it could be argued that a subject-centred freedom as liberation does always fall into one of these two models. It is a statement that can be supported by Iris Marion Young's argument that there are two "competing paradigms of liberation" (1990, p. 158), the first is an ideal of

assimilation, and the second is a politics of difference, as I noted in my discussion of Drucilla Cornell.

At the beginning of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argued that, in feminist theory, “the qualification for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended” (2006, p. 2). According to what I have analysed throughout this chapter, one could say the same about freedom; namely that the qualification for being a subject must first be met before freedom can be extended. In other words, this qualification answers the question ‘who is the subject of freedom?’. Therefore, the question is, more precisely, ‘who is (represented) in the space of freedom?’. Women were/are not, hence, the means to attain this space is to interrogate the condition for being a subject as well as what restrains certain people to attain this space and subjecthood. The theoretical work of the authors that I discussed was about the construction of the subject of freedom. Moreover, as Judith Butler argued, “the political construction of the subject proceeds with certain legitimacy and exclusionary aims” (2006, p. 3). For Butler, the problem is the construction of the subject of feminism. That is to say, the problem, for her, is the postulation of an identity which is often fixed. When it comes to the question of freedom, I assume that the problem is the same. On one hand, the problem of the unity of the women subject as identity or assimilation was exposed in my discussion of Delphy and Millett. On the other hand, the problem of unity as inclusion was also highlighted in my discussion of Cornell’s work. On that latter point, following Butler, I submit that “it would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of ‘women’ that simply needs to be filled in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to become complete.” (2006, p. 20-21) In the first case of women as identity/assimilation, like in the work of Wollstonecraft, there is the defence of a “pregendered ‘person’ characterised as freedom” (Butler, 2006, p. 28). In the second case of women as inclusion, like in Cornell’s work, there is the defence of the whatever/however gendered person/sexuate being under the ideal of universal personhood, characterised as freedom. In both cases, the united subject whether it is through

assimilation or inclusion is the epistemological framework from which freedom can be thought of in theory, as free choice, autonomy etc., and in practice, as the means to attain this theoretical ideal, through liberation, regardless of its content and form. Which means whether it is through reform like in Wollstonecraft and Cornell, or in a more revolutionary way like in Delphy and Millett.

Therefore, the problem with the theories of freedom that I analysed throughout the chapter is that they start from the identity of the subject, whether it is in a more individualist or collective way. In response to that, subject-centred feminism, and one could add, theory of freedom, Butler suggested making those questions start from what could be called an ontology of vulnerability.

### **Ontology of Vulnerability**

For Butler, the question of vulnerability/precariousness is important because it is ontological, ethical, and political. According to her, “community emerges out of the recognition that vulnerability is a mode of existence not only for oneself but for all others as well, that new forms of community emerge through the avowal of a ‘common human vulnerability’” (Mills, 2015, p. 46) Hence, vulnerability/precariousness is an existential concept that defines a common condition because we are all subject to mortality. On the other hand, precarity is a political concept that “designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death.” (Butler, 2009, p. 21-22) In other words, we all share a condition of vulnerability, yet this vulnerability is unequally distributed. Accordingly, the question, for Butler, is ‘how to make life more livable?’, and, on the ontological level “what is a life?” (Butler, 2009, p. 1). In order to make her point, she argued in favour of a “new bodily ontology” which considers that “the body is exposed to socially and politically articulated forces as well as to claims of sociality” and, she adds, “it is the differential allocation of precarity that [...] forms the point of departure of rethinking of bodily ontology” (Butler, 2009, p. 2-3). To summarise, Butler took the question of life as a point

of departure, which implies a tension between the *common* human vulnerability (precariousness) that emerges with life itself and a *differential*, unequal distribution of precarity. We are in front of a tension between equality as precariousness and inequality as precarity. The existential situation is equal, the political one is not.

For Butler, the problem is that our norms produce a frame of recognition that limits the ontological status of humanity. In other words, who will be recognized as human and who will not. Ontology is given to those who fall in the frame of recognition, in the norms; and ontology is denied for those who fall outside those norms of recognition. Therefore, because precariousness is common to all humans (Butler, 2020), “the recognition of shared precariousness introduces strong normative commitments to equality and invites a more robust universalising of rights that seeks to address basic human needs.” (Butler, 2009, p. 21-22) In other words, a generalised precariousness implies normative consequences, or an ethical imperative (Butler, 2009, p. 33). However, this ethical imperative implies a relationality between subjects. In order to make her point, Butler takes Levinas’s ethics where the ‘I’ is always constituted by the ‘Other’. This is why, for Butler, autonomy is a false question since we are always dependent on others. Nevertheless, the question of community remains, how the common shared condition of vulnerability bears the potential to create a community? And what about the risk to erase the singularity of a certain condition of precarity? As an answer, Butler stated that the “fact of singularizing exposure, which follows from bodily existence, is one that can be reiterated endlessly, it constitutes a collective condition, characterizing us all equally” (2005, p. 35). In other words, and as Catherine Mills had it, singularity before equality means substitutability<sup>23</sup> (2015, p. 59). More precisely, “substitutability

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<sup>23</sup> For Catherine Mills, the paradox between difference and substitutable in Butler comes right from her Hegelian inspired ethic of the subject. There is a risk of “a kind of totalisation that says, despite our differences, we are all human, that is, vulnerable.” (Mills, 2015, p. 59). In other words, our singularity is subsumed under a general totalising category of vulnerability. The common denominator to our singularities takes the advantage over those singularities. Therefore, the singularity does not matter much since all of them fall back into the category of vulnerability.

becomes the mechanism by which we are morally bound to others [... and] part of this substitution is that as humans, we have certain characteristics in common” (Mills, 2015, p. 59). Indeed, as Butler emphasised, “precariousness underscores our radical substitutability and anonymity” (2009, p. 14).

Therefore, the problem with Butler’s ontology becomes clearer precisely with this notion of substitutability. First, this problem could be raised from the moment Butler emphasised the ‘ethical imperative’. Indeed, because precariousness is common to all, we do not know who has an ethical imperative to whom? This entails the question of “by what measure are vulnerabilities apprehended in their (in)equality?” (Vij, 2019, p. 516) In other words, what is the measure? Who measures? The equality constitutive of the notion of precariousness is what Tiffany Tsantsoulas (2018) called a quantitative equality that is characterised by its anonymity and abstraction. Indeed, as we saw above, singularity is substitutable, hence anonymous. In other words, it is not X and Y are equal, but Z and Z’ are equal because they are the same. The qualitative content of singularity does not matter much since it falls back into the category of precariousness. Precariousness transforms X and Y into Z and Z’. Singularities are indistinguishable units of precariousness. Thus, precariousness taken as a quantitative equality, as anonymity, bears the risk to be characterised by its political illustration in precarity. However, the question of the measure remains. What constitutes precariousness? Basically, precarity as the substitutable singularity takes its content from a historically located context. In other words, a specific type of precarity, a singularity, can become paradigmatic and then, the scale from which equality and inequality are measured. The frame of recognition. For instance, in Marxism, the class condition is what represents the totalising figure of precariousness. Moreover, because precariousness is related to substitutability, the paradigmatic figure of precarity can subsume the others. Otherness, differences, are integrated within sameness. What is substitutable is substitutable to something, a figure. Substitutability does not start from nothingness, it needs a point of departure from which the substitution can be made. On the theoretical side, the paradigmatic figure of precarity becomes the scale, as I said, but then,

also the analogy by which one can express or describe a precarity. This heuristic function of analogy bears two risks. First, it can empty the paradigmatic figure in order to put the emphasis on another figure of precarity by analogy. From a singularity to a general scale, it becomes an abstraction, emptied of its materiality. As Sam Bourcier argued, Butler “proposed a radical dematerialization within the discursive and performative field.” (2018, p. 682) It is something which is visible in the feminist texts that made use of the women-slave analogy or race-gender analogy in order to describe women’s condition of oppression, but I will explore this point in detail in the next chapter. Second, the paradigmatic figure is the universal, the commonality under which differences are integrated as the basis of community. In other words, community equals commonality. Moreover, these two risks are not exclusive to one another. The first risk of emptying a category, a singular precarity from its singularity, can be a means to emphasise the constitution of a new category that can be constituted as exclusive. The mutuality of the two risks is, I think, well-illustrated by the use of the slave metaphor in feminist theory, but we will discuss that in the next chapter.

Accordingly, I suggest that Butler’s ontology of vulnerability has the same limits as the former identity-related ontology that we analysed in feminist theory. Namely, it also falls back into the model of unity as assimilation or unity as inclusion. It does not mean that they are strictly the same, they can differ in degrees and the later model of unity as inclusion is more context-based, yet they both produce a force of unification that tends to, at least theoretically, subsume the particular under an idea of the general. This thesis will be investigated more in detail in the next chapter by a discussion of inclusive feminist theories such as Iris Marion Young’s and intersectionality.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I have analysed the basic theoretical ground of different theories of freedom within feminist theory. First, I tried to show that freedom was predefined as autonomy,

independence, or choice, rather than fully conceptualised. This concept “functioned as a kind of mantra of liberation, a given ideal” (Grosz, 2010, p. 139) that is to be attained. As a result, the question was not ‘what is freedom’, but rather ‘who/what is the subject of freedom and how to attain this freedom?’. I tried to show that these two questions (who and how) are linked, as, put together, they ask the question of women and their coalition. Accordingly, we first saw that feminist theorists, from different and sometimes antagonistic traditions, chose to focus on the notion of identity. Two models of the subjects’ unity emerged from these theories. First, a model of unity as identity or assimilation, like it is the case, for instance, in the work of Christine Delphy or Mary Wollstonecraft. Second, a model of unity as inclusion as was the case in Cornell’s work. Against those identity-based theories of freedom, I turned to the work of Judith Butler and her critique of identity politics. While I follow and agree with Butler on her critique of identity as well as her critique of the notion of autonomy, I argued that the ontology of vulnerability that she offers raises the same problems as the identity-based ontology. Namely, it can fall back under the two models of unity that I described. Therefore, I submit that the problem of freedom cannot be solved within the identity versus conditions of existence binary, precisely because I submit that these two propositions share the same goal: namely, creating a unified collective subject before even thinking about freedom, yet as its condition. In other words, the epistemic-ontological root of freedom, its condition, is a unified collective subject that can be achieved under one of the two models of unity. I will not strictly discuss the question of coalition/plurality in the next chapter but in chapter V. Rather, in the next chapter, I will discuss more extensively these two models, unity as sameness/assimilation and unity as inclusion, from a decolonial perspective. In other words, I will analyse the modality of the creation of the collective subject from which freedom is supposed to start. I will argue that if one wants to ground freedom on an idea of the unified

subjects, regardless of the model (assimilation or inclusion), it implies an appropriation<sup>24</sup>. I will start to dig into the coloniality of freedom. In other words, I will highlight that when freedom is conditioned to a universal idea of the subject or of the organised collective subject, it has unfreedom as a corollary.

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<sup>24</sup> This idea of appropriation can already be seen in Butler's political use of the category of precarity. As Sam Bourcier argued, Butler "extends the 'we' of the 'poor' in such a way that 'we' can be included in it or even substitute to them" (2018, p. 678-9).



## **Chapter II: Freedom as Liberation: The Ontological Problem**

In the previous chapter, I have unmasked the question that was underpinned in the feminist theories of freedom as liberation that I have analysed. In those theories from different traditions, the question is always ‘whose freedom?’ or ‘who is the subject of freedom?’ without an in-depth analysis of the question ‘what is freedom?’. Consequently, there is something unquestioned about freedom. There is an ontological presupposition that freedom starts from the subject whether collective or not. Thus, the problem is about the construction of the subject of freedom. As I have shown in the first chapter, when freedom is conceptualised as such it is about an adaptation or a correction to what freedom already is. For instance, women should have the same freedom as men. The basis and the starting point of freedom is then a masculine freedom that needs to be reformed by considering new subjects. This actualised freedom is supposed to liberate women from oppression. The question is then about the subject of freedom as liberation. In order to make this liberation and to make freedom a reality, as I said, the question of the construction of the subject of this freedom is the main point. Therefore, different theories are developed to attain this ideal. It is what I call the instrumental reason of freedom. This reason can be divided into two main categories, as described by Iris Marion Young. There is the assimilation model of liberation and liberation as a politics of difference (Young, 1990, p. 158). Schematically, the first one tends to create a homogeneous subject of freedom and the latter a heterogeneous one. I respectively call them the homogeneous hypothesis and the heterogeneous hypothesis. Accordingly, some theoretical instruments are developed to advocate in favour of one of these hypotheses. In the last chapter, I have started to outline the problem of these two hypotheses. In this chapter, I want to explore these problems from a decolonial perspective. To make my point, I will first analyse the homogeneous hypothesis and what I believe to be its instrument, the slave-metaphor. Thereafter,

I will investigate the heterogeneous hypothesis and its instruments, namely the politics of difference and intersectionality. Finally, I will try to show that these subject-centred theories of freedom as liberation are based on a colonial ontology and that rather than always searching for the good subject of freedom, one should ask what freedom is. This chapter will outline one of the hypotheses of this thesis, that freedom makes the subject appear and makes it come into being. In other words, that freedom's being coincides with the subject's appearance, and that freedom's appearance coincides with the subject's being.

## The Homogeneous Hypothesis

In this first section, I will show that, in feminist theory, the necessity of a homogenous body is illustrated by the use of the slave metaphor. Moreover, I will argue that the constitution of women as a One is only possible when other women are excluded from the political body. As Susan Buck-Morss put it, “by the eighteenth century, slavery had become the root metaphor of Western political philosophy, connoting everything that was evil about power-relations”, hence, “freedom, its conceptual antithesis, was considered by Enlightenment thinkers as the highest and universal political value.” (2009, p. 21) To illustrate that, one can think about Rousseau's claim that “man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (2002, p. 156) or Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), even if this expression was not strictly from Hegel<sup>25</sup> but was coined later on by Alexandre Kojève in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1980). However, feminist theory made repetitive uses of this metaphor. Indeed, the slave metaphor and its more contemporary expression in the gender-race analogy is omnipresent in authors like Wollstonecraft, Olympe de Gouges, Kate Millett, Colette Guillaumin or Simone de Beauvoir, who referred to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic in the introduction of *the Second Sex*, in order to define women as

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<sup>25</sup> Hegel used '*Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*' which can be translated as 'Lordship and Bondage'.

the *Absolute Other* (1976, p. 17). In this section, I will analyse the use of the slave metaphor as the instrument to answer the homogeneous hypothesis theory of freedom as liberation.

## **The slave metaphor**

As I said previously, in the history of modern western political thought, the idea of slavery quickly became the, supposedly, antithesis against which to think about freedom. For instance, for philosophers such as Rousseau, “becoming free meant not only adapting the natural state of liberty to the modern world, it also meant ceasing to be a slave.” (Stovall, 2021, p. 105) Moreover, the French thinker Denis Diderot, in the *Encyclopédie*, wrote that “every member of the same species has the right to enjoy it as soon as he is in possession of reason.” (2010, p. 82) This sentence highlights the hiatus between the use of slavery as a metaphor and the reason for the use of this analogy. Indeed, slavery works here as “a metaphor for despotism and oppression of all kinds; Europeans who lack political freedom are in effect slaves.” (Stovall, 2021, p. 106) Hence, one could say that these Enlightenment philosophers understood slavery in a broader sense like it was used by the Greeks or the Romans. Especially since, for instance, the *Code Noir* of 1685 was never mentioned by French philosophers. However, I believe that the use of this metaphor is related to the transatlantic institution of slavery and that it is particularly visible in feminist theory. In the following paragraphs, I will try to show, on a general level, that the use of the slave metaphor tends to create a homogenous subject in feminist theory. Hence that in order to theorise freedom as liberation, its subject needs to be homogenous.

First, I believe that one needs to focus on the difference between slavery as an institution and western women’s condition of existence, in order to understand the meaning of the use of the women-slave analogy. In other words, one has to see what they structurally do not have in common in order to highlight how the commonality is created. If I start the investigation by taking the use of the metaphor with a general understanding of slavery and not related to the specificity

of the transatlantic slave trade, I will need to define what is the structure of slavery in general. Indeed, even if slavery had many historical variations, some scholars like Aurélia Michel (2020) or Claude Meillassoux (1986) tried to find what is in common in every declension of slavery. First, there is “a common reality, about which almost everybody agrees in every language: the slave producer, the seller, the buyer, the slave user himself.” (Michel, 2020, p. 35). Moreover, Michel observed that “every slave leaves their original land” (2020, p. 35), thus, there is no notion or feeling of belonging to a community, a land or something. Moreover, there is an economic dimension that can be characterised as a total labour alienation. Indeed, because there is no feeling and actual belonging, the slave “does not participate to the work necessary to the reproduction of their group” (Michel, 2020, p. 37), not even to their individual reproduction understood as the reproduction of the biological needs of their body through labour. Hence, the slave’s productions “are deviated towards an exterior service.” (Michel, 2020, p. 37) And it is precisely because the slave does not participate to the reproduction of the group that the slave was defined as anti-Kin (Meillassoux, 1986). To put it differently, “because the slave only works for the company that employs him, he breaks the principle of deferred reciprocity within kinship: he cannot engage in kinship because he cannot feed children nor count on them in return at his old age<sup>26</sup>” (Michel, 2020, p. 39). Furthermore, this exclusion was also, as a result, an exclusion from humanity. From this description, we can see that women’s condition of existence in the western world was and still is totally different from the structure of slavery. In fact, western women were characterised by their supposed specific relationship within kinship as a defined role in humanity. Their labour was precisely related to the reproduction of the group they belong to-the reproductive labour. Therefore, I suggest that the claims for freedom were opposite. When it concerns slavery, what was criticized was the *exteriority from humanity* and from the western feminist standpoint and following the colonial frame, what was criticised was necessarily an *interiority within humanity*,

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<sup>26</sup> It is a point which was also highlighted by Angela Davis in *Women, Race & Class* (2019, pp. 1-25), when she discussed slavery in The United States.

precisely because white women were part of humanity. So, an inferior hierarchical interiority within humanity, a double standard.

However, one could argue that the use of this metaphor is just a general analogy that is used to highlight a condition of domination. Even if it is true, I put that the use of the slave metaphor in western feminist theory is specifically related to the transatlantic slave trade. Indeed, if one follows the historicity of this analogy in feminist theory, it goes from the one with slavery during modernity to the analogy with the category of race that started in the 1970s with materialist feminism (Bereni, Chauvin, Jaunait, Revillard, 2012, p. 278) with authors such as Christine Delphy, Collette Guillaumin or Monique Wittig<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, it coincides with the genealogy of race<sup>28</sup> that started with the transatlantic slave trade and that is still present with the category of race. Moreover, the slavery from the transatlantic slave trade is mentioned by philosophers such as Wollstonecraft or Hegel, whose philosophy has the Haitian Revolution as background (Buck-Morss, 2009). Hence, if slavery is totally different from the western women's condition; one could ask why feminists use this metaphor in relation to the transatlantic slave trade.

## **A heuristic metaphor**

Following Guy Bouchard, I suggest that the use of this analogy is primarily heuristic. However, where I do not follow him, is that I believe that there is, to use Aimé Césaire's words, a "choc en

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<sup>27</sup> See the first chapter for the use of this analogy by Delphy and Kate Millett. In *The Straight Mind*, Wittig heavily used this metaphor. For instance, she argued that "[t]he perennality of the sexes and the perennality of slaves and masters proceed from the same belief, and, as there are no slaves without masters, there are no women without men" (2010, p. 2; my translation). In *Sexe, Race et Pratique du pouvoir*, Colette Guillaumin submitted that "[t]he belonging of slaves to their master, the belonging of women to the group of men (and to a man), as a tool, is of the same kind." (2016, p. 39; my translation). In those works, the authors used the slave-metaphor and also made the analogy between race and gender, for instance Guillaumin coined the concept of '*sexage*' on the model of 'esclavage' (slavery). In the introduction of *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir characterized man as the master and women as the slave. For the racial implications of Beauvoir's use of the master-slave dialectic see Broeck, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> I understand race here as the concept that organised the world in racial categories from Euromodernity and that is still organising the world today. There also was an understanding of race before Euromodernity but I am not talking about that. See Nirenberg, 2014.

retour [backlash]” (2004, p. 13) that I think to be the creation of a homogenous subject. The slave-metaphor as a heuristic tool of production of a theory of freedom, also creates a homogeneous subject, like the structure of slavery created a homogeneous collective subject/producer with the figure of the *N\*gro*. Hence, in what follows, I will argue that the use of the slave metaphor illustrates the needs of a homogenous collective subject in order to theorise freedom as liberation. In order to make my point, I will first try to show how slaves were constituted as a homogenous collective. Thereafter, I will hypothesise the ‘*choc en retour*’ and try to prove it in the next part.

As it was shown by many scholars (Williams, 2013; Stickers, 2015; Inikori, 2020), the creation of race as we understand it today is concomitant to the transatlantic slave trade. It was in 1684 that the French traveller, philosopher, and Doctor François Bernier published *Nouvelle division de la terre par les différentes espèces ou races d’homme qui l’habitent* (New division of the earth according to the different species or races of men who inhabit it) in the *Journal des savants*, which was one of the first attempts to divide the earth into different races which each have specific characteristics. These rankings put the Europeans at the top of the hierarchy and Africans at the bottom of it. Moreover, all of this was also concomitant to the expansion of capitalism and mercantile societies as Eric Williams showed in his book *British Capitalism and British Slavery* (2013). What was at the centre of the intersection of capitalism, slavery, and racial theories, was the transatlantic slave trade along with the construction of the figure of the *N\*gro* as well as, in comparison, the one of the *White*. In other words, it is the racial division of the world that is still present today. Indeed, the figure of the *N\*gro* is specific because it is at the intersection of slavery and being black *in* the plantation. Thus, this figure is assimilated to a specific place, the plantation, a social function, slavery, and a race, black. Accordingly, we can start to see a homogeneity that is, *de facto*, created through the specific geographical, social, and racial delimitations of this figure. However, this process of homogenisation is even more visible if one looks at the economic/capitalist dimension of the transatlantic slave trade. From the Caribbean plantations, the slave is defined as “the laboring force

which undertakes the proper functioning of the plantation” (Michel, 2020, p. 118)<sup>29</sup>. They represent an investment which becomes quickly profitable depending on the number of slaves owned by the master. It was the same in the United States where slaves were described as “profitable labor-units” (Davis, 2019, p. 3). The number that makes the profit. This is why, slaves were considered as a *stock of capital*. Therefore, through the social function of the slave, there is a process of dehumanisation which is illustrated by a process of homogenisation with the use of an economic quantitative language. For instance, when one talks about a wheat stock, it represents a totality without individuality and this totality is described by its function in the process of production. Similarly, slaves were considered a homogeneous force of labour that was characterised by its function in the process of production. And this process of homogenisation is a result of the institution of slavery. In fact, “the success of the company is based on its management capacity, and in first place on its capacity to manage the labouring force” (Michel, 2020, p. 123)

Thenceforth, why is the slave metaphor used in feminist theory if women’s condition is not related at all to the slave’s condition? As a drafted response to this question, I follow Guy Bouchard’s hypothesis that the role of the women-slave analogy is first and foremost heuristic. This heuristic dimension can explain why it can be considered as “the matrix of European feminism” (Vergès, 2021, p. 170; my translation). In other words, the formation of the collective subject is made in relation to the objects that create the said condition of slavery, such as marriage (Astell, 1730; Cronan, 1973), education and customs (Wollstonecraft, 2004), the heterosexual family (Delphy, 2013; Millett, 1979) or more globally patriarchy as I showed in the previous chapter. Moreover, as Bouchard showed, throughout history, the category of slave is recognised as a status. Black people “were recognized as slaves, by their master, which was not the case for women.” (1987, p. 135).

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<sup>29</sup> All the quotes from Michel are translated by me.

The status of domination was recognised in the law as white people, men and women, were able to own slaves (Jones-Rogers, 2019). Hence, this creates a separation between civil rights and racial rights. Indeed, if western women could own slaves, it was not because they had civil rights, but because they had racial rights. Furthermore, western women were not constituted as a social category as such, they were part of the aristocracy, bourgeoisie, third-state etc. The heuristic role of the metaphor is both *analytic*, the recognition of a shared condition of domination against the atomisation of women in different classes, and *political*, the constitution of a collective subject that shares the same experience, namely, patriarchy. The slave metaphor is a means, by analogy, to create a political category (women) based on a common experience of domination. Therefore, “as the Black in cotton plantations, the married woman is, against her will, under the absolute power of a master, she is a slave in an almost literal sense.” (Bouchard, 1987, p. 136) And it is precisely because this heuristic role of the metaphor is both analytic and political that there is a *choc en retour* (backlash). Of course, my point is not to argue, that European women were not homogenised by patriarchy. My point is to show that this homogenisation is used to create a collective subject of freedom, to make it come into being. In other words, the force of homogenisation that is present in slavery is not erased by its metaphorical use, rather it is displaced. As the white is constructed against the black, ‘women’ as a category is constructed against and with black.

My hypothesis is that the use of the slave metaphor is marked by what Du Bois called the *color line*<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, the slave is superficially made visible by the analogy, only for a utilitarian, heuristic, purpose, while at the same time, the actual condition of slavery is invisible. The metaphor keeps the process of homogenisation that is used to create the European feminist subject of freedom based on a same experience that is, by analogy, assimilated to the one of slavery. In other words,

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<sup>30</sup> In *The Philadelphia Negro* (1995) and in *The Souls of Black Folk* (2008), W.E.B. Du Bois made popular what Frederik Douglass called before him the *color line*. This line relates a separation between the world as experienced by black people and the world as experienced by white people. It is related to his concept of the *veil* and *double consciousness*, which states that black people can see their world as well as the white world, while white people are only able to see their world as the black world is invisible to them.



the use of the slave metaphor illustrates a reproduction of the racial division of the world. The figure of the *N\*gro* was created as a homogeneous producer who produces the western way of life. Thus, the tool, slavery, creates a homogeneous collective producer, the *n\*gro*. The result is the assimilation of the producer and the tool, *n\*gro*=slavery. Analogically, in western feminism, the (heuristic) tool, the slave metaphor, creates a homogeneous producer, white woman, as the producer of freedom. The result is, also the assimilation of the producer and the tool, women=slavery. Yet, there is a displacement as women are not the producers of wealth accumulation (slavery). By using the metaphor, they empty the content of slavery to replace it with their analysis of women's oppression. The actual conditions and purpose of slavery are invisibilised. For instance, the European way of life as well as their freedom relies on the unfree labour of the slaves (Anker, 2020, 2022). This relationship of continuity between unfreedom and freedom, between the condition of unfreedom that creates freedom is never questioned. Therefore, in the switch from the analytic to the political use of the slave metaphor, the subject stays intact. In the next part, I will try to show how this process of homogenisation that creates a white subject of freedom is at play in feminism.

## **White Freedom**

In order to highlight how the use of the slave metaphor creates a racially homogenous subject, I will first look into one of its inaugural moments with Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In this text, what I call the paradox of the women-slave analogy is made explicit and can be characterised by "an emerging discourse on *humanity* and rights by way of separating 'woman' from 'slave' *in the very move of analogizing their situation.*" (Broeck, 2018, p. 55; my emphasis) In the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft asked, "why do [men] expect virtue from a slave [woman], from a being whom the constitution of civil society has rendered weak, if not vicious?" (2014, p. 73). What is interesting in this sentence is the correlation that Wollstonecraft makes between 'slave' and 'civil society' which expresses well the paradox present in the woman-slave analogy. Indeed, slaves are

made visible where they are not.<sup>31</sup> More precisely, when Wollstonecraft establishes this correlation, she also highlights the fact that European women belong to civil society even if they are subjected to what could be considered as a patriarchal state of exception. By this, I mean that European women belong to society, as opposed to slaves, but they have an exceptional status that is discriminatory, for instance, when it comes to suffrage. It is precisely because western women are part of the civil society that they have an inferior status, because this society, according to Wollstonecraft, is rooted in customs that create women's inferiority. However, when it comes to actual slaves during modernity, this correlation is not possible, simply because they were not considered as subjects, they were an *abjection*, as a rejection from civil society, as I showed in my above discussion of the distinction between slavery and white women's conditions of existence. In other words, white women's subjectivity is objectified but they are not, according to Wollstonecraft, primarily objects in society. Their subjectivity is submitted to a state of exception that objectifies them. The subject of Wollstonecraft's theory of freedom is *within* civil society, and, one could add, the middle class. Following Himani Bannerji, I suggest that the slave metaphor "serves as an interpretive and organized device of text, [...which provides] the *point of departure* for her [Wollstonecraft] reform and utopian proposals." (1997, p. 229; my emphasis) It is the heuristic device that shapes Wollstonecraft's feminist discourse. In other words, and as Sabine Broeck summarised, "the foundational writing of gender as discourse [...] *needs* slavery as an analogy" (2018, p. 56; my emphasis) to emphasise a situation of injustice through the analogy. As a matter of fact, it is the point of departure or the main analogy of several theories of gender<sup>32</sup>. Indeed, it could be argued that if gender inequalities were considered natural, then, a way to emphasise the unjust character of these inequalities was to compare them with the *abject* history of slavery. One can take Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, where she started her phenomenology of gender from

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<sup>31</sup> This observation is true for other feminists such as Christine Delphy or Kate Millett as I showed in the previous chapter, but it is also true for other feminists who uses this metaphor precisely because in the West, women are part of civil society, even if not in the same ways as men. For instance, when Delphy and Millett wrote their text, women had the right to vote.

<sup>32</sup> See footnote 27.

the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, where, as for Wollstonecraft, the woman is compared to the slave, the *Absolute Other*. For Sabine Boeck, we can see, by the use of the Hegelian allegory, “a philosophical premise that, in the tradition of Wollstonecraft and early modern feminism, *displaces* the early modern foundational triangle constellation of (white) *subject*, (white) *object*, and the Black male and female enslaved *abject*.” (2018, p. 109; my emphasis on ‘displaces’) To put it differently, the abject/slave category is erased or made invisible by displacing the word ‘slave’ from the *abject* to the *object*, or what I call the *objectified subject*. This invisibilisation of the abject illustrates the colour line.

The metaphor is the linguistic means by which the original content ‘slave=abject’ is emptied from its meaning. In other words, it makes visible that there is one (white) subjectivity that is divided in two: *man* and *woman*, and it is precisely these subjectivities which are concerned with freedom as liberation. Hence, it reveals the racial distinction that is characterised by the creation of whiteness against black/slave, or more precisely the figure of the *N\*gro*. Thus, we are in front of an *anthropological difference* (white men and white women) that is inside an invisible *ontological difference* (being=white and non-being=non-white). It means that the subject of freedom as liberation needs to be part of being. *I am so I can be free*, which should be understood as I am (part of being) so I can be (have) free(dom). In other words, freedom as a product of liberation, is available if you already are part of being and this being is characterised by its homogeneity. It can only be created by a unified subjectivity, the homogeneous hypothesis, that I call a racially gendered subjectivity, which aims at an even more unified subjectivity, that I call a white humanist subjectivity<sup>33</sup>, understood as the end of patriarchy, without considering its racial dimension.

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<sup>33</sup> It can be illustrated with Drucilla Cornell’s view of freedom as liberation and her ideal of subjecthood that I described in the last chapter.

Another more contemporary example, mentioned by Françoise Vergès in her book *Le ventre des femmes* (2020)<sup>34</sup>, highlights how the use of the slave metaphor creates a racially homogeneous subject of freedom. In 1973, the French newspaper *Le Nouvelle Observateur* published the *Manifesto of the 343*, written by Simone de Beauvoir and signed by 343 women “who had the courage to say, ‘I’ve had an abortion’”, when abortion was illegal in France. The text said that “they [women] are those whose condition is unique in history: human beings who, in modern societies, do not have the free ownership of their body. Until now, *only slaves experienced this condition*” (My emphasis). Even if this manifesto was an important turning point in women’s struggle for the free ownership of their bodies, it “draws a cartography of the struggles that incorporates the social [...] but ignores the racial.” (Vergès, 2020, p. 170) In other words it is an illustration of DuBois’s colour line as the racial is not visible and invisibilised from the perspective of the white world. The manifesto, and the declarations which followed in its aftermath, made visible the patriarchal structure of the State. Abortion was considered as a State taboo while “a million of women were aborting every year in clandestine conditions, and it was working-class women-workers, employees-who were mostly victims of ‘butchery’ abortions” (Vergès, 2020, p. 171). However, a few months before, abortion was not a State taboo in French Overseas departments and especially at the island of La Réunion. On February 23, 1973, thirty women from La Réunion, testified at a trial against forced abortions and sterilisations of which they were victims. Therefore, the “lifting of the taboo, the denunciation of the hypocrisy and of the patriarchal violence is grounded on the erasure of another State violence, that targets women of color.” (Vergès, 2020, p. 171) These events and the manifesto reveal that the slave metaphor is used as a tool in order to create a racially and geographically homogenous subject. In the manifesto, the women-slave analogy is used as the means to justify the political struggle for freedom as liberation. It creates a collective experience of domination that is the basis of the creation of the collective subject that aims to enjoy freedom. However, it also

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<sup>34</sup> All the quotes from Vergès are translated by me.

shows a cartography of freedom that is ontologically rooted on a racial and geographic division within the same nation-state.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the forced abortions in La Réunion were not mentioned at all in the manifesto, while it was a result of the control of the colonial and former enslaved body. In other words, the enslaved body is used as a metaphor but its actuality, which is manifest in the events of La Réunion, is invisible. There is a displacement from the abject to the objectified subject, as the experience of the abject is not part of the collective shared experience that creates the subject of freedom. The paradigmatic and maybe more extreme figure of this feminist freedom as liberation would be what François Vergès called *civilisational feminism* (2019, p. 67), where freedom becomes a homogenisation via a process of assimilation to the West. To put it differently, to liberate the Global South by assimilating it to the West and its values.

The problem is not the struggle for the free disposal of one's body, but it is how the subject of this freedom is created. The free disposal of one's body concerns both the women who were doing clandestine abortions as well as those, from La Réunion, who were victims of forced abortion. However, by the use of the slave metaphor as both the analytic and political means of the struggle, a white subject of freedom is created and, as a result, the freedom aimed at is also penetrated by the color line. Thus, in western feminism, the slave metaphor is the illustration of an instrumental reason (both analytic and political) that creates a relation of automaticity between liberation and freedom and that realizes the homogeneous hypothesis. In the next part, I will focus on the heterogeneous hypothesis.

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<sup>35</sup> The French nation-state has a specific colonial history, but as DuBois argued, "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line" (2007, p. 3). The geographical-racial division can be seen even within the same city as well as in overseas territories. In Europe the color line can be exemplified by the colonies but also by the Jewish who were also racialised (Goldstein, 2020). In the United-States, for instance, people from Puerto Rico are citizens but do not have the right to vote for the president.

## The Heterogeneous Hypothesis

In the previous part of this chapter, I have analysed the use of the slave metaphor in feminist theory to justify and conceptualise an idea of freedom. This ideal of freedom can be assimilated, as I said, to what Iris Marion Young called a liberation as assimilation. In the second part of this chapter, I intend to analyse what Young called liberation as difference or inclusion which are the instruments to support the heterogeneous hypothesis. I chose to focus on Young as her conception of difference, I think, encompasses Cornell's and Butler's conception of freedom that I have described in the first chapter. Following the decolonial framework that I have used, I will show that this ideal of freedom as liberation is still rooted in a colonial matrix. In other words, liberation as assimilation and liberation as difference as the two faces of the same coin which forms what I call freedom as liberation. To make my point, I will first analyse Iris Marion Young's politics of difference that, I will argue, tends to create an equivalence between differences and ultimately make them analogous with each other; consequently, following the logic of gender-race analogy. Then I will focus on the notion of intersectionality which, I will argue, displaces the problem instead of solving it. My aim is to show that, like the ideal of liberation as assimilation, liberation as difference makes the conceptualisation of freedom precedes action, which leads to an (Eurocentric) identitarian conceptualisation of freedom as sovereignty<sup>36</sup>, even if the former is homogeneous and the latter heterogeneous, or essentialist and anti-essentialist.

### Iris Marion Young's Politics of Difference

In her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), Iris Marion Young argued for a paradigm of liberation embedded in a politics of difference. For her, the assimilationist model creates an "ideal

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<sup>36</sup> By 'freedom as sovereignty', I mean that freedom is an attribute of the sovereign subject. It explains why the question was about the subject of freedom rather than what freedom is.

of a universal humanity without social group differences [which] allows privileged groups to ignore their own group specificity” (Young, 1990, p. 165). In other words, this ideal is blind to differences and is not specific enough on how to fight inequalities and injustice, hence, it is problematic. However, I will argue that Young’s ideal of liberation as a politics of difference is also problematic because of her radical anti-essentialist view on differences that, I will show, tends to make social groups substitutable precisely because she desubstantialises these groups<sup>37</sup>.

First, Young places her politics of difference within the frame of radical democratic pluralism as theorised by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (1985) amongst others. This democratic ideal posits an “equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups” (Young, 1990, p. 163). There is supposed to be equal access to political participation and deliberation so society can change and become more just. In this model, group differences have a political significance that will lead to the betterment of society and *liberate* everyone, hence, making them *free*. Moreover, a key point for Young is to understand difference as relational and anti-essentialist. According to her, difference “emerges not as a description of the attribute of a group, but as a function of the relations between groups and the interaction of groups with institutions” (Young, 1990, p. 171). She also described these social groups as affinity groups as, I will be part of the group “I feel the most comfortable” with, with the people “who are more familiar” “in a given social situation” (Young, 1990, p. 172). This hypothetically means that one person could simultaneously be part of two social groups or one and another one regarding the social situation. Put differently, there is a *fluidity* within social groups. Indeed, Young argued that an essentialist view “freezes the experienced *fluidity* of social relations by setting up rigid inside-outside distinctions among groups [...] encouraging conflict and parochialism” (2000, p. 99; my emphasis). For instance, the group of women is differentiated by race, sexuality, nationality etc. Thus, “there is no collective entity”

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<sup>37</sup> This discussion follows my discussion of Butler’s ontology of vulnerability in Chapter I, where I showed that it also tends to desubstantialise singularities.

but individuals and their relationship with each other (Young, 2000, p. 89-90). To summarise, Iris Marion Young's view of freedom as liberation relies on a politics of difference which is based on the affirmation and participation of social groups in the public debate and political institutions. Furthermore, social groups do not have essence or substance (Young, 2000, pp. 81-120) but are characterised by their relationality and their plasticity<sup>38</sup>. However, while I am sympathetic to Young's attention to not naturalising social groups and identities, I think her anti-essentialism is problematic in two ways. First, it is Eurocentric and bears the risk to impose on some social groups a European/modern view of what they are and/or should be. Second, I think this anti-essentialism tends to make social groups interchangeable which also opens the door to the slave-metaphor or the gender-race analogy that I have criticized previously.

In his book *The Invention of the Americas* (1995), Enrique Dussel argued that the 'discovery' of the Americas is not an encounter with the Other as such, but rather an eclipse or a covering of the Other. For him, "the Indian was not discovered as Other, but subsumed under categories of the Same. This Indian was known beforehand as Asiatic and known again in the face-to-face encounter and so denied as Other, *covered over*" (Dussel, 1995, p. 32). The Other acquired a meaning when it became part of the European world, regardless of what it was before. 'Same' does not mean that for the Europeans, Indians were of the same value. They were considered primitive, while the European *ego cogito* was first formed as an *ego conquiro*, an 'I conquer' (Dussel, 1995). For Dussel, conquest is a covering up of the other, a suppression of Alterity. The Indians became the periphery of the European centre. Moreover, in virtue of being an 'I conquer', the European ego was defined by its plasticity, its universality, its possibility to become and to own everything<sup>39</sup>, by "the infinity of its possibilities of transformation." (Ajari, 2021, p. 109). Indeed, "[w]hiteness is marked by the

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<sup>38</sup> By plasticity I mean "the capacity of a given body or system to generate new form, whether internally or through external intervention" (Schuller & Gill-Peterson, 2020, p. 20). However, when plasticity is generated through external intervention, I call it the process of plasticisation. It is, as I understand it, a synonym of anti-essentialism.

<sup>39</sup> About anti-essentialism or plasticity and modernity, see Tilley (2017), Jackson (2016), Nunn (2019).



capacity for self-making and moving forward through time, whereas the racialized body is consigned to the fate of being made to move by others.” (Schuller & Gill-Peterson, 2020, p. 3) On the other hand, the racialised body was subjected to a process of plasticisation, not on the individual level but on the one of population/group (Jackson, 2016; Schuller & Gill-Peterson, 2020, p. 8). This plasticisation “is the fundamental violation of enslavement” (Jackson, 2016, p. 118) as it makes bodies interchangeable. The Euromodern ego is plastic and can impose a process of plasticisation on populations. The former is sovereign the latter is not. This means that it imposes a process of transformation on populations that are considered formless, without history, *without essence*. Accordingly, I suggest that Iris Marion Young’s politics of difference is still embedded in the coloniality of this (essentialist) anti-essentialism<sup>40</sup>, precisely because she considers social groups as plastic, without substance, then, somehow equivalent as ‘non-essential’ is the category that encompasses all social groups. My point is not to say that Young’s theory is an attempt to reproduce a plasticisation of the population as a biopolitics, but rather that the epistemological foundation of her theory is embedded in this colonial matrix. To me, it is particularly visible through her conceptualisation of identity and difference, within which, I will argue, social groups are interchangeable.

First, it should be emphasised that Young does not make any precision or distinction when she argued in favour of an anti-essentialist understanding of social groups. Indeed, the questions of what essence are we talking about, who and what made these essences, are never asked. It is the case precisely because Young’s theory lacks historical/material depth in her analysis. In order to build up her ideal of liberation based on a politics of difference, she sometimes mentions women’s rights, Indigenous rights or language rights for non-English speakers without any distinction (1990,

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<sup>40</sup> I take the idea of essentialist anti-essentialism from Lewis Gordon (2012). It means that it is by virtue of its universality that this anti-essentialism is essentialist. There is something which determines or causes the possibility of anti-essentialism. This is also why anti-essentialism was criticised for this contradiction; see Nunn, 2019.

p. 173). That is to say, she theoretically moves between social groups and social categories which sometimes do not have anything in common or can be marked by deep antagonism, precisely because of their different history. Moreover, Young often refers to cultural imperialism and cultural revolution<sup>41</sup>. This emphasis on the ‘cultural’ part of identities without a historical analysis is, I think, manifest of a view of discriminated identities and social groups which is based on misrecognition as racist, sexist, homophobic etc., biases of perception of one’s value. For instance, Young talked about “[t]he cultural imperialism in which white men make stereotypical assumptions about and refuse to *recognize* the values of Blacks or women” (1990, p. 65; my emphasis). In other words, a politics of difference should solve or at least try to solve the problem caused by cultural imperialism. However, by grouping different discriminations under the same category, they become analogous. In Maria Lugones’ words, different forms of interactions “cannot be conflated and confused with each other under the label of ‘difference’” because it is equivalent “to *think of all differences as the same*” (2003, p. 72; her emphasis). It could be argued that this category of ‘difference’ as used by Iris Marion Young could reproduce the gender-race analogy by subsuming them under the same concept. Indeed, if every category is *similarly different*, they can be made analogous. In my interpretation, Young’s categories of cultural imperialism and difference work a bit like Butler’s idea of precariousness, they subsume the singularities under a broad concept. Moreover, Young talks about cultural imperialism and not imperialism precisely because she does not consider 1) the material conditions of existence and 2) the conditions of possibilities or the history of these material conditions. This is why she argued for a policy-based model of the politics of difference (Young, 1990, p. 173).

Another point that highlights my claim that she makes identities interchangeable is that she makes lists such as “blacks, Hispanics, gay men and lesbians, old people, and *other marked groups*” (Young,

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<sup>41</sup> See Young, 1990, p. 58-6, 152-155.

1990, p. 164; my emphasis) which creates equivalences between these groups without considering the different historical formation of these groups. Can the group 'women' be made equivalent to 'black'? In the previous part of this chapter, I showed that they are not the same and I have demonstrated the problems of making them analogous. Hence, "anti-essentialism sees everywhere only empty signifiers, discursiveness and construction, [and it] theorises a radical plasticity of the political subject" (Ajari, 2021, p. 110). Furthermore, the fluidity or plasticity that Young theorises is not that simple. If I take the categories of women and races, the move between categories is not just based on affinity but on conflictual relationships. For instance, does the support of Afghan women make one part of the women/feminist social group or non-white/anti-racist one? Is this a question of patriarchy or western imperialism? If the former, is it sustainable without considering imperialism as its matrix? Like Afghan women do not have fathers and brothers<sup>42</sup>. To put it differently, it is not a question of fluidity but of conflictual (imperialist) relations, their history and material conditions of possibility. In my interpretation of Iris Marion Young, social groups are mobilised under an indifferent category of difference that pushes a general or universal idea of justice and liberation which are themselves defined by this empty category of difference. The totalising force of non-essentialism as the category that subsumes difference, echoes what Levinas understands by *totality*. Indeed, Levinas read the history of western philosophy as an absorption of the Other by the Same (1990, pp. 35-6). However, for him, the Other is absolutely other, and not reducible to Sameness so a totality. In his philosophy, the distance between the Same and the Other "can never be effaced" (Uhlmann, 1997, p. 128). However, I believe that by subsuming every difference under the category of 'non-essential', Young actually makes those differences reducible to a totality. In other words, the different substance of social groups is reducible to a category of sameness which is 'non-essential'.

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<sup>42</sup> For an analysis of the femonationalist discourse about Afghan women see Cloud, 2004 and Fernandes, 2017.

For Norman Ajari<sup>43</sup>, the essence of a social group is constituted by what he calls the deep historicity (*historicité profonde*) that he defines as the “combination and concatenation” of “the persistence of modes of domination from the past”, “the existence and transmission of a culture of struggle” and “the presence of physical markers or a habitus which betrays the belonging to a subaltern group” (Ajari, 2021, p. 108). As Steve Biko had it, “it is a culture that emanates from a situation of common experience of oppression” (Biko, 2005, p. 46; Ajari, 2021, p. 108). However, Ajari submits that there is no European deep historicity<sup>44</sup> as such, this is why Europeans can become everything and are characterised by self-transformation. Therefore, when all the social groups fall into the empty category of difference, they are conceptualised following the colonial logic of the euromodern ego, the euromodern plastic political subjectivity. It is a form of eurocentrism. Following that logic, it could be argued that under Young’s politics of difference the only possibility, at least on the epistemological level, for non-white people is to become white<sup>45</sup>. As Frantz Fanon said, “for the black there is only one destiny. And it is white” (2015, p. 10). To follow Enrique Dussel another time, the non-white is “subsumed under categories of the Same” (1995, p. 32), their essence or deep historicity is subsumed under the empty anti-essentialist category of difference. The problem of this empty category of difference is that it takes the Eurocentric view of anti-essentialism as the way to establish social justice and freedom. Liberation is not based on a specific group struggle that is historically rooted, but on the hypothetical, if not utopian, possibility of liberating everyone at the same time by acknowledging *difference* in general, in the policy-making and political institutions. It is the reformist or institutional version of *le grand soir*.

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<sup>43</sup> All the quotes from Norman Ajari are translated by me.

<sup>44</sup> An example of deep historicity could be what Aimée Césaire called ‘*la negritude*’ (2004), or what Steve Biko called ‘black consciousness’ (2005). It could be argued that there is something that comes close that what Ajari understands by deep historicity among some categories of white people such as white women or the white working class, but I do not think it is incompatible with what Ajari argued for. Indeed, he talks about the conceptualisation of the European modern political subjectivity that was and still is oppressive for certain categories within the white world, as I said women, the proletariat etc. However, to some extent, it could be argued that race transcends some categories. An example of it could be that white women could own slaves.

<sup>45</sup> Young does not explicitly say that nor was it in her politico-philosophical agenda at all, yet I think that it could be a result of her model of difference. Especially when she argued for a global democracy by reforming Western international organisation such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or the United Nations (2005, pp. 284-5).

Following the problem that I have just exposed in Young's politics of difference as liberation, an epistemological proposition to overpass it could be found within the concept of intersectionality. However, I will argue that this concept displaces the problem rather than solving it.

## **The Intersectional Option**

The concept of intersectionality comes from legal theory with the work of Kimberle Crenshaw, who theorised an analytic tool to highlight a lack within feminist and anti-racist discourses, namely, "how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1243). In her canonical article *Mapping the Margins*, Crenshaw coined and used intersectionality "to denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences." (1991, p. 1244) This analytic tool suggests that being a Black woman is not the addition of being black plus being a woman, but that it is the intersection of these categories which creates a specific experience that is not reducible to racism or sexism. Contrary to Iris Marion Young's totalising category of difference, intersectionality focuses on the specific lived experience of a social group experience, marking and mapping the differences between them. In other words, this tool theorises and describes difference, it comes before difference, while for Young difference is the first category. For instance, an intersectional analysis will highlight that black women's relationship with work and family is different from white women<sup>46</sup>. Therefore, following Young's ideal of freedom as liberation through a politics of difference, to replace the empty signifier of difference with intersectionality could theoretically solve the problem that I have raised above. However, I think that it displaces the problem rather than solving it for two main reasons. First, intersectionality creates a photography of the social world, and the result of the analysis only fits a specific situation,

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<sup>46</sup> See the first chapter and especially the part on Christine Delphy and Kate Millett; see also Collins, 2000 and Davis, 2019.

this is why it comes from legal theory. Second, when it comes to freedom, intersectionality creates a sequentialisation embedded within the question of rights. Even if the way of theorising freedom is slightly different from what I have exposed above, it is still prescriptive, meaning that the concept precedes and encapsulates action. In other words, identity or the subject/group is still the unquestioned ground from which freedom is thought.

For Patricia Hill Collins, one of intersectionality's important contributions is the untangling of "the relationships between knowledge and empowerment-[it] shed new light on how domination is organized." (2000, p. 246) She used the term *matrix of domination* to make explicit the precision of intersectional analysis. For Collins, "[r]ace, class, gender and sexuality all remain closely intertwined with nation" (2000, p. 247), this is why she talks about the USA matrix of domination, the UK matrix of domination etc., when speaking about the specific experiences of Black women in the USA and in the UK. In other words, the national context is the background against which the intersectional analysis is/should be done as well as its feature that enables the analysis to avoid generalities such as 'all black women'. Actually, it can be argued that this analysis of the matrix of domination was already present in Crenshaw's article as she portrayed intersectionality within the USA legal context through the questions of domestic violence and rape. By focusing on these cases, Crenshaw emphasised the difference between anti-essentialism and intersectionality. In her words, anti-essentialism "sometimes misreads the meaning of social construction and distorts its political relevance" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296). Intersectionality could be read as a social constructivist tool since it aims at unveiling "the processes of subordination and the various ways those processes are experienced by people who are subordinated and people who are privileged by them." (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1297) However, as Collins argued, intersectionality relies on an epistemological supposition that knowledge leads to empowerment and that the more and more precise the knowledge will get, the more powerful the empowerment will be. First, this causality, if not identity, between knowledge and empowerment can be questioned. How does someone go

from the enunciation of a specific and precise knowledge of a condition of oppression to empowerment? As Françoise Vergès said, talking about black women cleaning employees in the hotel industry, “how to integrate elements that are not about identities such as the history of slavery and colonialism” (2020, p. 41)? Basically, how does one go further than the photography pictured by intersectionality? This question relates to Elsa Galerand and Danièle Kergoat materialist critique of intersectionality (2014). For them, intersectionality lacks a historical depth, and it tends to freeze the analysis. By thinking in terms of race, gender and class instead of social relationships, namely, how these categories are historically produced with one another<sup>47</sup>, the intersectional analysis condemns itself precisely because one has to add more categories or intersections to make the analysis precise enough. In other words, it tends to become an endless list of categories. For Galerand and Kergoat, the goal is not about

“a question of drawing up a more ‘truer’ cartography of the diversity of identities, nor of taking as an object the relations of power once crystallised and objectified in minds and bodies. It is rather a question of going back to the processes of production of groups and objective and subjective affiliations.”

(2014, p. 51; my translation)

To put it differently, while starting from identities stabilises or maps reality, thinking in terms of social relationships provides a dynamic analysis. Accordingly, the investigation should be the other way around. Categories are *de facto* intersectional, so the question is what produces these intersectional categories.

When it comes to freedom, taking intersectionality as a tool is problematic because I think that it sequentialises it. Indeed, if knowing leads to empowerment, in the context of liberal western democracy, rights and rights claims are the inevitable means to make the causality between

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<sup>47</sup> For instance, see the work about racial capitalism (Robinson, 2021), that necessarily will take the North/Global South relationships and their coloniality into account, or racial patriarchy.

knowing and empowerment. Freedom is already conceptualised in terms of rights and the intersectional analysis can 1) expand the frame of a specific right. For example, suffrage. 2) create new rights, for instance, in the form of affirmative actions. Because intersectionality can potentially be infinite, in the sense that other forms of identities can be added to the analysis, freedom also becomes an endless sequentialisation of rights. The bigger the intersectional photograph becomes, the bigger freedom becomes as well. It is a matter of analysing who is freer and who is less free in a specific society. Therefore, freedom is taken as a quantifiable criterion and the right measure against which the quantification is made is ultimately the one who is the freest, namely the white wealthy man who is the most privileged in society. Here, 'privilege' is not understood as something to abolish, but as something to attain for everyone<sup>48</sup>. 'Privilege' means that one does not have a disadvantage, that one does not have an external/internal barrier that restrains their freedom. For instance, according to a report from the New York Civil Liberties Union (2019), in New York, between 2014 and 2017, 53% of the reported stops by the police were black people while 11% of them were white. It illustrates a constraint on black people's freedom of movement in the public space. Moreover, freedom conceptualised in that way stays embedded and can only be theorised and applied within a specific nation-state. Hence, freedom is not the concept to be questioned, rather, who has access to this freedom and who does not. It is, again, about the subject of freedom.

However, in this thesis, my aim is to suggest another understanding of freedom resulting in another way of conceptualising it. From the two first parts of this chapter, I put that another conception of freedom cannot be thought of from the standpoint of the subject. Whether it is understood in essentialist or anti-essentialist terms the result is the same. Freedom is assimilated to liberation and its realisation is circumscribed to the sphere of rights and of the state. *Difference* and *intersectionality* are

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<sup>48</sup> In *Mapping the Margins*, Crenshaw stated that "[w]omen of color are differently situated in the economic, social, and political worlds. When reform efforts undertaken on behalf of women neglect this fact, women of color are less likely to have their needs met than women who are racially privileged." (1991, p. 1250) Therefore, reforms need to take intersectionality into account as the law will not be race or gender blind so everyone can be at the same level, meaning at the level of the most privileged.



the instrumental means by which the heterogeneous hypothesis can be realised. The means by which liberation can operate and freedom be achieved in liberal democracies. To put it differently, freedom is thinkable from the standpoint of those who are the less free in free societies. And when it comes to non-white people the reparation, and equality are made by the legal means of the State. It again echoes Fanon's words that the black's destiny is white (2015, p. 10). In the next and last part of this chapter, following what I have started to do, I will focus on the coloniality of this subject-centred freedom. I will argue that freedom must not be thought of from the standpoint of identity but from what Frantz Fanon called *zones of nonbeing*. In other words, I want to propose to set the ground for another ontology of freedom that is not grounded on the subject's identity.

## **The Ontology of Freedom**

In the last parts of this chapter, I tried to show that the assimilation of freedom to liberation is problematic because it needs to be grounded in a theory of the subject whether it is homogeneous or heterogeneous. The question I will answer now is whether or not there is a specific colonial matrix that creates the causal association of freedom to liberation from Euromodernity. Nevertheless, this latter question implies an ontological one. The ontological claim that was taken for granted in the theories of freedom that I have criticized is that the subject-homogeneous or heterogeneous-makes freedom. Against that claim, the question that I want to explore is if it is freedom that makes the subject appear and then makes it come into being? In order to start answering this question, I will follow two main hypotheses. First, that freedom, from modernity, is based on what Norman Ajari calls an "*ontologie de la prise*" (2016, p. 5), which I translate by '*ontology of seizure*'. Second, that it is possible to think of a concept of freedom that is not grounded on a theory of the subject. To make my point, I will first focus on what Nelson Maldonado-Torres called the coloniality of being. Thereafter, I will analyse what Maria Lugones called the coloniality

of gender. Finally, in order to understand freedom as *praxis* and not *poiesis*, I will suggest understanding it as an *ontological resistance*<sup>49</sup> (2015, p. 108).

## **The coloniality of being**

In the previous parts of this chapter, I have suggested that freedom as liberation is assimilated to an idea of sovereignty. The subject is sovereign and hence free. The homogeneous or heterogeneous collective subject is free in virtue of the sovereignty of the subject. In other words, the 'I' or the 'we' are free if sovereign. Homogeneity and heterogeneity are just two different instruments, more or less inclusive, to enunciate and establish this sovereignty. Now, I want to put forward that under this assimilation of freedom to sovereignty, there is a relationship between freedom and mastery which is ontological and can be traced back to Columbus's conquest of America in 1492, as a breaking point in the history of Western subjectivity. To put it differently, the homogeneous and heterogeneous hypotheses are based on a colonial conceptualisation of the subject. In order to make my point, I will analyse freedom as mastery in the light of the notion of coloniality of being. The concept of 'coloniality'<sup>50</sup> is used by decolonial theorists to refer to what remains from the colonial matrix in postcolonial times. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres argued, the idea of the coloniality of being "responded to the need to thematize the question of the effects of coloniality in lived experience and not only in the mind." (2007, p. 242) To put it differently, this concept implies "a rethinking of ontology in the light of coloniality and the search for decolonization." (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 242)

The idea of coloniality of being is first related to the one of coloniality of power. According to Anibal Quijano, "America was constituted as the first space/time of a new model of power of

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<sup>49</sup> This point will be much more explored in Chapter IV but here, I attempt to set the ground for the understanding of freedom as ontological resistance.

<sup>50</sup> This concept was coined by Anibal Quijano (1992).

global vocation” (2000, p. 533). This new model of power was characterised by two axes. First, “the codification of the differences between conquerors and conquered in the idea of ‘race’”, and second, “the constitution of a new structure of control of labour and its resources and products.” (Quijano, 2000, pp. 533-4) Therefore, the idea of being is intrinsically related to an idea of power as mastery. Historically, this shift in European subjectivity is rooted in the ‘discovery’ of America by Columbus in 1492. Accordingly, I want to suggest that the subject of freedom is what Enrique Dussel called the *ego conquiro* (1995). For him, the euromodern subjectivity, which is best illustrated by the Cartesian *ego cogito*, is first an *ego conquiro*. However, the question is how to understand the meaning of ‘*conquiro*’? For Nelson Maldonado-Torres the Cartesian doubt has for background what he called a “misanthropic skepticism” (2007, p. 246). In Euromodernity, “skepticism becomes the means to reach certainty and provide *a solid foundation to the self*” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 245; my emphasis). *Dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum*, which means, I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am. In other words, one cannot doubt of their own existence while they doubt. Accordingly, the foundation of the self is related to the doubt about things, that, taken from the standpoint of the misanthropic scepticism, can be extended to people. As Maldonado-Torres argued, the statement “‘you are rational’ takes the form of the question ‘are you really rational?’” (2007, p. 246). The same goes on for humans, ‘you are human’ becomes ‘are you really human?’. Thus, the misanthropic scepticism is a doubt directed toward non-Europeans’s humanity which serves to annihilate the difference between Europeans and non-Europeans by excluding the latter from the Western’s conception of what a human is. For Maldonado-Torres, this scepticism was framed by the question of war during the Valladolid debate in the middle of the sixteenth century. This debate focused on whether the Spanish could conquer and colonize America in order to dominate and convert the Amerindians or not. Hence, we can see that the question itself is an illustration of the misanthropic scepticism as what was at stake, and put in brackets, was the humanity of the

Amerindians<sup>51</sup>. It is from this debate and the question of the humanity of non-European people that Maldonado-Torres put the basis of the *ego conquiro* in the notion of misanthropic scepticism. Moreover, for him, the characterisation of this subjectivity is a “naturalization of the *non-ethics of war*” (2007, p. 247; his emphasis). Here, ethics should be understood from Levinas's philosophy, which means the recognition, or to consider one's alterity. However, it is precisely this alterity that is put in brackets by misanthropic scepticism. Thus, it is a negation of the ethical relationship between the self and the other. As a result, the *ego conquiro* has a preferential option for war (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 246).

However, against Maldonado-Torres's point, I follow Norman Ajari<sup>52</sup> who argued that to put war as the centrality of colonialism is problematic for two main reasons. First, because it impoverishes the diversity of the manifestation of colonial dominion, and second because war is not colonial as such. In other words, the problem is that Maldonado-Torres “conceives war in general from the specificity of colonial wars, rather than the other way around.” (Ajari, 2016, p. 4) Indeed, this genocidal view of war cannot be strictly applied to the forms of colonialism that appear during Enlightenment. Therefore, Norman Ajari suggests, by using Carl Schmitt's *The Nomos of the Earth* (2006), that the *ego conquiro* is not a ‘non-ethics’ but ‘another ethics’. For Schmitt, war is not negatively defined as an act of cruelty, but positively as “an attribute of civilisation.” (Ajari, 2016, p. 5) As he had it, “in the perspective of the *jus publicum Europaeum* [European public law], all *land* on the earth belonged either to European states or to those of equal standing, or it was land free to be occupied, i.e., potential state territory or potential colonies.” (Schmitt, 2006, p. 172; his emphasis) Consequently, the ground of the colonial order is not war, as Maldonado-Torres understood it, but ‘seizure’ or ‘appropriation’ that first took the form of ‘land-appropriation’ that

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<sup>51</sup> Precisely because there was a debate about their humanity, some argued that they were humans some not, it was their humanity that was put into bracket as soon as it became an object of debate. See Dussel, 1995.

<sup>52</sup> All the quotes from Ajari are translated by me.

is considered by Schmitt as a new form of freedom (2006, p. 174). However, what Schmitt did not say is that for lands to be considered as ‘free lands’, the humanity of their inhabitants as well as their history must have been negated beforehand.

This is why the European subject of freedom is rooted in an *ontology of seizure* as a coincidence of *land-appropriation* and *life-appropriation*. “[T]he freedom of the European and the colonial settler depends on the unfreedom of the colonized” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 113). To put it differently, unfreedom is not the antithesis of freedom, but its condition. Just like “democracy, plantation and colonial empire are objectively part of the same historical matrix” (Mbembe, 2018, p. 41; my translation), freedom and unfreedom are part of the same philosophical (and historical) matrix that is rooted in an ontology of seizure. I will explore this point again in Chapter III.

### **The coloniality of gender**

I have suggested that freedom as liberation is rooted in an ontology of seizure by addressing the question of the coloniality of being. I used Norman Ajari’s ontology of seizure and expanded it to the question of freedom, as he mainly focused on the concept of dignity. Now, I intend to interrogate the role that gender plays in that conception of being, by focusing on what Maria Lugones calls the coloniality of gender. For her, gender is central to understanding the coloniality of power. In other words, gender is also at play and is central when it comes to human/non-human partition.

In *Heterosexualism and the Colonial Modern Gender System* (2007), Maria Lugones introduced and developed the concept of the coloniality of gender. This conceptualisation is a response and a critique of Anibal Quijano’s pioneer work on the coloniality of power. For him, power structures “the four basic areas of human existence: sex, labor, collective authority and subjectivity/intersubjectivity, their resources and products” (Quijano, 2001-2002, p. 1; Lugones, 2007, p. 189). It is the coloniality of power along with Euromodernity which create and engender

domination. For Quijano, “the disputes/struggles over control of ‘sexual access, its resources and products’ define the domain of sex/gender and the disputes, in turn, can be understood as organized around the axes of coloniality and modernity.” (Lugones, 2007, p. 189) However, according to Lugones, Quijano’s scope about gender is too narrow because he remains embedded in the heterosexual and patriarchal “Eurocentred, capitalist understanding of what gender is about.” (2007, p. 190) Thus, for Lugones, if one wants to understand the arrangements of gender “along ‘racial’ lines”, one needs to understand the “features of the organization of gender in the modern/colonial gender system” (2007, p. 190); which is something that Quijano failed to analyse because he assumed the naturalness of this system. Against this modern/colonial gender system, Lugones argued that indigenous societies did not have a gender system before the European colonisation, hence, that it has nothing to do with nature. Moreover, in her essay *Toward Decolonial Feminism* (2010), she emphasised that, for her, the gender system imposed upon colonised people was significantly different from the one “conquistadors imposed on European women living in the colony” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 116). In other words, colonised women and white women were not of the same gender. More precisely, “the multifaceted gender system imposed in the colony subordinated European women but dehumanized indigenous, African slave, and poor mestizo men and women.” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 117) Therefore, at the heart of the gender system we find the same human/non-human divide that was present in the notion of race. Actually, this point was also highlighted by Angela Davis when she argued that there was no gender difference amongst the slaves, but a negative equality that put them indistinctively as labour units and forces of labour<sup>53</sup>. Nevertheless, the difference was between men’s and women’s punishment (Davis, 2019, p. 1-6) and also because of women’s reproductive function. As Françoise Vergès showed, the womb of women was used as a tool to reproduce slaves as units of labour (Vergès, 2021). However,

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<sup>53</sup> At the qualitative level, there was a difference in treatment, some slaves were freed, yet it was not significant enough to threaten slavery as a system. Freeing slave and more or less cruel treatments were according to the master’s will. Moreover, houses slaves and field slaves were also treated differently, yet one could do both in their life as Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* testifies.

“as savages, the colonized manifested biological difference (sex), but they lacked a gender system” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 117). Slaves were viewed as male and female, they were *sexed*, but not as men and women, so not *gendered*. Moreover, the negative equality between colonized men and women was taken as evidence of their barbarity or non-humanity. Indeed, for Lugones, it is precisely gender hierarchy that “marks the civilized status of European women and men” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 117). Being sexed but genderless is a sign of non-humanity.

However, Lugones’s claim that gender is a product of Euromodernity and colonialism was contested by some scholars who questioned the empirical validity of her argument that there was no gender system prior to colonisation, which implies that gender is a product of Euromodernity and colonisation (Segato, 2001; Cusicanqui, 2004). Whether her claim is wrong or not on the empirical level is not the question, it is a “false dilemma” because it has the merit to situate “gender in relation to the genocidal logic of the coloniality of power.” (Mendoza, 2016, p. 118). Nonetheless, Lugones and Mendoza are still in Maldonado-Torres’s frame of the *ego conquiro* rooted in the idea of the genocidal non-ethics war as they link the coloniality of power to a genocidal non-ethic war as I have described above. Yet, in order to understand the instrumental character of freedom as liberation in feminist theory, freedom needs to be understood as being rooted in an ontology of seizure and not an *ego conquiro* that is understood as a non-ethics war. Indeed, if both the homogeneous and heterogeneous hypotheses are based on an ontology of seizure which illustrates the coloniality of freedom, this coloniality is not found in a genocidal logic that would be hidden in feminist theories of freedom. First, if we take the question of being and not only power, then, as we saw, the frame of non-ethics war does not work. If we take our example of the slave metaphor as the paradigmatic illustration of the homogeneous hypothesis, with a genocide the metaphor could not have happened. Indeed, there will be no possibility of appropriation, which is, as we saw, the centre of this metaphor; because appropriation, in the frame of an ontology of

seizure is not only the appropriation of land but also of life, not exclusively understood as death like it was the case for indigenous people, but of their existence that is turned into a labour unit.

Now, if we take this feminist conceptualisation of freedom as rooted in an ontology of seizure, the appropriation that represents the slave metaphor is made explicit. Following the ‘appropriation-misanthropic scepticism-European subjectivity’ paradigm, the slave metaphor is an appropriation of slaves’s experience which, in the very move of appropriating, puts in brackets their material lived existence-as I highlighted in the first part of this chapter, white women’s and slave’s lived experience was not the same. If scepticism is “the means to reach certainty and provide a solid foundation to the self” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 245). Thus, through the heuristic dimension of the slave metaphor, European feminists put the certainty of their condition of oppression as being *de facto* universal because it, at the same time, puts in brackets the slaves or people of colour’s different experiences of oppression. This claim is actually perfectly illustrated by the example of the Island of la Réunion that I mentioned. Moreover, if pushed to the extreme, Young’s conception of difference as the instrument of freedom as liberation could imply the same idea of life-appropriation. Indeed, as I showed, imposing an anti-essentialist view on every social group opens up the problem of erasing the deep historicity, the existential ground of some social groups. In order to erase something, one has to make it theirs first. The Otherness is appropriated in order to be transformed into Sameness as Dussel demonstrated with the eclipse of the other (1995). Consequently, in feminist theory, the homogeneous and heterogeneous hypothesis are still embedded in this ontology of seizure. In the following and last section of this chapter, I will suggest that, in order to think about freedom as alien to any instrumental reason, one needs to understand freedom’s starting point as an ontological resistance rather than an ontology of seizure. To put it differently that freedom must be thought of from the zone of nonbeing rather than the zone of being. These binary categories are so far quite analytic, but I will develop them more in-depth throughout the thesis.



## Ontological resistance

In *Peau noire, masques blancs*<sup>54</sup>, Frantz Fanon stated that “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.” (2015, p. 8) This quote makes the distinction between a Sartrean zone of nonbeing that is experienced from the zone of being; and, one that is experienced, in Fanon’s perspective, by black men, so from a zone of nonbeing. The difference between the two is that Sartre’s zone of nonbeing is assimilated to a state of nothingness, however, according to Fanon, the zone of nonbeing in which black people are is structured by racism. Thus, it is not a nothingness since it obeys a racist structure. Therefore, what is at stake here is a distinction between a zone of nonbeing, which is below the line of humanity, and a zone of being which is above it (Grosfoguel, 2019). In other words, the colour line is what makes the distinction between these two zones.

Moreover, this distinction between these two zones of nonbeing can be interpreted as, for the Sartrean one, an alienation, and for the Fanonian one, a double alienation. Indeed,

“if a man goes through alienation to become a being who, as Sartre says, makes himself a lack of being so that there might be being, for Fanon a black man’s alienation within a racist culture—what we should perhaps call a double alienation to distinguish it from the alienation of (white) man—prevents him from making himself a lack of being.”

(Oliver, 2003, p. 176)

In the first case the ‘lack of being’ is created, whilst in the second case, the lack of being is one’s being as such. From that scenario, we can see how the ontology of seizure is the means to create the ‘lack of being’. Through the use of the slave metaphor, the slave’s existence in the zone of

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<sup>54</sup> In this section, all the quotes from Fanon are translated by me. I reference the French version of his books.

nonbeing is appropriated in order to create, or to illustrate, in a heuristic way, the ‘lack of being’. However, this heuristic move, through the use of the analogy, incorporates, to follow Fanon’s example, black people into the realm of white people. It is also what Young’s politics of difference exemplifies when she suggests an anti-essentialist, so a Western, conception of social groups. In that sense, the *representation* or *recognition* that is *de facto* created by the slave metaphor is an *assimilation*. Indeed, the use of the slave metaphor that homogenises, or the heterogeneous discourse on difference, creates a representation, they incorporate the slave/negatively racialised<sup>55</sup> into the white discourse, according to the rules of this white discourse. Ultimately, whether it is a homogeneous or heterogeneous hypothesis, the result is an assimilation to Western values. As I put previously, ‘difference’ is also an instrument to attain an already established conception of freedom. Thus, it echoes Fanon’s statement that “for the black, there is only one destiny. And it is white.” (2015, p. 10). It is precisely because “the black has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white” (Fanon, 2015, p. 108) that the appropriation is possible. Moreover, in an anti-essentialist discourse, the impossibility of the ontological resistance is generalised as the possibility to create an ontology is annihilated. Therefore, in order to think about freedom out of this ontology of seizure, meaning out of the question of the subject, I suggest taking the Fanonian zone of nonbeing as a starting point. Indeed, the subject-centred theories of freedom that I have discussed so far always focus on a dialectic between unfreedom/domination and freedom. Freedom is conceived through its (false) antithesis unfreedom. However, the question of what type of freedom is enacted from the zone of nonbeing is never asked, precisely because freedom is a taken-for-granted concept.

For Fanon, it is from the zones of nonbeing that “an authentic upheaval can be born” (2015, p. 8). However, as I have already briefly outlined, this upheaval, this natality, does not take the form

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<sup>55</sup> I use ‘negatively racialised’ to refer to non-white people. If we take race for a production of Euromodernity, white people are positively racialised and people of color negatively racialised. Moreover, the word ‘racialised’ shows that race is not in nature, but a socio-historical process of racialisation.

of a representation/recognition/politics of difference which results in an assimilation. It is rather, an “alterity of rupture, of conflict, of battle” (Fanon, 2015, p. 215) It is a rupture, a conflict against ontology, as “ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black.” (Fanon, 2015, p. 108) It is a *presence*, if not the creation of a *new zone of being*. In other words, it takes the form of an *ontological resistance* that “focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the *spectator* crushed to a *nonessential* state into a privileged *actor*” (Fanon, 2002, p. 40; my emphasis). The spectator is the one here who has no ontological resistance. Accordingly, being an actor is to start from the zone of nonbeing through an ontological resistance. It is a *separation* from ontology as a way to open the possibility of another ontology from the zone of nonbeing, or what Sylvia Wynter called the *demonic ground* (1990). It is a way “to be *actional*” (Fanon, 2015, p. 215; his emphasis). Therefore, taking the zone of nonbeing and ontological resistance as a starting point is a way to displace freedom (as well as politics) from the realm of *poiesis* (production) to the one of *praxis* (action), as well as from its Eurocentric dimension. In that sense, freedom is to be understood from a conflictual relationship and not from or as a social progress that is made manifest, for instance, in its inscription in the law. Moreover, starting from the zone of nonbeing, allows us to start from a situation, a space, which is outside or at the periphery, escaping the institutional pre-conceptualisation of freedom. Ultimately, starting from the zone of nonbeing is a way to put the question of what freedom is and not who the subject of freedom is. Indeed, freedom in its western conceptualisation was always theorised from the zone of being as it was antagonised with slavery. If freedom cannot be thought of from slavery, not as its antithesis but as its situation of departure, what is then the maroon’s<sup>56</sup> experience but an attempt to separate from the white world to constitute another ontology.

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<sup>56</sup> Maroon was the name given to slaves who flew from slavery by escaping the master’s property. It will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter V.

The ontological resistance is a point of exteriority which constitutes itself as a centre. That is to say that it is not an exteriority that aims to join the centre that exteriorised it, but rather the constitution of a new centre. Indeed, the movement from an exteriority to the centre is not an invitation but an illustration of the ontology of seizure, sometimes disguised in a politics of representation, or what Young calls a politics of difference. On the contrary, the ontological resistance is a surge, the manifestation of a *presence* that attempts to *separate* itself from the centre. My preliminary proposition is, then, that freedom has to be analysed as a separation from the realm of being in order to create the possibility of another ontology, and I think Hannah Arendt and Frantz Fanon's work can help to move this hypothesis forward.

## Conclusion

While in the first chapter I have started to outline that feminist theories of freedom are in fact theories of the subject, in this chapter, I showed the limits of the feminist theories of freedom that are grounded on the question of the subject. Through an analysis of what I called the homogeneous and heterogeneous hypothesis, I wanted to highlight the coloniality of these theories of freedom and their eurocentrism by remaining anchored in the question of rights in liberal democracy, hence in the zone of being. By doing so, my aim was not to say that the demands and the fight for rights are bad or a waste of time. Rather, I wanted to show that even western feminist theory, which is considered a *radical critique* of the maleness of western political and social theory, is rather a *radical correction* of its maleness when it comes to the question of freedom. That is to say, western feminist theory is a critical move that aims to correct who is the subject of freedom, without considering its ontological roots. When freedom is assimilated to liberation through an instrumental reason, then, whether it is in western feminist theory or western male political theory, it has the same limits, namely a risk of homogeneity and/or assimilation that I tried to make visible by what I called freedom's ontology of seizure. I framed my analysis of the ontology of seizure and my

proposition of the ontological resistance from the standpoint of decolonial thought and the continuum between slavery, colonisation, and race, for two reasons. First, because it is, as I tried to show, constitutive of Euromodernity, hence, it is inevitable if one wants to discuss western concepts. Second, because, to follow Norman Ajari, a focus on the particular makes possible the eventual universalisation of a statement (2019, p. 36). Therefore, in the following chapters, I aim to understand freedom from these particularities that I will consider as a manifestation of ontological resistance. To put it differently, I intend to track the manifestation of freedom from the zone of nonbeing. The aim of this approach is to find an alternative structure to the concept of freedom as *praxis*. I will use a phenomenological approach that I will describe in the next chapter. More precisely, Hannah Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology, as it was the first phenomenological approach that puts the focus on freedom and politics or freedom *as* politics. Indeed, for Hannah Arendt, "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom" (2006, p. 174). Thus, in order to think about freedom as *praxis*, one first needs to understand politics as *praxis*. Consequently, the following chapters of this thesis will try to understand and analyse the phenomenon of ontological resistance, in order to understand the structure of freedom. Moreover, I will keep a decolonial lens to inform this work.



## **Chapter III: A Phenomenological Approach to Freedom**

In the previous chapter, I have identified two analytic categories to analyse how freedom was conceptualised in feminist theory. The first model is based on a homogeneous view of the subject that is often understood through the identification of women to a class. The second relies on an anti-essentialist heterogeneous view of identity. The commonness of these models lies in the importance given to the subject and identity for the conceptualisation of freedom. In other words, those theories of freedom are theories of the subject as the question is not ‘what is freedom?’ but rather ‘who is the subject of freedom?’. Therefore, freedom is assumed, and pre-conceived and the matter is how to make this freedom more inclusive. This inclusivity was for instance taken from the perspective of rights as an extension of rights. Moreover, I have suggested a decolonial reading of these theories and I submit that they are rooted in what I call an ontology of seizure, meaning that those pre-conceptions of freedom assume an appropriation whether it is on the symbolic or material level. I have chosen to focus first on western feminist theory because I think it is, in a certain way, a magnifying glass, of modern western political theory. Indeed, in the attempt to correct the masculine theories of freedom they focused on the question of the subject rather than freedom in itself. Hence, what changes is who can join and enjoy a preconceived view of freedom rather than freedom in itself. Indeed, if one looks at liberal feminism, Marxist and radical feminism or postmodern feminism, the frame is still the one of negative or positive liberty. Namely the absence of external coercion for the former and the absence of internal coercion for the latter (Berlin, 2002). Even if the separation between those theories is not always clear cut and they can be intertwined. Concerning postmodern feminism, I would talk, following Leslie Paul Thiele,

about a postmodern freedom that would be defined as a ‘creative self’<sup>57</sup> (Thiele, 1994, p. 281). However, in each case, as William Connolly argued, “mastery is the route to freedom.” (1991, p. 29) In other words, freedom coincides with sovereignty. These freedoms are subject-centred and imply a mastery/sovereign self.

The problem with those preconceived accounts of freedom is that they entail a solipsist epistemology as well as a solipsist methodology, in other words, they reflect a “philosophical solipsism” (Gordon, 2019, p. 17) By that, I mean that the subject is taken out of the world, the being-in-the-world is conceptualised not from the world but from an ideal shaped in what Arendt called the *bios theoretikos* or the *vita contemplativa*, to the detriment of the world (Arendt, 1998). To put it differently, an out-of-the-world perspective shapes the world. In order to solve this problem, in this chapter, I will first suggest a phenomenological approach to understand freedom. I will especially focus on Arendt’s phenomenology which takes plurality and the world, as core phenomena. Therefore, my understanding of freedom will take being-in-plural-in(and of)-the-world as the starting point of analysis, in contrast to a theory of the subject that would guide the understanding of freedom. In doing so, my attempt is not to provide a definitive and universal account of freedom, but rather to contribute to the understanding of freedom. This focus on understanding rather than definitive truth is important in Arendt’s hermeneutic phenomenology as I will demonstrate. Secondly, I intend to provide a decolonial reading of Arendt’s phenomenology by conceiving coloniality in its worldly dimension, as, what Arendt calls, an in-between. In her words, an in-between is what “relates and separates men at the same time.” (1998, p. 52) In the last and third part of this chapter, I will focus on Arendt’s deconstruction of freedom, to which I will add a decolonial reading, in order to show that in those ideas of freedom I have criticised, the idea of appropriation is foundational. In other words, I want to argue that

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<sup>57</sup> Namely the possibility of self-creation, of the self-creation of one’s personality as I have showed with Drucilla Cornell’s freedom of personality in Chapter I.



colonialism is one of the experiences that gave birth to this subject-centred freedom. Lastly, and contrary to what is commonly understood, I will offer the hypothesis that *freedom precedes liberation*, and not the other way around.

## **Hannah Arendt's Phenomenology**

In the first part of this chapter, I intend to describe Hannah Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology and her relevance for the understanding of freedom. Phenomenology was born from the hands of Edmund Husserl who intended to create a new first philosophy, a science of the phenomenon that aims to go back to the things themselves. This new science aimed to describe the structure of experience without falling into the subject-object dichotomy. Therefore, its goal was to revisit, or even to surpass, some statements forged by philosophy before Husserl, namely within the metaphysical tradition such as idealism or cartesianism. As I have outlined in the introduction of the thesis, the first aim of phenomenology is to describe the phenomenon in its manifestation, this is why Husserl described the structure of consciousness in his work, Heidegger, the structure of the *Dasein* and Hannah Arendt the structure of politics. In what follows, I will outline Hannah Arendt's phenomenology.

### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

The irony about Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology is that it is itself concealed within her work. Indeed, she never fully described nor explained her philosophical approach. Yet, one could find some clue about her methodological stance in her texts, and one could also try to dismantle her demonstrations to find out their methodological foundations. In this section, rather than exploring the content of Arendt's phenomenology, I will investigate its foundations. In other words, I will

describe her hermeneutic phenomenology as a twofold method of *deconstruction* and *experimentation* (Borren, 2010).

In a grant application to the Rockefeller Foundation for her book *Between Past and Future* (2006), Hannah Arendt described her intention as twofold, “first, a critical examination of the chief traditional concepts and conceptual frameworks of political thinking [...] to find out where these concepts came from before they become like worn-out coins and abstract generalizations.” Therefore, she wants to “examine the concrete historical and generally political experiences which gave rise to political concepts. For the experience behind even the most worn-out concepts remain valid and must be recaptured and reactualized” (Young-Bruehl, 1984, p. 325). Here we can see the similarities with Heidegger’s task of deconstruction that I have explained in the introduction of this thesis. She did not present her method as a negative enterprise of debunking, but rather, like Heidegger, she uses this method for a creative appropriation of what has been transmitted by the tradition of political thought which, according to her, starts with Plato and ends with Marx. In the preface of *Between Past and Futures*, she presented all the chapters of the book as “exercises [which] move between past and future, [which] contain *criticism* as well as *experiment*” (Arendt, 2006, p. 14; my emphasis). However, these two steps are not divided and antagonistic as “there is an element of experiment in the critical interpretation of the past” (Arendt, 2006, p. 14). Here we can see two words that could remind us of Heidegger, ‘experiment’ and ‘interpretation’. Respectively, we could argue that the experiment part refers to the ‘creative appropriation’, in its creative part, while interpretation refers to Heidegger’s hermeneutics. As Marieke Borren had it, Arendt’s deconstruction takes the shape of a genealogy, (2010, p. 28; see also Taminiaux, 1997, p. 199), however, we can go further and say that her genealogy is actually twofold. In Arendt’s words, the chief aim of interpretation “is to discover the real origins of traditional concepts in order to distil from them anew their original spirit” (2006, p. 14). It is precisely in this search for the ‘real origins’ that the twofoldness of her genealogy comes. First, she wants to bring the concept to its origin,

which means its creation-most of the time in Greek philosophy-like she did, for instance, with *authority* (Arendt, 2006, pp. 91-141) or with *action* in *The Human Condition* (1998). In other words, Arendt goes back to what she thinks to be the conceptualisation of the concept in western philosophy. However, as a phenomenologist, Arendt is concerned with experiences. She stated in her grant application for the Rockefeller Foundation that she wants to examine the experiences that gave rise to the political concepts. The second step of her deconstruction is to find the ground of the concepts, namely the original experience from where it arose. This is why, she refers a lot to the pre-philosophical Greek experiences, notably when she mentions Homer. It is, in a certain way, what Heidegger called “the birth certificate” (1968, p. 44) of the concept.

Hannah Arendt justified her approach by stating that “if words for distinct phenomena have come to be used synonymously there is a reason for the confusion, that is, that some overriding concept had subsumed the different words” (Young-Bruehl, 1984, p. 405). Therefore, the investigation starts with words because “as Heidegger maintained, [they] carry the record of past perceptions, true or untrue, revelatory or distorting.” (Young-Bruehl, 1984, p. 405). Moreover, “Arendt did not simply dismiss theorising of all varieties in favour of ‘naïve’ experience. All experience must be brought out of its inchoate and undifferentiated state and given its proper distinction in language” (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1984, p. 199). An example of the confusion between two concepts related to a lived experience can be found in the distinction that Arendt made between *power* and *violence*. For her, power is the outcome of people acting together while violence signals the end of action. Hence power and violence are not synonyms for her. According to Arendt, these two concepts have been intertwined in the western history of political thought because politics has been understood as a matter of ‘who rules whom?’, but I will come to this point in the next chapter. For our purpose now, what is important is that for Arendt, making distinctions is not an essentialist enterprise but a phenomenological one. It means that distinctions “bring out the specificity of distinct phenomena” (Borren, 2010, p. 51), this is why she always starts “anything by saying, ‘A

and B are not the same'. [Which] comes right from Aristotle.” (Arendt, 2018, p. 455) In other words, a distinction is not a binary, it simply helps the theorists to catch the specificity of a phenomenon.

Concerning the experimental part of her method, one could locate it in her emphasis on the importance of storytelling because it “transcends the given, facts or testimonials, and turns them into a meaningful account, while remaining true to the facts.” (Borren, 2010, p. 35). An example of it can be found in her analysis of what Arendt called the dark times where the light of the public realm is extinguished, where individuals are among what Heidegger called *Das Man*, ‘the They’, which is a sort of mob where no one can find his or her true self. She intended to describe this phenomenon by focusing on the life of some men and women in dark times. Therefore, storytelling can help us to catch the specificity of a certain experience. Storytelling gives us “rich phenomenological descriptions which reveal their meaning [of political phenomena] bottom-up or inductively.” (Borren, 2010, p. 36). What interests Arendt in storytelling is that stories are not giving us generalities, rather they reveal the contingency and uniqueness of political phenomena. In contrast with previous theories that we saw, such as Iris Marion Young’s politics of difference that tend to subsume different phenomena such as racism and sexism under the same category of ‘difference’, Arendt focuses on the uniqueness of a political phenomenon. That is to say, what distinguishes a specific political phenomenon from another one, yet, this does not mean that it cannot share a relationality with another phenomenon. For Arendt, stories, unlike historiography, can preserve experiences in their uniqueness “without reducing them to chains of cause and effects.” (Borren, 2010, p. 36)

As I argued previously, Arendt’s deconstruction of metaphysics, is twofold. A deconstruction of the *metaphysical fallacies* and of the *metaphysical prejudices*. In the next part, I will investigate her

deconstruction of the identity of thinking and knowing as it helps to clarify her hermeneutic phenomenology.

### **The identity of thinking and knowing**

First and foremost, for Hannah Arendt, thinking and knowing are not the same because they do not raise the same question. Thinking is concerned with meaning while knowing is concerned with truth. This distinction raises another one illustrated by the difference between understanding and science. However, stating that thinking is concerned with meaning does not imply that it has nothing to do with scientific knowledge, but in that case, it has “the role of a means-end; the end is determined by a decision about what is worthwhile knowing, and this decision cannot be scientific.” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 54) In other words, it refers to the fact that all scientific knowledge is also the result of a discrimination. Against the massive amount of data in front of them, the scientists have to discriminate in order to conduct their research. Moreover, the end that will result from this discrimination “is cognition of knowledge” which “once established as truth, [...] becomes part and parcel of the world [of appearances].” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 54) Then, when the scientist withdraws from the world to think, it is in order to establish a scientific method that will serve as a means to pursue scientific knowledge. Thus, in Arendt’s words, science is “an enormously refined prolongation of common-sense reasoning in which sense illusions are constantly dissipated just as errors in science are corrected.” (1978a, p. 54). Yet, it does not mean that the thinking activity disregards truth, rather “facts, scientific knowledge and experience are the source of thinking’s quest for meaning.” (Borren, 2010, p. 33) As an example of the distinction between truth and meaning, we take an empty bottle. Its truth is to be, for instance, in plastic, while its meaning, *what it means for it to be*, will be to contain water, to hold a drink or even to make a trap to catch wasps during the summer. Hence, truth is unambiguous and compelling while meaning is variable, plural and more or less convincing.

Hannah Arendt's investigation into the activity of thinking relies on Kant's distinction between *Vernunft* (reason) and *Verstand* (intellect). While "the intellect (*Verstand*) desires to grasp what is given to the senses, [...] reason (*Vernunft*) wishes to understand its *meaning*" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 57; Arendt's emphasis). In other words, the activity of thinking (*Vernunft*), raises the question of meaning beyond the *sensus communis* as well as science. In fact, the question of meaning cannot be answered by common sense, but one has to withdraw from common sense-which does not signify to abandon it-to aim at meaning, and it is precisely from this point that Arendt deployed her hermeneutics. Indeed, "by posing the unanswerable questions of meaning, men establish themselves as question-asking beings" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 62), which means that understanding is their mode of being, it is not something they do, but something they *are*.

Because she separated thinking from knowing, Hannah Arendt was able to conduct a method that aims at understanding political phenomena, which are events that happen in the world, and which are witnessed by individuals. However, as we highlighted previously, the quest for the meaning of these events cannot simply rely on common sense, they require an interpretation, a hermeneutic. In Arendt's words, understanding "is the specifically human way of being alive", it is how we "try to be at home in the world" by understanding it (1994, p. 308). Therefore, her approach is grounded on an existential claim. Furthermore, "understanding is based on knowledge and knowledge cannot proceed without a preliminary understanding" (Arendt, 1994, p. 310). In other words, they are not the same, but they are related. There is a 'as-structure' of understanding, "we always perceive something *as something*" (Borren, 2010, p. 22, my emphasis). The object of your preliminary understanding is perceived with the help of knowledge. For instance, as Marieke Borren argued, I will experience a party as a social event and not a natural one (2010, p. 22). This is a non-reflective understanding which is the ground of every process of understanding. After that comes the 'fore-structure' of understanding, which is reflective or critical. Hannah Arendt's account of understanding is rightly described by Marieke Borren as a 'hermeneutic circle' which

“only starts when a phenomenon engages us.” (Borren, 2010, p. 23) This circle has three parts, first, it “starts with a careful, phenomenological, analysis of the lived experience of the world which is full of uncritical, pre-reflexive and prejudiced understanding of meaning;” (Borren, 2010, p. 24) It then refers to the phenomenological exigency of description of what appears to us, what is given to our *sensus communis*. It starts with “popular language” (Arendt, 1994, p. 312) which expresses this preliminary understanding. However, in front of a new event, this uncritical understanding “ranges the new among the old” (Arendt, 1994, p. 313). Then, “we need to distance ourselves from these prejudices [of the preliminary understanding...] through a critical examination of them.” Lastly, “we return to a better, elucidated version of the implicit understanding, which is explicit understanding or interpretation in the full hermeneutic sense.” (Borren, 2010, p. 24) On top of that, this process is open-ended and “cannot produce final result” (Arendt, 1994, p. 308), this is why it takes a circular form. Imagination and storytelling play a crucial role in the critical step of understanding because they allow us to see the newness of the phenomenon that engages us. Moreover, they allow us to consider the perspective of others, to “[make] present what is absent” (Arendt, 1992, p. 79) to ourselves, this is what Arendt, following Kant, called the “enlarged mentality” (Arendt, 1992, p. 43). Therefore, the deconstruction and experimentation steps of Arendt’s method are present in this hermeneutic circle, and both are part of the critical step of understanding.

Through the exploration of Arendt’s methodology, we saw that every quest into the meaning of something should start with a phenomenon that appeals to us, so in the world of appearances. A phenomenon can be analysed with the old categories, but to do this dismisses the event in its novelty. However, by going into this hermeneutic circle one could critically reflect on the event. Yet, an element is missing from her philosophical approach. Namely, the colonial dimension of metaphysics. Indeed, if her task of deconstruction dismisses coloniality, then, this coloniality

remains untouched after the deconstruction. For instance, saying that the body-mind is a metaphysical fallacy does not explain how it is intertwined with colonialism.

## The Colonial Difference

From the perspective of Hannah Arendt's phenomenology, deconstruction is about uncovering the veil that metaphysics has put on the history of western philosophy and its concepts. In other words, the meanings of western philosophical concepts have been covered up by metaphysics resulting in a single understanding of these concepts. To put it differently, concepts are taken for granted precisely because they represent a truth claim, politics *is that*, freedom *is that*, etc. The being of a concept is taken for granted and serves as a category of analysis from which historical events, political phenomena are understood without critical reflection. This is why, the hermeneutic circle opens up the possibility to think political phenomena anew without the weight of the tradition. We can see how this philosophical approach can be useful to offer a new understanding of freedom. Indeed, following the western traditional, metaphysical, concept of freedom, certain things will be considered as a manifestation of freedom, others not. As we saw in the last chapter, metaphysics compels freedom to be thought of from a zone of being. According to our category of understanding, freedom is antagonised with a conception of unfreedom, as we saw with the women-slave metaphor. Hannah Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology allows us to depart ourselves from this preconceived category of freedom, and to see freedom elsewhere, out of the zone of being. However, the problem with Arendt's phenomenology is that it is mainly still focused on metaphysics. I will argue that, in order to investigate the meaning of freedom seriously, one needs to take into account not only metaphysics, but also its imperial and colonial dimension. From that perspective, the birth certificate of the concept is not only to be found in the pre-philosophical Greek experience but also in other experiences such as the colonial experience,



which will be our concern here. In other words, what is missing in Arendt's philosophical approach is a *deconstruction of the colonial fallacies*, or of the colonial attitude (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

## **Metaphysical and Colonial Fallacies**

Regardless of the insightful account of imperialism provided by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, several problems are raised by her analysis, especially from the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology and the experiential basis of the concepts. First of all, Arendt makes a distinction, or should I say, a clear-cut separation between imperialism and colonialism, as well as respectively between expansion and conquest. In this part, I will highlight the problem of this analysis of imperialism leading to what I think lacks in her philosophical approach, a decolonial perspective.

From the beginning of her analysis of imperialism, Arendt maintained that “imperialism is not empire building and expansion is not conquest” (2017, p. 169). She also argued that “expansion as a permanent and supreme aim of politics is the central political ideal of imperialism” (Arendt, 2017, p. 162). The problem that she has with expansion is that, as an economic principle, when applied to politics, it transfers a limitless instrumental logic of accumulation into the realm of politics. Moreover, for Arendt, imperialism annihilates the possibility of creating a political body, precisely because the latter is constituted by its limits within the frame of the nation-state. In her words, “what the imperialists actually wanted was an expansion of political power without the foundation of a body politics.” (Arendt, 2017, p. 174) And it is on this point that Arendt made her distinction between colonisation and imperialism. David Temin emphasised that “Arendt interprets colonization as a form of ‘transplant’ whereby emigrants reproduce social and political forms in a new space.” (2019, p. 9) This point was highlighted in her book *On Revolution*, where the colonisation of the land which is now the United States allowed the constitution of a body politics. In other words, her distinction could be summarised as conquest and colonisation “could *once* form

new political bodies: imperialism, however, closes off this possibility.” (Temin, 2019, p. 9; their emphasis) From that perspective, there is not just a discontinuity between colonisation and imperialism, but a sort of antagonism and a different logic. And this is where, I think, the problem lies.

By making this sharp distinction between colonialism and imperialism, Hannah Arendt rooted totalitarianism and more precisely the Nazi form of totalitarianism back to imperialism. She talked about a “boomerang effect”<sup>58</sup> (Arendt, 2017, p. 201) to say that imperialism was the condition of possibility of totalitarianism. Therefore, “she does not think of colonization as a precedent to totalitarian rule in Europe.” (Temin, 2019, p. 11) Actually, Arendt does not mention colonisation much in her work, and I think it is precisely what lacks from her analysis of Euromodernity as well as of the metaphysical fallacies and prejudices. Indeed, within her deconstruction of metaphysics, she takes the western philosophical tradition as autoconstitutive. By that, I mean that she takes western thought to be constituted by its internal experiences and not its constitutive other<sup>59</sup>. In other words, she does not acknowledge the role that the colonised played in the constitution of Euromodernity. It is a conception of the western history of philosophy which covers up colonialism and does not recognise the role that it played in its formation. To put it differently, “colonisation, it is assumed, was something that happened elsewhere – albeit at the hands of Europeans – and consequently has no perceived bearing on contemporary European politics.” (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021, p. 19) There is a *colonial attitude* that covers up the experiential ground of the history of philosophy. This is why a hermeneutic phenomenology should be

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<sup>58</sup> It is her account of the ‘boomerang effect’, amongst other things, that made her thought valuable in postcolonial theories. Some argued that *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was a “constitutive book for postcolonial studies” (Grosse, 2006, p. 37). Moreover, this ‘boomerang effect’ has been read in conjunction with Aimé Césaire ‘*choc en retour*’ from his *Discours sur le colonialisme*. Some have considered her thought at the limit of eurocentrism (Rothberg, p. 33).

<sup>59</sup> Arendt mentioned the relationship between civilisation and barbarians in her account of the idea of rights, which is key to her account of European self-understanding as right bearer, yet she did not take into account the role that colonialism played in the construction of Western thought. So, when I am talking about the constitutive other, I am talking about the racialised others.

implemented by a *de-colonial attitude*. Briefly, for Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “the de-colonial attitude, different from the natural racist attitude of an anti-black and colonial world and from the theoretical attitude that often serves to justify it, mobilizes de-colonial theory and critique as well as a phenomenological investigation characterized by the use of the de-colonial reduction.” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 105).

From a decolonial perspective, the link, or continuity between colonisation and imperialism could be clarified. Indeed, my aim is not to say that there is no discontinuity between colonisation and the imperialism that Arendt is talking about, rather that they share a common ground. They both can be traced back to the same birth certificate. Namely, the ‘discovery’/invasion of the Americas and the encounter with the Other. As I have argued in the last chapter, it is from this encounter, from 1492 if you will, that land and life appropriation became paradigmatic and constitutive of the western experience. Reflecting on this pre-philosophical experience, a lot of philosophical and political debates were about justifying this appropriation. The Valladolid debate is an instance of it and draws the beginning of a genealogy of metaphysical justification of appropriation as it was the case with Francisco de Toledo radicalising Aquinas’ metaphysical instrumentalism to justify the mining in colonial Peru (Bentancor, 2017). Moreover, when it comes to Arendt’s colonisation-imperialism distinction, from the perspective of what I call the ontology of seizure, colonialism, and imperialism, even if they have (or not) a different logic, respectively a transplant logic of founding a political body, and an expansionist logic of closing off, both are grounded on land and/or life appropriation<sup>60</sup>. In other words, they are both rooted in an ontology of seizure. Colonialism first *is* appropriation, imperialism first *is* appropriation. I use ‘first’ here to mark what is covered up by the colonial attitude. To talk about, for example, imperialism, as *being* a limitless

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<sup>60</sup> This appropriation is still visible in contemporary imperialism even if it could be argued that part of the lands is appropriated, especially the parts where resources are. See Hickel, Dorninger, Wieland, Suwandi, 2022 and see Borrel, Yabara, Collombat, Deltombe (dir), 2021, for a history of the imperial relationship between France and Africa.

wealth accumulation, covers up the first gesture of appropriation. The wealth accumulation is seen and experienced from the West, but not from its underside, the natives, for whom the western appropriation is the first experience of it.

Therefore, uncovering the underside of Euromodernity cannot be reduced to a deconstruction of the metaphysical fallacies and prejudices, it also needs a deconstruction or an uncovering of its underside which is constitutive of it. In other words, I submit that a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of our political concepts needs to take colonialism, or to put it in a schematic way, 1492, as a birth certificate, in order to uncover the colonial attitude that veils both the metaphysical fallacies and prejudices<sup>61</sup>. In the next parts, I will argue that what Maldonado-Torres calls the *de-colonial reduction* (2007) and what Gordon called the *ontological suspension* (1995) are useful and insightful tools, even if I think incomplete.

### **The de-colonial reduction**

In his book *Against War*, Nelson Maldonado-Torres introduced the de-colonial reduction, which is “the introduction of coloniality as a fundamental axis of reflection in the analysis of ideologies and of the critique of ideologies.” (2007, p. 100) This approach is highly inspired by his reading of Fanon for whom, according to Maldonado-Torres, “the colonial reality and the racist legacy of Europe appear [...] as the greatest crimes and pathologies of Europe.” (2007, p. 100) Therefore, I will first highlight the heuristic value of the de-colonial reduction, and thereafter I will turn to what Lewis Gordon called Fanon’s ontological suspension (1995).

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<sup>61</sup> I am not implying that colonialism is the unique political event that led to this construction of freedom, as also the Augustinian discovery of the Will led to it, but my main focus is to unveil the coloniality of freedom. I also think Arendt did an enlightening unpacking of the non-colonial political events that are constitutive of Euromodernity, so I will not develop this here. See Arendt, 1978a, 1978b, 1998.

The de-colonial reduction is about the introduction of coloniality as the fundamental feature of understanding. However, coloniality is not a keyword that is thrown in the analysis, rather it is the expression of a situation, a conditionality of knowledge. To put it differently, from a hermeneutic and a decolonial perspective, coloniality highlights the *colonial birth certificate* of a concept. From the perspective of western thought, freedom is considered as the ordinary and unfreedom is exterior/extraordinary. However, from a decolonial perspective, unfreedom, understood from the standpoint of freedom, so as its contradiction or negation, is part of the ordinary. The de-colonial reduction highlights the colonial difference, it “makes explicit the challenges posed by the colonial condition to theories that assume a unified world where humans live and coexist” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 101). In other words, it emphasises the epistemological limits of western categories of understanding as well as it opens up the possibility for the understanding of existence in a (neo)colonial context. In that sense, this reduction is not simply the destruction of thought, but rather it situates existence, it helps to understand its situated meaning without subsuming it into pre-conceived theories or concepts as truth claims. It is the practice “through which the colonizing dimensions of practices, ways of thinking, and critique come to light.” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 101) To put it differently, I think that the de-colonial reduction has a hermeneutic value that will be explored more in the following parts of this chapter.

In reference to Hegel’s ontology of ‘being for others’, Frantz Fanon stated that “ontology is made unattainable in a colonised and civilised society” (2015, p. 108). By that, he meant that western ontologies within the history of philosophy are not appropriate to understand the lived experience of the black man. Indeed, these ontologies do not take into account the *sub-ontological difference* which is the “difference between Being and what lies below Being” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b, p. 254). This difference refers to the coloniality of being that I have talked about in the last chapter, the difference between human and non-human as theorised during the colonisation. Western ontologies are built upon from the perspective of Being, of humanity, of the zone of Being and

do not help us to understand lived experiences from the zone of nonbeing. It is precisely this experience that is covered up by the colonial attitude. Accordingly, what Lewis Gordon calls the *ontological suspension* would be a bracketing of the colonial attitude in the form of ontology, to uncover what is the lived experience of those who lie below Being. It is not a rejection of ontology as such, but a way to temporarily put aside western ontologies. In Lewis Gordon's words, "ontological suspension means that we are less concerned with what something is and more concerned with its thematization, its meaning" (2000, p. 79). In other words, it echoes Arendt's distinction between meaning and truth that I talked about previously. When it comes to the question of freedom, as we saw in the previous chapters, in western feminist theory, freedom's being is assumed and not reflected on. Freedom is about the subject and the object of conceptualisation is the subject not freedom. In that case, an ontological suspension would bracket that ontological claim about freedom, to focus on its meaning in a specific situation. To put it in Arendtian language, it allows us to understand a phenomenon from a different perspective without subsuming it into a pre-conceived understanding that would take the shape of a taken-for-granted truth claim.

However, I think that what Gordon means by 'ontological suspension' can be somehow difficult to apprehend. Indeed, by placing his phenomenological stance in both Husserl and Sartre, the question is: is Gordon's approach closer to Husserl's phenomenological reduction or Sartre's radicalisation of it by what he called the nihilation? First of all, Gordon defined the natural attitude as the "world of interests and purpose" (2000, p. 73), and it is by the suspension of these interests that "I find myself approaching these objects of thought as phenomena" (Gordon, 2000, p. 73). Therefore, a phenomenon is apprehended as an object of thought by a consciousness. Indeed, for Husserl, a phenomenon is an object of consciousness. From that perspective, consciousness is always a consciousness *of something*, and it is through this intentional structure that we have access to the phenomenon, not as a subjective construction, but as an objective one. To put it differently,

reality is taken from the perspective of the intentional consciousness once the natural attitude has been reduced or suspended. Intentional consciousness is the sphere of transcendence from which a phenomenon can be understood. To clarify Gordon's relation to Husserl and Sartre, I think that both of them have to be taken as having a different ontology rather than a different methodology. Indeed, Sartre shares the *reduction* with Husserl, however, he proceeded to a radicalisation of this reduction that aimed to unpack the relation between consciousness and the ego made by Husserl. For Husserl, it is the transcendental ego that experiences and from which intentionality is analysed as the core structure of experience. However, for Sartre, the ego has to be externalised from consciousness. In other words, the ego is an object exterior to consciousness because it can be reflected on. Therefore, in Sartre's philosophy, reduction takes the form of a *nihilation*, everything is externalised from consciousness, including the ego. Consciousness is a pure consciousness of itself, it is pre-reflective.

I submit that Gordon adopts Husserl's methodology and Sartre's ontology, as the operative concepts of his philosophy are the Sartrean *being in-* and *for-itself*<sup>62</sup> as well as *bad faith*, the latter describes when the for-itself acts as an in-itself. Indeed, as Gordon had it, "the critical ontological role of the concept of bad faith in the study of human phenomena is that of a hermeneutical scheme in which to understand human beings" (1995, p. 136). For Paget Henry, Gordon's philosophy "has its roots in the dialectic between being and nothingness as it affects the formation of human consciousness", and it is precisely bad faith that serves to thematise this dialectic (Henry, 2005, p. 16). Nevertheless, while the ontological suspension might work for the analysis of anti-black racism, as Gordon showed in the insightful *Bad Faith and Antiracism* (1995), I think that it remains limited for my purpose because it does not consider enough the meaning-formation of

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<sup>62</sup> For Sartre, the being-in-itself corresponds to a substance and the for-itself to pure existence without substance, to the nothingness from which a consciousness projects itself in the future. For instance, a chair is a being-in-itself, however the human being is a for-itself, and they live in bad faith when they escape the freedom of the for-itself, to find security in the in-itself. In other words, when their life is ruled by a preconceived role to follow leaving no space for freedom. See Sartre's example of the waiter in *L'être et le néant* (1943).

concepts in the world. Precisely, what ontology should be bracketed? How can it be identified without a clear interpretation of their colonial dimension? For Gordon, the problem is directed towards “all ontologies asserted as ONTOLOGY” (1995, p. 133) namely, as an in-itself grounding human doings. However, the problem of the recognition and identification of these ontologies remains and I think cannot dismiss a hermeneutic such as the Arendtian one I have described above. I believe that the analysis of certain phenomena exceeds the in/for-itself dualism, which can itself be taken as an ONTOLOGY<sup>63</sup>, even if phenomenological. In the following part, I suggest understanding coloniality as an *in-between* rather than a process of de-colonial/ontological reduction. Such an understanding, I will maintain, helps to re-centre political phenomenon from the perspective of the world, of the being-in-the-world and not just being.

### **Coloniality as an *in-between***

As I argued previously, the de-colonial reduction aims at bracketing the colonial attitude. However, the major problem with it, is that it results on the bracketing of one worldly perspective. Following, Hannah Arendt, I will consider the question of plurality as being central to the question of understanding and meaning formation. In other words, following Sophie Loidolt (2018), I will maintain that plurality should be the transcendental ground from which a phenomenon can be understood as it presents an attempt to avoid methodological solipsism by putting the question of the world at the centre of the analysis.

Merleau-Ponty argued that a complete reduction is impossible. Indeed, “if we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem” (Merleau-Ponty, 2000, p. 664), but we are *in- and of-the-world*. We are not just in the world like a chair is on the floor, rather we are part of the world, the world cannot be reduced, not even a fragment of the world. The reduction of the colonial attitude

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<sup>63</sup> In some interpretations of Merleau-Ponty, it has been argued that Sartre’s distinction between in and for-itself reiterates the Cartesian dualist ontology. See Hall, 1980.



would result in the bracketing of a fragment of the world, precisely because this attitude is not just a state of consciousness, or a theoretical production, but a way to be in the world, a *mode of being*. This attitude is a perspective from which we are in and of the world and from which we experience phenomena. It is part of what Arendt calls plurality, part of the “multiple first-personal experiences in which the world and objects show up, manifest themselves *within* this world *in the form of interaction*” (Loidolt, 2018, p. 65; author’s emphasis) In other words, the ‘as it appears’ of a phenomenon is apprehended “by the outwardness and worldly manifestation of plural subjectivities” (Loidolt, 2018, p. 66). From that perspective, bracketing the colonial attitude would result in an alteration of the understanding of the relational dimension of a political phenomenon. Indeed, for Arendt, something does not appear just for me, but *to many*, even if it does not appear in the same fashion. The world might be common to all, but it does not mean that it is not differentiated or saturated according to different situations as Fanon highlighted it in his analysis of the colonial city in *Les damnés de la terre*. It is from this perspective of plurality that the hermeneutic becomes relevant, and I would say, more significant than a reduction. The reduction implies that the process of bracketing will make appear what was hidden by the natural or colonial attitude. It implies an automaticity and a causality between bracketing and revealing. On the other hand, deconstruction aims at understanding what forbids or conceals the questioning. In other words, hermeneutics and deconstruction aim at asking what are the (ontological/metaphysical/colonial) concepts which pre-determine our understanding of a phenomenon, and not just bracketing them by assuming what they are. The reduction aims at bracketing the ‘knowing’<sup>64</sup> to understand the ‘doing’, without acknowledging the ‘doing’ that gave birth to the ‘knowing’, its birth certificate. To put it differently, the aim of deconstruction and hermeneutic phenomenology is to extricate the non-philosophical history of philosophy, or if you will, the non-philosophical but *relational* and experiential history of philosophy. It is about the

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<sup>64</sup> The de-colonial reduction aims at showing the colonality of knowledge for Maldonado-Torres (2007).

unveiling of the ground from which a question or a concept is posed. When it comes to freedom, I think that this ground is an ideal idea of personhood, but I will explore that point later in this chapter. The paradox is that thinkers such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres have unveiled the experiential grounds of the concepts<sup>65</sup>, while at the same time advocating a reduction. This is another reason that leads me to think that the reduction is not fully appropriated.

From the perspective of Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology, the field of research is not consciousness but "the in-between of the common world", the investigation starts "from the 'inside' of a common experience, addressing the multiplicity of appearance" (Loidolt, 2018, p. 66). Sophie Loidolt argued that Arendt's conception of the world encompasses two different 'in-between'. The first relates to "the world of objects and objectivity" (2018, p. 98) and the second to the web of relationship, it is "the world that emerges through our intersubjective relations" (Loidolt, 2018, p. 99). These two conceptions of the world are not exclusive to each other but the opposite, "the former stabilizes and structures the latter" and "objects, artifacts, equipment, architecture, etc. make sense only in a human world, which is always a common world and a world of interaction." (Loidolt, 2018, p. 99) These two conceptions are "two interrelated fields of meaning" (Loidolt, 2018, p. 99) It is from this Arendtian perspective that I want to suggest that *coloniality is an in-between* as it relates to both conceptions of the world described.

To describe the in-between, and the relationship between these two conceptions of the world, Arendt used the metaphor of table. She argued that "as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, *relates and separates* men at the same time." (1998, p. 52; my emphasis). Here, I think that 'relates and separates' have to be taken as a single movement, they both go together and can be explained in different ways regarding how this

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<sup>65</sup> See my discussion of the coloniality of being in Chapter II.

relation/separation works. The relating dimension would refer to the unicity of the world, its commonality, basically, we share the same world, regardless of the state of this world. However, 'separate' can have two distinct dimensions. One would be a formal separation, we are sat around the same table, we are equal but we have different perspectives, it is the experience of a sort of symmetry. Another would be, asymmetric, what binds each other is also what asymmetrically separates each other. Even if we share a world, one's experience of the world can be *saturated by* the experience of the other. The former is limited, the second limitless, and it is because the second is limitless that the former has to be limited. The limitless/limited relationship passes *in-between* people. Indeed, Frantz Fanon talks about the "*immobility* to which the colonised is condemned", and how the colonised should not "cross the *limits*" (2002, p. 52; my emphasis). In other words, the limitless character of the coloniser lies in its power to create limits for the colonised. Bracketing the limitless power of the coloniser could put a light on the limited power of the colonised but it does not show the relationality that creates the limitless/limited causality. This is also why I believe that the Arendtian in-between could be more fruitful than the reduction. Moreover, sometimes, these limits are also objective, in what Sophie Loidolt after Arendt calls the first in-between. It can be illustrated with the example of apartheid or even the division of the city into two zones, one for the colons (zone of being), and the other for the colonised (zone of nonbeing) (Fanon, 2002, p. 42). From that perspective, coloniality affects both in-between in their interrelatedness (the objective and the relational in-between) and creates what Arendt calls a *world alienation*, or a destruction of human worldliness (1998, pp. 248-256).

Therefore, a phenomenological analysis of coloniality in general, cannot only take the perspective of the being in and of the world taken as an ideal (what plurality should be), but of the being in and of world alienation (what plurality actually looks like in a context of colonial domination for instance). The analysis of coloniality, as an in-between, aims to unconceal, to track, the movement from the zone of being to the zone of nonbeing, and conversely, as much as their interrelatedness,

within experience, and, within the meaning-formation of concepts. In other words, coloniality is the in-between that relates and separates the zones of being and nonbeing<sup>66</sup>. A decolonial hermeneutic phenomenology should aim at retrieving the *alienated plurality* that informs experience. Namely, the asymmetric plurality that I have talked about with the table example. With that in mind, in the following part of this chapter, I will actualise Arendt's deconstruction of freedom by taking coloniality into consideration.

## The Underside of Freedom

Interestingly, Arendt pointed out this asymmetrical relationship in a context of world alienation. She even identified, theoretically and on the experiential level the relationship, or should I say the continuity, between unfreedom and freedom, the conditionality of the former to the latter. Indeed, her analysis of the emancipation of labour (Arendt, 1998, p. 139) or of the assimilation of freedom to sovereignty (Arendt, 2006) both illustrate that point. However, she failed to recognise the colonial root, the experiential birth certificate of this relationship between freedom and unfreedom. As Fanon highlighted, the “triumphant reports by the [colonial] missions in fact tell us how deep the seeds of alienation have been sown among the colonised.” (2002, p. 45) This sentence illustrates the contradiction formed by the colonial logic. Achille Mbembe identified two contradictory logics, first the non-acceptance of difference, and second the non-acceptance of similarities (2007, p. 39). Indeed, “by wishing that the colonised looks like [the coloniser], the [colonial] potentate makes the colony the very figure of ‘anti-community’, a place where, paradoxically, division and separation constituted the very form of being-with” (Mbembe, 2007, p. 39-40). In other words, the colonial world alienation, and its in-between, coloniality, negates the

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<sup>66</sup> In *Les damnés de la terre*, Fanon defined the colonial world as manichean (2002, p. 52), while it might be more complex, I follow him for analytic purposes, and the complexity of this apparent manicheanism will be explored by keeping this analytic.

very existence of plurality, of being-together. This in-between is not characterised by similarity and difference (plurality), but by non-similarity in the name of difference and non-difference in the name of similarity, what I call a *distorted or non-plurality*. And it is from the perspective of this distorted plurality, and its actualisation, that coloniality should be apprehended. To be clear, it does not mean that plurality as the multiple perspectives from which meaning unfolds is not there, but that plurality, as a political condition for worldliness is negated or distorted. For Arendt, plurality, as a condition of worldliness, is actualised through deed and speech; in a distorted plurality, the relationship between the “colonised subjects and their masters” (Mbembe, 2007, p. 40), deed and speech takes the form of violence and domination. In other words, coloniality, as an in-between, is a distortion of plurality, if not the attempt to negate it. At the same time, the colonised subjects are supposed to be liberated (by bringing civilisation to them, so creating a similarity), while they are subjugated (because of their difference).

Surprisingly, this analysis is close to what Arendt has to say about the emancipation of labour<sup>67</sup>, as well as in her deconstruction of freedom. In this part, I will focus on her deconstruction of freedom and how it should be implemented by coloniality. To make my point, I will first outline her analysis of freedom as sovereignty that can be rooted in sovereignty and solipsism. Then, I will argue that her analysis should be implemented by a look at the role colonialism played in the association of freedom with sovereignty. Lastly, I will argue that Arendt is still embedded in coloniality when she makes liberation to precede freedom.

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<sup>67</sup> Arendt argued that while the emancipation of labour is formalized by liberties in the shape of rights, it paradoxically creates a society of labourers, alienating them from the world and the political. In other words, this emancipation, these liberties, are correlated to an experience of unfreedom, of alienation. To put it differently, freedom creates the frame of alienation.

## Solipsism and sovereignty

Throughout all her work, Arendt developed a critique of sovereignty, both as a form of political organisation as well as a concept. For her, sovereignty is a form of power without any superior authority, it is also “the modern way to conceive of the people’s power because of a shift in our philosophical understanding of liberty.” (Rubinelli, 2020, p. 181) Indeed, for Arendt, freedom entails an uncontrollability because it belongs to the sphere of action, it is alien to sovereignty. In her words, “if men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce.” (Arendt, 2006, p. 165) The modern western conceptualisation of freedom is, for her, of the obliteration of action and plurality from the philosophical tradition that reflects a rejection of the political. This shift in the meaning of freedom is rooted in solipsism as an illustration of philosophy’s preference for “solipsist speculation to the observation and actual experience of politics.” (Rubinelli, 2020, p. 183) In other words, the experience that conceptualised modern freedom is the philosopher’s attempt to control the uncontrollability of action. For Arendt, it is from this thinking experience that freedom started to be conceived as subject-centred and sovereign. Freedom and sovereignty became identical (Arendt, 1960, p. 40) and “as much as freedom entails control over one’s thoughts, sovereignty entailed control over one’s deeds.” (Rubinelli, 2020, p. 184) To put it differently, sovereignty is for the realm of human affairs what solipsism is for the realm of thought. Indeed, as Arendt had it, the sovereign conception of freedom leads to “a denial of human freedom”, that “the freedom of one man or a group or a body politics can only be purchased at the price of the freedom [...] of all others” (Arendt, 1960, p. 40). This means that unfreedom becomes the condition of freedom. However, before going further, I will focus on Arendt’s critique of solipsism and its relationship to freedom.

For Arendt, solipsism is the “claim that nothing but the self ‘exists’ or, more moderately, [solipsist theories] hold that the self and its consciousness of itself are the primary object of verifiable knowledge” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 46). For her, Descartes is the solipsist thinker *par excellence*, even if

solipsist theories were present long before him as well as after him. The *cogito ergo sum*, is the perfect example of it. When Descartes said “I am, I exist, that is certain. But how often? Just when I think; for it might possibly be the case if I ceased entirely to think, that I should likewise cease altogether to exist<sup>68</sup>” (Descartes, 1992, p. 76), we can see how he postulates the identity of thought and being by formulating that only the thinking ego does exist. Against Descartes, Arendt quoted again Merleau-Ponty saying that “our certainty that what we perceive has an existence independent of the act of perceiving, depends entirely on the object’s also appearing as such to others and being acknowledged by them.” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 46) In other words, she reaffirmed her formula that being and appearing are the same and that the being only exists by appearing before others, “the appearance always demands spectators” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 46). One of the most important findings of Descartes was the thinking ego, as a bodyless being out of the sensory world, the *res cogitans*. However, the thinking activity gave rise to the doubt to postulate the existence of being, but as Arendt stated, “the *cogito* is subject to the same doubt as the *sum*.” (1978a, p. 49) Yet Descartes is not the only solipsist in philosophy. In Husserl’s phenomenology, “only the reduced cogito has an absolute existence” (Taminiaux, 1992, p. 170) as I have shown in the introduction of the thesis. This is why, Arendt criticised him for being a solipsist because according to Husserl, the world is supposed to be created through the life of consciousness, the reality of the object is defined by its intentional relationship with consciousness. Concerning Heidegger, Arendt accused him of solipsism as well as “in his fundamental ontology: Existence belongs to the essence of the individuated *Dasein*, and such existence when resolutely seen provides the key to the meaning of Being.” (Taminiaux, 1992, p. 170). In other words, *Dasein* finds its authentic being when it withdraws from its being-in-the-world to find solitude in the *bios theoretikos*. Therefore, here again, we can find a solipsist claim as only the activity of thinking, as a withdrawal from the sensory

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<sup>68</sup> “*ego sum, ego existo; certum est. Quandiu autem? Nempe quandiu cogito; nam forte etiam fieri posset, se cessarem ab omni cogitatione, ut illico totus esse desinerem*”

world, is in touch with being. However, for Arendt, we are in touch with being only within the world of appearances.

Solipsism refers to what Arendt called philosophical freedom, which is an inner freedom, a retreat from the world. For her, this freedom is “an attribute of thought or a quality of the will” (2006, p. 148), and it is precisely this experience of the willing ego that gave rise to a political freedom viewed as *liberum arbitrium* (free choice), and which concerns the sovereign subject, it is “the ideal of a free will, independent from others” (Arendt, 2006, p. 163). Because freedom is associated with free will, on the political level, freedom is associated with sovereignty. The political version of the willing ego is the sovereign ego<sup>69</sup>. The problem is that, for Arendt, this sovereignty is an illusion that can only be maintained “by the instruments of violence” (Arendt, 2006, p. 164), it is a politics of sovereignty. Because the sovereign subject is rooted in the willing ego, freedom becomes an abstract representation of one’s individuality, out of the world, hence, out of coercion. When freedom is identified to the will, it is a mental representation of different choices to attain a goal. For Arendt, “sovereignty is possible only in imagination, paid for by the price of reality.” (1998, p. 235) It is a subject “whose idea of freedom derives from the model of its own rule: first, from its rule over people and things, and then, internalized, from its rule over its entire concrete substance, which it commands by thinking it.” (Adorno, 2004, p. 222) Therefore, freedom is means-end, it produces a causality that leads to the aimed goal. Moreover, it “corrupts freedom into obedience”<sup>70</sup> (Adorno, 2004, p. 232) In other words, and from the perspective of the sovereign, the free will is conditioned to the coercion of others, precisely because in order to shape reality according to their will, the sovereign needs to use coercion. Because the willing/sovereign ego is independent from others, the illusion of freedom as sovereignty can be maintained by violence, as Arendt argued

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<sup>69</sup> As Arendt argued, Carl Schmitt “recognizes that the root of sovereignty is the will: Sovereign is who wills and commands” (1960, p. 40) See also *The Constitutional Theory* by Carl Schmitt (2008).

<sup>70</sup> In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno argued that Kant (and other idealists), especially in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, has a paradoxical notion of freedom that implies coercion in the form of obedience, because of a “fear of anarchy” (Adorno, 2004, p. 232).



(2006, p. 164). In Adorno's words, "what produced freedom will recoil into unfreedom" (2004, p. 262), which again, echoes Arendt's analysis of the emancipation of labour.

For Arendt, the modern western conception of freedom which is omnipresent in political theory comes from the discovery of the Will as well as its political extension in the notion of sovereignty. However, even if Arendt rightfully identified the continuity and conditionality of unfreedom to freedom when the latter is associated to sovereignty, she missed one of the experiential grounds that shapes the political theories of sovereignty, namely colonialism.

### **The Colonial/Sovereign free subject**

As we saw in the last chapter, for Enrique Dussel and other decolonial scholars, the *ego conquiro* is foundational of European modernity. Indeed, the idea of conquest, which took the name of 'discovery' shaped modernity. The 'discovery' of America "and the ensuing exploration of the whole earth" (Arendt, 1998, p. 248) are, for Arendt, part of the events that determined Euromodernity, along with the reformation which, "by expropriating ecclesiastical and monastic possessions started the twofold process of individual expropriation and the accumulation of social wealth" (Arendt, 1998, p. 248). However, from a theoretical perspective, one could argue that the modern western conceptualisations of freedom, related to the question of sovereignty and property, were anchored in the experience of colonisation rather than solely in the Reformation<sup>71</sup>. Indeed, it has been held that the philosophies of the state of nature which were constitutive of a political or civic euromodern notion of freedom were also informed by the colonies (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021; Moloney, 2011), that Locke's association of freedom and property is also rooted in the Caribbean colonies, especially in Barbados (Anker, 2022; Rana, 2010), or that Grotius's conception of the sovereign free subject takes its origin in Dutch colonial expansion (Stelder,

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<sup>71</sup> Even if the two cannot be separated as Protestantism played a role in the British conquest and expansion, especially against the Spanish empire. See Hodgkins, 2002 and Lepore, 1999.

2021). In this part, I will focus on the experience of colonialism as a birth certificate of this sovereign subject-centred freedom, and as foundational of the Euromodern entanglement of freedom and unfreedom.

As I said previously, following Enrique Dussel, the idea of conquest, of the *ego conquiro* is foundational of Euromodernity. However, the modes of conquest were not always similar. For instance, the Iberian's justification of colonialism was different from the one theorised by Hugo Grotius which relies on the idea of a contract. For Mikki Stelder, "Grotius's construction of the non-European people as enslaveable and (dis)possessable was precisely what enabled the Dutch/European, free, rational Man as a legal person to be established in the first place." (2021, p. 2) Grotius was the first to introduce the notion of subjective, individual rights, meaning that "man was born a sovereign and free individual who could execute his own right" (Grotius, 2006, p. XVIII). This sovereign, free subject is, then, *the starting point of his philosophy* (Grotius, 2006, p. XVIII). At the centre of Grotius's notion of sovereignty lies the idea of property and its acquisition, there is a right of conquest as well as a right of extraction. In other words, "Man's *being* resides in his rational acquisition of private property to the exclusion of all others." (Stelder, 2021, p. 6; their emphasis) As Stelder highlighted, these two rights depend on a rationality that is, for Grotius, characteristic of the European man, a specific rationality is needed to acquire property, and Indigenous people do not have this rationality<sup>72</sup> (Stelder, 2021, p. 6). Therefore, conquest is not legitimated regarding one's humanity as it was the case during the Valladolid debate (as we saw in the previous chapter), but regarding one's rationality and possibility to acquire property. In order to justify the seizure of lands, Grotius theorised a 'voluntary slavery' that goes with the idea of a benevolent master. This idea of slavery is related to his conception of differentiated rationality.

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<sup>72</sup> Western women were also considered of not having this rationality as European men. This is why some feminist thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft based their argumentation on the fact that men and women are equal in reason. They enlarged the reason of the European man to European women as I discussed in Chapter I.

Indeed, it is in Indigenous people's rationality to subject voluntary because they were "naturally inclined to give up their freedom." (Stelder, 2021, p. 7) Consequently, it is an act of free will. In that case, free will justifies slavery as much as slavery is justified by free will. In other words, it follows a natural order. Free will is both understood as the European man's being, the free sovereign subject, and the Indigenous man's being voluntary slave. One's freedom is in sovereignty and one's freedom is in enslavement. From that perspective, "slavery is framed as an act of benevolence." (Stelder, 2021, p. 8) At the heart of coloniality, we find the question of the free sovereign subject. The attempt to justify colonialism is based on a theory of the free subject, and it is in virtue of this freedom that the act of seizure is justified. Freedom is constituted by unfreedom, unfreedom is justified by freedom and presented as free will.

Another example of that can be found in Locke's theory of freedom that is both informed by Grotius's view on property and labour as well as by the colonial experience in Barbados. For Elisabeth Anker, "[t]heories of liberty as individual self-possession, of legitimate government as based in consent, of self-rule as a rejection of state tyranny, and of economic freedom as uncoerced labour and trade have links to the production of sugar." (2022, p. 38). In her book *Ugly Freedom*, Anker drew the genealogy of this relationship between freedom and unfreedom by following the thread the sugar's history in the plantation. For her, sugar "links individual freedom to plantation mastery" (Anker, 2022, p. 38). Accordingly, this sovereign freedom has something to do with a vision of independence that is related to "landowning and economic prosperity" (Anker, 2022, p. 39). In her work, she showed the importance of Locke's account of freedom and property, as both his "life and work developed connection between Barbadian sugar and liberal freedom" (Anker, 2022, p. 56). In other words, the understanding of freedom is related to the formation of the Caribbean. It is the experiential ground of the concept. Following the work of Grotius, Locke theorised a connection between freedom and appropriation, freedom as appropriation through his account of property. In the *Second Treatise of Government*, he justified land's appropriation by the

improvement of this land (Locke, 2003, p. 114). Indeed, Locke drew “from West Indies planters’ power to construct a version of individual freedom as an alternative to monarchical sovereignty” (Anker, 2022, p. 59). Therefore, in his philosophy, the experience of the plantation is the ground from which a subjective sovereign freedom was theorised as an alternative to the sovereign power of the State. This investigation into the *bittersweetness* of sugar<sup>73</sup> also shows how solipsism works as a methodological tool in theories of freedom. Freedom is theorised as sovereign from a sovereign perspective. Lewis Gordon talks about a “philosophical solipsism” (2019, p. 17). Indeed, freedom is taken as an ideal of personhood, the free subject<sup>74</sup>. This ideal is the starting point from which freedom is understood out of the world. Thus, freedom is a theory of the subject, of personhood out of the world. It is something that is visible in Drucilla Cornell’s Kantian/Rawlsian view of personhood. For her personhood is related to the protection of an *imaginary* domain, so out of the social world, an ‘as if’ domain as I have discussed in the first chapter.

However, these theories of freedom miss the experiential ground from which personhood as an ideal of the free sovereign individual was built. This ideal of personhood relies on a zone of being whose very existence depends on a zone of nonbeing. If we take my definition of coloniality as an in-between that creates a world-alienation, sugar is an illustration of this coloniality of freedom. Sugar lies in-between the zone of being and nonbeing, sugar means freedom for the former and slavery for the latter. As Elisabeth Anker had it, it is a *bittersweetness*, it cannot be sweet without being bitter, and its bitterness comes from its sweetness. The plantation, that one could describe as the mode of being disposed of the coloniality of freedom, of sugar, is rightfully defined as a land or an earth without world-*une terre sans monde*-by Malcom Ferdinand (2019, p. 51). Slaves do not inhabit/live on the plantation they survive/live in it. It is a paradigmatic figure of the colonial

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<sup>73</sup> “*Sugar/Bittersweet* depicts the sugar plantation as a pioneering scene of brutal domination and dispossession, as well as an outgrowth of owners’ particular practices of freedom.” (Anker, 2022, p. 40)

<sup>74</sup> The construction/conception of the words is preceded by this idea of personhood, indeed indigenous lands were considered as *terra nullius* (nobody’s land) so they can be seized. See Fitzmaurice, 2014 and Pagden, 2013.

world-alienation, it organises the modes of being-with and in-the-world (Ferdinand, 2019, p. 85). Consequently, I submit that there is a continuity between the idea of *terra nullius* and the colonial world-alienation. In the last part of this chapter, I will argue that in order to give another understanding of freedom the subject should not be the starting point of investigation but rather the world.

### **A worldly perspective on freedom**

Hannah Arendt asserted that “if men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce” (2006, p. 165). Similarly, I claim that if we want to understand freedom as a political phenomenon, it is methodological solipsism we must renounce. As I have argued previously, from the rise of Euromodernity, freedom was understood as a theory of the subject, ultimately leading to an idea of freedom as mastery (of one’s environment, of one’s will and of others), so a theory of the sovereign subject.<sup>75</sup> In the feminist theories of freedom that I have analysed in the previous chapters, the world was somehow taken into account, precisely because women’s oppression was the starting point of analysis, so *a specific situation in the world*. However, the analysis of this situation has sometimes fallen into a solipsist methodology because the worldly subject became an abstraction taken out of the world, as the use of the slave metaphor exemplifies. This “thought becomes the world, then the absence of an outside creates the illusion of omniscience.” (Gordon, 2019, p. 26) One could argue that intersectionality is an attempt to do justice to the complexity of the world, however, when used as a tool to theorise freedom, the result is still a theory of freedom which is a theory of the subject. Whether this theory of the free subject is heterogeneous or homogeneous depends on the conception of free personhood. Ultimately, these subjective conceptions of freedom conceal the worldly background from which they were theorised. Indeed,

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<sup>75</sup> In his article *Heidegger on Freedom: Political not Metaphysical*, Leslie Paul Thiele argued that three main conceptions are to be found since the birth of Modernity, negative, positive, and postmodern liberty. He argued that those three conceptions of freedom are subject-centred resulting in a conception of freedom as mastery. See Thiele, 1994.

they are about the ideal free subject, what is concealed precisely because the world is not considered, is that these subjects are in the zone of being. Therefore, those conceptions of freedom are anchored and conditioned to the zone of being and unthinkable outside of it, as Gordon had it, the outside is absent (2019, p. 26). It could be maintained, if I follow my analysis of feminist theories, that those theories of freedom are first and foremost grounded in the zone of nonbeing, as oppression is the starting point of analysis. However, by creating an identity between freedom and liberation, it means that freedom is still conceptualised in the zone of being precisely because in order to be free one has to be liberated from the zone of nonbeing.

In an article about the politics of resistance, Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen argued that “by focusing on the constitution of the subject, the resistance literature has ended up lacking a fully developed conception of the world” (2016, p. 193). I follow his statement by saying that *by focusing on the constitution of the subject, the freedom literature has ended up lacking a fully developed conception of the world*. In other words, I mean that, in order to understand freedom as a political phenomenon, the perspective of the being in the world in plural must be taken. Freedom does not concern the subject, the idea of personhood, the ideal subject in the ideal zone of being, rather it is experienced in the world and in plural. Following Arendt, I relate freedom to plurality which means that freedom has something to do with a relational ontology, it happens *in-between* people, it affects the world and its plurality, hence, it also affects the subject. Nevertheless, a theory of the subject does not guide the conceptualisation of freedom. Therefore, if one wants to conduct a phenomenological analysis of freedom, by considering coloniality, the idea of the world would not be idealised in the mode of an ‘as if’, rather the context in which freedom happens is one of world-alienation. Indeed, a fully developed conception of the world, considers “those concrete structures, institutions, and relations that stand between human beings.” (Hyvönen, 2016, p. 193) Taken broadly, these structures would be racial capitalism, heterosexism, etc., as well as their interrelatedness and their expression in the objective world, in architecture or institutions (Vergès

& Vrainom, 2021; Blais, 2009). From an Arendtian perspective, these structures structure the world, they create and sustain a mode of organisation that aims at destroying human's plurality and human's capacity to act in concert. As I have argued above, the system of plantation is the paradigmatic figure of this world alienation, it is a land/earth without world, as an inhabiting without the other (Ferdinand, 2019, Dussel, 1995). Moreover, the "plantation is not limited to the frontiers of land property or factory. It characterises global spatial injustices, relationships of power and dependence between different located situations in the world." It organises the ways of being together in the world (Ferdinand, 2019, p. 84-5; my translation) From that perspective, the zone of being and nonbeing cannot be clearly delimited, they can be situated both in a city (Fanon, 2002), or even within the same bus as racial segregation testifies. For my purpose, I choose to investigate the meaning of freedom from the perspective of the zone of nonbeing, which I define as an embodiment, a mode of being disposed in the world as I will discuss in the following chapter.

This focus on the zone of nonbeing showcases an element of Arendt's account of freedom that needs to be exceeded. Namely, she made liberation conditional to freedom, liberation must precede freedom. According to Arendt, "in terms of political process, [freedom and liberation] belong together, and yet as political phenomena they are entirely different and must be kept distinct" (2018, p. 352). She particularly emphasised the difference between freedom and liberation in her book *On Revolution*. For her, liberation finds its meaning in rebellions while freedom finds its meaning in revolutions. Both are not the same, but they belong to each other in the sense that "liberation, though it may be freedom's *conditio sine qua non*" does not automatically lead to it (Arendt, 1978b, p. 207-8). In other words, liberation is the condition of freedom. It is explicit if one looks at the Greek experience, being liberated from the household and its necessity, was a requirement to be free in the polis. Hence the slaves were not free while the slave owners were. However, from my perspective, this view of liberation preceding freedom makes implicit that one needs to be liberated from a zone of nonbeing in order to act freely. Therefore, freedom is, again,

only thinkable of from the zone of being, which would mean that freedom, in order to appear, needs an established, predefined, organisation. Yet, following Arendt, I state that freedom's condition is plurality. To put it differently, wherever plurality, understood as action in concert, appears in the world, there is a possibility for freedom to appear. Moreover, Arendt's notion of plurality is not submitted to a specific mode of organisation, it can be considered as *an-archic*, but I will talk about it in the fifth chapter of this work. However, I think that Arendt's view of liberation is too encompassing. For her, liberation aims at the destruction of an order, an authority. Once this order is destroyed it creates an abyss of nothingness, which means that something new has to be built.

Paradoxically, freedom appears from an abyss, but it needs a specific organisation conditioned by liberation. Moreover, the total destruction of an order is unlikely to happen, which means that freedom would also be a marginal phenomenon in history. Consequently, I suggest that it is in fact freedom that precedes liberation. Liberation being a guiding principle for freedom. Because "liberation holds out the possibility of the complete overthrow of oppressive structures" (Horsley, 2000, p. 217), it means that it is an ongoing process. From a decolonial perspective, if liberation means decolonisation, then, the independence of ex-colonised countries is not a total liberation/decolonisation. Decolonisation/liberation is an ongoing process. I will explore this hypothesis in the last chapter of this thesis.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was the last one of the first part of this thesis where I aimed at problematising freedom. Indeed, in the first chapter, I argued that theories of freedom were in fact theories of the subject. Thereafter, I highlighted in the second chapter the coloniality of these conceptions of freedom. Finally, throughout this chapter, my aim was to de-centre freedom from the category of the subject by advocating a worldly and plural perspective of freedom. I have argued that Arendt's



hermeneutic phenomenology is a good way to understand freedom as it is centred on the world and on plurality, avoiding any solipsist philosophy and the understanding of freedom as a theory of the sovereign subject. Consequently, this work will not provide a feminist or non-white theory of freedom as I have tried to undo the identification of theory of freedom to theory of the subject. Rather, by taking Arendt's definition of freedom as the "*raison d'être* of politics" (2006, p. 151), my question is: what happens when people act together? Following Arendt, I submit that freedom appears when people act together, then my understanding of freedom will focus on this political phenomenon. Moreover, because I want to look at freedom where it is supposedly not, I have suggested to start the investigation from the zone of nonbeing, as I think it is where freedom is likely to happen in the context of world-alienation. From that perspective, feminism and anti-racism are not taken as a politics of identity, but rather a worldly politics of liberation, as a guiding principle rather than a guiding identity of the subject. This is why, I have proposed that freedom precedes liberation, contrary to what is commonly assumed, but I will discuss these points in-depth in Chapter VI. Furthermore, I have argued that the zone of nonbeing is a mode of being disposed in the world rather than a clear-cut geographical separation. In order to make that point, in the next chapter, I will focus on what I think to be Arendt's hidden phenomenology of the body and the importance that being disposed in the world has in it. I will try to show, that from this perspective, freedom can be understood as what I call a *phatic movement*. To make my point and try to give a first understanding of freedom, I will also focus on Fanon's phenomenology of the body in *Les damnés de la terre*, in which he described the experience of the colonised in Algeria. Ultimately, this Chapter III help me to set the basis for the following chapters which will clarify my three-dimensional understanding of freedom. In Chapter IV, I will characterise freedom as an embodied ontological resistance, in Chapter V, I will offer an understanding of freedom as an *an-archic* mode of organisation, and in Chapter VI, I will suggest that freedom precedes liberation.



**PART II:**  
**An Alternative Understanding of Freedom**

## Chapter IV: Embodied Freedom and Disposition

In the previous chapter, I advocated a phenomenological approach to understanding freedom. Indeed, this methodological stance, by taking the world into account and perspective allows me to get out of the subject-centred theories of freedom that are in fact theories of the subject's identity. However, it does not mean that the subject is not an important point from which freedom can be understood. If freedom is a political phenomenon, then it has something to do with subjects. In this chapter, I will suggest that an Arendtian phenomenological account of *our embodiment in the world* could be the starting point from which to think about freedom.

Hannah Arendt's status as a major political theorist of the twentieth century has gained her an important amount of, sympathetic or not, secondary literature on her work. Amongst this corpus, one of the leading trends is, to use Claude Lefort's formula, to think "with and against Hannah Arendt" (2002). This motto was also invested by Seyla Benhabib to highlight the importance and relevancy of Arendt's work, as well as to point out her tendency to make distinctions. Thinking "With Arendt, Contra Arendt" (Benhabib, 2003, p. 123) is a way to use her art of making distinctions in order to subvert them. In the Arendtian distinctions, the more commented and still criticised are the political/social and public/private ones. According to the critics, these distinctions are "dichotomies" (Benhabib, 2003, p. 124), or two antagonist categories. According to Arendt, the body is what should not appear in public, what should stay in the private realm. The crisis of Modernity that she identified with what she called the rise of the social, is best illustrated by the publicity of private matters such as the necessity of the body. Accordingly, the more and less sympathetic scholars such as Connolly, Tierney or Honig agreed on Arendt's supposed reluctance regarding the question of the body. As Bonnie Honig argued, "[t]he human body is, for Hannah Arendt, a master signifier of necessity, irresistibility, imitability, and the determination of pure process." (1992, p. 217) Hence, the body is submitted to the biological life-process, when we

are driven by our biological body we cannot act in public because we have to be liberated from the necessity of life in order to appear in public.

However, I will defend that these criticisms of *the* Arendtian body are mistaken for two main reasons. First, they give an account of *an* Arendtian body, while I will argue that the Arendtian body is actually multifold. Second, they do not take into account, what I believe to be Arendt's philosophical approach. I will support the hypothesis that there is a hidden or implicit phenomenology of the body in her work which leads to her view on the embodiment of action, then, of the political. To make my point, I will first address some of the main critiques of the Arendtian body in order to show that the biological/labouring body is not the only body on which Arendt has something to say. Thereafter, I will show that a more precise account of her phenomenology of the body can be found in the German version of *The Human Condition*, where she used the Heideggerian term *Befindlichkeit*-that she translated by 'identity' in the English version. I will outline the basis of her understanding of the embodiment of action by showing that there is a *hexis* and an *ethos* of action, the latter being the embodiment of what Arendt calls the principles of action. Ultimately, I will turn to Frantz Fanon's phenomenology of the body, to supplement Arendt's, and to show that freedom is an embodied pathic movement, an authentic dialectic between the body and the world, and an ontological resistance.

## **The Arendtian (biological) Body**

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt analysed the question of the body when she discussed the labouring activity. According to her, the human condition is divided into three activities, *labour*, *work*, and *action*. Work is the activity of craftsmanship, a means-end activity which produces the objects that are in the world. Action is the political activity *par excellence*, where people appear before others in public through deed and speech. Labour is the activity "which corresponds to the

biological process of the human body” (Arendt, 1998, p. 7). Therefore, the natural process of life which is located in the body *needs* the product of labour to regenerate the life process. We produce and consume in order to stay alive. Then, this is a claim about the biological or the labouring body, and it is precisely this body that is considered to be the Arendtian body, or the only Arendtian understanding of the body. This body cannot appear in public, because politics cannot be the realm of necessities, as “[t]he distinctive trait of the household sphere was that in it men lived together because they were driven by their wants and needs.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 30)

As Thomas Tierney understood it, the problem for Arendt is “that this privative dimension of privacy has been lost in modernity, that the private is no longer the realm of subhuman, slavish activity.” (1993, p. 16). Indeed, with the rise of the social, what was before private-for the Greeks-became public. Some critics reproached Arendt for her tendency to “treat the body as a hindrance or inconvenience to public life” (Tierney, 1993, p. 40). To put it differently, she is accused of celebrating the Greek account of the body against the Euromodern introduction of the body in public. This critique is well addressed by William Connolly in his text *A critique of pure politics* (1997). Just like Kant instated a purity in his morality, Arendt reinstated “a corollary model of purity inside the political ‘realm’ itself.” (Connolly, 1997, p. 15) For Connolly, this Arendtian temptation of purity is partly marked by “her depreciation of ‘the body’ in ethics and politics” (1997, p. 15). He criticised her blindness to the liberation from the bodily necessities as a political question. What is at stake here is her supposedly sharp distinction between the social and the political. For the Greeks, the liberation from the household, then from bodily necessity, was made possible by owning slaves. On the other hand, in Arendt’s interpretation, with Euromodernity and the rise of the social, society became a big household, then, private-unpolitical-matters were made public, all the matters that concerns the bodily necessity such as eating. However, for Connolly, the body has a political value and can be the object of political action. According to him, Arendt failed “to engage the micro-politics by which those thought-imbued feelings of anxiety, disgust, resentment,

responsiveness and generosity that enter so profoundly into private and public ethics, are shaped” (Connolly, 1993, p. 18) because she maintained the biological body out of the political realm. Therefore, she missed the sensibility of the body that could be made into a political object. However, as Liesbeth Schoonheim asserted, by his attempt to make the Arendtian body unidimensional or univocal, Connolly “is liable to the same criticism [...as] he posits a body that is univocal and *subordinate* to politics.” (2019, p. 481; my emphasis) Yet Arendt argued against the submission of the body to politics, she “objects to the fact that some corporeal dimensions are objects of political action.” (Schoonheim, 2019, p. 480) Hence, it means, that emotions or anything related to the biological body is not an *object* of the political. However, it does not mean that the political cannot be *embodied*. Indeed, for her, the necessity of the body is not something that one could be liberated from by politics.

What is mostly missed by the critiques of the Arendtian body is her own philosophical approach, namely a hermeneutic phenomenology that I have outlined in the previous chapter. And I think, Arendt had this approach with the concept of the body. I believe that one cannot have a fair view of Arendt’s understanding of the body without taking her philosophical approach into consideration.

In his critique of Arendt’s account of the body, Tierney holds that her view on the body blinded her interpretation of the Greeks’ and Christians’ tradition of thought. However, I think this is a misunderstanding of what Arendt is doing while discussing the tradition. Whether Arendt’s account of Christianity is accurate or not is not the issue here. Tierney accused Arendt of subsuming her interpretation of the tradition under her account of what the body is. Yet, according to her philosophical approach, I suggest analysing her attempt to discuss the tradition as part of her deconstruction of metaphysics. Indeed, she does not advocate a Greek account of the body against the Christian one, rather, she tries to analyse what role does the body play in the

metaphysical tradition. In the following paragraphs, I will show that it is fruitful to read Arendt's discussion about the body in the tradition as a critique of the attempt to be liberated from the necessities of body. I will argue that, for her, the biological body cannot be mastered.

When Hannah Arendt is discussing the body in *The Human Condition*, she first refers to the Greek experience. In her interpretation of the Greeks, the body was considered as subhuman, it was the body and its necessity that separated them from immortality. Biological life was considered less than human and suicide was esteemed higher than being enslaved, as being enslaved meant to be subjected to the necessity of life. However, a means to escape or to master the biological body was to own slaves in order to move freely in the public space. Suicide was seen as a more noble act because the slave "served only life's necessities and submitted to the compulsion of his master because he wanted to stay alive at all costs" (Arendt, 1998, p. 316). Moreover, for the Greeks, immortality was achieved by doing great deeds that could be remembered. Yet, the philosophical tradition understood that the biological body was part of the human condition, of the *vita activa*. More precisely, "[t]he death of Pericles and the Peloponnesian War mark the moment when the men of thought and the men of action began to take different paths" (Arendt, 1998, p.17n16). This path was opened by the philosophers, arguably by Socrates himself, who found a higher principle than the one of the *polis* where immortality is achievable. Thus, something new replaced the mortal body/immortal action dichotomy. This shift from the men of action to the men of thought is illustrated by the distinction between immortality and eternity. The thinker, by leaving the *vita activa*, enters the *vita contemplativa* which is the realm where eternity can be experienced. As Arendt explained, this is the reason why Socrates never wrote down his thoughts, because at "the moment he sits down to write his thoughts he ceases to be concerned primarily with eternity", rather, she follows, "[h]e has entered the *vita activa* and chosen its way of permanence and potential immortality." (1998, p. 20). Therefore, while for the Greeks, the distinction was between the labouring body and the immortality of work, deed, and speech, in the philosophical tradition since Plato, the immortality is not a concern anymore. Rather, the distinction is between the *vita activa*



and the *vita contemplativa* as the realm of eternity, where one withdraws from the world in order to think. In the *Phaedo*, Plato argued that philosophy was a way to detach ourselves from our body. It is precisely our body that stops us from going to the eternal realm of ideas (Plato, 1969, p. 49, 66d5). This dualism between the body and the soul is part of what Arendt called *metaphysical fallacies* (1978, p. 12), and more precisely, the two-world theory which is the separation between the sensible world or the world of appearance and the intelligible world where the truthfulness of things can be found. In the *Gorgias*, Plato discussed the nature of the soul. Socrates tells us that the soul is constituted by an intelligible part, the *noûs*, which is corrupted by the sensible world. As Socrates claimed, “our body is a tomb” (Plato, 1969, p. 275, 493a) for our soul because it is what relates us to the sensible world. Therefore, the body must be mastered by the soul. For Plato, philosophy is a way to achieve this as it represents the death of the body. In other words, “the philosopher frees his soul from association with the body” (Plato, 1969, p. 47, 65a). Hence, Plato’s dualism is an attempt to master the body in order to attain the sky of ideas.

If I decide to focus on the question of the body, what is at play, in the metaphysical tradition for Arendt, is the attempt to master the body. This critique can be found in Arendt’s discussion of Christianity and Euromodernity as well. When discussing Augustine, Arendt highlighted that the body was subjected to the mind by the will, which is an organ of the mind. Although Augustine did not make a separation between the body and the mind such as “the death of the body, the separation of the soul from the body, is not good for anyone” (2003, XIII:6). In order to maintain the unity between the body and the soul, the body must be mastered by the soul as death is the end of this unity. Hence, Christians’s concern for life is higher than the Greeks. Moreover, even when Augustine talked about the eternal resurrected body, he emphasised this relationship, as “the spiritual flesh will thus be subject to the spirit” (2003, XXII:21), a body “which will be completely subdued to the spirit, will receive from the spirit all that it needs for its life, and will need no other nourishment” (Augustine, 2003, XXII:25). Here again, there is an attempt to master the body.

However, for Hannah Arendt, “it depends upon labor to produce whatever is necessary to keep the human organism alive” (2018, p. 786). It means that labour is a condition for the biological body to work, however, the body cannot be mastered since “laboring always moves in the same circle prescribed by the living organism” (Arendt, 2018, p. 795). Thus, the biological body cannot be mastered precisely because the labouring activity is subjected to it.

Therefore, what has been criticised as the Arendtian body is her attempt to describe the living organism as a body that cannot be mastered. Indeed, whether it is the subjection of the body over the soul for Plato, the subjection of the body over the will for Augustine, or the subjection of the body over politics in Euromodernity, these attempts are metaphysical fallacies precisely because the biological necessities that emanate from the body will always remain until our death. In the next section, I will show that there are Arendtian bodies, as the biological body is not Arendt’s only endeavour to discuss the body.

## **The Arendtian bodies**

In the following paragraphs, I will analyse the phenomenal structure of the Arendtian bodies. First, what could be said about a non-biological or non-labouring body could be related to her view on labour as a means-end activity. Indeed, labour is the means to fill the biological needs of the body. The movement of the labouring body is cyclical (Arendt, 1998, p. 96). As Linda Zerilli argued, the movement of the body, for Arendt, is “generic, uniform, univocal, a virtual prison-house. Nothing is less common, less communicable, less public than the body” (1995, p. 189). However, even if Zerilli was here talking about what is, for her, the Arendtian account of the body, as I showed above, it is referring to the biological body. Then, what could be a possible account of a *communicable*, *public*, and *non-generic*, in other words political, body in Arendt’s thought? According to Margaret Betz-Hull, a close reading of Arendt’s political theory shows that for her, “the body

does represent more than a mere mute motivation” (2002, p. 161). In *The Human Condition*, Arendt stressed that “the origin of the early reproach of busybodiness (*polypragmosyne*) levelled against those who spent their life in politics” in “[t]he time-honored resentment of the philosopher against the human condition of having a body” (1998, p. 16n15). In Arendt’s thought, the body has another role in the human condition, namely the appearing body that “functions as a vehicle of the speech and deeds of political action” (Betz Hull, 2002, p. 162). When Arendt states that “being and appearing coincide” (1978, p. 19), she means that the reality of something depends on its appearance in the world, in front of others. Therefore, she outlines a possible role that the body could play in her theory of action. She emphasised this latter point in her critique of the Cartesian *res cogitans* for being bodyless (Arendt, 1978, p. 48). By that, she meant that we are always in the world, that the body cannot be separated from the mind. For her, reality cannot be accounted without appearances, without the activity of perception. Moreover, it is precisely on this notion of appearance that her political phenomenology relies.<sup>76</sup>

Hannah Arendt is concerned with lived experience, and she aims to understand the meaning of a phenomenon which cannot be subsumed under a pre-existent category. For Arendt, every political phenomenon needs to be understood in its novelty, this is why the new cannot be subsumed under the old. She stated that every appearance in public is like a second birth, a contingency that brings novelty into the world and that cannot be described by a means-end instrumental model of politics (Arendt, 1998, p. 176). Within the very performance of action, the actors express their ‘*who-ness*’, who they are and not their ‘*what-ness*’, what they are (Arendt, 1998, p. 179). From a political perspective, Arendt is not concerned with the empirical data that describe the identity of someone. Rather, *who* someone is, is a manifestation of a political identity within the very performance of action. In other words, it reveals the “unique *distinctness*” of someone (Arendt, 1998, p. 176; my

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<sup>76</sup> See Arendt (1978; 1998, pp. 175-243), Marieke Borren (2010), Sophie Loidolt (2018).

emphasis). Men's<sup>77</sup> distinctness "are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men", this type of appearance, Arendt follows, is "distinguished from mere bodily existence" (Arendt, 1998, p. 176). Here, she makes a distinction between a political appearance and the labouring body. The labouring body does not know distinctness because its cyclic process is the same for everyone. However, the way we appear before others in public is distinct. This statement could be related to Merleau-Ponty<sup>78</sup> when he argued that the lived body is not an object, "I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather, I am it." (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 834). When Merleau-Ponty explained that 'I am my body', it means, from an Arendtian perspective, that our distinctness is necessarily embodied. Furthermore, it refers to the distinction I have made between the body as an object and embodiment. When the body is taken as an object, its appearance is submitted to a model of analysis. In other words, I *already* or *instantly know* what this object/body is. However, if a phenomenon is embodied and appears in public, then, this *embodiment is a disclosure*, meaning that the body is what discloses the phenomenon that is yet to be discovered or understood. Therefore, to follow Arendt's formula that 'being and appearing coincide', the distinct body which appears before others reveals *who* someone is and not only *what* someone is. The what-ness of someone is the result of the knowledge of a body as an object for empirical sciences. Every time we appear in public, it is "like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance" (Arendt, 1998, p. 176-7). Thus, we are the embodiment of something new. We insert ourselves into the human world and this insertion "is not forced upon us by necessity, like labor, and it is not prompted by utility, like work." (Arendt, 1998, p. 177) Accordingly, I stress that *there is not an Arendtian body but the possibility of Arendtian bodies*. Every human activity has, I hypothesise, a specific mode of embodiment. Moreover, each embodiment is conditioned. The labouring body is conditioned by

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<sup>77</sup> I use the masculine when I am directly referring to Arendt's arguments and quotes. I use 'men and women' or 'they/them' for my own arguments.

<sup>78</sup> The translations from Merleau-Ponty are mine

necessity, the *homo faber* or the working body is conditioned by utility and the political body “may be simulated by the presence of others [...], but it is never conditioned by them”. Rather, “its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 177) Yet it does not tell us precisely what the hypothetical conditions for the embodiment of politics are.

For Hannah Arendt, politics regroups simultaneously what she described as two human conditions, namely *natality* and *plurality*.

“If action as beginning corresponds to the fact of birth, if it is the actualization of the human condition of natality, then speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as distinct and unique being among equals”

(Arendt, 1998, p. 178)

Now, I will highlight the relationship between embodiment, natality, and plurality. Indeed, because they are the conditions of politics, to look at their possible embodiment is necessary to explore my hypothesis of the embodiment of action.

Regarding speech, it seems obvious that one needs a body in order to speak and express their distinctness. Political embodiment seems conditioned to natality and plurality that both rely on two political activities which are *action* and *speech*. Nevertheless, the question of how politics is precisely embodied remains. What is underpinned here is the question of the who-ness, how is a *who* embodied in a certain way that it is not a *what*. An exemplification of this distinction could be found in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phénoménologie de la perception* when he mentioned Phaedra. More precisely, he held that “the actress becomes invisible, and it is Phaedra who appears.” (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 870) Here the distinction between the actress and Phaedra can be assimilated to the one Arendt

made between *what-ness* and *who-ness*. Indeed, the what-ness of someone is a general role that someone has in society, a social status that can be rooted in an empiricity or not. It is a general category that does not acknowledge the necessary distinctness of the who-ness. On the other hand, being Phaedra means to be distinguished from the other actresses. The latter becomes invisible when the former appears because the *embodied-who* appears in place of the generic *embodied-what*. Through her performance, the actress shows her distinctness. Because the what-ness could be assimilated to a social status, it is a fixed category that remains out of the space of appearance. However, the who-ness exists only in a specific space of appearance, where *who someone is* can be disclosed to others. Therefore, the distinctness of Phaedra as the who-ness of the actress is conditioned to a space of appearance, which is theatre in this example. Accordingly, I submit that the what-ness does not have a specific embodiment, or, at least, is not directly conditioned to it, while the who-ness is characterised by its embodiment. By this, I mean that the distinctness of the what-ness is more generic, it is a category like gender. In other words, the perception of a what-ness is produced by a social category.

Consequently, an Arendtian understanding of the embodiment of distinctness is not just that ‘one needs a body in order to speak’. Rather, it is that the distinctness is an embodiment. Phaedra is distinct from another actress because of the speaking performance. The actress becomes invisible, then silent, and it is Phaedra who appears, through deed and speech. Put together, the deed and speech are what reaffirm the contingency, in other words, *the distinctive newness of the who*. However, if the relationship between who-ness and novelty seems clearer now, what about the question of plurality, one of Arendt’s condition of politics.

As Hannah Arendt had it, the “revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others [...] that is, in sheer human togetherness.” (1998, p. 180; Arendt’s emphasis) Togetherness is a condition of appearance as we cannot appear for ourselves. It would mean that our body has become an object that appears before us. Merleau-Ponty explained that an object is

not always available to me while my body is, as it is always *with me*. Each of my actions, even the most ordinary ones, are embodied (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 769). Thus, both the who-ness and the what-ness are embodied. In Arendt's philosophy, Who-ness is distinctness, and I submit that it is because it is embodied that this distinctness can be disclosed to others. According to Arendt, this togetherness, this plurality, is a web of relationships. "Action and speech go on between men", it is an in-between that "owes its origin exclusively to men acting and speaking directly *to* one another." (Arendt, 1998, p. 182-3, her emphasis) In other words, I can disclose my who-ness only amongst others.

Here, I built a hypothetical account of what the Arendtian bodies could be by putting together Arendt's formula of 'being and appearing coincide' and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. However, it remains a hypothesis since there is, apparently, no evidence of Arendt's embodied action or about the *embodied-who*. To a certain extent, she gave clues about this possibility of embodiment when she stated that speech is bound to the existence of a living body (Arendt, 1998, p. 183). Yet, it seems, again, to be a reference to the biological body. This is why, in the following section, I aim to evidence an Arendtian account of embodiment that does not refer to the biological body as such.

## **Identity as Befindlichkeit**

As is often the case in Arendt's work, when an ambiguity seems to obscure what she means, a way to bypass this is to have a look at the German version of the book. In the case of *The Human Condition*, Arendt wrote both the English and German version. In *Vita Activa*<sup>79</sup>, Arendt sometimes uses the Heideggerian word *Befindlichkeit* that she translated as *identity* in *The Human Condition*. I suggest that this word is a direct reference to Heidegger as *The Human Condition* "grew right out of

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<sup>79</sup> German version of *The Human Condition*.

the days in Marburg and so in all respects indebted to [Heidegger].” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 117) In this section, I will first showcase the Arendtian use of this word, thereafter, I will focus on the meaning Heidegger gave to this concept that he coined. This will outline the possibility of Arendt’s phenomenology of embodied action.

Hannah Arendt used the word identity as a translation of *Befindlichkeit* under the chapter on *Action* in *The Human Condition*, and, more precisely, in the paragraph called *The Greek Solution* or *Der griechische Ausweg aus den Aporien des Handelns* (the Greek way out of the aporias of action). Here, *Befindlichkeit* refers to the “unchangeable identity [*bleibende Befindlichkeit*] of the person, though disclosing itself intangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible only in the story of the actor’s and speaker’s life” (Arendt, 1998, p. 193). *Befindlichkeit* is the human essence as “the essence of *who* somebody is” (Arendt, 1998, p. 193; my emphasis). However, as Arendt stated, for the Greeks, this essence can only come into being “when life departs, leaving behind nothing but a story” (1998, p. 193). Moreover, she described this ‘unchangeable identity’ as an *eudaimonia*, a Greek word that means ‘well-being’ and that she translated as the well-being of the *daimon*. Therefore, it seems paradoxical, how can the who-ness of someone, if according to my hypothesis is embodied, be made manifest after someone’s death? In order to solve this paradox, or at least to make sense of it, I will investigate first the Arendtian meaning of *eudaimonia* and *daimon* and then into the Heideggerian meaning of *Befindlichkeit*, in order to understand how and why she made a connection between the two.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt compared the who-ness of someone to a *daimon*. According to her, we cannot control the way we appear to others, rather, “the ‘who’, which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the *daimon* in Greek religion which accompanies throughout his life” (Arendt, 1998, p. 179). The relationship between *daimon* and *eudaimonia*, as expressed by Arendt, is closely related to the Heideggerian account of it. In



*Parmenides*, Heidegger stressed that “*εὐδαιμονία* [*eudaimonia*] means the holding sway in the appropriate measure of the ‘εἶ’-the appearing and coming into presence of the *δαίμονιον* [*daimonion*]” (Heidegger, 1992, p. 117). This ‘holding sway’ means that human beings are *eudaimon* “if they are properly attuned to Being.” (Tchir, 2017, p. 74) It is, in Arendt’s words, “a lasting state of being” (1998, p. 193), lasting after the death of the body. As “in *μῦθος* [*mythos*] the *δαίμονιον* [*daimonion*] appears” (Heidegger, 1992, p. 117), it is the *mythos*, the story or the myth left behind that gives the *daimon* its unchangeability (*bleibende*), that gives the *daimon* its immortality. Moreover, Arendt explained that “this *daimon* [...], this personal element in a man, can only appear where a public space exists” (Arendt, 1968, p. 73). It represents “the non-sovereign nature of self-disclosure and its retrospective, narrative unfolding.” (Tchir, 2017, p. 74) As Arendt and Heidegger hold it, the *daimon* is immanent to the actor, it is a part of the who-ness, it “is not a ‘spirit dwelling somewhere within the breast” (Heidegger, 1992, p. 117). Rather it is the ungraspable part of what I call the *embodied who*. It is a way to make the embodiment exist politically. However, it could be pleaded that Arendt’s use of *eudaimonia* expresses the unchangeable feature of identity rather than its embodiment. Indeed, the *daimon* is not embodied as such. This is why I will now focus on the Heideggerian *Befindlichkeit*, which, I will argue, is embodied, to highlight Arendt’s use of it.

In *Being and Time*, the word *Befindlichkeit* that could be translated as mood or feeling goes against our traditional understanding of what feelings are. Heidegger stressed the fact that *Befindlichkeit* is “prior to all psychology moods” (1962, p. 172). Rather, his understanding of ‘mood’ has something to do with truthfulness. It is then opposed to the common understanding of emotions as interfering with truth. Heidegger argued that *Befindlichkeit* has three main features, “the disclosing of thrownness [...], the current disclosing of Being-in-the-world as a whole [and] a more penetrating understanding of the worldhood of the world.” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 176) Basically, the first feature of *Befindlichkeit* must be understood as the finding of oneself (*sich befinden*) in its thrownness or its facticity. The *Dasein* (Being-there) makes the experience of itself through the

experience of its situation, its 'there' (*Das*). The 'thrownness' refers to the very experience experienced by the *Dasein* in its openness to itself. However, this openness implies the closing of the *whence* and the *whither*, which "remain in darkness" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 173). It means that the *Dasein* is thrown in a world with no prior knowledge but it just experiences its *Dass* (that-it-is), its facticity, which means the experience of oneself in the mood or state-of-mind that-it-has. Then, in *Befindlichkeit*, there is the experience of thrownness, "the Being of the 'there' is disclosed *moodwise* in its 'that-it-is'" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 173; my emphasis).

Regarding the second feature, Heidegger highlighted that a mood assails us, "it comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside' but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being." (1962, p. 176) Because Being-in-the-world as a whole has already been disclosed, it is the condition that "makes possible first of all to direct oneself towards something" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 176). In short, for Heidegger, *Befindlichkeit* is a mode of openness of the being-in-the-world, it is the "fundamental" (Dubois, 2000, p. 51) 'how' of the disclosedness of *Dasein*. In other words, *Befindlichkeit* is the very disclosedness in which the world is present for me, as a whole. Every experience of the world is disclosed in a mood, "we are never free of moods." (Heidegger, 1962, p. 175)

The third feature concerns the within-the-world things or the other beings that we encounter. However, in order to encounter other beings, we need to be affected; our concern has "the character of becoming affected in some way" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 176). Indeed, as Heidegger explained, we do not first arrive in a world and then encounter other beings, rather *Dasein* is always a being-with, which means that what it is, is characterised by its relation to beings. To summarise, *Befindlichkeit* is the openness of oneself through its thrownness, the openness of the world as a whole and the openness of the being-with in its being-affected (*Betroffenwerden*s). Moreover, it must be emphasised that *Befindlichkeit* is not a cognition nor a reaction, rather it is prior to them, it is what makes a reaction possible. It is then revelatory and constitutive of one's relation towards beings.

Concerning the translation of *Befindlichkeit*, I follow Christos Hadjioannou who argued that the term ‘disposition’ is more suited and is “the best option for translating *Befindlichkeit*.” (2019, p. 100) Indeed, *Befindlichkeit* is “more than a *passive being affected*: it also about *having a comportment*, in the sense that it requires a certain, even minimal, (relational) enactment that *relates* to an other.” (Hadjioannou, 2019, p. 100; his emphasis) Accordingly, it could be assimilated to Arendt’s view on plurality, even if Heidegger makes it start from the viewpoint of *Dasein* and self-understanding, but I will discuss this point later. Heidegger’s concept of *Befindlichkeit* as disposition is related to the *διάθεσις* (*diathesis*), which was coined by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*. For him, a disposition is “the arrangement [*taxis*] of something with parts in terms either of its place [*topos*], or of its potentiality [*dunamis*] or of its form [*eidos*]. Some sort of position has to be involved, as indeed the very word disposition suggests.” (Aristotle, 2004, p.141, 1022b) Aristotle also explained that a disposition is “disposed well or badly” (2004, p. 141, 1022b). In that sense, it could hypothetically relate to being as a *who* (well) or as a *what* (badly) for Arendt, but I will explore this possibility in the following sections. Moreover, Heidegger coined *Befindlichkeit* in relationship with *Stimmung* (mood), as every disposition is determined by a *stimmung*. More generally, when it comes to political phenomena, I believe that this idea of mood is important as it allows us to go beyond subject-centred interpretations. For instance, in terms of political action, Frantz Fanon talks about a revolutionary mood, but I will talk about that in the last part of this chapter.

These attunements or moods which determine our disposition can be enlightened by Heidegger’s interpretation of the Aristotelian *Pathos*. In Heidegger’s philosophy, “*pathos* leaves the narrow domain of psychology and is instead situated within the broader domain of life and its movements.” (Oele, 2012, p. 7) It is an essential movement of being at “the center of the fundamental changes affecting a living being’s existence” (Oele, 2012, p. 9). In other words, *Pathos* is a mode of being disposed. In *De Anima*, Aristotle discussed the *pathos*, the affections of the soul, as a phenomenon that encompasses both body and soul. Indeed, it seems “to be the case that with

most affections the soul undergoes or produces none of them without the body” (Aristotle, 1986, p. 128, 403a). Similarly, Heidegger emphasised the connection of the body and the *pathos*, as “our being gripped by such and such a πάθος [*pathos*] does not come exclusively from what befalls us, but the γένεσις [*genesis*] of πάθη [*páthē*] is also given by corporeality.” (Heidegger, 2009, p. 136) Therefore, the *pathos* is a mode of being that is also given by its corporeality. The living human being is an *embodied being in the world*. For Heidegger, *pathos* is “the being-taken of human being-there in its full bodily being-in-the-world” (2009, p. 132) Hence, *Befindlichkeit* makes manifest the relationship between *pathos* and *hexis*<sup>80</sup>. For Heidegger, the *hexis* is “the *determination of the genuineness of being-there in a moment of being-composed as to something*” (2009, p. 119; Heidegger’s emphasis). Here, the genuineness refers to the authenticity of the Being of *Dasein*. Hence, *Befindlichkeit* puts *pathos* and *hexis* together as *pathos* is what is made manifest, what makes us visible, *embodied*, in *hexis*. It reveals the coming-to-be; *embodiment is the condition for the being to come to be*, or what Heidegger and Arendt respectively called, a disclosure of being or of the ‘who’. In other words, *pathos* is the manifestation of the wellness or badness of what is disposed, then of its authenticity or not.

After this Heideggerian digression, I can now come back to Hannah Arendt and her use of *Befindlichkeit*. As I said above it, Arendt associated *Befindlichkeit* with the word *bleibende* to mark the unchangeable character of identity, she is not referring to a passing mood. Following Heidegger, she uses *Befindlichkeit* to talk about the ‘how’ of the Being-in-the-world, the ‘how’ of our appearance in the world before others. Indeed, as being and appearing coincide, being-in-the-world also means appearing-in-the-world. However, Arendt does not view *Befindlichkeit* from the viewpoint of *Dasein*. As Sophie Loidolt (2018) had it, the specificity of Arendt’s phenomenology is to place *plurality* as the core phenomenon instead of *Dasein*. Therefore, *Befindlichkeit* is to be seen from the perspective of plurality. Arendt “takes the perspective of the worldly appearing of this ‘how’ of existence,

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<sup>80</sup> Another term for ‘disposition’ in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*

which appears to others as my unique being-in-the-world” (Loidolt, 2018, p. 210), then, it concerns the disclosure of the ‘who’. For Arendt, *Befindlichkeit* does not mean a givenness to myself, a finding of oneself. Rather, it concerns one’s givenness to others. According to the Arendtian account of *Befindlichkeit* and in respect to the Heideggerian account as well, there is the possibility of an Arendtian political phenomenology of the body that appears. In regard to the Heideggerian embodied *Befindlichkeit*, I will argue in the next section that political action is embodied and made manifest through a *pathos*, a *hexis* and an *ethos* of action.

### **The embodiment of action**

In this last section, I will show what I think to be Arendt’s account of *hexis* in what Sophie Loidolt calls *the excellence* and *the location thesis* (2018, p. 130). Thereafter, I will focus on a possible account of Arendt’s *pathos* and *ethos*. I will defend that Arendt gave a political account of *pathos* and that what she called ‘political principles’ are the *ethos* of action. The idea of *pathos* allows us to go beyond the Euromodern conception of the subject that is rational and masters its emotions. Moreover, both these ideas of *pathos* and *ethos*/principle of action will be more developed in Chapter V. In that last section, I principally aim to highlight the importance, if not the conditionality, of the body to politics in Arendt’s thought.

According to Sophie Loidolt, *the excellence thesis* is best expressed by Arendt when she stated that “no activity can become excellent if the world does not provide a proper space for its exercise” (Arendt, 1998, p. 49; Loidolt, 2018, p. 133). On the other hand, *the location thesis* refers to the elementary meaning of the private and the public which “indicates that there are things that need to be hidden and others that need to be displayed publicly if they are to exist at all.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 73; Loidolt, 2018, p. 133) For instance, I argued in the beginning of this chapter that the biological or labouring body *should* stay hidden, it *should not* appear in public. On the contrary, action *should* appear in public to have a political existence. Here, the emphasis put on *should* and

*should not* shows that, for Arendt, it does not mean that a specific activity cannot appear in public as such. Labour *can* appear in public, but it *should not*. The should/not must be taken as an ‘in order to’, *in order for the becoming to be*. For instance, in order for plurality to be politically significant, it must appear in public in front of others. If it stays private, this plurality becomes friendship, as Sophie Loidolt stated (2018, p. 141). Accordingly, I think that this Arendtian account of the location of an activity refers to the Heideggerian understanding of *hexis*.

As I explained above, the *hexis* is “the *determination of the genuineness of being-there in a moment of being-composed as to something*” (2009, p. 119; Heidegger’s emphasis). The authenticity of the *Dasein*, for Arendt, is to be found in a specific disposition or *hexis*. According to her, authenticity depends on the formation of plurality as a political ‘we’; it is then based on an activity. Moreover, the authenticity of plurality is related to its visibility but also “on *how* the activity is realized” (Loidolt, 2018, p. 223; her emphasis). Hence, the *hexis* is a specific disposition in which the becoming authentic is possible or not. Its stability depends on the activities and their actualisation, even if a *hexis* can change precisely because of the *pathos*. In other words, the *being-in-the-world* is always a *being-disposed-in-the-world*. However, the character of this being disposed, its authenticity or not, depends on the *becoming-to-be* of this being. To illustrate this, I suggest coming back to the distinction I made between an actress (*what*) and Phaedra (*who*). To be-Phaedra or to be-an-actress depends on the ‘how’ of the becoming to be. Being-Phaedra means to be-disposed in a certain way that is different from being-an-actress. The *hexis* is not the same because of the becoming-to-be, or the *pathos*. The question could be put differently as, what makes the shift of disposition from what-ness to who-ness? First, *pathos* is related to authenticity and inauthenticity which means as a way to be disposed in an authentic way or not. Being disposed as a ‘what’ or as a ‘who’ has something to do with the authenticity of our disposition. In other words, the authenticity of *Befindlichkeit*. Indeed, a “*pathic* movement can lead to destruction, but can also mean the coming to fruition and full actualization of something” (Oele, 2012, p. 12). To be disposed in an authentic

way for the actress is a way to become Phaedra. The actress fully becomes *who* she is, Phaedra, through acting. However, if the performance is judged as bad, the pathic movement leads to the destruction of Phaedra. Then, to follow Arendt's claim, the "unchangeable identity [*bleibende Befindlichkeit*] of the person, though disclosing itself intangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible" (Arendt, 1998, p. 193). Who someone is refers to its authentic *bexis* that is achievable through a *pathic movement*. The *pathos* is an *embodied movement* towards authenticity or not. Accordingly, I suggest that the body, is the first condition of politics, because this movement is what expresses the uniqueness of the 'who' as one of the conditions of plurality.

For Arendt, the presence of others is required for a political action to be remembered (Arendt, 1998). These others can make who one is and make one's action "grasped as palpable entity only after it has come to its end", when one is "leaving behind nothing but a story" (Arendt, 1998, p. 193). However, when it comes to the question of the body, one could argue that action is embodied within the *pathic* movement, within its very performance, but that the remembrance of action makes the body vanish. In other words, we would remember a disembodied action. It would mean that within the story, the actor is a disembodied actor. Yet, as I suggested above, corporeality is the first condition of politics as it makes possible the uniqueness of the 'who'. Therefore, the question should be, what bodily presence remains after the performance of action? What bodily presence, what embodiment remains in the story? I suggest that the body leaves an *ethos*, or rather, takes the form of an *ethos* once the action is done. I submit that within the story, the trace of the embodied action is an *ethos* that is illustrated by what Arendt called 'political principles'. It implies that politics would not be meaningful without its corporeality which enables the creation of an *ethos*.

Hannah Arendt's concept of political principle is not clearly described in her work but rather disseminated. In *What is Freedom*, she argued that principles are what make action springs, they are

the originary power of action (Arendt, 2006, p. 152). In *On Revolution*, she stressed that principles guide the action, they have a guiding power (Arendt, 2016, p. 120). Finally, in *The Promise of Politics*, she emphasised their “organizing power” (Muldoon, 2016, p. 122), their relationship to political community or plurality. Moreover, she added that these principles become “fully manifest only in the performing act itself” (Arendt, 2006, p. 151). A principle has something to do with the performance of the action, it is, what first sets action into motion (Arendt, 2006, p. 194). Furthermore, these principles that inspire action are not psychological emotions or “empirical desires and motivations” (Muldoon, 2016, p. 123). They cannot be assimilated to any goal to follow. Rather, they are general like the love of equality or honour. I believe that the Aristotelian distinction between ἀρετή (*arete*) and τέχνη (*techné*), or between virtue and craft/skill is underpinned in the distinction between means-end goal and inspiring principles. For Aristotle, “works of art have their merit in themselves” while virtuous act (*arete*) depends on how the agent is acting (Aristotle, 2004, p. 37, 1105a25). In Homer, the *arete* is the attribute of the hero and their courage (Finkelberg, 1998). In other words, it is what is made manifest in the performance of action and what guides the action itself. The similitude between Arendt’s notion of principle and the *arete* is also visible since she compared the principles to the Machiavellian’s notion of *virtu*, which is inspired by the *arete* (Ball, 1994). Thus, principles are to be understood in the sense of *arete* as they inspire action rather than they prescribe it.

Another important point is that for Aristotle, the *arete* is one of the three categories of *ethos* (Aristotle, 1991). This *ethos* does not belong as such to the speaker, but it appeals to the audience to judge its credibility. Arendt also highlighted that principles are criteria through which the action of the actor can be judged (2005, p. 65). In other words, “the two [deed and principle] appear together simultaneously in the public realm in which they can be interpreted and judged.” (Muldoon, 2016, p. 125) Additionally, Arendt emphasised that principles are immanent, which means that they belong to the time and space of their appearance. This immanence makes them “manifest in the world as long as the action lasts, but no longer” (Arendt, 2006, p. 151). However,



because principles also are standards of judgment, they can be remembered. An action is judged in the light of these principles as a remembrance of past political actions. Therefore, because principles inspire and guide the action of the doer, it is through them that the *who-ness* of the actor becomes manifest, its *ethos*. In other words, a principle, in the sense of *arete*, guides the actor and makes manifest *who* the actor is. In Heraclitus's words “ἦθος ἀνθρώπου δαίμων [the *ethos* of man is its *daimon*]” (2004, p. 310). Actually, it is precisely, this account of *ethos* that Arendt emphasised in her note from February 1956 (Arendt, 2002, p. 760). The *daimon* refers to the political principles that are made manifest in the *ethos*.

Accordingly, I submit that principles are what inspire and guide the *pathic* movement of the actor, disclosing *who* someone is, in an authentic *hexis*. The *pathic* movement, when one is acting, is the embodiment of a principle that results in a manifestation of *who* someone is; which means a manifestation of their being-disposed-in-the-world. Thus, I claim that the immanence of the Arendtian principles is not just related to their spatiality and temporality but also to their embodiment. What differentiates a principle from a norm or a rule to follow is its embodiment, which gives a principle its distinctness. The generality or universality of a principle means that it can possibly be embodied in a different way by men and women of action without losing their distinctness. In other words, it is the embodiment that enables the passage from a general *arete* to a specific *ethos*-or *daimon*, without losing the spirit of the former. A heroic Achilles is different from a heroic Ulysses. Even if they both are heroic, their *way of being* heroic is not the same. They embody heroism in a different way. It is the embodiment that allows principles to be actualised, because if they were not, every new act would be subsumed under an old, fixed category-Ulysses is heroic like Achilles and not in himself. Therefore, when I suggest that corporeality is the condition of politics, I mean that it is the condition of plurality because of its requirement to distinctness. To put it differently, one's *embodied pathic movement* is the condition of one's distinctness, then, of politics.

I explained why the thesis of the antipolitical Arendtian body cannot be taken to be the only Arendtian understanding of the body. Indeed, through an interpretation of her use of *Befindlichkeit* to define the who-ness of someone, I showed that the body plays a conditional role in Arendt's theory of action. More precisely, my point was that what can be seen as an evidence—we need a body to move, then, to act—is actually justified in Hannah Arendt's philosophy. The Arendtian account of the body that I have described could be characterised as a politicisation and pluralisation of the Heideggerian *Befindlichkeit*. While for Heidegger *Befindlichkeit* was the finding of oneself to itself, for Arendt it is the finding of oneself to others. Even if I agree with Sophie Loidolt that Arendt put plurality as the core phenomenon of her phenomenology rather than *Dasein*, yet my aim was to show that the body plays an important and conditional role in it. In other words, my goal was to emphasise the conditional role that the body plays in Arendt's theory of action. Now, in the last part of this chapter, I will turn to Frantz Fanon's phenomenology of the body, and I want to suggest that freedom is an embodied pathic movement and an ontological resistance.

## **Embodied Freedom**

In the previous parts of this chapter, I showed what I have argued to be Hannah Arendt's hidden phenomenology of the body. I believe that this detour to Arendt's phenomenology was important because it helped me to set the basis of a non-subject-centred understanding of political phenomena. Indeed, the body cannot be taken out of its mode of being disposed in the world. As I have said, the body has a conditional role in action, in a certain way, through its pathic movement, the body constitutes the *archives* of action. For Merleau-Ponty, “my body and phenomena are inevitably linked.” (2000, p. 1000) This is why, if, following the purpose of this work, I want to analyse freedom as a political phenomenon from a phenomenological perspective, the starting point of investigation is the disposed *embodied* experience. As a lived phenomenon, freedom is

*inevitably* embodied. Therefore, the body in motion, the pathic movement, is a privileged experiential ground from which freedom can be enacted, then appear and become manifest *in the world*. Accordingly, in the last part of this chapter, I will hypothesise that freedom is an ontological resistance, meaning that it changes the ontological status of a relationship between people. When freedom appears, something comes to pass *in-between* people, which affects, *de facto*, our mode of being disposed. A state of relationship is actualised. In order to make my point, I will analyse Fanon's phenomenology of the body in *Peau noire, masque blanc* and *Les damnés de la terre*, his account of the women activist in *L'An V de la révolution algérienne*<sup>81</sup>, as well as Frederick Douglass' fight with the slave master Covey.

## **Alienated Embodiment**

In this part, I want to actualise Hannah Arendt's account of what-ness and who-ness with Fanon's phenomenology of the body, and what could respectively be understood as the *alienated embodiment* and *the authentic embodiment*. In *Peau noire, masque blanc*, Frantz Fanon used Merleau-Ponty's account of the body image (BI) and the body schema (BS). Shaun Gallagher highlighted that these two concepts have often been used interchangeably while they should "be kept conceptually distinct" (1986, p. 541). Indeed, I think that the distinction between these two concepts is important to understand Fanon's account of the lived embodied experience of the black man.

The body image could be defined as an overall consciousness of our own body while the body schema is the sensory-motor pre-reflective body that creates a smooth relationship with our being situated or disposed. In other words, the body image is a 'me' while the body schema is an 'I'. The body schema is the "bodily know-how that makes the correspondence between embodied subjects and their situations smooth and seamless" (Zeiler, 2013, p. 71) It illustrates the unity of my action

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<sup>81</sup> In this section, all the quotes from Fanon are translated by me. I reference the French version of his books.

and my environment, the dialectic between the body and the world<sup>82</sup>. Accordingly, as I have highlighted before, our body is not just in space or in the world, but *of the world*. In ‘normal’ situations, the body schema precedes the body image as the former is pre-reflective (‘I’) and the latter is a consciousness of one’s own body, so is reflective (‘me’). This ‘normal’ situation is the *authentic embodiment*. On the other hand, Atari and Tanaka suggested that in some situations, the body schema is absorbed or assimilated by the body image (2020, p. 659). The ‘me’ precedes the ‘I’. It is the *alienated embodiment*. Indeed, “in the white world, the man of colour encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema.” (Fanon, 2015, p. 110) This is why, for Fanon, there is an *historico-racial schema* below the body schema (Fanon, 2015, p. 110) In Fanon’s description, the black man has lost the unity between the body and the world that makes him move smoothly in the world. From the perspective of the historico-racial schema, the black man experiences an *epidermal racial schema* (Fanon, 2015, p. 109). The man of colour is *fixed* while “dissected under white eyes” (Fanon, 2015, p. 108) In other words, it means that the body schema is assimilated to the body image (the N\*gro) that precedes it; “the body image is forced onto him [the man of colour] by white people’s gaze” (Atari, Tanaka, 2020, p. 660). Fanon argued that the black man has “no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man” (2015, p. 108), precisely because a body image is forced onto him. Accordingly, I suggest that the body image is a place where coloniality takes place and becomes embodied. Two distinct body images are created by the in-between relationship between the black and the white man. The latter’s unity of the body and the world is such that it is characterised by the figure of the white free sovereign individual that I have talked about in the previous chapter. On the other hand, the former is the N\*gro, whose disposition, whose being in and of the world, is saturated. The black man is fixed, ontologised as non-being by the white. By the very fact of creating his reality, his dialectic between the body and the world, the white *creates* the black’s man reality down to the bodily level. Therefore, there is an

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<sup>82</sup> Following Whitney Shiloh, I describe this dialectic as “the body schema is an ongoing and creative calibration and cultivation of the body as a set of possibilities in and through its environments” (2019, p. 308)

*ontological relationship of domination* between the black and the white, where the former does not have any ontological resistance.

In *Les damnés de la terre*, Frantz Fanon highlighted this alienated embodiment, this alienated disposition, in a fashion that makes explicit the relationship of the body to the world. In his description of the colonial city, Fanon said that “the city of the colonised is a *squatting* city, a city on its *knees*, a *sprawling* city” (2006, p. 43; my emphasis). He used a corporeal metaphor which illustrates the unicity of the body and the world, the being embodied and/hence disposed. As I have argued in the previous chapter, if one takes coloniality as an in-between, the relational in-between (web of relationships), as well as the objective in-between (architecture etc.), are intertwined. The city of the colonised is a squatting city and so are the colonised. They are *in-* and *of-the-city*. This is what ‘being disposed’ means in this context. Moreover, Fanon described the colonised as being in a state of “muscular tetany” (2006, p. 46) and that, “faced with the colonial arrangement, the colonised is in a state of permanent tension” (2006, p. 54). The city is muscular as much as its inhabitants. In other words, *the zone of nonbeing is a disposition where the body image takes over the body schema*.

Now, I want to suggest that this Fanonian account of the *alienated embodiment* can be identified with Arendt’s account of *what-ness*. According to what I said previously, what-ness means to act according to a pre-defined social role. In our case, what-ness assumes an ontological relationship of domination. One should behave in a specific way according to how society is structured-by racism and colonialism in that case. The colonised must behave in a specific way according to the “colonial arrangement” (Fanon, 2006, p. 54) and their body image, as “space is redefined in terms of the BI” (Atari, Tanaka, 2020, p. 660). For Fanon, this alienated embodiment is such that it opposes the mind to the body. He talks about “muscular dreams” (Fanon, 2006, p. 54), meaning that the body schema is at play, and runs smoothly only at night in the dreams of the colonised.

Moreover, the body schema outlines the possibility of action as “during the colonisation, the colonised frees himself every night between nine in the evening and six in the morning” (Fanon, 2006, p. 53) Therefore, to follow Arendt’s category, the alienated embodiment (what-ness) also relate to the world-alienation I have talked about in the previous chapter. In other words, there is an *alienated dialectic* between the body and the world.

However, importantly enough, Fanon also argued that the colonised are “dominated but not domesticated” (2006, p. 54). As soon as the colonial arrangement relaxes, even a little, the muscle in tension deploys itself, Fanon talks about a “constant muscular tonus” (2006, p. 55) which unleashes the muscle as soon as the colonial grasp diminishes, even for a moment. The possibility of motion, the pathic movement is related to a *kairos*, an opportune moment. To put it differently in terms of BI and BS, as soon as the colonial grasp diminishes, so is the body image imposed upon the man of colour, what is unleashed then, is the body schema, and the potentiality of being disposed in an authentic way, an authentic embodiment. And it is, at this moment, I will argue, that freedom can appear.

## **Authentic Embodiment**

As I have said previously, an important feature of being disposed is the Heideggerian idea of *mood*, something in the atmosphere if you will, that is prior to psychological feelings, so to a reflective subject. Accordingly, while the alienated embodiment (what-ness) is characterised by BI → BS, the authentic embodiment is characterised by BS → BI, and so can be identified with Arendt’s idea of who-ness. Following that suggestion, the BI is also what becomes the *ethos* of action, what survives the embodied action after its end. Therefore, the pathic movement is the movement which leads to BI and can become an *ethos*. In order to illustrate that, I will focus on Fanon’s account of the Algerian woman activist (*la militante*) in *L’An V de la révolution algérienne*, and I will

show how freedom appears within the pathic movement as a way to actualise the distorted plurality in a colonial setting.

In his analysis of the Algerian revolution, Fanon made a socio-history of the role of the veil (*haïk*)<sup>83</sup> in the revolution. For the colonisers, the veil is a sign of patriarchal oppression, this is why the programs which aim to push women to unveil themselves are supposed to create a breach in the Algerian family unit and society. Indeed, as Fanon had it, the colonial motto in Algeria can be summarised as “let’s win over the women and the rest will follow” (2011, p. 275). On the other hand, the veil is also appropriated by the Algerian women as a way to resist the coloniser. Fanon described this latter phenomenon as “an attitude of counter-assimilation” (2011, p. 279). In other words, “to the colonial offensive against the veil, the colonised opposes the cult of the veil.” (Fanon, 2011, p. 284) Therefore, at this point in the colonial Algerian society, the veil/unveil was part and parcel of women’s body image. As “space is redefined in terms of the BI” (Atari, Tanaka, 2020, p. 660), the veil is part of the Algerian society, part of its *flesh*. Hence, to unveil the Algerian women is to unveil, to expose, the *Algerian flesh* naked, ready to get violated by the coloniser (Fanon, 2011, p. 280). To put it differently, unveiling the Algerian women means to place a colonial body image upon them. In both cases, it could be argued that the BI precedes the BS as the un/veiled woman represents an image to which one BS should conform for colonial or resistance purposes. However, there is a significant distinction between these two body images because the former entails a seizure, an appropriation of one’s body, especially since clothes, the veil here, can be seen as a “direct extension of the outer surface of the body” (McLuhan, 1994, p. 120). On the other hand, the veil is used as a means to conceal weapons, but it also disciplines the body (Fanon, 2011, p. 286), understood here as the body schema, such as “the absence of the veil alters the Algerian woman’s body schema” (Fanon, 2011, p. 294). Ultimately, then, the veil can be seen as being part

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<sup>83</sup> The haïk is a specific veil wear in North Africa, especially in Algeria.

of the body schema through what could be called a process of incorporation (Zeiler, 2013, p. 72) that extends the possibilities of one's lived body. It cannot simply be seen as a fixed BI imposed on one's body as the role of the veil has changed throughout the revolution. However, a specific body image emerges in Fanon's account of the Algerian revolution, *la militante*, the Algerian woman activist, engaged in the revolution.

The figure of *la militante* is interesting because I think that it highlights a pathic movement, a setting where the body schema precedes the body image. In Fanon's words, there is no imitation (2011, p. 286), no BI to follow and no role to conform to, it is "an authentic birth" (Fanon, 2011, p. 287). The *birth*, the emergence of *la militante*, is possible because of a revolutionary mood that enables the pathic movement and creates a change in the disposition. The zone of nonbeing is not just this arid zone anymore, alienating one's body schema, but also the place of revolution, where the *revolutionary mood* appears. Indeed, "in triggering the struggle, the Algerian is loosening the vice that was tightening around the native city" (Fanon, 2011, p. 289). In this new configuration, according to Fanon's analysis, the Algerian woman "became the embodiment of cultural resistance" (Gordon, 1995, p. 64). From the perspective of the coloniser, the Algerian woman has no ontological resistance in the coloniser/colonised relationships as well as in the Algerian society. Indeed, "Fanon sees in the colonialists' recurrent dream and policy of *freeing* the Algerian woman of the veil as a will to knowledge, *to possession*, to violence; a desire to violate by unveiling the woman" (Sekyi-Out, 1997, p. 221; my emphasis). For the colonisers, the veiled woman is just a body image, she has no agency, no body schema, while for the Algerian society, the veil is part of women's body schema. Hence, when Algerian women got unveiled for revolutionary purposes, they had to re-learn their body schema, "their former corporal schema was destroyed but it became possible for them to invent a new one" (Khalifa, 2005, p. 45). For Fanon, during the revolution, the Algerian woman discovers "new means of muscular control [she...] relearns her body [...] in a totally *revolutionary fashion*" (2011, p. 294; my emphasis). In other words, a new *political* dialectic



between the world and the body was created, leading to the body image of *la militante*. I believe that this dialectic is political precisely because it displaces the ontological relationship between the colonisers and the colonised. Indeed, the action of *la militante*, her pathic movement, so her engagement in the revolution, makes the colonial disposition or arrangement to collapse (Fanon, 2011, p. 296). From that perspective, the being disposed in the world changed during the revolution, through the action of *la militante*. In Fanon's words, "the militant discovers the woman militant and they jointly created a new dimension to Algerian society" (2011, p. 295fn). Therefore, through the action of *la militante*, society's organisation, whether it is the colonial arrangement of the Algerian society, has been actualised. This is what a political authentic embodiment is, it creates an open-ended disposition which makes the closed-off colonial disposition collapse. If the being disposed is always in and *of-the-world*, then, the "authentic birth" represented by the pathic movement of *la militante* is also the openness of a new mode of being disposed. A new dialectic between the body and the world, that affects not just one's body, but the world and all the beings disposed in that new setting.

In other words, I believe that the political dialectic of the body and the world creates a space of freedom, which means a space where the relational in-between can be changed<sup>84</sup>, where action takes the form of an ontological resistance. To make this point clearer, I will, in the next and last part of this chapter, analyse the example of Frederick Douglass' fight with Covey.

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<sup>84</sup> This revolutionary movement also changes the objective in-between. Indeed, still in *L'An V the la révolution algérienne*, Fanon described how the radio, so a colonial object, was used for decolonial revolutionary purposes by the colonized (2011 pp. 303-330). Therefore, when the colonial arrangement starts to collapse, it is not only the relational but also the objective in-between that is subject to change. It shows how the two in-betweens are intertwined.

## Freedom as Ontological Resistance

In his texts such as the *Narrative or My Bondage and My Freedom*, Frederick Douglass narrates his fight with Edward Covey. To contextualise, Douglass was a slave working for Covey in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Covey was known as being a “n\*gro breaker” (Douglass, 2014, p. 165; 2009, p. 57), and, throughout his work, Douglass described the inhuman treatments he experienced with Covey until a breaking point, which is a fight between the two. In the literature, when some scholars wrote about this fight (Watkins, 2016; Hansen, 2012; Davis, 2014), a distinction is often made between psychological and physical freedom. In the sense that Douglass’ sense of freedom did not coincide with his emancipation from slavery as such. Hence, the “turning point” that this fight is, is understood to be psychological freedom. However, while I am sympathetic to this interpretation, I want to suggest another reading of it. I think that something *in-between* Douglass and Covey happened. Accordingly, my interpretation of this freedom does not assume a body/mind separation, it would be *a freedom enacted from the zone of nonbeing* which is not reducible to a psychological freedom and does not coincide with the liberation from slavery, but in that case, precedes it.

In Lewis Gordon’s words, “Douglass was what Fanon accurately described [...] as a ‘zone of nonbeing’.” (2000, p. 48) Indeed, if, as I have suggested, the zone of nonbeing is a disposition, Douglass has precisely described his being disposed in his texts<sup>85</sup>. He narrated his situation under the mastery of Covey as similar to the one of an oxen: “they were property, so was I; they were broken, so was I” (Douglass, 2014, p. 170). His treatment was inhuman, such that he *was not living* with Covey but *remained* with him (Douglass, 2014, p. 172), it is a form of social death, “a form of death-in-life” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 21) that he defined as a “wretched condition” (Douglass, 2014,

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<sup>85</sup> Douglass wrote that he was “a living embodiment of mental and physical wretchedness” (2014, p. 178) which illustrates his dialectic between his body and the world, both are in a state of wretchedness, his body as the quote shows as much as the world, “this wretched place” (Douglass, 2014, p. 175).

p. 176). Moreover, Douglass describes himself as being a *prey* in Covey's eyes. Indeed, Covey is pictured as an always present snake making Douglass on his guard all the time, never secure. This prey-hunter relationship illustrates the ontological status of the domination between the master and the slave, as well as Douglass's incapacity of ontological resistance in Covey's eyes. This phenomenology of the prey highlights a state of being that could be assimilated to what Elsa Dorlin called the *dirty* or *negative care* (2017, p. 171). This ethics is a specific dialectic between the body and the world where the *care about/for others* is not in order to help, to heal or reassure others, rather it is about "caring about others to anticipate what they want, will or can *do against us* [*faire de nous*]" (Dorlin, 2017, p. 175; my translation). In a certain way, this awareness of one's disposition in the world with others, is a means of self-defence. Douglass knows that Covey is "watching every movement of the slave" (2014, p. 173). The 'fear of punishment' that Douglass talks about is an illustration of this anticipation of others's behaviour, here Covey, in a situation of domination. However, this situation has been changed by a decisive breaking point in Douglass's live, his fight with Covey.

Now, I want to focus on this fight, to understand what happens in-between. My aim is not to provide any theory of violence justification. Rather, I suggest interpreting this fight in terms of freedom understood as ontological resistance embodied in the form of self-defence. First, what can be noted is that with this fight, something *unexpected* happened, at least for Covey, precisely because in his eyes, Douglass does not have any ontological resistance. Indeed, Douglass specified that his "resistance was entirely unexpected" (2014, p. 194). However, in the moment of the fight, the ontological relationship of domination changed, the ontological relationship became *diachronic* as the prey almost became the hunter. As Elsa Dorlin had it, "the *metis* of self-defence always lies in a defence-attack principle [... which] installs a new relation to the word" (2017, p. 59; my translation). To put it in a phenomenological language, it creates a new dialectic between the body and the world. From that perspective, self-defence is not means-end, it is a pathic movement which

“politicises bodies” (Dorlin, 2017, p. 59; my translation), meaning that it goes from an inauthentic to an authentic dialectic of the body and the world. Douglass decided to “stand up for [his] own defence” (2014, p. 194) and from this moment the ontological relationship was redistributed, “the very color of the man was forgotten, [... and] the conquest was about equal” (Douglass, 2014, p. 194). It seems like Douglass’s new being in and of the world entailed a modification of his body schema, he relearnt his body and found his “strong fingers firmly attached to the throat” of Covey (Douglass, 2014, p. 194). In introducing the fight in his *Narrative*, Douglass wrote: “you have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see now how a slave was made a man” (2009, p. 63). To me, this sentence perfectly illustrates what happened in terms of BS and BI. The ‘man into slave’ shows how the BI imposed upon the slave made him a slave, how his BI precedes his BS. On the other hand, the ‘slave to man journey’ is described as a *resurrection* by Douglass, an authentic birth so a BS that precedes the BI. The pathic moment that is illustrated by this fight is a moment of authentic embodiment and of ontological resistance. It is an *enactment* of freedom.

As much as the body is the archive of action, so of freedom, I want to suggest that the fight with Covey is a manifestation of freedom. According to my interpretation of this fight, I claim that *freedom is a world-changing ontological resistance*. Indeed, freedom changes, even if for a time, the ontological relationship of domination (master-slave) into a diachronic relation. I characterise that pathic movement as an ontological resistance for two main reasons. First, because, as I said earlier, Douglass previously did not have any ontological resistance in Covey’s eyes but throughout his pathic movement he attained an ontological status. Indeed, he argued that his sense of manhood, so of being, was revived. More precisely, he said; “I was *nothing* before; I WAS A MAN NOW” (Douglass, 2014, p. 197; his emphasis). Second, ontological resistance because it changed the ontological status of the world, of the being disposed. The fight created a new *Mitsein* (being-with), it is world-changing in the sense that it actualised the web of relationship, so the relational in-between. By that I mean that this fight created a mood, what could be characterised as a *rebellious*

*mood*, affecting everyone's mode of being disposed. In Douglass' words, himself and the other slaves "were all in open rebellion, that morning" (Douglass, 2014, p. 196). Indeed, when Covey asked the other slaves for help, they did not do anything. The web of relationships was not organised by Covey anymore, rather Douglass's pathic movement *disorganised* the world formerly organised by Covey, to open up the possibility of world changing. In other words, freedom is an ontological resistance that affects the dialectic between the body and the world in plural. It is, in a certain way, an actualisation of plurality, of the relational in-between.

## Conclusion

To recap, in this chapter, I have put the first stone of my preliminary understanding of freedom. This chapter was the first step of my attempt to understand freedom as a political phenomenon. Starting with the question of the body was important to me, precisely because of Arendt's phenomenology of the body. Indeed, the Arendtian body is always disposed in the world and is the condition of politics, hence, of freedom if "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom" (Arendt, 2006, p. 174). Moreover, this Arendtian and later on Fanonian account of the body showed that we cannot think about the subject ideally, out of the world. Indeed, the subject is always disposed because it is *affected* by situations, as much as the subject's actions affect a situation. Moreover, because, following Arendt, the world is also conceived as a web of relationships, understanding freedom from the perspective of the world, so of the embodied subject, is always to give a plural account of embodied subjects. In virtue of the dialectic of the body and the world, the pathic movement entails a change in disposition so a change of being affected, and a change of mood. The revolutionary mood in Fanon's account of the Algerian Revolution and the rebellious mood in Douglass's fight with Covey are both related to pathic movements, respectively to the actions of the women activist for Fanon, and to Douglass's fight. In other words, and to follow Fanon's

example, what he described as “the flesh of the revolution” is, in my understanding, this actualised relational in-between, it expresses the ontological resistance in plural, hence freedom.

Nevertheless, one could maintain that this account of freedom as ontological resistance in plural, was focused on figures rather than movements or social organisations. In other words, one could argue that this preliminary account of freedom is too personified. Whilst this might be true, first I think that the focus on an individual’s experience helps to analyse in detail what comes to pass in-between people. As I said in Chapter II quoting Norman Ajari, particularities can potentially lead to generalisation (p. 93). Moreover, in a letter to Karl Jaspers, Arendt explained that “it seems that certain people are so exposed in their own life [...] that they become, as it were, junction points and concrete objectifications of ‘life’.” (Arendt, 1993, p. 12) Then, those personified stories bear the possibility to understand social and political phenomena in their uniqueness, they bind the philosophical understanding to the phenomenon in itself and help us to develop a new understanding of a phenomenon. Nevertheless, in the next chapter, I want to explore more in-depth the question of plurality. In doing so, I will follow the hypothesis that freedom has another dimension in addition to being an ontological resistance, namely that *freedom is an an-archic mode of organisation*. Therefore, I will focus on movements and social organisation and not only to specific figures.

## Chapter V: *An-archic Freedom and Plurality*

In the previous chapter, I talked about freedom as embodiment. More precisely and by relying on Fanon and Arendt, I suggested that freedom is a dialectic between the body and the world that appears as a form of ontological resistance. At the end of the chapter, by using the example of Frederick Douglass's fight with Edward Covey, I have ultimately proposed that freedom should be understood as a collective form of ontological resistance. Indeed, even if Douglass' example can be seen as individual, I have demonstrated that the fight with Covey reconfigured the web of relationships as the other slaves did not listen nor obey to Covey's orders during the fight. In the present chapter, I want to explore this last point further. Some scholars such as Judith Butler (2016, 2018) have already conceptualised freedom as a sort of collective action. In theorising freedom of assembly, Judith Butler argued for something "other than a specific right protected by existing national or international law, including human rights law." (2016, p. 50) Rather, she wrote that freedom of assembly "may well be the precondition of politics itself." (Butler, 2016, p. 50) She associated her idea of freedom with the idea of popular sovereignty illustrated by 'we the people'. In other words, freedom of assembly is the precondition of politics in the sense that it is the precondition of making political claims as a 'we the people'. What I want to suggest in this chapter is different. Rather than thinking about freedom as a precondition of politics, I follow Hannah Arendt's statement that "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom" (2006, p. 174). This statement entails a coincidence of freedom and politics, they both appear together, hence, the former is not a precondition of the latter. Moreover, this statement means that the meaning of freedom is political and that the being of politics, the cause of its existence, is the apparition of freedom. This is why freedom is for Hannah Arendt a political phenomenon. As I have already said, for Arendt, politics is characterised by plurality and natality, understood as the potentiality of a new beginning.

Therefore, if freedom and politics coincide, freedom is also characterised by these two features. I suggest that natality is illustrated by what I call an ontological resistance. This resistance, that I have already sketched in chapters II and IV, is ontological because it is world-building. It appeals to and enacts a new social ontology, a new mode of organisation. In other words, a new in-between. I have already more or less extensively unpacked this dimension of freedom in the last chapter. In this chapter, I will focus more in-depth on the relationship between plurality and natality by defining *freedom as a collective ontological resistance*. The main hypothesis of this chapter is that *freedom is an an-archic mode of organisation*. *An-archic* in the double sense of *archein* as beginning and command. It is *an-archic* because it is a new beginning and also because it does not follow (*an-*) any rule (*arche*) of organisation.

To make my point, I will first focus on Arendt's account of the political by highlighting her deconstruction of the substitution of making for acting, which is, for her, a metaphysical prejudice. Then, I will outline an an-archic theory of freedom that I find to be implicit in her theory of political action. Second, I will use the experience of marronage to exemplify what I understand by freedom as being *an-archic*. Ultimately, I will suggest that *an-archic* does not mean chaotic or coming of out nothing. Rather, through the example of Black Lives Matter, I will show that freedom as an an-archic mode of organisation and a collective ontological resistance is guided by principles that guide action.

## **Hannah Arendt and the Political**

In chapter III, I have showed that Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology is committed to the deconstruction of metaphysics, and more precisely to what she calls metaphysical fallacies and prejudices. Briefly, the fallacies concern all the metaphysical assumptions in philosophy such as the body-mind dualism. On the other hand, the prejudices refer to the metaphysical assumptions



in political concepts such as politics. In order to understand Arendt's account of the political, I submit that one has to, first, dig into her deconstruction of this concept in the history of western political philosophy. This is why, I will first focus on what she takes to be the substitution of making for acting, as the metaphysical prejudice par excellence. Then, I will outline the basis of an *an-archic* understanding of freedom.

### **The substitution of making for acting**

One of the first and main metaphysical prejudices Hannah Arendt identified is the substitution of making for acting. This is what she meant when she said that politics is theorised as a means-end activity on the model of craftsmanship. For Arendt, *acting* and *making* refers to two different human conditions, respectively *action* and *work*. While for her action-which is always in concert-is the political activity *par excellence*, work is the activity of the craftsman. In her process of deconstruction, Arendt found the origin of this substitution in Plato.

For Hannah Arendt, the traditional substitution of making for acting is due to what she called the frailty of human affairs. A political action is unsure, unstable because one cannot know its outcome in advance. The main characteristic of action is natality or new beginning as we can never know or anticipate its end. Basically, one cannot know what the future of a new beginning will be. Moreover, action, in order to be remembered, needs spectators who will tell the story of it and allow action to attain a sort of immortality; therefore, action depends on the spectators and not only the actors. The verb 'to act', in its Greek and Latin origins was divided in two different verbs, *archein* (the begin, to lead, to rule) and *prattein* (to pass through, to achieve, to finish). And in Latin, *agere* (to set in motion, to lead) and *gerere* (to bear). Even if these two words described two interconnected parts of action, within the tradition, "the word that originally designated the second part of action, its achievement-*prattein* and *gerere*- became the accepted word for action in general, whereas the words designating beginning of action became specialised in meaning, at least in

political language.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 189) Against the frailty of human affairs, Plato wanted to make sure that the one who engages in action was also its master, without the help of others. In other words, for Arendt, Plato wanted a model where the outcome of action is mastered by the actor. Therefore, he wanted to make sure of the sovereign character of each action. For Arendt, Plato’s will is explicit in the *Statesman* where *archein* and *prattein* became two different activities, “the beginner has become a ruler [...] who ‘does not have to act at all (*prattein*), but rules (*archein*) over those who are capable of execution.’” (Arendt, 1998, p. 223) Thus, the one who acts (*prattein*) is the one who executes the orders of the ruler (*archon*). Even if the ruler does not act as such, he is still the master of the action because he commands it. Plato then introduced a difference between the ruler who *knows* how to rule but does not act, the doer who executes. For Hannah Arendt, this division between thought and action does not rely on a political experience, rather, it rests on the experience of the household “where nothing would ever be done if the masters did not know what to do and did not give orders to the slaves who executed them without knowing.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 223) Indeed, in the *Statesman*, the stranger<sup>86</sup> asked: “a large household may be compared to a small state:-will they differ at all, as far as government is concerned?” (Plato, 1969, 259b, p. 1022) A question to which the Young Socrates replied that there is no difference. As Arendt argued, against what was for her the error to interpret Plato like he aimed to abolish family, “he wanted, on the contrary, to extend this type of life until one family embraced every citizen<sup>87</sup>.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 223) Hence, for Plato, “the *rules of behavior* in public matters should be derived from the master-slave relationship in a well-ordered household” (Arendt, 1998, p. 224; my emphasis), then, this is how the relationship between rulers and ruled should be understood.

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<sup>86</sup> *The Statesman* is a dialogue with two main protagonists, the Stranger and the Young Socrates (which is not Socrates but a namesake). In this dialogue, the Stranger tries to find the definition of the statesman.

<sup>87</sup> As Arendt emphasised, it is also explicit in the Fifth book of *The Republic* at 463c and 465b (Plato, 1969).

Moreover, because this relationship between ruling and being ruled is a manifestation of the division between knowing and doing, Arendt argued that Plato “introduced the principle of domination into the intercourse of man with himself.” (1998, p. 224) The superiority of the *bios theoretikos* over the *bios politikos* means that the philosopher-king rules the city, but it also means that the soul rules the body. On the top of that, “all beginning was understood as the legitimation for rulership, until, finally, the element of beginning disappeared altogether from the concept of rulership.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 225) Consequently, because Arendt associated freedom with natality, according to her, the pre-philosophic Greek political experience of freedom disappeared from political philosophy.

As I have emphasised before, the ruler is the one who knows. Yet, for Arendt, Plato decided to strengthen the substitution of rulership for action by the activity of making. This other substitution is directly related to Plato’s theory of ideas. For him, the ideas, or forms, are the non-physical essences of all things that we see in the physical world and every object in the world is a mere imitation of its idea (*eidos*). Accordingly, the notion of fabrication is twofold, “first, perceiving the image or shape (*eidos*) of the product-to-be, and then organizing the means and starting the execution.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 225) Here we can easily see how this twofoldness refers to the knowing (the *eidos*) and doing (to execute the fabrication). In Plato’s non-political writings, the notion of idea refers mostly to what is beautiful, but in his political writings, he was concerned with the *ideal* state, thus, “the ideas transformed into standards, measurements, and rules of behavior, all of which are variations or derivations of the idea of the ‘good’” (Arendt, 1998, p. 225). This will to impose the doctrine of ideas to politics was a means to eliminate the frailty of the human affairs. Indeed, while for Plato the ideas are pure, stable, and not subjected to variation, it is the opposite for the object of the physical world<sup>88</sup>. Therefore, the ideal state is where “the

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<sup>88</sup> See the *Tiameus* 28 (Plato, 1969, p. 1161)

philosopher-king applies the ideas as the craftsman applies his rules and standards” (Arendt, 1998, p. 227).

According to Hannah Arendt, this is why the tradition of political thought started from Plato, because he is the one who substituted making for action. Since then, the concept of action, which is for Arendt the political activity *par excellence*, was interpreted in terms of fabrication. Indeed, the whole tradition of western political theory “makes it almost impossible to discuss [political] matters without using the category of means and ends and thinking in terms of instrumentality.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 229) Therefore, the very concept of politics that we commonly use in political philosophy is based on a concept of action that is itself based on Plato’s wish to put the experience of the household out of the private sphere, to make it public. Moreover, in the Greek Antiquity, the concept of liberation was related to the private life in the household. To go into the public realm, one must liberate himself from the necessity of life, this is why people had slaves, to free them from the necessities of life. Hence, when the model of the household was imported to the public realm, so was liberation which took the place of freedom. Freedom was based on a definition of politics and action as beginning, and liberation on a concept of politics as means end.

### **An *an-archic* theory of freedom**

Because freedom was taken for granted in the Greek polis, it was not theorised as such by Greek philosophers. Its appearance in the history of western philosophy can be dated to Christian philosophy with the discovery of the Will that results on a conceptualisation of freedom as a matter of choice, the *liberum arbitrium*. However, this conceptualisation was not based on a political experience, but a faculty of the mind. Therefore, Arendt chose to focus on the political experience of the Greek polis to revive freedom and conceptualised it from an existentialist phenomenological approach (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1991). In this section, I will propose the basis of a theory of freedom as *an-archic*, grounded on an Arendtian understanding of it.

When digging into the Greek polis experience, Arendt found a conception of freedom in Herodotus *Persian Wars*, in the third book of his *Histories*. From this moment, freedom “was understood as a form of political *organisation* in which the citizens lived together under conditions of no-rule, without a division between rulers and ruled.” (Arendt, 2016, p. 22; my emphasis) In this text, (Herodotus, 1928, §80-82, p. 109), three forms of government were discussed; oligarchy, the rule by the few, monarchy, the rule by one and *isonomia*. The first two are well known but not *isonomia* (*ἰσονομία*) which means equality. Rather than a form of government as such, *isonomia* signifies “a principle or a rule to constitute citizenship” (Balibar, 2010, p. 208). Yet, paradoxically, *isonomia* is a rule that expresses the notion of ‘no-rule’. As Otanès<sup>89</sup> stated in the text of Herodotus, “I desire neither to rule nor to be ruled” (1928, §83, p. 11). Thus, as Balibar emphasised, this principle is properly anarchist. Which means that it knows no *archein*. Moreover, it must be noticed that this equality was given by the polis in virtue of citizenship, because according to the Greek, men were not equals, in the sense that equality “was not understood as a quality inherent in human nature” (Arendt, 2016, p. 23). Then, equality existed only in the political public realm. This is from this notion of *isonomia* that Hannah Arendt coined her concept of *plurality* as the basic condition of action. Or rather, plurality is a phenomenological and existentialist interpretation of it. Indeed, for her, plurality rests on two conditions that are *equality* and *distinction*. Equality should be understood as *isonomia*, whilst *distinction* refers to how we appear to others. In other words, we reveal *who* we are to others in distinction to *what* we are. As I said in the last chapter, the ‘who’ is the expression of one’s singular identity during the performance of action while the ‘what’ refers to sociological categories put upon us like race or gender. In other words, ‘what’ we are is something we *know*, and ‘who’ we are is something that appears and that must be *understood*; ‘what’ we are is concerned with *knowing* whilst ‘who’ we are is concerned with *meaning*. For Hannah

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<sup>89</sup> One of the three Persian princes who might be designated to rebuild the State.

Arendt, politics is a space that lies in-between men. She often used the metaphor of a table that both unifies and separates people. This space is precisely where the *isonomia* appears and is sustained by the actualisation of plurality through deed and speech, namely, every time men and women act together. For the Greeks, “no one can be free except among his peers” (Arendt, 2016, p. 23), which means that plurality in the Arendtian meaning is a condition of freedom. Without this condition of plurality, freedom cannot appear.

For Arendt, the best exemplification of freedom can be found in revolutionary experiences, precisely because revolutions are characterised by the potentiality to bring something new into being. As we also highlighted before, *archein* has a double meaning, to rule/lead and to begin, and for Arendt, this word was the best illustration of the phenomenon of freedom in the Greek polis. Accordingly,

“this twofold meaning manifestly indicates that originally the term ‘leader’ was used for the person who initiated something and sought out companions to help him carry it out; and this carrying out, this bringing something that has been begun to its end, was the original meaning of the word for action, *prattein*”

(Arendt, 2005, p. 126)

We can see here how spontaneity takes an important place in her conception of freedom. Indeed, the free action is spontaneous because it rests on nothing, it has nothing to hold on to. This is why I define freedom as *an-archic*<sup>90</sup>, its spontaneous beginning does not rest on any rule or authority. Moreover, because a revolution aims at building something new, so does an act of freedom, it aims at building a new authority. However, even if an act of freedom is characterised by this paradoxical relationship between authority and no rule, every act of freedom aims at questioning the authority in order to bear the possibility of a new one that should be grounded on this *an-archic* principle. For Arendt, the spirit of revolution, which is characterised by freedom and new beginnings, must

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<sup>90</sup> Etienne Balibar (2010) used the word ‘*an-archic*’ to describe Arendt’s conception of the right to have rights.

be present in every constitution, precisely because freedom is the *raison d'être* of politics (2006, p. 174). On the same level, every *archein*, every rule of a government, must be founded on a possibility of civil disobedience, because its legitimacy comes from the very questioning of it (Arendt, 1972).

Ultimately, freedom can be described as an *an-archic praxis*. Which means that freedom is an action that aims at the transformation of a social reality and at a new beginning (*praxis*), but this action does not rely on any rule or authority and is characterised by its spontaneous novelty (*an-archic*). As I showed, this absence of authority also means that freedom as a mode of organisation does not follow a rule. Indeed, contrary to the theories of freedom discussed in chapters I and II that make freedom dependent on a theory of personhood and subjects' unity, here, freedom, as I understand it, has something to do with *isonomia*, which is a mode of organisation that I also consider as *an-archic*. Hence, freedom's an-archism comes both from plurality (*isonomia*) and natality. In order to make this more explicit, I will use the example of marronage in the following part of this chapter, because I believe that it both exemplifies the *an-archic* mode of organisation as well as the new beginning dimension of freedom.

## Freedom as Marronage

In order to exemplify and unfold Arendt's notion of plurality I will suggest that marronage is a form of freedom which is an *an-archic* mode of organisation. I chose to focus on marronage for two points. First to de-centre Arendt's account of politics and plurality, and second, to follow my commitment to track the manifestation of freedom where it is supposedly not, in the zone of nonbeing. Moreover, my aim here is not to generalise all empirical cases of marronage and to subsume them under my theorisation of freedom, but rather to conceptualise marronage. The question is, to what extent marronage can be understood as an an-archic mode of organisation, hence a manifestation of freedom? Therefore, I will not attempt to make a truth claim about what

is marronage always and every time. To make my point, I will first introduce and follow Neil Roberts's account of *sociogenic marronage* (2015), in order to set the basis of what I understand by marronage. Then, I will focus on what has been called feminist marronage (Bentouhami, 2017) or more precisely on the experience of maroon women, as well as Audre Lorde's account of the erotic (2019). Both of these accounts will help me to suggest that freedom is an *an-archic* mode of organisation, which could also be understood as an actualisation of plurality, a collective ontological resistance, and in that case, against colonial gender norms. To state it more broadly and in Arendtian categories, marronage could be seen as *a flight from what-ness to who-ness*. Lastly, I think that marronage is a good example to understand freedom precisely because it does not start with a theory of the subject, rather what is highlighted with this activity is the act in itself since the name of the community is also the name of the act. In a certain way, they both coincide. Freedom and its subjects appear at the same time, the latter does not precede the former. Freedom comes in virtue of action and not from a theory of personhood.

## **Sociogenic Marronage**

Marronage is the action of flight from slavery during the transatlantic slave trade. This escape from slavery sometimes resulted in the creation of maroon's communities. Historiographic studies made the analytic distinction between *petit* and *grand marronage* (Thompson, 2006), the former referring to short-term escapes and the latter to long-term ones. Moreover, *petit marronage* characterised the flight of an individual or a small group, while *grand marronage* denotes a significant collective flight. In this chapter, I focus on *grand marronage* as *petit marronage* was often individual and resulted in a lonely life which did not threaten plantocracy as much since "his [the maroon's] chances of long-term survival as a free person would have diminished considerably had he attempted to carry out assaults on the White community." (Thompson, 2006, p. 59) Indeed, it was *grand marronage*, collective flights, that plantocracy feared as it was disturbing the plantation's economy, hence its organisation (Thompson, 2006, p. 67). Accordingly, I will suggest that *grand*



marronage can be seen as an ontological resistance in the sense that it is both the organisation of plurality (community) as well as a disorganisation of society (plantocracy). And it is this point that I will explore now.

Grand marronage represents a broad analytic category. Neil Roberts suggested that it can be divided into *sovereign* and *sociogenic marronage* (2015, p. 89, 113). The former is a top-up form of organisation with a leader that could be illustrated by Toussaint Louverture, a leading figure of the Haitian Revolution (Roberts, 2015, p. 89; Césaire, 1981; James, 2001). On the other hand, the sociogenic<sup>91</sup> marronage, which concerns me here, is a bottom-up form of organisation. This focus on sociogenic marronage will help me to highlight the world and community building dimensions of marronage. In Roberts's words, this type of marronage allows us to understand "how revolutions are *themselves* moments of flight that usher in new orders and refashion society's foundations" (2015, p. 116; his emphasis) From that perspective and following Hannah Arendt's account of freedom, I argue that *sociogenic marronage is also a world-building practice*, as it opens up the possibility to create new in-betweens, new modes of being disposed in the world. Neil Roberts highlighted four characteristic principles in conceptualising sociogenic marronage. First, the act of naming, then vèvè<sup>92</sup> architectonics, third, the state of society, and fourth constitutionalism (2015, p. 116). In the act of naming, Roberts sees an act of freedom. Indeed, in the Haitian Declaration of Independence from January 1804, the Haitians are renamed 'natives', so "the newly endowed citizens are able to make demands of freedom, accountability, and responsibility on the state and one another." (Robert, 2015, p. 123) About the second principle, Roberts understands vèvè architectonics as "the blueprint of freedom that an individual or collectivity imagines in an ideal world [...] that resists sovereign decisionism and institutional design conducted by the state

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<sup>91</sup> Following Fanon, Roberts understands sociogenesis as "the prism that captures the process of flight from the zone of nonbeing" (2015, p. 119).

<sup>92</sup> A vèvè is a symbol used by vodou priests and is a guidepost for the *lwa* (law in Haitian creole) as a vèvè refers to a *lwa*. For instance, the vèvè of Baron Samedi represents the *lwa* of the dead and the vèvè Damballah represents fertility.

without authorisation, advice, and input from the citizen.” (2015, p. 126). I suggest that vèvè architectonics could be associated with two Arendtian categories. First, her notion of guiding principles, the *daimon*/principle guiding action, that I have discussed in Chapter IV, could be the *lwa* (law) guiding action, but I will come to that at the end of this chapter. Second, the non-sovereign, if not *an-archic*, organising power of Vodou ceremonies where *lwa* are cast. To illustrate my point, I will briefly focus on the ceremony of Bois Caiman which happened on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, and how it can be related to *isonomia* and world-building.

The ceremony of Bois Caiman is considered to be a, if not the, founding moment of the Haitian Revolution (Accilien, Adams, Méléance, Ulrick, 2006, p. 99; Mocombe, 2017, p. 83). On the night of August 14, 1791, some slaves reunited for a Vodou ceremony presided over by the priest (Houngan) Dutty Boukman and by the priestess (Mambo) Cécile Fatiman. During the ceremony, a black pig was sacrificed and from its blood, a pact was made between all the slaves (Accilien, Adams, Méléance, Ulrick, 2006, p. 98). In other words, this ceremony and the pact are what created both a bond in-between the slaves as well as birthed the revolution. We both find here plurality as understood by Arendt and the possibility of new beginnings. Now, I want to suggest that the Bois Caiman ceremony can be understood as an act of promising which I believe highlights the non-sovereign dimension of the ceremony. For Hannah Arendt, promising is “the only alternative to a mastery which relies on domination of one’s self and rule over others” (1998, p. 244). In contrast, to sovereign conceptions of community, communities created out of a promise leave the unpredictability of human affairs untouched, yet they create a sort of island of security in an ocean of uncertainty (Arendt, 1998, p. 237, 244). In other words, because promising is a promise towards a future, it binds people toward possible futures. It stabilises a community in the uncertainty of many possible futures. It is a promise to fly from, to leave the ever-present of domination for the uncertainty or unpredictability of the future. The act of promising and by extension of community building opens up the possibility of a new beginning, of world-building. Promising recognises “the

necessity of the future to the present” (Keenan, 1994, p. 303). In other words, it binds people together and ties them to the future in the present.

From that perspective, I see promises as acts of actualisation of plurality with its dimension of *isonomia* that I have talked about previously. Indeed, as Neil Roberts emphasised, marronage is also characterised by the creation of a “non-state space” (2015, p. 151-2). In the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution, what Roberts calls ‘proto-constituent assemblies’ were created. These public spaces “allowed for pluralistic participation”, moreover, “unlike in the colonial state, ex-slaves were full members under this civil body. One could be a speaker, a delegate, and seated in the audience.” (Roberts, 2015, p. 129) As Paget Henry had it, this third principle of sociogenic marronage entails “the transformation of the state of society in the interest of the masses, producing such outcomes as class, race, and gender equality” (2016, p. 310) For Roberts, these assemblies denote the constitution of a civil order rather than a political one understood as a government. This is why he considered them as *proto*-assemblies. These public spaces could be considered as *an-archic* in my Arendtian understanding of it, precisely because no rigid or strict order/rule organises them or the relationship between people. As highlighted before, these assemblies are pluralistic, hence welcoming differences, and they are isonomic because everyone could speak and address issues such as gender inequalities (Roberts, 2015, p. 130). In other words, these newly appeared public spaces are an actualisation of the community created out of the act of promising. These public spaces are islands of stability in the ocean of uncertainty that is the future. To emphasise the *an-archic* dimension of freedom as a mode of organisation, I will now focus on Audre Lorde’s account of the Erotic.

### **The *an-archic* Erotic marronage**

I previously focused on sociogenic marronage to sketch the world and community building dimensions of it. Now, I will focus on what I call the erotic marronage to emphasise the an-archic

dimension of world-building, by relying on Audre Lorde's account of the erotic. Within the history of philosophy, from Plato to Freud, *Eros* was a philosopheme that bears the thematic of sexual difference within it. In her text *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, Audre Lorde coined a new understanding of *Eros*. Here, I will suggest that Lorde's account of *Eros* helps us to understand the trialectic between the individual, the collective and the world. More precisely, I submit that the Erotic is a form of marronage that makes world-building possible.

In her autobiographical writings such as *Zami*, Audre Lorde described her sense of homelessness, of loneliness in the world because of her condition as a black lesbian woman. After Gennie's<sup>93</sup> death, Lorde started a "migratory journey through different home experiences" (Hua, 2015, p. 127). Because she lived at the border, or liminal space, of each community, Lorde did not find a home of differences, she was "disturbed by the effacement of her difference and the displacement and exile of her particular subjectivity in each community" (Hua, 2015, p. 128). In other words, she has been *in-worlds*, but never *of-the-world*, what I consider to be a trialectic between the self, the collective and the world, which is, in a certain way, alienated, precisely by the absence of plurality. Following Arendt's conception, plurality is characterised by equality and difference, and it is in virtue of difference that equality is a synonym of *isonomia*. However, when equality is alien to difference or subsumes it, it becomes sameness, meaning that a sovereign idea of the subject rules the community-making. Consequently, the being-of-the-world is alienated, this is why Lorde *flew* from house to house. For my purpose, I consider this act of flying, Lorde's migratory journey, as petit marronage, because it reflects her sense of loneliness and homelessness. In opposition, Audre Lorde describes her home (of-the-world) as a house of difference. She said that "our place was the every house of difference rather than security of any one particular difference" (Lorde, 2018, p. 226). For her, "difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is

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<sup>93</sup> Gennie was Audre Lorde's girlfriend.

forged” (Lorde, 2019, p. 112). In other words, *difference is a relational in-between*. Another concept from Lorde could encompass this notion of difference, it is the erotic. In what follows, and against her experience of petit marronage, I suggest an *erotic marronage* as a flying to an of-the-world place.

First, Lorde describes the Erotic as a power within each of us that can be alienated or corrupted by oppression (2019, p. 43). When she said that this power was corrupted, she meant by “the male world”. This power was corrupted “in order to exercise it in the service of men” (Lorde, 2019, p. 43). In other words, it creates a plurality alienated by heteropatriarchy. Eros is then distorted by the binary and hierarchical conception of sexual difference, but one could also argue, by its intertwinement with race. Thus, the power of Eros has been silenced. As Lorde reminded us, in Greek mythology, and especially in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Eros is a creative power born out of Chaos. It is “a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings.” (Lorde, 2019, p. 44), it is “the heart of the inchoate experience of feelings” (Kimoto & Willett, 2020, p. 116). It is a new and yet-to-be-discovered feeling. Accordingly, I think that Lorde’s account of the erotic helps us to apprehend our being disposed in the world. It bridges the gap of the theoretical distinction between the Heideggerian mood<sup>94</sup> that I have talked about in the previous chapter, and our being. In other words, *Eros highlights our being-of-the-world*. Moreover, the erotic appeals to the pathic movement, it appeals to “what we can feel in the doing.” (Lorde, 2019, p. 44). It bridges the gap between the beings who enact and the mood that affects them.

Lorde’s concept of Eros also appeals to plurality, it is not just a single experience between one being and the world, but what I call *a trialectic between the individual, the collective, and the world*. Indeed, in the ‘house of difference’ (*the world*), difference is the relational in-between (*collective*) from which

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<sup>94</sup> Mimi Sheller described the erotic as “a kind of *pervasive* energy that can be a source for social and political change” (2012, p. 244; my emphasis). Because this energy is ‘pervasive’, it is both prevalent and penetrating. Accordingly, I associate it with *moods* as, they also are pervasive energies which affect us and enable the pathic movement, so the possibility for social and political change.

“our personal [*individual*] power is forged” (Lorde, 2019, p. 112). It is a disclosure of who-ness in relation to others and the world. Furthermore, as a lifeforce, the erotic creates a shared feeling which puts people together, it provides “the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person.” (Lorde, 2019, p. 46) In other words, it is *a shared power*. Lorde uses the image of a bridge when she talks about the erotic. A bridge is an in-between that separates and reunites people together, it shares the same properties of the table that Arendt used as a metaphor to describe the in-between that is politics. Because the erotic reunites people together, it is also a mode of organisation. Lorde stated that the erotic “forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.” (2019, p. 46) To extend the metaphor, I believe that this bridge is the one that allows the passage, the flight from loneliness, homelessness, Lorde’s *petit marronage*, to the home of difference, plurality. In other words, the pathic movement from one side of the bridge to the other is what I call the *erotic marronage*. Furthermore, Lorde used the figure of the primordial Eros, which is not personified (like Aphrodite and Pandora were<sup>95</sup>), which means that it can be materialised without following any rules. It does not follow the rule of craftsmanship nor politics associated with a ruler/ruled relationship. Eros is a mode of organisation that can be materialised as an assembly or a protest which does not follow a specific rule such as gender and racial norms in Lorde’s case. Eros is *an-archic* precisely because it does not follow any rules but is materialised according to the connections made between the subjectivities. It creates a non-alienated trialectic between the individual, the collective and the world. *The erotic bears the promise of new beginnings*. Therefore, the other side of the bridge is a place where everything is yet to be built. To put it differently, *the erotic as an-archic marronage is world-building*.

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<sup>95</sup> See Vernant, 1988.

So far, I showed how marronage can be understood as an an-archic mode of organisation. Moreover, I have suggested that in virtue of being an act of flying from oppression, marronage is also world building. In what follows, I will investigate further this possibility of world-building brought up by the erotic marronage by looking at what has been called feminist marronage (Bentouhami, 2017; Vergès, 2019). From that perspective, freedom as an actualisation of plurality can be seen as a feminist and decolonial mode of organisation, a relational in-between that re-organises gender relations.

## **Feminist Marronage**

In the previous sections, I focused on the world-building and an-archic community building dimensions of marronage. Now, I suggest to focus more precisely on what I think to be the freedom implied in marronage and how it opens the way to think about freedom beyond the individual and the sphere of rights. If marronage is a flight from plantocracy, from colonisation, it also implies a flight from its gendered logic as well. Indeed, Françoise Vergès pointed out that black women were the source of racial capitalism as their womb was what reproduced the unit of labour, namely slaves (Vergès, 2020). Moreover, “gender shaped the laws defining hereditary slavery in both conception and consequence.” (Wood, 2010, p. 514) The plantation as a zone of nonbeing, was racialised and gendered, both were intertwined. Therefore, a freedom fleshed out of marronage would also hypothetically resist the coloniality of gender that I talked about in Chapter II. However, this (ontological) resistance, through marronage, to the coloniality of gender would be out of the frame of individual rights. Indeed, in the western feminist movements, “the resistance to the collective appropriation of women tended to take the shape of individual liberty as private property” (Bentouhami, 2017, p. 113)<sup>96</sup>. As I have shown in Chapter III, the question of freedom and rights from western modernity was based on the question of appropriation and

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<sup>96</sup> In this section, all of the quotes from Bentouhami are translated by me.

private property. In the case of Locke, private property was the means to justify appropriation. Against that, the erotic/feminist marronage would suggest a concept of freedom that is collective and not individual. This freedom is not the one granted by the colonies to (ex)slaves. For Hourya Bentouhami, the legal feminism that resulted from this conception of individual rights is a negotiation of the modalities of appropriation, so, it is still embedded in the colonial logic (2017, p. 113), so, I would add, in the ontology of seizure. In response, maroon “feminism is thought from the community, far from an individualist feminism which located its historical discourse in the frame of property with a biased interpretation of ‘my body, my property.’” (Bentouhami, 2017, p. 112-3) For Bentouhami, the claim ‘our body, our selves’ can be understood from the perspective of woman maroons in which our own body is part and parcel of a community of belonging.

Bentouhami defines marronage as a “territory that posits an *erratic circulation* of bodies and signs, and which is not grounded in the circulation of capital but on the *reparation of the community* as well as the *resistance* to the world of slavery.” (2017, p. 112) This quote highlights three major intertwined dimensions of freedom as marronage that I have emphasised previously.

- (i). The *erratic circulation* is a result of the an-archism of freedom as a mode of organisation, precisely because this organisation is non-sovereign and in a non-state space as Neil Roberts had it.
- (ii). The *reparation of the community* refers to the non-alienated trialectic between the self, the community, and the world, against the impossible/saturated ‘of-the-world’ of the Being-in-the-plantation.
- (iii). The *resistance* to the world of slavery is an ontological resistance that is also creative in the sense that it proposes another mode of organisation that disrupts the colonial order of the plantation and posits its ontological incompatibility with it. Bentouhami describes this resistance as a struggle *against* recognition (2017, p. 112).



The western liberty which was proposed at some point to some slaves is defined by Hourya Bentouhami as a *corps-doublure* (bodies-understudies)<sup>97</sup>, meaning that in order to be free and reach the zone of being, the slave must put on, like a double, the (white) body that is already in the zone of being (2017, p. 113). This notion of *corps-doublure* could encompass or put together the symbolic and material dimensions of appropriation implied with the ontology of seizure. By putting a white mask on to grant to the master's desire, one is alienated to the master's desire. In that sense, it is an appropriation of one's individuality. Indeed,

“the *corps-doublure* is precisely the one that births out of the injunctions of the institution of slavery: ‘be my body’ says the master, in the sense that the enslaved are enjoined to become other, to alienate themselves in the desire of the master”

(Bentouhami, 2017, p. 115)

From that perspective, this western colonial liberty is an alienated dialectic between one's body and the master's body, and the vector of this alienation is precisely the process of recognition that implies an appropriation. Accordingly, feminist marronage is about the introduction of a non-alienated, an authentic, dialectic between the body and the world, or should I say a trialectic between the body, the community, and the world, against this “deadly [colonial] duplication of bodies” (Bentouhami, 2017, p. 113)

As it was the case in the Algerian colonial city, in the plantation the muscle is also in tension. Indeed, the racial gendered system imposed by the plantocracy coded the muscle in capitalist exploitation (Bentouhami, 2017, p. 119). Against that, women maroons “contributed to recoding non masculine virile and masculine femininity forms.” (Bentouhami, 2017, p. 119)<sup>98</sup> In other words, precisely because the pathic movement of marronage is also a process of re-learning of

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<sup>97</sup> This colonial liberty based on the recognition of the master was given individually and was not threatening the system of slavery.

<sup>98</sup> See Cummings, 2012.

one's body schema, the collective struggle was recoded in terms of gender, escaping or *flying from the racial gendered colonial system*.

Bentouhami argued that feminist marronage is driven by an idea of 'equaliberty' such as conceptualised by Etienne Balibar (2010). This idea of the imbrication of liberty and equality illustrates what I understand by freedom as a mode of organisation. Yet I would stick to the term *isonomia* to describe it. Indeed, because the organisation takes the form of *isonomia*, it is equal. In other words, freedom as a mode of organisation signifies *freedom as isonomia*. If "maroon feminism is also understood as a redefinition of care in the light of practices of reparation of one's own body within the community and not in the sense of a care of the disabled and minors of the community by women alone" (Bentouhami, 2017, p. 121), it implies a care for the self that is also a care for others, the community, and a care for the world. This is why I understand care and reparation as community building, in the sense of a trialectic between the self, the community and the world. The liberal, colonial 'I' entailed by the individual liberties lie outside of the world and the community. It "crushes all the weak-willed 'we' [those in the zone of nonbeing]" (Bouteldja, 2016, p. 131), what is proposed to them is to abandon the community to endorse the white master's mask, the *corps-doublure*. Against that, marronage creates a space where freedom can appear as the power in-between people and where the 'I' can be disclosed in virtue of being part of a 'we'. In other words, the example of marronage helps to understand freedom as something that goes beyond the individual, or the liberal notion of individual rights. Rather, freedom, because it is a mode of organisation, creates a 'we', and it is in virtue of being part of the 'we' that the 'I' can be disclosed.

## Guiding Principles

As I said previously, plurality is, for Arendt, a web of relationships, a political ‘we’ that appears every time people act in concert. This political community created by political actions is more or less stable, its stability relies on the longevity of the public space that is created by the action in concert. As I have also said previously, I suggest that freedom is an *an-archic* mode of organisation, which means that it does not follow any rule. It does not mean that no rules were prescribed, but that, ultimately, it is not those rules that make the political community appear. Instead, I claim that political principles guide the action in concert. In chapter III, I defined these principles as the *ethos* of action. As much as there is a spirit of the law for Montesquieu, there is, for Arendt, a spirit of political action that is reflected by the general ideal which appears in the performance of action. It reveals “the fundamental values of a political community” (Muldoon, 2016, p. 126). To make my point, I will first describe Arendt’s account of the organising function of political principles, then I will read Idris Robinson’s analysis of Black Lives Matter (2020) along those lines, concluding that political principles guide and organise action.

### Hannah Arendt’s Political Principles

Throughout her work, Hannah Arendt often described what she calls political principles as principles of organisation (1972, 1994, 2005). Such principles can be visible through mutual promises (Arendt, 2016) such as what I have described above. They can also become institutionalised as a “principle of organization, [can] begins from below, continues upward, and finally leads to a parliament.” (Arendt, 1972, p. 232) Amongst those principles one could mention ‘justice’ or ‘equality’. Moreover, “[t]he extraordinary significance of these principles is not only that they first move human beings to act but that they are also the source of constant nourishment for their actions.” (Arendt, 2005, p. 195) In other words, those principles *guide* the pathic movement

of action. They are general ideals which can be expressed through goals or ends and that “map out certain directions” and where the origins of motion and action lie (Arendt, 1994, p. 335).

It is precisely because principles guide action that they have an organising *power*. Power is enacted through action by a guiding principle. Principles give and organise power, this is why I will focus first on Arendt’s account of power, before coming back to those principles. For her, “power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 200) Therefore, Arendt’s account of power is not associated with domination, on the contrary, it is something that appears when people act in concert, it is the power of a political community. It is “always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength.” (Arendt, 1998, p. 200). Power is what lies in-between people when they act together. Hence, power is non-sovereign, it is not an individual or a collective property such as Rousseau’s General Will, it is rather relational. Indeed, “power [...] does not inhere in the actors, but exists between those who act as the condition of their action” (Penta, 1996, p. 220). However, because, for Arendt, power cannot be assimilated with sovereignty, it is spontaneous and cannot be mastered (Brunkhorst, 2006, p. 125). Power as a relation is never pre-supposed or pre-constituted. It rather is the constitution of the collective which is contingent on the apparition of power. The web of relationships coincides with its spontaneous institution. Power “does not belong to the ends-means calculus, but instead can be seen, [...] as an end in itself.” (Penta, 1996, p. 220). Power is *an-archic* in the sense that its rule of organisation does not precede its constitution. It is not manufactured in the mode of craftsmanship, but it is characterised by the capacity to make something new to appear in the world, it is a *productive power*. It creates a trialectic between the self (who), the collective (plurality) and the world. From that perspective, Lorde’s account of the erotic, which I have talked about previously, can be seen as similar to Arendt’s concept of power.

Accordingly, power does not have a specific materialisation, but it can be the power enacted through civil disobedience or protest as “popular revolt against materially strong rulers [...] may engender an almost irresistible power” (Arendt, 1998, p. 200). Power is seen as a resistance against an order, a rule. This power is not only *against*, but also *for* something. As I said, it is a productive power, it has the *potentiality* to create something new into the world. However, this capacity of new beginnings is not purely chaotic but driven and cast out of political principles. The ‘for something’ is the general political principle that both drives action and makes power, so the formation of a political ‘we’ is made possible. If there is a protest with people fighting for justice, they fight for a certain idea(l) of the world, what it could or should be. In that case, the very act of protesting opens up the possibility of world-making. Even if these principles, such as justice or equality, are general, they also “act as *reference point* and framework around which other ideas and concept are organised.” (Muldoon, 2016, p. 125; my emphasis). Indeed, principles are not exclusive to each other, equality can appeal to justice etc. For instance, Toussaint Louverture said: “we do not want a circumstantial freedom that would be conceded only to us, what we want is the absolute adoption of the *principle* that even men born red, black or white cannot be the property of his alike” (Césaire, 1981, p. 278; my emphasis). In that quote, Toussaint Louverture opposes his principle of freedom to what he called the ‘circumstantial freedom’ of the colons<sup>99</sup>. Namely, freedom was granted to some slaves individually whilst others remained slaves. For Louverture, freedom as a principle encompasses a total equality in virtue of being human. From this quote, there is both the ‘*against*’ and the ‘*for something*’ of political power and principle. Indeed, the invocation of freedom as a principle characterises both an *against plantocracy*-‘the property of his alike’-and a *for a total equality*-‘red, black or white’-opposing an idea(l) of the world to a state of the world. Opposing a potential free mode of being in the world together to a colonial mode of being in the world. Also, what is interesting here, is that Louverture described the principle of freedom as a mode of organisation

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<sup>99</sup> Which could be associated with the *corps-doublure* that I have talked about in my discussion of feminist marronage.

that echoes what I understand to be *isonomia*. Hence, freedom understood as a principle can operate as a remembrance and/or an ideal of what freedom as a political phenomenon is. In other words, reviving freedom as a principle means reviving the idea of a past mode of organisation. For Arendt, political phenomena and principles are non-exclusive as principles spring from a fundamental experience (2005, p. 66) and become inspirational for further political actions.

Accordingly, principles enable, or are the source of power. Indeed, political action does not appear for nothing, but precisely *for something*, in the name of a principle. Accordingly, principles are the condition of freedom's appearance. Now, I want to follow up on the organising function of principles by arguing that principles, and not identity-as it was the case in the feminist theories I analysed in chapters I and II-, are the reference point from which a collective action, as a collective ontological resistance, so as a manifestation of freedom, can appear. From that perspective, freedom, as I understand it, is always related to a guiding principle.

### **Black Lives Matter's *an-archism***

Throughout the example of the Black Lives Matter's movement (BLM) in the United States, I want to show that it is because freedom is driven by principle that it is *an-archic*. If it was driven by identity, it would follow a rule, and it would take a means-end form. To make my point, I will focus on Idris Robinson's reading of BLM in his text *How it Might Should Be Done* (2020). But first, for contextual matters, BLM can be defined as both a social movement and a slogan. In 2013, the civil rights activist Alicia Garza created that slogan in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman who shot and killed the 17-year-old black boy Trayvon Martin. Since then, Black Lives Matter has been a slogan and a *rallying cry* accompanying protests against police murders and violence against black people. In the United States, every year since 2013 has been marked by BLM demonstrations such as the George Floyd protests in 2020. Moreover, this movement is international and has been referred to as the Black Spring, in reference to the Arab Spring.

In his article *How it Might Should Be Done*, Robinson provided an analysis of the BLM as a contingent, spontaneous, and radical movement that goes beyond claims to identity politics reforms. On the contrary, he argued that those uprisings are driven by the aim to overthrow racial capitalism. His analysis is characterised by the identification of two enemies that constitute the Janus-faced state, two different modes of governance. On one hand, there is the right wing as the sovereign imperial State, and on the other hand, the liberal progressives left as a biopolitical security (Robinson, 2020, p. 16). The first instance of governance is illustrated by repressive apparatuses like the state of exception and the second one “is concerned with the protection of [...] lives” (Robinson, 2020, p. 17). It can be security measures for the management of lives that are not necessarily a result of State actions. In a Foucauldian vocabulary, these are disciplinary measures<sup>100</sup> that can be found even within social movements. Their aim is to discipline and organise a movement according to rules. In the case of the liberal progressive left, it could be illustrated by measures such as “white people to the front, black people to the center” (Robinson, 2020, p. 10) in social movements, in order to create what is called a safe space, a space “keeping marginalized groups free from violence and harassment.” (The Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1346) The aim is not to say that these spaces are not useful, but that when they are the modalities of the organisation of social movements or protests, they instate an order rather than dissolving one. For Idris Robinson, these are “modalities of the police” (2020, p. 13) which are easily captured by neoliberalism and white elite as Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò showed (2022). Moreover, they bear the risk of being dissolved in a management of diversity<sup>101</sup> and a patrimonial discourse. Indeed, Robinson argued that in movement such as BLM, black leaders do not exist, however “white liberal [needs to] invent a Black leadership for him or herself” (Robinson, 2020, p. 15) in order to use them as tokens to pursue liberal reforms and to cut short the uprising. In other words, those made-up

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<sup>100</sup> See Foucault, M. 1993, 1997.

<sup>101</sup> See Bourcier, 2017.

leaders are white people's property<sup>102</sup>. A discourse on liberty as reform is framed by the question of property and "is premised upon the negation of Black life and the negation of Black liberty"<sup>103</sup> (Robinson, 2020, pp. 15-6). To put it differently, it is a replay of the coloniality<sup>104</sup> of freedom and its ontology of seizure. Therefore, a movement like BLM cannot be interpreted or understood solely from the lens of identity politics because it would both polish the movement and invisibilise its claims which are not mainly identitarian. Against the understanding of BLM in terms of identity politics, I suggest to understand Black Lives Matter as a political principle, in the Arendtian sense by first analysing the *an-archic* dimension of this movement.

It has been noted that BLM movements are decentralised, bottom-up, unstructured, and spontaneous (Harris, 2015; Clayton, 2018). For Robinson, this movement exceeds all classifications, it is a multi-ethnic<sup>105</sup> uprising where "different bodies, different shapes, different genders, manifested themselves in the streets together" (2020, p. 10). This unstructured organisation entails that the racial "boundaries began to dissolve" (Robinson, 2020, p. 10) within the movement, which does not mean that it is hermetic to those boundaries, rather that it is not what rules and makes the organisation. It is an *event* that brings about a *present* (Robinson, 2020, p. 8). In other words, it is an event in the sense that it interrupts the present and brings about the possibility of new beginnings, a new present, it is world-building. It instates a new trialectic of the self, the collective and the world that is not preceded by a preconceived mode of organisation to follow. It is then, *an-archic* as this formation "can only be defined in terms of its movement and its development" (Robinson, 2020, p. 14). To put it differently, the appearance of the movement coincides with its institution and is not preceded by it. For Idris Robinson, the movement reunited

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<sup>102</sup> For this point see also Ture, K. & Hamilton, C. V. 1992.

<sup>103</sup> Here again, we find a process that is close to what Bentouhami identified as *corps-doublure* (2017).

<sup>104</sup> See Ture, K & Hamilton, C. V. 1992, chapter I and the Chapter II of this thesis.

<sup>105</sup> For this point also see Fisher, D. R. 2019. The support for BLM was also multi-ethnic as a study from the Pew Research Center (2020) showed. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/06/12/amid-protests-majorities-across-racial-and-ethnic-groups-express-support-for-the-black-lives-matter-movement/>



“the part of America that has no part in it” (2020, p. 14), echoing what Jacques Rancière called *la part des sans-part* (the portion of portionless) (1995). Now, if *la part des sans-parts* became a ‘we’ under the slogan Black Lives Matter, it means that this slogan somehow guided action, that it is the source of this newly appeared plurality in virtue of collective action.

## **Black Lives Matter as a Political Principle**

As I said previously, Black Lives Matter is both a slogan and a movement. Both are non-exclusive to each other because the slogan, as a rallying cry, unites people together from different horizons. The slogan is the source of the plurality of the movement. For Arendt, a principle is a general concept or idea, but it is by no means a floating signifier as Laclau and Mouffe had it. Floating signifiers are characterised by a lack of specific object hence a lack of specific meaning but are dependent upon the *outcome* of an action (Laclau, 2007, pp. 36-45). It is a contest over hegemony and those who will be able to fill the meaning will be hegemonic in the political arena. In contemporary politics, those empty signifiers can be words such as ‘Republic’. For instance, in France, the concept of ‘Republic’ is mobilised both by the right and the left in a contest to establish who has the hegemonic meaning of what the republic is. Another example of it can be ‘the people’ which is used both by the left and the right in a populist strategy (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 2005). In other words, a floating signifier is characterised by its outcome and is essentially strategic in a contest for hegemony, it is first taken as an empty concept that can mean anything and is then filled up with meanings. On the contrary, Arendtian principles are the source of action, they are what makes action spring. Hence, while the content of a principle is also contingent on the struggle, it has already been filled with a previous meaning, it has a genealogy that can be actualised yet it keeps its *spirit*. Indeed, “Arendt’s principles are not eternal laws but historically specific criteria” (Muldoon, 2016, p. 125). From that perspective, the slogan ‘All Lives Matter’ can be seen as an floating signifier that was filled up by conservatives to constitute a hegemonic block against BLM

that has popular support<sup>106</sup>. However, I suggest that the slogan ‘Black Lives Matter’, as a political principle, has a meaning.

In analysing the meaning of BLM, some scholars have associated them with the history of civil rights movements with other slogans such as ‘we shall overcome’ or ‘I Am a Man!’ (Hogan, 2022). On the other hand, Christopher J. Lebron identified ‘Black Lives Matter’ as an idea (2018). For him, it represents “a civic desire for equality and a human desire for respect, the intellectual roots of which lie deep in the history of black American thought.” (Lebron, 2018, p. xiii) To make his point, Lebron traced the material and theoretical history of BLM by engaging with Frederick Douglass’s and Ida B. Wells’s “struggle and ideas” (2018, p. xvi) as well as the role black arts and letters had during the Harlem Renaissance, to the question of gender and sexuality in black equality or finally by addressing James Baldwin, Martin Luther King Jr and Audre Lorde. This history of the making of Black Lives Matter as an idea allowed him to identify other concepts and ideas that surround it, such as dignity, equality, or the erotic with Audre Lorde. However, one could argue that BLM is a sort of super floating signifier that encompasses other floating signifiers. Yet, these concepts are not waiting to get filled up precisely because they carry a vision of the world, they drive action *against* and *for something*. As reminded by Norman Ajari, in the Afro-descendant tradition, dignity is a fundamental political concept that “does not aim to produce hegemony or to aggregate a majority, but to describe the engine of the power to act of the oppressed.” (2019, p. 103; my translation) Indeed, these principles “come down to use through history” (Arendt, 2005, p. 195) and ““can be repeated time and time’ again in different historical contexts leading to their regeneration in new political settings” (Muldoon, 2016, p. 131). Therefore, to trace the history of

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<sup>106</sup> For an analysis of BLM popular support see the study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2020). <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/06/12/amid-protests-majorities-across-racial-and-ethnic-groups-express-support-for-the-black-lives-matter-movement/>

a principle is also to trail the history of the political action associated with it, hence, to freedom as a collective ontological resistance.

As I have already said, principles are the expression of an *against* and *for something*. They are both destructive and creative. If you take the example of a revolution, and if equality is the principle that guides it, the immanence, the materiality of the principle is characterised by the *destruction of the old unequal order* and *the creation of a new-hopefully-equal order* that can be institutionalised in a Republic for instance. However, destruction does not always precede creation, their temporal relationship is much more complex, but I will discuss that in the next chapter. Nevertheless, and to come back to our concern, if Black Lives Matter is a principle, what is its *against* and *for something*? Brandon Hogan suggested that Black Lives Matter should be understood by putting the emphasis on the meaning of ‘mattering’. For him, ‘mattering is a “two-place predicate [...and] is inherently relational and attitudinal” (Hogan, 2022, p. 29). In other words, it is an in-between, we matter for someone, for a group. There is a certain trialectic between the self, the collective and the world, where one can be at home in the world. Furthermore, a being-disposed or a situation of ‘they do *not matter*’ is implicit in the rallying cry *to matter*. This ‘do not matter’ situation is not moral but structural. The example of police violence is one amongst many, such as precarious situations regarding health, employment, or housing<sup>107</sup>. Implicit in the ‘to matter’ is the ‘do not matter’ as the illustration of the zone of nonbeing, from which and against which people are aspiring *to matter*. Hence, Black Lives Matter is “*against* the state and capital, *against* American society” and its structures (Robinson, 2020, p. 14; my emphasis), or what Malcom X called the ‘American nightmare’ (1989). This ‘against’ is also implicitly visible if we look at the vision of society and structural changes made on the online platform Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), where they appeal to prison abolition, universal healthcare, free education etc.

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<sup>107</sup> See Hershbein, B. J. & Holzer, H. J. 2021; Mincy, R. B. 2006.

Even if these are concrete suggestions of structural changes, Black Lives Matter, with a focus on the ‘to matter’ appeals to a fundamental ‘for something’ which is the source of action, institutional and structural changes. This fundamental ‘for something’, this ‘to matter’ principle, that is performed within the protests is another social ontological basis for society.

Brendan Hogan (2022) noticed that Black Lives Matter is both a fact and an aspiration. I suggest that these two intertwined dimensions illustrate two principles that can characterise BLM. First solidarity and second liberation. Solidarity is a fact, as it is *de facto* and not *de jure*. It is *de facto* as solidarity is both a principle and an *an-archic* mode of organisation because its institution coincides with its appearance. In the case of BLM, solidarity is not *de jure* as it is not a pre-defined rule, an *arche*, that manufactures solidarity. For Hannah Arendt, solidarity is the opposite of pity, and it is out of solidarity that “a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited” is established (Arendt, 2016, p. 88). For her, solidarity appeals to dignity and is an equalising force. Contrary to pity that is expressed for its own sake, solidarity appeals to the world, it is world changing. Solidarity is “the intersubjective experience of human togetherness” and “the very phenomenon that gives rise to calls for justice” (Hayden & Saunders, 2019, p. 177). From that perspective, the ‘to matter’ is an illustration of solidarity rather than pity. However, as I have implicitly said, solidarity is not enacted for its own sake, but is rather world-building. As highlighted by Hayden and Saunders, “the capacity for *freedom* finds its most politically meaningful expression when it is *experienced in acts of solidarity*, conceived by Arendt as a world-oriented phenomenon” (2019, p. 183; my emphasis). Therefore, if solidarity is both a principle and an an-archic mode of organisation, it also stands *against* and *for something*. I suggest that this against and for something is caught by the idea of *liberation as a political principle*. But it is an idea that I will explore in the next and last chapter of this thesis.

## Conclusion

This chapter followed directly from the previous one, in the sense that it focused on the necessarily plural dimension of our being disposed in the world. Even if the Arendtian notion of plurality was discussed in Chapter III, I chose to emphasise it more in-depth in this chapter, in order to highlight that freedom is also a mode of organisation. More precisely, I decided to follow Hannah Arendt's statement that "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom" (2006, p. 174) to show that freedom is an *an-archic* mode of organisation. To make my point I have first investigated Arendt's deconstruction of politics in the history of western of philosophy. Then, I have suggested that, in virtue of her characterisation of politics as plurality and natality, freedom can be understood as being *an-archic*. Thereafter, I used the example of marronage to de-centre Arendt's account of freedom and plurality from her account of the American Revolution, and to exemplify freedom as an an-archic mode of organisation and a collective ontological resistance. Because freedom as a mode of organisation does not appear out of the blue, following my discussion of Arendtian principles in Chapter III, I suggested that there are political principles that guide action without ruling or determining this action beforehand. Indeed, if political principles were a rule to follow, they would function according to the Platonic account of politics in the mode of ruling and executing. Moreover, these principles are what make the link between freedom as a mode of organisation and freedom as an ontological resistance. Political principles, which I have described as an *against* and *for something*, help us to understand freedom as a *collective ontological resistance*, precisely because those guiding principles are the reason why people reunite together and act.

Ultimately and through the example of Black Lives Matter, I submitted that liberation is a political principle. Accordingly, if liberation is thought of as a principle, it means that BLM is a (re)emergence of liberation as a principle in an actualised form. If liberation is a principle it means that it is not only destructive (against something) but also creative (for something). Moreover, if

liberation is a principle, it also means that it takes the form of an aspiration that is yet to be fully realised. Indeed, if Black Liberation means the end of racial and heterosexist capitalism, we are not there yet. Consequently, it would mean that freedom as an act of collective ontological resistance is a movement towards this aspiration, hence, it would precede liberation. It is an idea that I will explore in the last chapter of this thesis, where I aim to reframe the relationship between freedom and liberation. To put it differently, in the next chapter, I will suggest the hypothesis that *freedom precedes liberation*, and that is the third dimension of my understanding freedom.

## Chapter VI: Freedom Precedes Liberation

In the previous chapters, I have exemplified my thesis that freedom is a collective ontological resistance by discussing some lived experiences such as Frederick Douglass's fight with Edward Covey, the Algerian War for independence, marronage and Black Lives Matter. I have concluded that freedom, as a political phenomenon is a pathic movement and that its appearance coincides with its enactment. Moreover, because I stepped away from the conception of freedom as individual rights or an individual subjectivity, I have taken a worldly perspective that allowed me to think about freedom first as embodiment, a dialectic between the body and the world, and second as a trialectic between the self, the collective and the world. Basically, so far, I understand freedom as an *an-archic* mode of organisation and as a collective ontological resistance. All the examples that I have used to make my points highlight a different relationship between freedom and liberation than what I have already criticised. Indeed, in the two first chapters of this work, I criticised the tendency to assimilate freedom to liberation in feminist theory. I have argued that this assimilation results in a theory of the subject rather than one of freedom. Yet, there is another common relationality between freedom and liberation that is assumed. Liberation would precede freedom. In this chapter, I mainly want to challenge this conception. Indeed, if I follow the example of Douglass, and if liberation refers to the end of slavery, then Douglass's experience of freedom *precedes* liberation. Similarly, in the example of the Algerian War, if liberation is associated with decolonisation, then the freedom experienced by the *militante* in the flesh of the revolution *precedes* the independence of more broadly decolonisation understood from the perspective of decolonial thought. If the decolonial claim which states that coloniality is something that survives the independence of ex-colonised countries is true, hence decolonisation is still ongoing in Algeria.

Therefore, in both cases *freedom precedes liberation*, and it is precisely the hypothesis that I will follow in this chapter.

To make my point, I will first address the understanding of liberation preceding freedom in Hannah Arendt's philosophy. I will argue that this framing of the relationship between freedom and liberation is a result of a floating and too broad understanding of what liberation is. In opposition and following what I have started in the last chapter, I will suggest that liberation is both a principle and a potential materiality. Ultimately, I will support the thesis that freedom precedes liberation, where 'precedes' is not understood as a static before/after but as an ongoing movement.

## **Liberation Precedes Freedom**

This chapter asks the question of the temporality of action, politics, and ultimately of freedom and liberation. In this section, I will first address Arendt's account of liberation preceding freedom. This idea, I will argue, comes both from her account of the Greek Polis and her analysis of revolutions. However, I will assert that it creates a regime of historicity (Hartog, 2012), which is characterised by a strict before/after temporal divide which also makes a sharp separation between self/psychological and collective liberation. In other words, this account of liberation preceding freedom does not take liberation as a process but as an immediate fact, or state of liberation from something. Before making my point, I want to briefly emphasise what I understand by 'regime of historicity' and why it matters to analyse the relationship between freedom and liberation.

For Francois Hartog who coined the concept, a regime of historicity is a heuristic device that helps to understand the relationship of the present to the past and future. In his words, "depending on whether the category of the past, of the future or of the present comes to dominate, it is clear that



the order of time entailed by it will not be the same” (Hartog, 2012, p. 15; my translation). In other words, this tool is useful to analyse the relationship that a phenomenon has with time regarding its different actors. For instance, if one takes a specific event like the ‘discovery’/conquest of the Americas, the relationship that the West has to this event is not the same that the one Indigenous people have. Moreover, the regime of historicity would help “to apprehend in a better way, not time, all the time or the wholeness of time, but principally crisis moments” (Hartog, 2012, p. 38; my translation), or what Hannah Arendt called *gaps*, between past and future (2006). For our purpose, this heuristic tool can be useful to apprehend how freedom and liberation’s relationship to time is established and/or theorised.

### **Hannah Arendt on Liberation**

First of all, one has to ask to what phenomenon, in general, refers the concept of liberation. The easiest way to answer it would be to establish that liberation takes its meaning in its negativity, namely that liberation is always a liberation *from something*, it belongs to its structure. Moreover, this *from something* implies something to go against, to rebel against. This something is therefore oppressive to whoever wants to be liberated from it. In other words, liberation aims at abolishing a state of things. Thus, liberation can be used to describe a phenomenon that concerns only one individual, someone who wants to be liberated from his or her fear, but it can also be used to describe a phenomenon that concerns several people, for instance, the liberation of a group from an oppressive social condition. Accordingly, we can start to see how for Arendt liberation is distinct from freedom. Indeed, freedom in its political meaning has plurality for condition while liberation has not. Then, their structure differs.

According to Arendt, “in terms of political process, [freedom and liberation] belong together, and yet as political phenomena they are entirely different and must be kept distinct” (2018, p. 352). She particularly emphasised the difference between freedom and liberation in her book *On Revolution*.

For her, liberation finds its meaning in rebellions while freedom finds its meaning in revolutions. Both are not the same, but they belong to each other in the sense that “liberation, though it may be freedom’s *conditio sine qua non*” does not automatically lead to it (Arendt, 1978b, p. 207-8). This is because of this relationship between the two that “in the freedom and liberation Story of Revolution the pairing is often spontaneous and instinctive” (Selbin, 2010, p. 142). The main difference between the phenomena of rebellion and revolution lies in a different temporality. As Arendt stressed, a rebellion illustrated by an act of liberation tends to destroy an old order while a revolution is about the constitution of a “*novus ordo saeculorum*” (Arendt, 2016, p. 179), a new order. Indeed, the American Revolution was about the foundation of the United States of America and the French Revolution was about the constitution of the Republic. Moreover, the difference in their structure also lies in their relationship to plurality. A rebellion can concern an individual, a rebellion of a student against the authority of his or her professor for instance. But it can also have a pluralistic dimension, a rebellion of women against gender norms for instance. However, in both cases, a rebellion is directed against an authority. And as we said previously, when politics was assimilated to a ruling/being ruled relationship, the tendency to assimilate freedom to liberation results in conceptualising freedom as a liberation from politics, because politics was the expression of domination. Moreover, in a wider sense, liberation can also be assimilated to a mental phenomenon, for instance, for the Christians, the Will was considered as “an organ of self-liberation” (Arendt, 2006, p. 160), freeing Christians from worldly affairs. Yet, taking liberation as the end of politics is a mistake. Because “liberation holds out the possibility of the complete overthrow of oppressive structures” (Horsley, 2000, p. 217), it does not mean that it has to stop there. Liberation, through rebellion, also bears “the possibility of revolution” (Horsley, 2000, p. 217) which means the possibility to build something new, a new order, the constitution of a Republic for instance.

Moreover, liberation is not limited to a rebellion against the state, it can also be against some categories of thought for instance. In Arendt's hermeneutic circle we mentioned above, the deconstructive part can be described as an act of liberation. Indeed, this deconstruction aims at revisiting the philosophical tradition in order to get rid of it, or at least to be able to think and understand things without the weight of the tradition. In other words, to liberate ourselves from the weight of tradition that does not allow us to think things anew, or in their specific newness. In all the cases we described, liberation, in its structure, aims at the destruction of an order, an authority. But once this order is destroyed it creates an abyss of nothingness, which means that something new has to be built. This is where revolution takes its meaning. Indeed, as Arendt had it, in revolutions there is a "pathos of novelty" (2016, p. 27) which means that the destruction of the old opens up an abyss from which new beginnings can emerge. Revolution is concerned with new beginnings that have nothing to hold on to, in order to create a new temporality. The liberation frees people from the causal chain of history. One could take the creation of a new calendar (the French Republican calendar) during the French Revolution as an example of it. The liberation from the old aims to put the rebels as equals, they are taking their rights for granted. Based on that equality a space of freedom can arise.

However, I believe that this relationality between freedom and liberation coined by Arendt creates a strict Before/After divide. Freedom would only be able to appear *after* liberation, meaning after the destruction of an order. If one takes the example of the French revolution, it could work yet, those types of events do not happen every morning. Meaning that the total destruction of an order is unlikely to happen<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> Moreover, it can be argued that the French Revolution was not the total destruction of an order. Racial capitalism did not vanish after the revolution. Hence, It can be thought of as a restructuration or a reconfiguration rather than a total destruction.

## The Before/After divide

As I have just said, the view of liberation preceding freedom implies a strict before/after temporal divide. Yet, this sharp divide also makes the distinction between self-liberation and/or psychological liberation and liberation from social structure. Indeed, what Arendt refers to as the liberation from necessity can be individual whilst the liberation from oppression tends to be more structural. Nevertheless, this divide reiterates the individualist, subject-centred ontology. Indeed, if one takes a worldly perspective, as I have taken for freedom and politics, a trialectic between the self, the collective and the world, the divide between self/collective and worldly liberation would be a fallacy. Self-liberation would be taken on its own, out of the world, without any effect on the collective and the world. When I talk about effect, I do not necessarily talk about an immediate effect which would reiterate the before/after temporal divide. Therefore, in order to come up with another understanding of liberation, one has to refute this before/after temporal divide that I will talk about in what follows.

The first question one could ask is, what regime of historicity is entailed when liberation precedes freedom? If we start with the example of the Greek *Polis* that informs Arendt's account of liberation, first, it could be said that the slave's and the master/citizen's experience of time are not the same. Indeed, for the slave time is a closure or a focus on the present as they have to deal with the immediate necessity of life, whilst for the citizen, time is open and directed towards the future, as the citizen will deliberate with others about the future of the polis.

“Because all human beings are subject to necessity, they are entitled to violence toward others; violence is the prepolitical act of liberating oneself from the necessity of life for the freedom of world. This freedom is the essential condition of what the Greeks called felicity, *eudaimonia*, which was an objective status depending first of all upon wealth and health. To be poor or to be in ill health meant to be subject to physical necessity, and to be a slave meant to be subject, in addition, to man-made violence.”

(Arendt, 1998, p. 31)

As this quote shows, for Arendt, liberation is mainly associated with a liberation from the necessity of life. It does not mean that those necessities cease to exist but that one needs to be liberated from them in order to act publicly and experience freedom. She does not advocate a model of being liberated from necessity by the means of slavery, but she keeps the paradigm of liberation *preceding* freedom, where the former also is the condition for the latter. Therefore, the temporality between freedom and liberation can be understood as a before/after necessity. Actually, this framework also echoes Arendt's critique of the French Revolution. For her, the revolutionaries were too concerned with necessities and how to resolve the related problems that she framed under the term 'the social question' (Arendt, 2016). Indeed, instead of founding a Republic as an institutionalisation of freedom, they wanted to create a Republic that would be institutionalised by the fight against poverty (Arendt, 2016, pp. 53-110). In other words, they failed to understand that one needs to be liberated from necessity first, in order to constitute freedom<sup>109</sup>. Another way to see it would be to argue for the bracketing of the necessities of life in order to pursue a political action. This bracketing could be sort of a mental or psychological liberation in order to access the political realm. Regardless, it is still embedded in a before/after paradigm. This bracketing of necessity was also made, in the case of the American Revolution, by the existence of slavery. Indeed, because of slavery, the American Revolution "could overlook the existence of the miserable and with it the formidable task of liberating those who were not so much constrained by political oppression as by the sheer necessities of life." (Arendt, 2018, p. 346) This liberation as the transition from the 'before' to the 'after', is also made possible by slavery and slave's lives which were overlooked, so put in brackets. In other words, this liberation is based on the

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<sup>109</sup> "The Revolution, when it turned from the foundation of freedom to the liberation of man from suffering, broke the barriers of endurance and liberated, as it were, the devastating forces of misfortune and misery instead" (Arendt, 2016, pp. 108-9) In other words, the French Revolution made liberation a means-end goal instead of the foundation of freedom as a new system.

misanthropic scepticism<sup>110</sup> (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) that I have already talked about in Chapter II. Namely, the bracketing of one's life because of one's race. This view on liberation preceding freedom appeals to instantaneity and an immediate concept of liberation, which, because of its immediacy can reproduce coloniality<sup>111</sup>. What I mean by that, is that liberation becomes a buzzword to signify every supposedly before/after state. Moreover, an automaticity and a causality are implied from the before to the after. Indeed, 'once liberated you will be free'. From that perspective, liberation would be something that enables the flight from the before to the after. From the subjection of the necessities of life to an after liberated from them, regardless of how this flight is made, precisely because there is a causal relationship between the 'before' and the 'after'.

This conception of liberation preceding freedom appeals to the Arendtian concept of *gap*, of a historical breach. If liberation is what makes the transition between a before and an after, it is also what makes the transition between two different regimes of historicity. Accordingly, the *after*, would be the time of politics, so the possibility to experience immortality as action will be remembered (Arendt, 1998, p. 314). As Arendt said, liberation is "*prepolitical*" (1998, p. 31, my emphasis), it comes *before* politics. As *before*, the time of necessity has come to an end. In other words, it assumes a *universality* of time. Time is experienced the same way by everyone. The gap between past and future is experienced the same way by everyone. If we take the example of the foundation of the 'New World', this *after* was made possible by the liberation from the 'Old World',

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<sup>110</sup> As I have said in Chapter II (p. 83), the *misanthropic scepticism* is a doubt directed toward non-Europeans's humanity which serves to annihilate the difference between Europeans and non-Europeans by excluding the latter from the Western's conception of what a human is. For what matters here, if slaves are excluded from humanity, it also means that they are excluded from any concern about necessity and excluded from the Western history of the foundation of the United States.

<sup>111</sup> This discourse on liberation can be recuperated by neoliberal capitalism through the consumer figure. As shown (Toumajian, 2003; Kozinets, 2002), liberation is used as a discursive tool by the market. T-shirts of Che Guevara as a symbol of revolution and liberation are made by exploited workers in the Global South. Neoliberalism uses liberation as a marketing tool and in the same move bracketing the life of the workers who produce the clothes. Their life is put in brackets precisely because they are not visible in the marketing history of those clothes.

the mother country which is England (Arendt, 2016). Here, again, the relationship between liberation and freedom is organised by an Old/New, Before/After paradigm. Taken from that perspective, if liberation is the condition of freedom, it is also the condition of the seizure of Indigenous lands. Hence, the Before/After is not just Liberation/Freedom but also Liberation/Appropriation. Hence, it falls into the problem that I have highlighted in previous chapters, that freedom takes roots in appropriation.

Moreover, this conception of liberation from necessity, from domination, or more broadly from something, as the marking point of a before/after, asks the question of what is this something? What are the criteria that can tell that there has been a liberation from necessity so that the new-after can arise? Is self-liberation enough? Does it need to be a collective liberation? Does it have to be structural? Can reforms be considered as a form of liberation? If, in Arendt's words, liberation is prepolitical and conditional of politics, then it needs to be a collective liberation. But again, is a collective liberation understood as an instantaneous *coming to terms with*, achievable? If I take the example of marronage, it can be seen as a *liberation from the plantation*, enabling the constitution of a new community. However, it has been shown (Ferdinand, 2019; Thompson, 2006) that, for survival needs, maroon communities were still somehow dependent on the plantation and its resources. Moreover, the liberation from the plantation does not mean the liberation from plantocracy or colonialism, as the risk of being recaptured was always present. Another example of it is the Haitian Revolution leading to the independence of the country and the constitution of the first Black Republic. Can it be seen as a liberation from the colonial order since Haiti had to reimburse the ex-slave owners till the second half of the twentieth century?<sup>112</sup> This conceptualisation of liberation preceding freedom imposes a certain vision of failure/achievement as well as we can see in Arendt's analysis of revolutions. Indeed, in *On*

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<sup>112</sup> See Phillips, A. D. 2009; Obregón, L. 2018; Boltax, M. 2021.

*Revolution*, Arendt talked about the *failure* of the French Revolution and the *success* of the American Revolution. This failure/success paradigm is submitted to ‘liberation precedes freedom’ as a judging criterion. The French Revolution failed precisely because it failed to achieve liberation from necessity whilst the American Revolution was a success because it achieves liberation from necessity<sup>113</sup>. For Lewis Gordon, that idea of failure appeals to Euromodern philosophical anthropology and is an “atomistic and individual-substance based” model (2021, p. 78). For him, “under that model, the human being is a thing that enters into a system that facilitates or obstructs its movement” (Gordon, 2021, p. 78). Accordingly, we can see how for Hannah Arendt liberation is what *facilitates or obstructs* the possibility of freedom. Or, to push it further, how liberation enables (success) or makes impossible (failure) politics. In other words, it contradicts what I understand to be her an-archic account of freedom, precisely because liberation would be the rule (liberation from necessity) that makes the apparition of freedom possible.

Hence, I submit that this strict after/before conception of liberation is flawed, and this is why I want to suggest another understanding of liberation as a political principle and a future potential materiality, where freedom precedes liberation. By potential future materiality, I mean something that can be materialised in law, institutions etc. However, does not it just reverse the problem instead of solving it? In the sense that freedom would be the element that marks the before/after. Freedom precedes liberation as freedom before/liberation after. Or just to reproduces the liberation precedes freedom as a principle inspire action? The above counterargument would be true if political principles would only be the origin of action, but as I argued in the last chapter, principles also guide action. Therefore, the methodological exigency imposed upon me would be to not think about temporality from the analytic rigidity of the before/after paradigm. In that case,

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<sup>113</sup> “Had Robespierre lived to watch the development of the new government of the United States, where the Revolution had never seriously curtailed civil rights and, perhaps for this reason, succeeded precisely where the French Revolution failed, namely in the task of foundation” (Arendt, 2016, p. 131)



my thesis that freedom precedes liberation does not mean that when freedom ends and disappears, liberation can, in turn, appear. Similarly, to say that liberation is a political principle, hence the source of action and of the apparition of freedom, does not mean that when liberation is achieved, freedom appears. I reject these two propositions which reiterate the before/after paradigm. My task would then be to understand the relationship between freedom and liberation from another temporal perspective, or another regime of historicity.

I suggest that the core concept of this alternative understanding could be the ‘movement’. Indeed, in that case, liberation as a political principle is the source of action but also guides it. Liberation is an (open-ended) movement because it *accompanies* the action. As a matter of illustration, liberation would be the title of the book that has different stories of freedom for each chapter, and this book would have many succeeding editions. Therefore, with the thesis that freedom *precedes* liberation, I give to ‘precedes’ a moving character. *Freedom is the movement towards liberation*. That movement towards would be non-linear and alien to the Euromodern idea of unstoppable progress. However, it means that I have to go away from the idea of liberation as a static achievement, a conclusion to something. Rather than being only negative, a liberation from something, liberation would also be for something, following my understanding of political principles as an *against* and *for something*. In other words, and in what follows, I will suggest to *de-link* (Mignolo, 2007) liberation from its static temporal dimension. In Hamid Dabashi’s words, “instead of thinking of ‘total’ and final revolution [...], we need to think [in terms of] ‘open-ended revolutions’.” (2020, pp. 35-6). I think that the same applies to liberation and that we need to think about it as an *ongoing process*. Instead of thinking of total and final liberation, we need to think in terms of open-ended liberation. While talking about an in-between past and future, Arendt put liberation in the past and freedom as the present event directed towards the future. I will argue that in the gap between past and future both are open-ended processes directed toward the future. Liberation is the *horizon* if you will, and freedom is the *movement*.

## **Liberation as a Political Principle**

In discussing Angela Davis's *Unfinished Lecture on Liberation*, Lewis Gordon submitted that “no lecture on liberation is ever a finished lecture, since the human struggle for humanity ends only when there are no longer any human beings.” (2000, p. 44) Moreover, he described liberation as a “radical path” (Gordon, 2000, p. ix), or shall I add *an open-ended radical path*. In this second part of this chapter, I will focus on a conceptualisation of liberation as a principle and an open-ended ongoing process. To make my point, I will first undermine the separation between self/psychological liberation and collective liberation by focusing on Frantz Fanon. Thereafter, I will exemplify liberation as an ongoing process by associating it with *decoloniality*. Lastly, I will advocate an understanding of liberation as a principle which means that liberation is both an against and a for something. Therefore, it is also a productive force and appeals to imagination.

### **Frantz Fanon's Theory of Liberation**

This strict separation of psychological/self-liberation from collective liberation installs an out-of-the-world subject-centred perspective, on the epistemological level, and an individualist perspective on the political one. On that latter level, it could be exemplified by the liberation of certain slaves according to their master's will on the plantation, which would not endanger the very structure of plantocracy. Now, if I combine the political and the epistemological levels, it does not give an accurate account of reality. As Steve Biko showed (2005, pp. 20-21-69), alienated black consciousness, the feeling of inferiority, is a result of colonialism and is cultivated by the apartheid system in South Africa. In other words, one's state of consciousness is linked to colonial structure. Therefore, one cannot separate psychological/self-liberation from a collective one. To follow Biko's insight, this separation could be exemplified by what he called the myth of integration which

“makes people believe that something is being done when in reality the artificially integrated circles are soporific to the blacks while salving the consciences of the guilt-sticken white.” (2005, p. 64-5)

This link between the psychological and the structural is also what drove Frantz Fanon to redefine, or if you will, to decolonise psychiatry. His contribution as a psychiatrist was “to insist on the importance of the cultural context in which symptoms appear” (Vergès, 1996, p. 85). Indeed, instead of a phylogeny (species level) or an ontogeny (individual organism level), Fanon proposed a sociogeny which suggests that alienation and the colonisation of minds, is not an individual problem (Fanon, 1952, p. 11). Similar to Biko’s account of integration blocking the possibility of black consciousness, for Fanon, alienation is to be found in the official texts under the name of assimilation (2011, p. 722). Alienation is then to be analysed at the level of sociogeny. To put it differently, the aim is to understand how alienation is created by a set of relationships in society which here takes the form of colonialism. The individual, the collective and the organisation of the world are then inseparable. Throughout his work, Fanon associated liberation with decolonisation. National liberation is characterised by the decolonisation of the mind and collective decolonisation if you will, illustrated by the creation of national consciousness. In other words, “the national liberation struggle and the social revolution develop simultaneously at the personal and national level.” (Wright, 1992, p. 428) Accordingly, this alienation is an inauthentic falsely conscious self, “it is the artificial construction of the native as the coloniser has transformed the native through assimilation” (Wright, 1992, p. 428), annihilating-or wishing to do so-the possibility of national consciousness. For Fanon, authenticity is not to be understood as the pre-colonial state of being but rather as the possibility of creatively imagining a new humanity and a post-colonial nation. In virtue of Fanon’s inseparability of the self and the collective, the estrangement is not only from the self but also from others. Moreover, this alienation created a fictive dependence on the colonisers as there was “the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they

[the natives] would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality.” (Fanon, 1963, p. 169 in Wright, 1992, p. 428)

For Fanon, the need to put and think together liberation of the minds with national<sup>114</sup> liberation also comes from an imperative and what could be considered a possible failure, namely, neocolonialism. Indeed, if the liberated nation is built on a colonial imaginary, if the minds are still colonised, then the colonial matrix is reproduced whilst national liberation has been achieved. In other words, “if the individual and the nation experience the national liberation struggle without complete decolonisation, neocolonialism is the likely result. If decolonisation is not total, the new nation will be a neocolonial entity.” (Wright, 1992, p. 431) Against the totalising force of colonialism, liberation must be total. In Fanon’s words, “there is a necessity to *totalise* the event” (2002, p. 293; my emphasis), the revolution must not wait for the nation to create new men, “*everything* must work *hand in hand*.” (Fanon, 2002, p. 293; my emphasis) For Fanon, the means to achieve this total liberation, so to be purified from colonialism, is violence, as the ultimate *praxis*. To put it differently, violence is the *praxis* guided by liberation. Violence was for Fanon a destructive as much as a productive force as it leads to the creation of a new man, of a new humanism.

However, as Françoise Vergès noted, “if a political solution to social alienation could be pursued with determination, the same voluntarism in psychiatric practice would lead to the dismissal of problems” (1996, p. 96). Indeed, all these psychological and social problems analysed by Fanon (2002, 2015) “were not erased by independence” in Algeria (Vergès, 1996, p. 96). If, following Fanon, liberation is to be understood as total decolonisation it cannot be reduced to national

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<sup>114</sup> Fanon talks mainly of nation in terms of national consciousness and distinguishes it from nationalism. In his words, “national consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only capable of giving us an international dimension” (Fanon, 2002, p.235). See also his discussion of the postcolonial bourgeoisie elite (Fanon, 2002, p. 20-23, 47-49; Sajed & Seidel, 2019).

liberation. For Hamid Dabashi, the idea of a post-colonial state cannot be taken as a state that comes right after a revolution (2020), which would reintroduce the strict before/after temporality. For him, the *de-linking*<sup>115</sup> of the nation-state couple started with the Arab Spring but it is still an ongoing process (Dabashi, 2012, 2020). Hence, revolution, as much as state creation and liberation must be understood as an ongoing process. Fanon's awareness of the potentiality of neocolonialism showed that he was well aware that decolonisation does not only take a national liberation, this is why he also linked it to the decolonisation of the minds. Nevertheless, I argue that the concept of decoloniality as suggested by decolonial thinkers such as Anibal Quijano (1992) or Walter D Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018) is useful to apprehend liberation both as an ongoing process<sup>116</sup> and decolonisation or in fact, decoloniality.

### ***Liberation from something***

In his book *Freedom, Justice and Decolonization*, Lewis Gordon pointed out the distinction between decolonisation and decoloniality and the need to go *beyond* decoloniality while articulating a re-imagined concept of liberation (2021, pp. 12-32). For now, I will first highlight the distinction between decolonisation and decoloniality and between colonisation and coloniality that I have already started to draw in Chapters II & III as well as in the introduction of this work. However, my purpose here is quite different because I intend to follow Gordon in his claim to go beyond decoloniality, understood as 'against coloniality', its pure antithesis, in order to understand liberation as a principle. In other words, there is a need to go *beyond the against* to conceptualise liberation. But I will discuss that after highlighting the distinction between the terms.

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<sup>115</sup> Hamid Dabashi does not use the term 'de-linking' which comes from Mignolo (2007), but it exemplifies well, here, the decolonial imperative.

<sup>116</sup> As a matter of clarification, I do not understand 'ongoing process' to be similar to the Euromodern idea of linear and infinite progress.

For Anibal Quijano, colonialism can be defined as “a direct relation of political, social, and cultural domination imposed by the Europeans over the conquered [*conquistados*] of all continents” (1992, p. 11; my translation) On the other hand, coloniality (*colonialidad*) is “the most general mode of domination in the current world, once colonialism [*colonialismo*] as the explicit political order has been destroyed.” (Quijano, 1992, p. 14; my translation). In other words, coloniality (*colonialidad*) survives colonialism (*colonialismo*). Coloniality is what remains from the colonial matrix on the epistemic level and beyond. Indeed, during Euromodernity, knowledge was conceived through the rationality/modernity (*racionalidad/modernidad*) paradigm which was imposed as “a universal paradigm of knowledge and of the *relation*<sup>117</sup> between humanity and the rest of the world” (Quijano, 1992, p. 14; my translation and my emphasis). This is why, for Anibal Quijano, Euromodernity is inseparable from coloniality. Moreover, he argued that “the decisive weight of coloniality in the constitution of the European rationality/modernity paradigm, is clearly revealed in the current crisis of that cultural complex.” (Quijano, 1992, p. 14; my translation) However, this ‘decisive weight’ is not derivative but constitutive of modernity (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 4). And this is what I have tried to highlight in this work by unveiling the coloniality of freedom. The question of coloniality is then related to the one of knowledge, however “all the knowledge [...] is intertwined in all these [politics, economics, etc] praxical spheres [...] ontology is made of epistemology.” (Mignolo, 2018, p. 135) In other words, theory and praxis are not separated from each other. Therefore, and to follow Mignolo, “economy and politics are not transcendent entities [beings] but constituted through and by knowledge and human relations.” (2018, p. 136) Again, it emphasises what I said in Chapter III about coloniality as an in-between, a web of relationships.

From this account of coloniality and colonisation follows an understanding of decoloniality and decolonisation. The task of *decoloniality* would be “to liberate knowing and becoming what

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<sup>117</sup> I have emphasised this relational dimension of coloniality when I suggested to think of it as an in-between.

coloniality of knowledge and being prevents to know and become” while the task of *decolonisation* is the “‘taking hold’ of the state” (Mignolo, 2018, p. 136). In that distinction between decolonisation and decoloniality, we can see what Fanon started to outline about the decolonisation of the mind and national liberation, even if it goes a step further. Nevertheless, similarly to what Françoise Vergès argued about the difficulty of decolonising minds, Mignolo holds that one “cannot ‘take’ knowledge as the state was ‘taken’ by armies of national liberation during the Cold War.” (2018, p. 136) Therefore, the task of decoloniality is to question the very foundation of Western ontology and epistemology. This association of being with knowledge can be illustrated by the need to transmit certain modes of being, of social organisation to the new organisation by the means of institutions, such as education<sup>118</sup>. Accordingly, one aspect of colonialism was actually to take institutions in one civilisation (European) as “the tool to manage and control knowing and understanding in other civilisations” (Mignolo, 2018, p. 137). Mignolo argued that decoloniality “is first and foremost *liberation* of knowledge [which aims at] the transformation of colonial subjects and subjectivities into decolonial subjects and subjectivities” (2018, p. 146; my emphasis). Taken from that perspective, a liberation as wished by Frantz Fanon would both take decolonisation and decoloniality.

However, for Lewis Gordon, the overemphasis on *decoloniality*, and especially its ‘de-’ standing both for *de-linking* and ‘against coloniality’, can lead to fetishisation and “collapse into familiar patterns of religiosity, idolatry, and its accompanying moralistic investments.” (2021, p. 16) Ultimately, he submitted that “[t]his aim of decolonization *from* leads to no one ever being decolonized enough except, perhaps, the one who poses the problem of decolonization, with decoloniality being its purest commitment.” (Gordon, 2021, p. 16; his emphasis) This possible over-moralisation of the decolonial task would lead to a pure idea of the morally good individual

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<sup>118</sup> See Bhambra, G. K., Nişancıoğlu, K. & Gebrial, D. 2018.

shaping the decolonial task. To put it differently, it would fall back into a means-end system where a preconceived idea of what the decolonial subjectivity is would command the decolonial task, its result being already known. It would be like what I have criticised in the two first chapters of freedom being assimilated to liberation, under the idea of personhood. In other words, it would reproduce the failure/success paradigm that I have criticised above. Moreover, as Gordon noted, this idea(l) of the moral decolonial subject is easily captured by neoliberalism. Some discourses use decolonisation, in a neo-managerial grammar<sup>119</sup>, as a synonym for inclusion as Sara Ahmed highlighted in her book *On Being Included* (2012). This view would “privilege moral individuals over political subjects” (Gordon, 2021, p. 16) in their openness, opacity, and *impurity* (Lugones, 1994, 1999). Within that movement, the result would be a focus on decolonising the self without decolonising the rest if you will, leaving “structural inequalities intact.” (Gordon, 2021, p. 16). Accordingly, this ‘light’ decolonisation would be a metaphor more than anything else (Tuck, Wayne Yang, 2012), and it would reinstate the separation between psychological/self-liberation (light decolonisation) and structural liberation (the rest) that I have criticised above following Frantz Fanon.

This discourse can be exemplified by all the rhetoric around the question of ‘privilege’<sup>120</sup> such as white privilege or masculine, straight privilege, etc. However, by focusing only on privileges, for the subject to fit a moral idea of the individual, the trialectic of the self, the collective and the world is forgotten. The discourse on privileges is an appeal-if not an interpellation in the Althusserian meaning of becoming the subject of an ideology-to self-liberation by conforming to a model

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<sup>119</sup> See Özbilgin, M. & Slutskaia, N. 2017. Sam Bourcier described this managerial power as a new form of rational subjectivity which aims at normalising behaviours following a logic of personal development (2017). For an analysis of the use of this neo-managerial thinking within feminist and queer movements see Dubois, Q. 2022. <https://trounoir.org/?Queer-influence-le-management-de-l-innocence#nh3-12>

<sup>120</sup> Robin DiAngelo refers to white privilege as the privileges in a system of advantages based on race (2019), accordingly, male privilege would be a system of advantages based on gender, the heterosexual privilege a system of advantages based on sexuality etc.



proposed by someone else<sup>121 122</sup>. Moreover, this discourse puts a conditionality to the creation of a collective or of a political coalition. It reinstates the Before/After temporal logic and the (self) liberation preceding freedom as well as an identitarian model or an ideal of personhood that one needs to follow. It also implies absolute transparency amongst people in a collective, and as Maria Lugones pointed out, “the logic of transparency shines in the constructed lover of purity himself, the modern subject, the impartial reasoner. He is the measure of all things.” (1994, p. 476) In other words, it is the opposite of a spontaneous and contingent movement. Furthermore, after the interpellation, “both the privileged and the deprived return to their relative unequal material conditions in a society that remains structurally intact” (Gordon, 2021, p. 16). Hence it is a purely individualistic claim to decolonise oneself, and oneself only as a moral imperative.

Accordingly, if liberation is to be understood as decolonisation and decoloniality, it cannot only be a negative movement, but it also needs to be a creative open-ended one. As Catherine Walsh (2018) and Lewis Gordon argued (2021), liberation is not only a *liberation from* but also a *liberation for*. Decolonisation and decoloniality are both marked by the negative prefix *de-*, which gives words a sense of opposition, de-coloniality means against coloniality. Yet, to be fair, Walter D. Mignolo suggested a creative meaning to decoloniality. He proposed to understand decoloniality as a form of re-existing, “after undoing comes redoing” and “re-existence follows up on delinking” (Mignolo, 2007, p. 120, 106). In the following part, I will suggest conceptualising liberation as a political principle. Indeed, I will argue that understanding liberation as a principle allows us to understand it as an ongoing process as well as a negative and creative one.

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<sup>121</sup> Maria Lugones associated that with a logic of control (1994).

<sup>122</sup> In her book *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo proposes what people can do “to interrupt racism” such as “interrupt privilege” or “internalized superiority” (2019, p. 144). Similarly, Peggy McIntosh made a list of bullet points on how to overcome one’s resistance to recognising/acknowledging their own privilege (2020, p. 57). The goal is to be able to see privileges.

## ***Beyond the Against: Liberation as a Principle***

Lewis Gordon argued that “liberation *from* is a response to harm; liberation *for* is the rallying of creative resources of possibility.” (2021, p. 23; his emphasis) I believe that what he understands by ‘rallying of creative resources of possibility’ illustrates well what I have said in the last chapter about principles being the source of action as well as guiding it. Indeed, the outcome of action cannot be known in advance. Action can aim at a specific goal but whether this goal will be achieved or not cannot be predicted. In that sense, politics understood in the Arendtian sense of natality is an openness to several possible outcomes. And, if a principle is the source of action, it is the source of these possibilities. The ‘rallying’ is the source, and the ‘for something’ entailed by a principle is the ‘resources of possibility’ that guide action.

According to Catherine Walsh, the ‘for something’ dimension of decoloniality “takes us beyond an *anti* stance” (2018, p. 18; her emphasis), it stands “for the creation, and cultivation of modes of life, existence, being, and thought otherwise” (Walsh, 2018, p. 18; her emphasis). The term ‘re-existence’ that she took from Adolfo Albán entails a double meaning and makes resistance coincide with new existence. It makes appear a new world “radically distinct from that of savage capitalism, imposed western modernity, domination and oppression”, understood as a “collective resurgence” (Walsh, 2018, p. 18). Hence, it makes appear a new trialectic between the self, the collective and the world, distinct from the alienated plurality imposed by colonialism. Following Enrique Dussel, Walsh sees decoloniality as a path that is brought about from *praxis*. However, “the path cannot be made without *points of reference* that permit one to traverse topographies and labyrinths unknown. One needs a *compass* to know in which direction to walk” (Dussel, 2014 quoted by Walsh, 2018, p. 19; my emphasis). This idea of the compass illustrates well what I understand by political principles. Indeed, the compass is the source of the movement and guides this movement, it creates a direction that is yet to be discovered. A compass is distinct from a Global Positioning System (GPS) in the sense that, for the latter, the future or the point of arrival is known. With a compass,

the point of arrival can be imagined while with a GPS, the point of arrival is visible, already present on the map to follow. One can more or less follow blindly the GPS whilst the compass depends on human action, it only *guides* in an ocean of uncertainty. For Walsh, “the praxis [...] gives substance to and elucidates resurgence and the decolonial *for*.” (2018, p. 18) However, one could also say that the ‘for’ gives substance to the *praxis*.

If the ‘for’ is *beyond* ‘anti-stance’ it appeals to something. In Greek philosophy, this idea of ‘beyond’ is *epekeina* and has a relationship with *Parousia*. In Plato’s philosophy, the *parousia* is the word to illustrate the presence of the divine in all reality (Voegelin, 2009). For Eric Voegelin, there is a tension between *epekeina* (beyond) and *parousia* (presence) as the beyond is present in the presence. In that sense, reality is more than the thing-reality as it encompasses a horizon, hence, a beyond. This horizon is not an object but a beyond that is present in reality, for our concern, in a political phenomenon for instance. It is the beyond and its *parousia*, the presence of the beyond. To take the example of Black Lives Matter that I have analysed as a political principle in Chapter V, BLM as a rallying cry gave substance to the movement as much as the movement gave substance to the idea. The principle of action and action itself are intertwined; they substantiate each other. Therefore, the praxis makes the path, but the praxis is also guided by points of reference which are principles. However, political principles, even though they are general, are not universal, as understood from the modernity/rationality paradigm. This means that they are not a specific idea which pretends to be true everywhere and every time.

Taking Liberation as a ‘for’ and not only an ‘against’, urges us to *de-link* liberation from its supposedly universal meaning. The ‘from something’ is universal because its only content is captured by the destructive ‘from’, while the content of the ‘for something’ is captured in the ‘something’. When I said in the previous chapter that principles encompass other concepts and

ideas<sup>123</sup>, it is precisely in this ‘for something’ that these concepts and ideas lie. This is why, liberation, and maybe principles in general, should be understood as *pluriversal*<sup>124</sup> instead of *universal*. The ‘for something’ of liberation can appeal to justice, equality, and both. They appeal to different cosmologies and ideals. Hence, they appeal to imagination understood as the possibility to imagine “the map to a new world”, “to envision ‘somewhere in advance of nowhere’” (Kelley, 2007, p. xii, 2) Indeed, the risk of taking liberation, or more broadly, a principle as universal is to reproduce a solipsist ego-politics of knowledge (Mignolo, 2005). This would turn a guiding principle into a rule to follow and the compass into a GPS. A pluralistic or pluriversal account of principles implies a non-monistic view of the concepts and ideas that accompany them. For instance, as Serene Khader had it, a monistic view on justice when it comes to gender would be “the view that only one type of social or cultural form can house gender justice” (2019, p. 30). The same applies to liberation. A pluralistic or pluriversal idea of liberation would imply the possibility of different understandings as well as different horizons of liberation. This does not equal Laclau’s floating or empty signifiers as these different understandings, resulting from different modes of being disposed in the world, are not necessarily in a struggle for hegemony but, can be associated with the Tojolabal Indigenous notion of “walking while asking questions” (Grosfoguel, 2012, p. 98), or to Escobar’s idea of a dialogue of cosmo/visions which are “contrasting perspectives on life and the world” (2020, p. 121). Accordingly, the principle is never fixed but actualised at the same moment it appears. In other words, *liberation for* is an ongoing process.

However, if one follows Mignolo’s account of decoloniality as undoing and redoing, he made explicit that “*after* undoing *comes* redoing” (2007, p. 120), reproducing the Before/After paradigm which implies a totality that does not exist. This is why, in my reframing of the relationship between

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<sup>123</sup> See Chapter V, p. 186.

<sup>124</sup> See Mignolo, 2011 and Escobar 2020 for a discussion of Pluriversality.

freedom and liberation, I will suggest that *undoing comes with redoing*<sup>125</sup>, or that *de-linking comes with re-existing*. In what follows, I will reframe the relationship between freedom and liberation and argue that *freedom precedes liberation*, where ‘precedes’ has a non-static meaning out of the Before/After paradigm.

## Freedom Precedes Liberation

As I have said previously, to understand freedom precedes liberation in a static way reproduces the Before/After paradigm. Therefore, I will argue that ‘precedes’ needs to be understood as a movement. If I go back to my above brief discussion of *parousia*, it is basically the presence of the idea (principle) in the thing (phenomenon). Hence, the apparition of the idea is conditional on the apparition of the thing. Yet, if the idea (principle) is somehow the source of the apparition of the thing (phenomenon) then it can be seen to precede it as well. There is a paradox of the principle preceding while being preceded by action. In order to make sense out of this paradox, I intend to first investigate the present of action, what Arendt called the gap between past and future (2006). To put it differently, I want to look at the moment of the appearance of freedom as a collective ontological resistance. This moment is what I call the *existential gap* between past and future.

### The *Existential Gap* between Past and Future

In this part, I want to focus on the existential part of ontological resistance, as it will add a temporal dimension to the spatial-material one of freedom. Opening the way to my hypothesis that freedom precedes liberation. But first, I will focus on the gap between past and future as the location of action, and what Arendt understands as the temporality of action.

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<sup>125</sup> For instance, in the activity of marronage, the redoing, the creation of a new community out of the plantation, did not come after a total destruction of plantocracy.

In Arendt's theory of action, collective action does not only create a space but also installs a temporality. Etienne Tassin described this temporality of action as *binding*, in the sense that "it makes co-exist an active power with an accomplished act-but which is accomplished only as a continued accomplishing of action" (2017, p. 310; my translation). Following Aristotle's account of *energeia*, Arendt (1998, p. 206) saw action both as an end in itself and as something whose end lies outside of it. From that perspective, the end is not preconceived but present *in* the action and as a horizon. The end is not a term to something but is ongoing (Tassin, 2017, p. 312). In other words, the horizon aimed by action is precisely made into being within the action itself. This is why, Etienne Tassin described Arendt's temporality of action as undefined (*durée indéfinie*) (2017, p. 313), as "the promise of accomplishment is always reactivated every time people act", it is ongoing (Tassin, 2017, p. 313; my translation). Accordingly, action is the *start* of an ongoing end. New beginnings always re-activate the end. For instance, if the aim is the abolition of slavery, at every slave revolt, this goal is re-activated. Indeed, "the temporality of *praxis* [...] is always inaugural and a-teleological as the end is without a term, [...] it is a temporality of natality" (Tassin, 2017, p. 314; my translation). However, now, the question of this location of beginning in time, in relation to past and future, needs to be raised.

In her analysis of a parable from Kafka (Arendt, 2006), Arendt located the new beginning, or what could also be called the beginning of a beginning (Marchart, 2006) in the *gap* between past and future. In the parable, Kafka described a 'he' who struggles "against the two antagonists of the past and the future" (Marchart, 2006, p. 135). Accordingly, the gap between past and future represents the location of natality, so the breach that breaks the continuous flow of historical time. From an existential standpoint, man "always lives in the interval between past and future, time is not a continuum, a flow of uninterrupted successions" (Arendt, 2006, p. 11). The interval, the gap between past and future is a "constant fighting [where man is] making a stand against past and

future” (Arendt, 2006, p. 11). However, for Arendt, the image of the gap is a metaphor that can only be applied to the life of the mind, to mental phenomena, and not to political life, precisely because “gaps in time do not occur there” (2006, p. 13). Indeed, for her, the gap is a timeless space where the philosopher can think. This is why she criticised philosophers for being out of the world, in a space-time out of the world. Schematically, there is a gap in the *vita contemplativa* (*bios theoretikos*) but not in the *vita activa* (*bios politikos*). However, at the end of the second volume of *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt talked about a “*hiatus* between a no-more and a not-yet” (1978b, p. 204; my emphasis) which inevitably echoes the metaphor of the gap between past and future. For her, this hiatus corresponds to the time of revolutions, a gap “between the old order and a new era” (Arendt, 1978b, p. 205). Yet, this hiatus does not have to be associated with a totalising account of revolution. Indeed, for Arendt, “no single act, and no single event, can ever, once and for all, deliver and save a man, or a nation, or mankind” (2006, p. 168). Instead, as Olivier Marchart had it, at every action in concert, “a new beginning enters the world, then some small ‘piece’ of *revolutionary spirit*” (2006, p. 145; his emphasis). To put it differently, at every political action, the *horizon* of revolution appears as well.

I want to suggest that rather than an ‘outside of time’, the gap/hiatus between past and future can be understood as co-existing and struggling with the continuous flow of time. In a context of domination, the continuous flow of time has an ontological dimension. This dimension could be described as the temporality of the practico-inert<sup>126</sup> (Lievens, 2021) where time is defined by an exigency. Matthias Lievens argued that in “the capitalist factory, the labourer’s praxis is confronted with the ‘exigency’ (or ‘imperative’) of the machine” (2021, p. 11). Here, ‘exigency’ is understood as “a demand or claim that an element or region of the practico-inert makes towards an individual”

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<sup>126</sup> For Sartre, the practico-inert is a term to describe “everything that is produced by human *praxis* et that is fixed in the inertia of matter” (Tomès, 2005, p. 193; my translation). Moreover, those objects “have a weight on our future through the contradiction that opposes in them *praxis* and inertia.” (Sartre, 1960, p.138)

(Lievens, 2021, p. 11). To put it differently, it is the imposition of a “prefabricated future” (Lievens, 2021, p. 11). Within the context of slavery that I have extensively talked about in this thesis, the prefabricated future can be associated with the slave’s labour as well as the ‘production’ of new slaves by using women’s wombs. Hence, this temporality is racialised and gendered. Every sphere of life is dominated by this temporality. Accordingly, and in this context, the continuous time of domination is the time of racial capitalism. Being and time coincide as time defines being and its future. In other words, domination is a material, spatial and temporal ontological closure. If the slave has no ontological resistance, it also applies to the temporality of this ontology/domination. Therefore, I suggest understanding freedom as an ontological resistance that is also a resistance against the temporal dimension of domination.

Lewis Gordon defined the notion of existence both as *pointing towards* and *standing apart* (2000, p. 74). Indeed, he reminded us that *ex sistere*, the Latin etymology of existence, “means to stand apart” (Gordon, 2000, p. 74). Accordingly, existence is to exist and to stand apart, challenging “any preceding necessity, any preceding meaning.” (Gordon, 2000, p. 74) However, what Gordon does not mention is that if the existential moment challenges the past, it also inevitably challenges the future associated with it, its prefabricated future. From that perspective and to go back to Arendt’s analysis of Kafka’s parable, the gap/hiatus which is the place of struggle against past and future is where the *existential moment* happens. In Douglass’s fight against Covey, the resistance was against his past and (prefabricated)future of slavery. Douglass stood apart from being and time, from an ontological closure, and opened up the possibility of a new beginning so the possibility of a new being and time. However, the hiatus/gap created by Douglass was not an after of slavery. He introduces the possibility of a new temporality next to slavery even if the abolition of slavery was a guiding horizon. In other words, what the existential moment creates is a new potential temporality that stands apart from the one of domination, that co-exists with it for a while and that also clashes with it. Therefore, several temporalities can be intertwined, and a new beginning



does not fall into the strict before/after paradigm. Moreover, if Gordon somehow suspended ontology in favour of existence, I maintain that ontological resistance can be characterised as existential ontological resistance. In other words, *freedom is an existential ontological resistance*. Adding an existential dimension to the ontological allows, I believe, to avoid the closure that could be implied by ontology. In my understanding, existential ontology stands for the possibility of an open-ended new being and time, meaning that the trialectic of the self, the collective and the world has a dimension of temporality. Indeed, ontology in its own term can mean a certain fixed essence. On the other hand, an existential ontology is concerned with the understanding of modes of being in the world, and those modes of being have a temporal dimension. Or to put it differently, temporality becomes meaningful in lived experience.

From that perspective, freedom is the beginning of something radically new and, if liberation is a guiding principle, liberation is the horizon that guides freedom. In that sense, it is preceded by freedom. In what follows I will make more explicit this relationship between freedom and liberation. To extend the example of Douglass's fight with Covey, freedom as an existential ontological resistance appeared before the formal abolition of slavery but was one moment that led to it and made it appear in the world. It was a moment that re-actualised this principle/horizon. The principle which is the source of the free action does not appear until the action is enacted, in that sense it precedes it.

### **Liberation as the Horizon of Freedom**

In Etienne Tassin's words, "action is only understood as an event in the world if it is the birth of a world in the birth of a being-in(of-)the-world." (2017, p. 330; my translation) Action is an event, but also an *event-for*, and this for-something of the event is precisely the for-something of the principle, so, of liberation for our purpose. Thus, freedom is a political phenomenon but also a 'for something' in virtue of being guided by a principle. In other words, the principle is always to

come, and freedom is the pathic movement that is directed towards it, that leads to it. Ultimately, I want to suggest that this non-linear movement from freedom to liberation can be defined as *sociogeny* (Fanon, 2015; Wynter, 2001). A *socio-genesis* that I understand as a new world genesis. More precisely, I want to give a sociogenic meaning to ‘precede’ in my claim that freedom precedes liberation. I will argue that freedom is the movement that leads to liberation, it precedes it in the sense that it is part of the *socio-genesis* that leads to it.

As I have said before, Fanon coined the term sociogeny, to provide a social, relational understanding of racism and mental disorders against ontogenic and phylogenic explanations. For Lewis Gordon, sociogenesis is an “organization of meaning [that] does not only affect life but also constructs *new forms of life*.” (2021b, p.224; my emphasis) Therefore, it is not only a methodological tool but it is also the shape that takes the creation of society, of forms of life, or of what Sylvia Wynter called the Man (2003) and Fanon the possibility of a new humanism (2015). From that perspective, sociogeny is the name of a human process, a constellation of *praxeis*, towards something new. It has also been pointed out by Neil Roberts, who defines sociogeny as “the prism that captures the process of flight from the zone of nonbeing” (2015, p. 119), hence, it is a direction towards a somewhere, it has a horizon. A political principle is that horizon of novelty, its ‘for something’ is the aspiration for *new forms of life* or new forms of social organisation. In her work, Sylvia Wynter described sociogeny as a principle that would help us to understand all human orders. Accordingly, she grounds the Man in an *episteme* that has been invented and institutionalised, creating the Man. It would be, in a certain way, a “nonphysical principle of causality” (Ward in McKittrick, 2015, p. 35). Wynter aimed to build an ‘objective phenomenology’ (2001), where, according to David Marriott, she “makes sociogeny into something more like empiricism” where the problem of the invention of (the new) Man is reduced to “*techne* or method” (Marriott, 2011, p. 59). However, for Marriott, the reductionism to the invention of a new science in order to construct a new humanism is not what Fanon had in mind. On the

contrary, for Fanon, the problem of invention, of novelty is a ‘leap from history’. In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Fanon said:

“I am not a prisoner of History. I must not seek there the meaning of my destiny.

I need to constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence.”

(2015, p. 223; my translation, his emphasis)

However, this leap is not an escape from history, understood here as colonial history, but rather it is “to escape and yet to remain, to continue to relate to the ‘historical’ and yet never abandon the possibility of an open-ended travelling” (Marriott, 2011, p. 86). Indeed, it is this leap that introduces ‘invention into existence’ hence, novelty, and possible *new forms of life*. Here, I do not understand ‘invention’ as a means-end *techné* in Sylvia Wynter’s fashion, but rather as a novelty, “as a process of endless creation, infinitely expressed, and likewise perpetually self-engendering.” (Marriott, 2011, p. 86) This is why, for Fanon, it is by “going beyond [*dépasser*] instrumental historical data, that I introduce my cycle of freedom.” (2015, p. 224) Therefore, the point is not to create a preconceived new schema of being human, but rather an open-ended one that is contingent on the action. It is a horizon. It is important to emphasise the open-ended character of this horizon. Indeed, it is neither purely subjective (that would be solipsist) nor does it encompass all beings. It is a horizon that is constantly re-activated and actualised through the action. In other words, every time freedom appears, the horizon of liberation is re-activated and actualised. The leap that Fanon described is not once and for all, it is an introduction. As David Marriott highlighted, ‘invention’ is not a representation but a leap (2011, p. 76), and I would add, a leap into uncertainty and the unknown as the outcome of political actions cannot be known in advance. The compass to navigate in this ocean of uncertainty is that principle/horizon that is re-activated at

every action. Freedom is precisely this leap that initiates novelty and actualises the principle. In other words, by being a leap, freedom activates liberation as a horizon, a ‘for something’.

Interestingly, Sylvia Wynter associated new humanism, or the new man with what she called the Third Emergence understood as “the advent of human life in a non-linear making of the world” (Erasmus, 2020, p. 48; see Wynter, 1997). I want to keep this idea of emergence, of the genesis of a new world and a new man without following Wynter’s conclusion. This idea of emergence as *genesis* is, I think, helpful to understand my claim that freedom precedes liberation. Indeed, freedom is the emergence of the horizon, so represents the emergence of liberation. In that sense freedom is the emergence of liberation, it precedes it. However, this *socio-genesis* of liberation brought upon by the movement of freedom is never total nor totalising, it does not follow a historical *telos*, as for Fanon “against the historical becoming [there is] the unforeseeable [*imprévisibilité*]” (2015, p. 131). It then follows Wynter’s account of the non-linearity of the emergence. From that perspective, the temporality of freedom is a dialectic between the emergence and the horizon. Every emergence, natality, re-actualises the horizon. Contrary to Wynter, I believe that this emergence is not a total cut from the past or from historical time, but a leap. There is a co-existence. In other words, invention co-exists with the possibility of its destruction. Revolution co-exists with the risk of counter-revolution. To follow my previous example of marronage, if it is a praxis of freedom as a leap from plantocracy, it still co-exists next to plantocracy. Actually, for Roberts, sociogeny is associated with the flight of marronage. Maroons create “*counter-worlds*” (Wynter, n.d., p. 124; my emphasis) which are counter, against, and so also next to, in opposition but still somehow related to the plantation. Indeed, maroons can get captured back by their masters, foreclosing the horizon that once emerged. Yet, if they escape again, the horizon is re-activated and actualised, taking another dimension. In that sense, freedom conditions the horizon, hence liberation. To put it differently, the horizon depends on the emergence, the leap, thus, of freedom.

## Conclusion

Throughout that last chapter, I gave what I believe to be my last contribution to the alternative understanding of freedom I have built up throughout this thesis. This chapter was mainly a response to two different assumptions about the relationship between freedom and liberation. The first one is the assimilation of freedom to liberation in feminist theory that I have discussed in chapters I and II. The second one is the claim that liberation precedes freedom that I criticised in this chapter. Against those two models, I chose to focus on the idea that liberation is a political principle. Accordingly, I was able to reframe the relationship between freedom and liberation. I have first addressed the understanding of liberation preceding freedom. I have argued that this relationality produces a strict Before/After temporality that makes the advent of freedom and liberation, following that paradigm, impossible. It would require a total destruction of the new order, a liberation *from it*, so that freedom can be enacted. Against this account of ‘liberation from’, I have suggested that, following my understanding of political principles as an ‘against’ and a ‘for something’, that liberation is also a creative process. In other words, I have suggested that liberation is not only from but also a *liberation for* something. However, I have noted that this account bears the risk of solely reversing the problem. Namely, to keep the Before/After paradigm intact by just reversing its terms. Freedom would come *before* liberation and liberation *after* freedom. Against that assumption, I have argued for an understanding of liberation as an ongoing process. To make my point, I have provided a sociogenic non-linear meaning to the temporality implied in my claim that freedom *precedes* liberation. This account was made possible by a reformulation of freedom as ontological resistance as *existential ontological resistance*, adding a temporal meaning to ‘ontological resistance’. In other words, temporality becomes meaningful through the ontological resistance.

Ultimately, this temporal understanding of freedom and its relationship with liberation also adds a temporal dimension to what I called the trialectic of the self, the collective and the world. In other words, the leap from history that is illustrated by freedom as emergence/natality enables the possibility of a new world. This trialectic is then also ongoing according to its re-activation through freedom.

# Conclusion

The twofold purpose of this thesis was to problematise freedom and to provide an alternative understanding of it. More precisely, my aim of this thesis was not to highlight *everything* that is wrong with freedom nor to propose the opposite alternative where *everything* would be good. Rather, my goal was to outline and explore some blind spots and dead ends in the theories of freedom I have analysed, in order to propose an alternative, that is in itself not the right or the only understanding of what freedom should be, but only one. As a result, the originality of this thesis is not solely to contribute to political theories of freedom, decolonial thought and phenomenology, but to open a hopefully fruitful path to think about the coloniality of freedom and how to surpass it. In response, this thesis aimed at developing an alternative understanding of freedom as a political phenomenon, out of the colonial dimensions that informed the theories that I criticised. It entailed thinking about freedom differently, both on the epistemological and ontological levels. Therefore, the contribution that I made to political theory is indissociable from the one I made to decolonial thought and phenomenology.

Broadly speaking, this work advocates a phenomenological understanding of freedom that is better able to understand freedom as a political phenomenon of resistance from the zones of nonbeing. More precisely, I aimed at providing a non-subject centred understanding of freedom as well as reframing its relationship with liberation. This has first taken the form of a deconstruction of freedom to highlight its coloniality, and in response to it, a phenomenological analysis of the structure of some lived experiences. In Chapter I, I showed that in western feminist political theory, freedom was assimilated to liberation, resulting in an association of freedom with a theory of the subject. By analysing three main traditions of western feminist theory, namely, liberal feminism, materialist and radical feminism and postmodern feminism, I have argued that those

theories of freedom are in fact theories of the subject of freedom. In other words, freedom was never theorised as such but always assumed as free choice, autonomy, independence etc. What was not assumed, however, was the question of how to attain that preconceived freedom. Moreover, I argued that this focus on the subject of freedom occluded the possibility to theorise freedom as a concept. Ultimately, I have outlined the two hypotheses that inform those feminist theories of freedom as theories of the subject. The homogenous hypothesis aims to create a universal category of women and the heterogeneous hypothesis aims to create a more inclusive women category.

To follow up on what was outlined in the previous chapter, Chapter II was an attempt to underline the colonial dimension of the above-mentioned hypotheses. First, I showed that the homogenous hypothesis is marked by the use of the slave metaphor and the women-race analogy. I have argued that the use of this metaphor as a heuristic device created a white feminist theory of the subject, hence, of freedom. The use of this metaphor displaced and invisibilised the category of race. The homogenous women subject is thus white. Second, I showed that the heterogeneous hypothesis was subsuming every difference under the same category, namely anti-essentialism, rejecting the particularity and the distance, if not antagonism, that exists between different social groups. Accordingly, I have submitted that these theories of freedom are rooted in what I call an ontology of seizure, on symbolic/material appropriation. This allowed me to introduce the frame of my analysis of the colonality of freedom, namely that one's freedom is conditioned to another's unfreedom. To put it differently, that freedom is only attainable by those who belong to the realm of humanity, of being. In response, I have suggested to analyse freedom from what Frantz Fanon called the zone of nonbeing.

With that latter proposition in mind, I have suggested that the best way to understand freedom from the zone of nonbeing was by using a phenomenological approach. In Chapter III, I have outlined Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology and its importance in analysing political



phenomena. Following Heidegger, I have argued that Arendt's philosophical approach is both deconstructive and creative. However, even if her insight of imperialism is useful, I have suggested to add a more systematic decolonial perspective to her phenomenology. Accordingly, I have developed a decolonial hermeneutic phenomenology to pursue my investigation into the colonality of freedom. Whilst Chapter II started with western feminist theory to highlight the ontological roots of its theories of freedom, Chapter III investigated more in-depth the underside of freedom in general. I argued that the ontology of seizure resulted from the constitution of the free individual alongside free property by looking at the work of Hugo Grotius and John Locke. I maintained that in this western paradigm, unfreedom is the condition of freedom. In response to those subject-centred theories of freedom, I suggested a worldly and plural perspective on freedom rather than one based on the identity of its ideal subject. Accordingly, this enabled me to shift the investigation from the zone of being to the zone of nonbeing as a point of departure for this worldly perspective.

These three first chapters enabled me to problematise freedom and to open a path that allowed me to think about freedom anew, from an alternative perspective. The next three chapters represented each a different dimension of my three-dimensional understanding of freedom. I described freedom as an *embodied ontological resistance* in Chapter IV, freedom as *an an-archic mode of organisation* in Chapter V, and ultimately, I claimed that *freedom precedes liberation* in Chapter VI.

Following on the philosophical approach that I advocated previously, Chapter IV represented my main contribution to Arendtian studies. Against the literature, I defended that there is a phenomenology of the body in Arendt's work. I looked at the German version of her work and highlighted the use she made of the Heideggerian concept of *Befindlichkeit*. I argued that this concept is central to her phenomenological understanding of the body. I also made the distinction between the labouring body and what could be called the Arendtian political body. Indeed, because

she is concerned with politics rather than Being, I submitted that for her, the body is a condition of politics. Following her claim that “the *raison d’être* of politics is freedom” (Arendt, 2016, p. 174), I held that the body is a privileged site to investigate the meaning of freedom. More precisely, I argued that freedom is an embodied pathic movement and that Being is always an embodied being-disposed. Moreover, by associating Arendt’s account of the body with Frantz Fanon’s phenomenology of the body, I showed that freedom should be understood from the perspective of a dialectic between the body and the world. In doing so, I first analysed Fanon’s account of the Algerian Revolution, and especially the figure of *la militante* in terms of relationality between the body schema and the body image. Thereafter, I looked at Frederick Douglass’s fight with his master Edward Covey. These two phenomenological investigations from the zone of nonbeing led me to assert that freedom is an *embodied ontological resistance* that displaces the web of relationships between people. It changes their being disposed in the world with others.

In Chapter V, I suggested to further my claim that freedom is an embodied ontological resistance further by focusing on collective action, the being-with-others or being-together that I started to outline in Chapter IV. In doing so, I first discussed Hannah Arendt’s account of the political and her two main concepts of natality (new beginnings) and plurality (web of relationships). From that perspective, I claimed that her understanding of freedom is *an-archic*, meaning that it is a spontaneous beginning that does not rest on any rule or authority. It is an action that aims at the transformation of society without relying on a program or some preconceived rules to follow. Thereafter, I argued that freedom is an *an-archic* mode of organisation, meaning that this organisation does not rely on any preconceived theory of the collective subject. To make my point, I analysed Audre Lorde’s account of the Erotic and put it together with the activity of marronage, and more precisely Neil Robert’s account of sociogenic marronage (2015). This allowed me to understand freedom as an actualisation of plurality and a *collective ontological resistance*. Moreover, it led me to understand freedom as a political phenomenon from the perspective of a trialectic

between the self, the collective and the world. Ultimately, I defended the claim that freedom as an *an-archic* mode of organisation is not organised through a theory of the subject but through what Hannah Arendt called guiding political principles. In doing so, I provided an understanding of Arendt's notion of principles both as an 'against' and a 'for something', especially by focusing on Black Lives Matter.

In Chapter VI, the last chapter of this thesis, I concluded this work by reframing the relationship between freedom and liberation. I offered the third dimension of my understanding of freedom, namely that *freedom precedes liberation*. In doing so, I first addressed Hannah Arendt's claim that liberation precedes freedom. Yet, I maintained that this theorisation is embedded in a strict and non-realistic Before/After temporal divide. In response, and following what I outlined in the previous chapter, I argued that liberation is a political principle. That it stands against and for something. To make my point, I discussed Frantz Fanon's account of decolonisation (2002, 2015) and Walter D. Mignolo's and Catherine Walsh's account of decoloniality which is both destructive and creative (2007). Ultimately, and following my hypothesis that freedom precedes liberation, I provided a non-linear and ongoing meaning to 'precede' by relying on Fanon's account of *sociogeny*. It led me to offer a temporal account of my previous understanding of freedom as ontological resistance by providing an existential dimension to it. Therefore, I arrived at the conclusion that *freedom is an existential collective ontological resistance*.

Having spent a lot of time discussing freedom, its coloniality and its future, this thesis offers another way of thinking about freedom without subsuming it to a subjective question or reducing it to a theory of personhood. This thesis was also critical of certain reforms implied by those subjective conceptions of freedom, namely reforms that take the form of (human) rights, or more broadly what is understood as progressive policies. My claim was of course not to say that rights claims and demands are useless, conservative, or reactionary, especially considering what is

happening in the United States right now with Abortion law and LGBTQ rights. Rather, my aim was to provide another way to look at some questions that are not necessarily incompatible with rights claims, but which also aim at highlighting their limits. As I have argued in this thesis, freedom and liberation are both ongoing processes, meaning that I do not place myself in the sharp opposition between reform and revolution, especially since reforms can bring upon a 'revolutionary mood' to use Fanon's words.

## **Contribution to the literature and possible future research avenues**

Throughout this thesis, I have brought together and put into discussion many different philosophical traditions such as contemporary political theory, (black) feminist theory, Greek philosophy, phenomenology, decolonial thought, Africana philosophy, and Caribbean philosophy amongst others. However, four main contributions can be identified. First to the political theory of freedom, second to decolonial thought, third to decolonial phenomenology and fourth to Arendtian studies. These four contributions are inevitable related, non-exclusive, and they inform each other. However, in what follows, I will attempt to specify and map them.

My contribution to the political theory of freedom is twofold and takes the form of a critique and of a philosophical proposition. As a critique of the (feminist) political theories of freedom, my thesis steps away from the negative-positive definitions of freedom. Of course, some positive and negative elements can be found in my alternative understanding of freedom, but it does not follow this divide theorised by Isaiah Berlin. Moreover, I have strongly argued against a subject-centred theory of freedom, which I believe hinders the theorisation of freedom in favour of a theory of the subject. I have maintained that those subject-centred theories make freedom and sovereignty synonyms. This is not only a critique of individualism as I have asserted that these sovereign conceptions of freedom can also be found in a collective theory of the subject. Moreover, I

highlighted that those theories stay embedded in the frame of liberal democracy and rights and make freedom unconceivable out of this frame. Additionally, and in response, I have suggested an understanding of freedom that starts from what I call the trialectic of the self, the collective and the world. In other words, freedom is not about the subject, but about the subject, the collective and the world, each of these dimensions informing the other. Following Arendt, because we are in the world in plural, a political phenomenon such as freedom must be apprehended from this three-dimensional framework. Moreover, I would add a slightly related contribution which is to centre political theory within (post)continental philosophy and especially phenomenology, something that is pretty much still absent in the mainly analytic anglophone political theory.

My critique of the subject-centred conceptions of freedom echoes my contribution to decolonial thought. As I have said before, one of the tasks of decolonial thought is to track, unveil and analyse the coloniality of power and of knowledge. Accordingly, this field of knowledge has seen many contributions such as the coloniality of gender by Maria Lugones and the coloniality of being by Nelson Maldonado-Torres. More modestly, my contribution would fit in the emerging research concerning the coloniality of freedom. As I said in the introduction, ‘coloniality of freedom’ is almost absent from anglophone research. Hence, my contribution is both an opening to future investigation of the coloniality of freedom and a frame of investigation. By arguing that freedom is rooted in an ontology of seizure, my aim is to provide a frame of analysis to track the relationality between the zone of being and nonbeing when freedom is advanced in discourse, theories, and policies. In other words, what unfreedom is implied by this freedom? The analysis of the relationality of freedom and unfreedom is not new as Elisabeth Anker’s book *Ugly Freedom* and Tyler Stovall’s book *White Freedom* testify. However, my contribution aims to provide a more systematic theoretical frame to track the relationship between freedom and unfreedom whether it is on the material or symbolic level such as in my analysis of the use of the slave metaphor in feminist theory.

Another related contribution is to decolonial phenomenology, so both to decolonial thought and phenomenology. Decolonial phenomenology is a quite recent field, at least when presented in that fashion. Indeed, European phenomenologists have been used and useful by decolonial thinkers such as the importance of Emmanuel Levinas for Enrique Dussel and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. However, systematic phenomenological tools and methodology can be found in the work of Lewis Gordon through what he called the ontological and teleological suspension, as well as in Nelson Maldonado-Torres's work and his de-colonial reduction. Yet, this emerging field of decolonial phenomenology has been mainly informed by Husserl, hence the reduction/suspension, Sartre, and of course Frantz Fanon. My contribution to that field is no Husserlian-Fanonian nor Sartrean-Fanonian but Arendtian-Fanonian. Accordingly, I have developed a decolonial hermeneutic phenomenology which aims at finding the colonial birth certificate of concepts and the relationality between the zones of being and nonbeing, the coloniality that passes *in-between* them.

My last main related contribution is to Arendtian studies. I would describe this contribution as threefold. First to Arendt's phenomenology, second to Arendt's theory of freedom, and third by putting Arendt in dialogue with Fanon and other decolonial thinkers. The first part comes mainly from Chapter IV where I have developed an Arendtian phenomenology of the body. The question of the body remains under-theorised amongst Arendtian scholars. Her reluctance to the question of the body is often taken for granted if not assumed. In response, I demonstrated that there is a political phenomenology of the body in her work that is made manifest by her use of the Heideggerian concept *Befindlichkeit*. For the second, part, my contribution to the debate about her theory of freedom is to offer an *an-archic* understanding of it and to suggest that her account of freedom is informed by the concept of *isonomia*. Last part, by putting Arendt in dialogue with Fanon and other decolonial thinkers, I hope to have opened new ways of thinking about her work. It is common to critique Arendt's writing on imperialism and colonialism, but it is less common

to engage in a fruitful, creative, dialogue between Arendt and decolonial theories. Especially between Arendt and Fanon who are often reduced to their apparently different account of violence. I said apparently because Arendt is ambivalent towards violence, what she has to say about it differs from *On Violence* to her *Jewish Writings*, but it is not the subject here.

Finally, I think that the findings from this thesis open some possible avenues of research. Today, freedom could be considered as a buzzword. It is used for marketing purposes, by politicians, by international companies, and so on. Every political debate has somehow something to do, and to say about freedom. A debate about energy? Let's talk about energetic freedom. A debate about consumer society? Let's talk about consumer freedom and marketing freedom. The financial crisis? A critique of capitalism and neoliberalism? What about economic freedom? In front of this constant use of freedom, the question is: why is freedom used that often as an argument? What affects does freedom appeal to? In other words, what is the purpose of freedom? I would say that the frame that I have provided in this thesis about the coloniality of freedom and its ontology of seizure would help to frame the question differently. If the hypothesis of the coloniality of freedom is taken seriously, then the question would be, for all these instances, how freedom is a medium through which coloniality is reproduced? This question implies to look at the other side, the unfreedom that enables the freedom. For the question of energy, if one takes the example of nuclear energy. It has been argued that "the development of nuclear technology is one of the necessary conditions for the preservation of the economic and political independence of every country" (Sakharov, 1978, p. 14). In a similar fashion, nuclear energy has been associated with the sovereignty of a country, as testified by a note from the French presidency<sup>127</sup>. Hence, we are again in front of a sovereign freedom. However, the question would be, on what does this freedom rest? Materially speaking, this freedom rests on uranium that France extracts from Africa. In other

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<sup>127</sup> See <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2022/02/10/repandre-en-main-notre-destin-energetique>

words, a (neo)colonial relationship between France and ex-colonised African countries (*la Françafrique*) guarantees France's economic freedom. The search for the relationality that is hidden behind every discourse or concept of freedom is the task of the researcher who investigates the coloniality of freedom, who investigates the use of freedom for the reproduction of colonial relationships. All of that to basically say that I believe that the investigation of the coloniality of freedom opens many possibilities, from different disciplines, beyond philosophy.

On the other hand, the alternative understanding of freedom that I have developed throughout this PhD could be useful to look at social movements from another perspective. To be clear, my understanding of freedom is not a normative model to be applied but rather a phenomenological understanding which needs to be reflected on according to the object of investigation. It means that my three-dimensional freedom account of freedom is open to actualisation. Looking at some political events from the perspective of freedom as ontological resistance could push us to understand what vision of the world is at stake and go beyond the understanding of those events in terms of identity politics. Moreover, the emphasis on freedom could help to displace freedom from the realm of rights. Ultimately, by taking freedom from the perspective of the self, the collective and the world, it could provide an alternative framework to think about coalitional politics, out of the endless debate over identity politics.



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