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Bodies in chorus aquilombado. Towards a theory of political action*

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Abstract

Thinking with Saidiya Hartman and Conceição Evaristo, this article develops a critical lexicon to apprehend feminist and antiracist political actions enacted by subjects rarely recognized as political agents. By interpreting counter-narratives and *escrevivências* as methods of refusal, it examines how these practices challenge dominant representations rooted in misogyny and racism. Centering the lives of Esther Brown and Natalina, the article traces the emergence of a *chorus aquilombado* — a collective mode of resistance that redefines the boundaries of political action and agency.

Keywords: Saidiya Hartman, Conceição Evaristo, Escrevivência, Counter-narrative, *Chorus aquilombado*

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Corpos em coro aquilombado.
Por uma teoria da ação política.

Resumo

Em diálogo com Saidiya Hartman e Conceição Evaristo, este artigo propõe um léxico crítico para apreender e nomear ações políticas feministas e antirracistas realizadas por sujeitos raramente reconhecidos como agentes políticos. Ao interpretar a contranarrativa e a escrevivência como "métodos de recusa" que desafiam representações hegemônicas ancoradas na misoginia e no racismo, mobilizo as trajetórias de Esther Brown e Natalina em um movimento analítico que revela como suas práticas compõem um *coro aquilombado* em formação — uma modalidade coletiva de resistência que redefine as fronteiras da ação e da agência políticas.

Palavras-chave: Saidiya Hartman, Conceição Evaristo, Escrevivência, Contranarrativa, Coro Aquilombado

How might one begin to reckon with the performative capacities of those marked by racialized and gendered dispossession, when the very grammar of the black performative is haunted by coerced visibility, spectacular suffering, and the sexualized terror that secures the pleasure of others? What critical lexicon could apprehend the fugitive protocols and improvisational tactics enacted by those whose political gestures are often dismissed as excess, pathology, waywardness, or deviance? And, crucially, how can one refuse both the reduction of these acts to the terms of subjection and the seduction of imagining them as unmediated expressions of political resistance or redemptive vitality?

In light of these questions, the words woven throughout these pages attempt to theorize the political practices of those seldom (re)presented (Spivak, 2010) – by traditional political theory — as agents capable of meaningfully transforming our social and political reality. These are subjects routinely circumscribed by narratives of pain, suffering, subjection, and the enduring afterlife of slavery — women, whose bodies are feminized, epidermalized[1], and racialized, and whose lives are consigned to the domains of domesticity, labor, and asymmetrical intimacy.

However, such theorization becomes possible only if we are willing to relinquish an analytical framework that assumes that the public sphere occupied predominantly by white men — figures presumed to be rational, autonomous, objective, and epistemically authoritative — is the norm. Only then can we begin to apprehend the political practices of those who rarely appear in canonical accounts of political action, especially when resistance and refusal are manifest in forms that not only escape dominant standards of legitimacy but also exceed the conventional boundaries of the political and the public[2].

The structure of the argument unfolds as follows.

Following a note on definitions — focusing on the concepts of misogyny, sexism, racism, Amefrican women, and blackness — the second movement of the article engages with Saidiya Hartman's *counter-narratives* and Conceição Evaristo's *escrevivência* as interventions in the contested terrain of representation. By attending to form/content — *counter-narrative* and *escrevivência* — this analysis joins the struggle over what Stuart Hall calls "the ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation" (Hall, 1900:225)[3]. Hartman's counter-narration and Evaristo's *escrevivência* will be read as constituting an alternative regime of representation — one that emerges from the speculative and imaginative force of Black feminist political thought, staging Black and *Amefrican* women as narrators of their own lives, telling their stories "as if they were free" (Hartman, 2019:xiii).

In the third movement, I will walk alongside the lives of Esther Brown and Natalia, which are narrated in Hartman's counter-narrative and Evaristo's *escrevivência*. This positioning is not merely a matter of ethical or moral obligation arising from the scarcity of genuine efforts to comprehend, acknowledge, and regard these women with the dignity that is inherently theirs. Rather, Esther Brown and Natalina occupy center stage because their lives embody a profound vision — a vision of a world in which every individual possesses unrestricted access to the earth

[1] "Epidermalization," as an interpretation of Simone Browne's (2015) definition, is mobilized here to describe the moment when race is imposed upon and made readable on the very surface of the body —"literally the inscription of race on the skin" (Hall, 1996:16) To call women's bodies "epidermalized," then, signals a gendered and racialized condition in which Black (and feminized) subjects are rendered hypervisible as objects of control, commodification, and asymmetrical intimacy, while their capacity for full political agency is simultaneously denied.

[2] In this sense, the argument developed in this article aligns with a tradition of feminist political theory that interrogates not only the unjustified exclusions and hierarchies produced by the conventional division between public and private spheres, but also the broader field of debate that challenges the very limits of the universal subject that is assumed by canonical theories of political action and citizenship (Okin, 1998; Fraser, 1992; Young, 2000; Elshtain, 1981; Biroli, 2014).

[3] Stuart Hall's essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" is referenced here. According to Hall: "The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization (...) They had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as Other". It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to "knowledge, not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, but by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm" (Hall, 1990: 225; 116).

and the full range of life's essentials, articulated according to their own desires, preferences, and inclinations (Hartman, 2019:471). This vision imagines a world in which women, especially Black and Amefrican women, are emancipated from the authority of husbands, fathers, bosses, or *patroas*, freed to dream their own dreams and liberated once and for all from the perennial question, *"Ain't I a Woman?"* (Truth, 2021).

To comprehend and name the practices of those who dwell where life can never be taken for granted, I will argue that it is necessary to expose the intimate linkages between Black and Amefrican performance and the persistent specter of contested subjection, grotesque exhibition, and the exploitation and violation of bodies for the pleasure and entertainment of others. To fully appreciate the interventions made by these radical thinkers and political subjects requires a willingness to imagine "something as unimaginable and unprecedented as too fast girls and surplus women and whores producing 'thought of the outside' — that is, thought directed toward the outer bound of what is possible" (Hartman, 2019:471).

In tandem, I contend that Hartman and Evaristo, through their narrations of Esther Brown's and Natalina's wayward lives, conjure a "thought of the outside" (Hartman, 2019:471) about the world as we know it; a mode "of friendship and solidarity" (Hartman, 1997:13) that challenges conventional understandings of political action, and of the typical political actor deemed capable of enacting radical social change. In the final movement, by drawing upon concepts such as *politics as transfiguration* (Benhabib, 1986; Gilroy, 1993), or *politics without a proper place* (Hartman, 1997), the article aims to establish a conceptual framework for recognizing the myriad forms of political action depicted in Hartman's and Evaristo's narratives as integral components of a feminist and antiracist political theory of refusal (Honing, 2021).

Ultimately, my hope is to present Hartman's and Evaristo's terms and frames as "methods of refusal" (Honing, 2021:72) for imagining and naming alternative modalities of political engagement, alliance, and actions enacted by subjects rarely recognized as political agents within democratic struggles traditionally perceived as irrelevant Yet, they are already present, acting in *chorus aquilombado* from the outside.

1. Note on vocabulary

For the purposes of this article, the terms "misogyny," "sexism," "racism," "Amefrican," and "blackness" require definition.

Borrowing from Kate Manne (2017:27), I define misogyny as "the system that polices and enforces its governing norms and expectations" regarding women. Misogyny is thus understood as "a social-political phenomenon with psychological, structural, and institutional manifestations" (Manne, 2017:27). Sexism, by contrast, is defined as "the branch of patriarchal ideology that justifies and rationalizes a patriarchal social order" (Manne, 2017:20). Sexism is "scientific," whereas misogyny is "moralistic," and together they sustain a "patriarchal order" that possesses "a hegemonic quality" (Manne, 2017:20). Patriarchal ideology mobilizes a wide inventory of mechanisms aimed at achieving a single goal—namely, placing women in their (supposedly) deserved position.

Similarly, racism is defined here, following Audre Lorde (2007:155), as "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance". Yet, as Tommie Shelby (2014:66) further suggests, racism is also "a set of misleading beliefs and implicit attitudes about 'races' or race relations whose wide currency serves a hegemonic social function".

Misogyny and racism, both punitive branches or manifestations of patriarchal and racist ideologies, emerge when hostility and aggression are directed toward women at least partly — though not necessarily exclusively — due to their gender and race. According to these definitions, black women who resist or openly violate the norms and expectations that regulate their prescribed social roles provoke two intertwined forms of violent reactions: one racist, the other misogynistic. Indeed, *what else could evoke such hostility and aggression if not a woman's open refusal to fulfill the social role assigned to her? What could provoke greater hostility and aggression than a Black woman refusing domestic labor? What could incite more hostility and aggression than a Amefrican*

woman who insists upon defining the terms of her motherhood, her sexuality, and her bodily autonomy?

In this sense, gender and race are not mere "labels of identification" (bell hooks, 1990:1), nor are they independent analytical categories divorced from the social contexts vividly depicted in the scenes where Brown and Natalina take center stage.

Another definitional qualification concerns the term "Amefrican"[4]. This concept denotes a specific social relation that simultaneously refers to a historical process and to a territory commonly known as Latin America. The cultural dynamics of resistance, accommodation, and reinterpretation characterize this territory. Furthermore, "Amefrican" refers to the creation of new forms of resistance, accommodation, and reinterpretation influenced by Atlantic diasporic experiences and enriched by significant contributions from Indigenous cultures (Gonzalez, 2020:240). According to Lélia Gonzalez, the category of Amefrican is intimately linked, among other factors, to the concept of blackness. In alignment with Saidiya Hartman, I define blackness as a form of social relationality rather than a fixed identity or category of identification. "Blackness" marks social relations and is constitutive of the bodies, performances[5], and lives of the protagonists examined here. Hartman (2018:467) proposes that blackness:

> incorporates subjects normatively defined as black, the relations among blacks, whites, and others, and the practices that produce racial difference. Blackness marks a social relationship of dominance and abjection and potentially one of redress and emancipation; it is a contested figure at the very center of social struggle. Therefore, 'performing blackness' conveys both the cross-purposes and the circulation of various modes of performance and performativity that concern the production of racial meaning and subjectivity (...) (Hartman, 1997:56-57).

With this conceptual architecture and critical lexicon now in place — which included a description of the entangled operations of misogyny, sexism, racism, *Amefricanidade*, and blackness — I move from definitional groundings to situated scenes of embodiment, improvisations, and invention. The following section shifts from terms to textures, tracing how Hartman and Evaristo articulate a *method of refusal* that conjures a form of freedom shaped by a different way of telling the story of an action in concert.

2. Cross-purposes: *walking with* Saidiya Hartman and Conceição Evaristo

In the first scenario, the revolution precedes the Gatsby's plot. Before the Harlem Renaissance; before F. Scott Fitzgerald; before Radclyffe Hall and Henry Miller; before communists and socialists crowded Harlem's Street corners discussing free love; before queer relations and queer bodies populated the Ubangi Club, the Garden of Joy, or the Clam House, the reconstruction of intimacy, the reshaping of personal ties, and the remaking of the bodies inhabiting these spaces had already begun. The hallways, rented rooms, balconies, and ventilation shafts had already been inhabited by unruly subjects endowed with the capacity for experimentation. In this counter-narrated past, the tenements and shared houses emerge as social laboratories for creation, experimentation, and improvisation. Within this laboratory, the room was constituted as a domain for thought-in-action, as a space for performing, contesting, overcoming, dismantling, and

[4] The concept of "Amefrican Women" derives from "Améfrica Ladina", a notion that was not originally coined by Lélia Gonzalez, but which gained particular prominence through her political and academic contributions (Rios, 2019:78). According to Luiza Bairros (2000), Gonzalez proposed a distinctive variant of diasporic thought. According to Flávia Rios, for Gonzalez "to think of Améfrica Ladina, rather than Latin America, is/was a multiple subversion. First, it foregrounds groups subordinated by the patriarchal and colonial system on the continent. Secondly, by emphasizing this reality, the notion also highlights the experiences and forms of resistance of Black and Indigenous women. Thirdly, it seeks transnational solidarity without denying the plurality of territorial, cultural, and demographic formations of each country. Fourthly, the idea of Améfrica Ladina problematizes categories and languages created within colonial thought. Lastly, it represents an anti-imperialist stance toward North America, especially against 'the political purpose of the imperialistically dominant power of the region: the United States'" (Rios, 2019:78).

[5] Borrowing from Hartman, performance and performativity are defined in this article as interrelated strategies, practices, and enactments of power that involve denaturalizing displays and discursive re-elaboration (Hartman, 1997: footnote 20, chapter 2).

reconstructing power relations structured around gender, sexuality, class, and race (Hartman, 2019:61).

"If" one can imagine that young, black women not only inhabited these spaces but also acted in concert, will see how they were the authors of a repertoire of deviant practices. The conclusion that will be reached radically differs from conventional narratives about the structural changes in the private sphere, the sphere of intimacy, and ultimately, the public space/sphere heralded under the promise of modernity. When listening is guided by the imperative to redress the violence of history and its archives (Hartman, 2008), another narrative comes into the horizon — one composed of different characters, scenes, and sounds. Young Black women appear as the innovators, the radical thinkers whose lived experiences have redefined sexuality, intimacy, parenthood, kinship, conventional gender roles, and the social location of the racialized subject.

These subjects of radical imagination and practice are rendered in Hartman's prose as *deviant, errant, fugitive, recalcitrant, anarchic, unruly, willful,* and *wild* — lives remembered as *beautiful experiments*. The deviant life is beautiful in a specific sense: beauty here is not a luxury, but a method for excavating possibility within the space of confinement; it is the trace or residue of a radical act—or of many. In this sense, the art of existing transfigures what is already given (Hartman, 2019).

The alternate setting unfolds in a different era, language, and geographical landscape. Unlike the urban environments of New York or Philadelphia, Minas Gerais becomes the canvas upon which Conceição Evaristo inscribes her characters. Within this *escrevivência*—a fusion of memory, fiction, and ancestral recollection—the portrayals of Amefrican women encapsulate multiple ways of inhabiting the world. The backdrop of violence, poverty, suffering, discrimination, and scarcity emerges as tangible anguish, reflected in tear-filled eyes and weeping visages (Evaristo, 2016).

Yet, as Jurema Werneck (2016) reminds us, a discerning gaze reveals more than Amefrican women in despair. It sees beyond the brink of non-being—beyond those subjected to rape and other forms of violation. It apprehends more than the depiction of women grappling with the torrents of life, whether embracing or resisting them; it perceives the strategies forged for endurance, continuity, and collective survival.

Those who pay attention will encounter women who "learn the language of the oppressor to construct the freedom to curse!"—women who stitch life together with threads of iron (Evaristo, 2016:n/p). In doing so, they revolutionize the frame: they challenge the norms that determine who counts as a woman, who is recognized as human, and who is granted the capacity to effect political transformation.

Ana Davenga, Maria, Duzu-Querença, Natalina, Salinda, Luamanda, Cida, Zaíta, Maíta, and men and boys without mothers inhabit *Olhos D'Água*, by Conceição Evaristo. In these multiple stories written by Black hands (Nascimento, 2021a), the "right place" assigned to these women within the Brazilian *afterlife of slavery* emerges unequivocally[6]. A well-known Brazilian saying, recalled by Lélia Gonzalez, helps to name this imposed position: "White women for marriage, mulatto women for fornication, and Black women for work" (Gonzalez, 2020:235). In this widespread expression, socio-economic and sexual overexploitation are shown to be co-constitutive elements of the same misogynist and racist regime.

Yet these women are also the bearers of radical imagination and experimentation. They reveal how it is not only impossible to adjust, adapt, and endure, but also how dignity may be forged beyond, and not despite, the absence of liberation[7]. In Evaristo's prose, one finds the resources to dismantle an image in which the body–voice–agency of Black, Amefrican women was always already placed under the control of others. With Evaristo, it becomes possible to delineate the narrative modes that are capable of naming both the invention and the resistance enacted in

[6] The "right place" is, in fact, multiple places, as a woman's race, class, nationality, and other social markers will shape that place in conjunction with her gender (Spelman, 1988).

[7] Here I reference the following passage from bell hooks: "Black women were told that we should find our dignity not in liberation from sexist oppression but in how well we could adjust, adapt, and cope. We had been asked to stand up and be congratulated for being 'good little women' and then told to sit down and shut up. No one bothered to discuss how sexism operates both independently of and simultaneously with racism to oppress us" (hooks, 1990:7).

response to the violation and interdiction historically imposed on some lives rather than others — first by the system of slavery, and today by the enduring logics of racial and misogynist domination in Brazilian society.

In more ways than one, the works of Hartman and Evaristo share interlaced purposes. Both write about — and from within — a world shaped and disfigured by slavery. "The life of the captive and the commodity," writes Hartman, "certainly wasn't my past, but rather the threshold of my entry into the world" (Hartman, 2022:35). For both authors, the relationship between slavery, coloniality, and the present remains unfinished, unresolved, and radically open.

In her effort to construct a vocabulary that adequately describes the *afterlife of slavery*, Hartman offers not only a critical analysis of the enduring hold of racial slavery but also a rejection of the linear narrative of "from slavery to freedom." She foregrounds the difficulty of apprehending and representing "the temporal entanglement of racial slavery as our past and our present, the enduring consequences of the slave's expulsion from and precarious belonging to the category of the human, (...) and the protracted duration of unfreedom" (Hartman, 2022:29). This raises the pressing question of how to disrupt conventional perspectives, reassess historical timelines, challenge linear narratives of progress, and rupture the continuum of slavery itself (Hartman, 2022).

Transitioning from *critical fabulation* to a *counter-narrative* emancipated from the logics of judgment and categorization — the very mechanisms that subject young Black women to surveillance, arrest, punishment, and confinement — opens multiple pathways for critical imagination, refusal, and narration. In tracing Hartman's intellectual trajectory, from *Scenes of Subjection* to *Wayward Lives*, we witness the emergence of a critical lexicon forged "from nowhere, from the nowhere of the ghetto and the nowhere of utopia", from within the very condition described as the *afterlife of slavery* (Hartman, 2019:8).

Critical fabulation is a *method of refusal* employed in "Venus in Two Acts" (2008) and in "The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner" (2018). It functions as a narrative strategy designed to reconstruct, within the constraints of archival silence, a fuller account of the lives of the enslaved. The objective, however, is not to restore what was lost or to redeem the dead, but to expose the limits of the archive and create possibilities for imagining what could have been lived, said, or done.

In this method, Hartman proposes a deliberate destabilization of historical authority. She reorganizes narrative elements, reconfigures the sequences of events, and introduces divergent and contested points of view to unsettle the accepted status of historical "fact." By refusing the linearity and objectivity presumed in conventional historiography, she foregrounds the ways in which sources are themselves shaped by the logic of racial capitalism and by the very violence they purport to record. Through this approach, Hartman seeks to reveal how certain lives were rendered disposable — both within the Atlantic slave trade and within the disciplinary frameworks of history[8].

She emphasizes the need for imagining the resistance of the enslaved subject, even when only silence or fragments remain. By collapsing distinctions between narrator and character, and allowing conflicting voices to co-exist within the text, Hartman challenges the primacy of authorized discourse and exposes the contested nature of narrative, event, and historical truth (Hartman, 2008).

Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments can be understood, as Fanny Höjer (2020) suggests, as both a literary and theoretical extension of the method of critical fabulation —a narrative practice that *interweaves* the past, present, and future to recount the lives of Black women beyond the silences and violences of the archive. For Bonnie Honig, counter-narration constitutes a "method of refusal" and an act of rescue. As she puts it, Hartman "rescues her wayward women from careless cruel obscurity by individuating them, offering to each an indelible individuality and the shelter of tender memory" (Honig, 2021:73). Yet there is more at stake: counter-narration, in Hartman's hands, is not merely a matter of individualization. It also enacts a collective and political mode of telling a story, in which refusal becomes shared and resonant in the formation of the chorus.

[8] For an engagement with the notion of *critical fabulation* and Hartman's approach to the archive as a site of narrative and political intervention, see Ventura, 2024.

In this work, Hartman immerses the reader in the voices, experiences, and intimate textures of young Black women's lives, refusing the conventional distances between past and present, narrator and subject. Through a mode of close narration, she collapses the boundary between authorial voice and the voices of the wayward, allowing for their speech, rhythms, and ways of seeing to shape the very architecture and movement of the text. Rather than stabilizing historical figures as coherent or fully knowable subjects, Hartman makes space for their multiplicity, opacity, and invention — foregrounding the sensorial, relational, and affective dimensions of Black social life in the early twentieth-century American cities of Philadelphia and New York. In doing so, her text opens a space in the present and future to envision different forms of freedom.

The radical imagination and errant actions of young Black women appear to the reader in open rebellion, rendered through figures and events drawn from the archive. These women emerge from fragments culled from a range of sources: the journals of rent collectors, sociological surveys and monographs, trial transcripts, slum photographs, reports by investigators of vice, social workers, and parole officers, interviews with psychiatrists and psychologists, and prison case files (Hartman, 2019:8). Yet the archive is only the point of departure. In a sense, Hartman both moves with and against the archive — taking what it yields and fabulating the rest. "Her fabulations," asserts Honig, "refuse the authority of the archive, contest its moral judgments, and defy the positivism in which it has historically been wrapped" (Honig, 2021:73). The result is a counter-narrative grounded in the insurgent realities of lives dismissed or pathologized by disciplinary knowledge.

The counter-narrative begins with a speculative proposition—an *if*: *What if we were to imagine these young Black women as sexual modernists, free lovers, radicals, and anarchists?* Such a question opens space for an alternate story of the twentieth century, one rooted not in linear progress or moral reform, but in the refusal, experimentation, and waywardness that animated these lives. The *if*, as a mode of inquiry, arises from the practice of excavating rebellion from within the archive itself. It seeks to disentangle acts of refusal, mutual care, queer attachment, and forms of outlawed intimacy from the terms: deviance, criminality, and pathology. It affirms possibilities such as free motherhood (reproductive autonomy), intimacy outside the institution of marriage, and queer and insurgent passions — forms of life often rendered unthinkable or inadmissible.

By listening to whispered conversations in dimly lit rooms and attending to moments in which the aspirations of the wayward felt within reach, Hartman constructs a narrative that does not claim to recover the past as it was but speculates on what might have been — what was imagined, desired, or nearly grasped (Hartman, 2019).

If one were to envision young Black women as social visionaries, innovators, and political agents—as Hartman invites us to do—the result would be a narrative of the wayward: a story marked by resistance, refusal, and radical possibility. Alternatively, this could take the form of a *speculative history of the wayward*, aimed at reconstructing the acts of rebellion and experimentation carried out by young women in the emerging ghetto — a space of racial confinement that succeeded the plantation (Hartman, 2019).

In Conceição Evaristo's oeuvre, *escrevivência* is articulated as a diasporic practice that weaves together memory, fiction, and ancestral remembrance. Evaristo defines *escrevivência* as a mode of writing by Black women that seeks to blur and dismantle the dominant representations of the past — representations in which the embodied voice of enslaved Black women was subjected to the control not only of slaveholders, but also of men, women, and even children (Evaristo, 2020).

The essence of *escrevivência* evokes the figure of the *Mãe Preta* — the Black woman forced to live as an enslaved worker within the master's household[9]. Entrusted with the most intimate and exhausting tasks of colonial domestic life, these women were charged with caring for the family: they nursed children, prepared food, tended to daily needs, and taught the master's children their first words — all while confined to the condition of enslavement, as Evaristo emphasizes (Evaristo, 2020). Yet their burden extended beyond the material. As Evaristo writes, there came a moment

[9] Another crucial reference to the figure of the *mãe preta* and her role within the racist and sexist structures of Brazilian society is found in Gonzalez (1984).

when these constrained and dispossessed bodies were also tasked with a further obligation: the responsibility of telling stories to lull the household into sleep (Evaristo, 2020:30). It was the *Mãe Preta* who was made to soothe the future masters and mistresses, those whose lives were "marked by the possession of power" (Fricker, 2000:147), and who would inherit the structure of privilege they had been raised to take for granted.

By returning to this figure, Evaristo finds the impetus to imagine, expand, and ultimately exceed the limits of this imposed role — to tell stories. *Escrevivência* becomes an act of transgression — an insurgent use of language and writing that refuses the function of pacification within the master's house. Conceição Evaristo's literature does not seek to comfort those within structures of domination; it seeks, instead, to awaken them from their unjust reveries (Evaristo, 2020).

Escrevivência has never been a passive endeavor, nor a practice that is confined within its own parameters. For Evaristo, writing is a fundamental mode of observing, absorbing, and surrendering to life and existence (Evaristo, 2020). Yet it is not to be confused with autobiographical fiction or acts of self-representation. Rather, the text is permeated by the history of a collective experience and transcends the limits of the individual "I". *Escrevivência* arises from a literary practice shaped by the positionality of someone who is Black, a woman, economically marginalized in a place like Brazil. In this context, the subject of writing does not act in isolation but within the entangled coordinates of shared experience and collective memory (Evaristo, 2020).

To understand Evaristo's approach to crafting fictional texts that blur the boundaries between writing, life, memory, and language — what would later be conceptualized as *escrevivência* — one may turn to *Becos da Memória*. "I invent without hesitation", she asserts. "Even the stories grounded in reality are inventions. There is a profound gap between the event and its narration, and invention flourishes within that space". For Evaristo, this does not invalidate the truth of the narrative. On the contrary:

> Nothing recounted in *Becos da Memória* is false. I aimed to portray fiction as if it were lived experience, as truth. At its core, the foundation of the narrative in *Becos* is an experience that is mine—and mine alone. (...) And how does one navigate memories that are sometimes vivid, sometimes faded? Invention, then, emerges to fill the void left by transformed memory (Evaristo, 2017:13-14).

Considering the fallibility of memory — its tendency to forget, distort, and, crucially, its confinement to what can be articulated and preserved within archival forms — the need for imagination and invention becomes evident. In this context, both imagination and invention operate as acts of liberation, aligned with what Homi Bhabha (2014) terms *the right to narrate*. This right entails more than the freedom to speak or to tell stories; it signifies the authority to reinterpret history, to inscribe new meanings in the social fabric, and to redirect its trajectory. For Bhabha, the right to narrate is not merely a linguistic capacity but a metaphor for a fundamental human aspiration: the entitlement to be heard, acknowledged, and represented.

In Evaristo's work, the fictionalization of memory and familial experience produces a form of revolutionary writing — one that interweaves memory, fiction, and ancestral remembrance to displace the traditional locus of Black women's voices. This narrative strategy reclaims authorship over stories historically told about them, rather than by them. Furthermore, Evaristo turns to the ordinary dimensions of Black women's lives — what Nazareth Fonseca (2020) calls "black memory-skin" — to affirm the political and epistemic significance of the everyday.

Within this framework, Evaristo's characters—and the author herself—identify misogyny and racism as primary targets of literary and political confrontation. As Evaristo and her protagonists claim a central role in the narrative, they challenge not only entrenched social norms but also the structural mechanisms that have long confined Amefrican women to subordinate roles. This intervention implicitly contests the persistence of a well-known Brazilian adage that need not be repeated here but that continues to echo across time and space.

Through *escrevivência*, Evaristo constructs a narrative that is capable of disrupting the hegemony of dominant systems of representation—those which, as Stuart Hall (Hall; Gilmore,

2021) argues, were imposed by colonizers to regulate the meaning of the colonized and their worlds. Crucially, one must not overlook Evaristo's position as a woman surviving in diaspora, as articulated by bell hooks (1992) in her reading of Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Evaristo's writing constitutes a diasporic phenomenon embedded in representation, a site of struggle where meaning is contested, reclaimed, and reimagined once the colonial experience is understood as a regime of domination and representational control (hooks, 1992).

Saidiya Hartman's work, too, can be situated within this contested terrain, engaging the very same conflicts around narration, visibility, and power. In the sense articulated here, Evaristo and Hartman participate in a shared dialectic — one that is forged at sea (Nascimento, 2023), shaped by the histories of diaspora, displacement, and struggle, and continually reworked through insurgent acts of narrative creation.

These approaches to contextualizing the problem of representation within dominant regimes of meaning can produce multiple outcomes. One such outcome is the emergence of *counter-narratives*—narratives untethered from the logics of judgment and categorization that have historically subjected young Black, Amefrican women to surveillance, arrest, punishment, and confinement. Another possibility lies in the practice of *escrevivência*, which weaves together memory, fiction, and ancestral remembrance to transform both memory and erasure into acts of narrative reclamation, restoring voice to those rendered historically inaudible.

Both gestures resonate with an insight articulated by Hortense Spillers (2003): when the languages of history, theory, or politics fail to account for the lived experiences of those who fall between legible categories — those without institutional recognition, support, or assigned place — a need arises to invent a form. To inhabit the interstitial space between names, classifications, and agendas is to encounter the insufficiency of existing discourses. It is precisely from this site of imposed silence that the imperative to imagine otherwise — and to write from elsewhere — takes shape.

Still, the matter does not end there. The texts that emerge from these methods of refusal and creation catalyze the development of a political theory—both feminist and antiracist, grounded in the serious undertaking of imagining "the end of this world" (Silva, 2019:n/p). Contrary to the Arendtian notion of "understanding as reconciliation" (Arendt, 2018:127), the aim here is not to feel at home in the world as it is. Drawing on Arendt (1993; 2007), the act of storytelling — as a mode of political theorization — is instead mobilized to inspire freedom *against* this world[10]. A world structured by racism, misogyny, and the afterlife of slavery calls not for reconciliation, but for refusal. The search for roots, then, must be directed elsewhere. I propose that the radical imagination and acts of refusal voiced in the visions of Saidiya Hartman and Conceição Evaristo, as well as of the young Black girls they bring into the field of narrative and theory, nurture the conditions from which a political theory of liberation—and of refusal—can take root.

3. Esther Brown, Natalina, and their beautiful political lives

Esther Brown did not write a political treatise on the moral imperative of refusing external governance, nor did she compose a blueprint for collective Black resistance. She left no memoir recounting the contours of her personal life or the intricacies of her romantic entanglements. And yet, the manifesto of a nonconformist existence can be read in the assemblage of documents that give shape to her profile — sociological surveys, medical evaluations, and legal records. Brown expressed a visceral aversion to labor; she detested the working conditions available to her, which

[10] Hannah Arendt opens the way for conceiving of political theory as a form of storytelling when she writes: "[w]ho says what is – λέγει τὰ ἐόντα – always tells a story, and in this story, the particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning" (Arendt, 1993:261). She further notes: "storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it, that it brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they really are" (Arendt, 1970:105). My argument, however, moves in a different direction. In contrast to seeking reconciliation with the world as it is, counter-narrative and *escrevivência* gesture toward a reconciliation with what might be — if one dares to imagine and fabulate against the archive.

amounted to servitude, and recoiled at the very notion of work. Her desires pointed elsewhere: toward a world imagined otherwise (Hartman, 2019). Her mind pulsed with the unruly thoughts and audacious dreams of an alternative horizon.

The streets became her sanctuary—a space of possibility animated by her desires and instincts. As she wandered, her imagination surged with visions of who she might become and what she might pursue, though the meanings of those desires remained elusive. Her thoughts were erratic, fragmented, and untamed. The ghetto reverberated with dissonant rhythms, improvisational routines, and alternative modes of being. Brown embraced a way of life marked by refusal, risk, and irreverence. This orientation—an affective and cognitive mode of being—shaped how she came to know and inhabit the world. In this landscape, improvisation became the means for navigating chance, making a life from what appeared, at first glance, to be mere happenstance (Hartman, 2019). Here, action precedes any stable or normative conception of identity, personhood, or self.

Because she refused to conform to the dictates of the "domestic labor textbook", authorities regarded Esther Brown as possessing an excessive and dangerous degree of freedom. This freedom — evident in her manner, comportment, and everyday choices —was perceived not as autonomy, but as transgression. It was read as an affront to moral order, a threat to the norms that governed gendered behavior and racial discipline. A social worker described her as "ungovernable" (Hartman, 2019:250), and her teachers concurred, insisting she had been granted too much liberty, too much space to drift beyond control. What they failed to grasp was that her time at the Hudson Training School for Girls had only sharpened her resolve to resist, to confront authority, and to trouble the terms of obedience.

Her so-called unruliness was cultivated in a social world where any refusal to comply with normative expectations was immediately moralized, and where deviation became synonymous with deviance. Her conduct was scrutinized with disciplinary precision: to speak too openly, to linger in communal spaces, to socialize beyond the boundaries of supervision — all were treated as signs of criminality. Casual encounters, silences, or moments of joy could be interpreted as evidence of wrongdoing (Hartman, 2019).

Until July 17, 1917, Esther had managed to evade the formal gaze of the police through a mix of instinct and improvisation. But when confronted in court, she lacked the language that might shield her. In that setting, guilt was not determined by transaction, but by affect. The charge of prostitution did not require proof of exchange; it hinged instead on the perception that she was enjoying herself. Her refusal to dissociate from the signs and habits associated with sexual autonomy — her rejection of conventional labor, her unwillingness to perform regret — became, in the eyes of the court, incriminating.

Under the Tenement House Law, she was convicted not for what she had done, but for how she had chosen to live. Her unemployment and presumed sexual freedom were rendered legible as a moral failure. In this courtroom, the future was foreclosed: the legal system claimed the authority not only to punish but to predict, projecting a life trajectory through the interpretive frame of the mug shot — an image meant to capture and fix the essence of her deviance (Hartman, 2019).

However, Esther Brown traced a cartography for another world. She longed for something beyond — something different, livable, and radically other. Her hunger yearned for unfamiliar forms of beauty. She neither desired a husband nor sought a father figure; she had no interest in obeying a boss or following the dictates of a *patroa*. She rejected all forms of external command over her desires and her future. A similar refusal echoes in the life of Natalina, recounted through memory, fiction, and recollection in the work of Conceição Evaristo.

Natalina gave birth to four children. But only the fourth child was, in truth, her first. Unlike the others, this child belonged solely to her — claimed by no man, no *patroa*, no institution. While she may not have desired the other pregnancies—rejecting the equation between womanhood and compulsory motherhood — the fourth child was different. It was an act of deliberate will, of ownership over her body and her choices. The earlier children were given away before, or shortly

after, birth, a fate that haunted her. "It was as if the others had died in the middle of the road. They were given right after, and even before, birth. The other bellies she hated" (Evaristo, 2016:n/p).

In rejecting the expectations imposed by marriage, maternity, and domestic servitude, Natalina enacted an intimate form of insubordination. Her decision became a quiet declaration of autonomy—an assertion that Amefrican women could inhabit other forms of life, claim the right to choose, and reimagine the meaning of kinship and desire.

No, this time, she owed nothing to no-one. If that belly had a price, she too had hers — and the exchange was made with a precious and incalculable currency. This time, she would have a child who was entirely hers, unthreatened by the claims from a father, mother, Sá Praxedes, companion, or employer. She would teach this child that to live is also to die, that to give life is not separate from the possibility of taking it (Evaristo, 2016).

Her son was conceived in the fragile margins of a life marked by layered violences — gendered, racialized, economic, and sexual — and by the pervasive force of poverty. Like Duzu, another of Evaristo's characters, Natalina carried within her an intimate knowledge of death as a constituent part of existence. She, like so many Amefrican women, endured what Sueli Carneiro (2000) called the *matriarchy of misery*: the structural accumulation of socioeconomic and sexual exploitation. Yet Natalina does not merely survive — she transforms. She becomes an emblem of the *Amefrican Woman*, situated within a historical continuum shaped by cultural dynamism, practices of resistance, creative adaptation, and the re-signification of identity.

Much like the protagonists of *Praisesong for the Widow*, *Mama Day*, and *The Salt Eaters*, Natalina inhabits a space of insurgent subjectivity. She confronts and subverts normative gender roles, asserting her right to name her motherhood on her own terms. As bell hooks (1992) reminds us, such women enact a radical political gesture by claiming the authority to define family, care, and love outside patriarchal prescriptions. In the closing lines of *Olhos D'Água*, Evaristo affirms this redefinition: "She [Natalina] was happy. Her son was about to burst into the world any day now. She was anxious to look at that son and not see the mark of anyone, perhaps not even hers" (Evaristo, 2016:n/p).

A figure like Natalina or Esther Brown — who navigates life without relying on a *patroa* or a man for sustenance — disrupts conventional assumptions about women's social station. A Black woman who refuses the strictures of domestic labor provokes unsettling questions regarding her status and role in a society that has repeatedly sought to confine her. "Ain't I a Woman?" This stubborn and disquieting question resurfaces, charged with the task of re-situating Black women in a world perpetually skirting the edges of danger and precariousness.

It is worth pausing at this juncture. Sueli Carneiro exposes the fallacy of female fragility, a notion frequently employed to rationalize male dominance over women — yet one that is built upon a particular and exclusionary understanding of "woman". When we hear calls for women to "take to the streets and enter the workforce", Carneiro asks: *Who exactly is being interpellated?* "We, Black women", she insists, remain absent or only partially included in that universalized vision, revealing the gulf between an ostensibly inclusive slogan and the actual experiences and material conditions of most Black women. "We, Black women", in her terms:

> we are part of a contingent of women, probably the majority, that never recognized themselves [in] this myth because we have never been addressed as fragile. We are part of a contingent of women who worked for centuries as enslaved people in the fields or the streets, as merchants, *quituteras*, prostitutes... Women who did not understand anything when feminists said that women should take to the streets and work. We are part of a contingent of women whose identity is comparable with an object. Yesterday, [we were] at the service of fragile little maids and perverted landlords (Carneiro, 2019:314).

In contrast to their white counterparts, Black working women — as analyzed by a longstanding tradition of Black feminist though — have often been perceived and treated in ways that align them more closely with men. This perception inaugurated a centuries-long debate concerning the "place" of Black women in the social order, and their departure from normative gender roles and expectations.

Gender norms prescribe the behaviors and traits deemed appropriate for individuals occupying socially sanctioned gender positions. In privileged white contexts, as argued by Sally Haslanger (2012), performing masculinity effectively entails strength, autonomy, rationality, activity, and physical appeal. Conversely, femininity is associated with nurturance, emotional expressiveness, cooperation, and beauty. When, alongside Hartman and Evaristo, I call attention to the enduring crisis surrounding the social and political status of Black women, it becomes evident that these binary constructs—and their presumed universality—must be exposed and resisted.

Still, there are further complexities to be considered.

Throughout the Western philosophical tradition, ideals such as rationality, knowledge, and morality were constructed in opposition to characteristics historically associated with women — regardless of whether they are Black, white, or otherwise racialized. Within this framework, women are frequently portrayed as governed by emotion rather than reason, lacking in impartiality and abstract reasoning, inherently intuitive, and symbolically closer to nature than to culture. These depictions have persistently relegated women to the margins of full moral and epistemic agency.

As Haslanger (2012) notes, this tradition confronts women with an impossible dilemma: women should either strive to be morally and intellectually competent and, in doing so, fail to embody the social ideal of femininity; or conform to normative femininity and thereby forfeit individual agency and moral authority.

Judith Butler further deepens this tension by showing how rigid gender norms regulate the very conditions of social legibility. According to Butler (1986), the social imperatives surrounding gender conformity are so powerful that individuals experience profound injury when their performance of manhood or womanhood is deemed improper. Since social existence requires that one appears to have an unambiguous gender identity; existing beyond or outside normative gender scripts renders one's very existence socially unintelligible. If, as Butler contends, human existence is always already gendered, then any deviation risks not just censure but the denial of social recognition itself.

In Butlerian terms, straying from established gender norms places one's social existence at risk. Similarly, as Hartman demonstrates, Esther Brown was confronted with an impossible choice — one that jeopardized not only her freedom, but her very survival: either submit to servitude willingly or be compelled by the force of law. This dilemma, shaped by the intersection of race, class, and gender, exposes the structural coercion that governs the lives of women who are racialized as Black. To live outside the script assigned to Black womanhood — one that dictates behavior, desire, labor, and bodily presentation — is to be cast as deviant. For Brown, such defiance was not only an act of refusal; it was also a pursuit of beauty — a radical attempt to make life itself into art.

In this sense, as Hartman (2019:251) writes, "the aesthetic wasn't a realm separate and distinct from the daily challenges of survival (…) What she created was Esther Brown. That was the offering, the bit of art, that could not come from any other. She would polish and hone that. She would celebrate that every day something had tried to kill her and failed. She would make a beautiful life". Here, the aesthetic is not ornamental—it is existential. The cultivation of beauty amid precarity becomes a form of agency, a mode of crafting a self and a world against the odds.

Moreover, within contexts shaped by dispossession and violence, beauty and survival acquire meanings of their own. Survival is never mere. It is, as Audre Lorde reminds us, a political act, a mode of resistance that exceeds form: "We must remember and comfort ourselves with the fact that survival is, in itself, a victory" (Lorde, 2004:89).

Esther Brown, like Natalina, exemplifies what Hartman describes as "an artist without an art form" (Hartman, 2019:227). Both sought to shape lives unbound by the various forms of servitude imposed upon Black women. Their effort to "live as if they were free" constituted a radical gesture — an act of thought and imagination that materialized in the improvisational practices of everyday life (Hartman, 2019). Refusing to be reduced to bare survival, Brown and Natalina, as "modern intelligent individuals," recognized the value of risk and the urgency of seizing opportunities for autonomous action (Hartman, 2019:227).

In Natalina's case, resistance is inscribed in the very texture of her life. She defies normative expectations around motherhood, desire, and caregiving. In Brown's trajectory, resistance exceeds the private sphere and the realm of necessity, becoming part of what Hartman (2019:xv) frames as a *revolution in a minor key* — an insurgent practice that unfolds in quiet, often invisible registers. In both lives, we witness the emergence of political agency from outside conventional frameworks of political recognition.

Esther Brown, in particular, was perceived as a threat — a figure whose illegitimated form of action disrupted dominant categories of political action. Like any subject without a sanctioned space for expression, she was cast as dangerous. And yet, she became part of a *chorus aquilombado* — a fugitive collective whose performance reverberates across territories and tangled temporalities.

4. The chorus as political action

The chorus gathers force, continuously testing new forms and possibilities. In December 1919, the incarcerated girls at Lowell Cottage raised their voices in unison, breaking through to an audience that had long cultivated deafness as a civic virtue. In the aftermath of the 1914 scandal involving interracial and lesbian relationships, the institution imposed further divisions — segregating wings by race, age, addiction, status, and presumed capacity. From these confined quarters designated for Black girls emerged a "sonic revolt", a "noise strike", the "din of an infernal chorus" a clamor that would reverberate even through the pages of *The New York Times* (Hartman, 2019:279).

In this act of collective defiance, the noisy girls dismantled the symbolic and material authority of the reformatory. They ensured the institution could no longer claim innocence, nor pretend to rehabilitate those it sought to discipline. Speaking with one united voice, they denounced the prison conditions, made visible the abuses they endured, and declared that each of their bodies had been violently displaced from any rightful position. Together, they refused to be treated as anything less than human and free. They shattered windows, overturned furniture, carved grievances into the walls, and filled the air with sound—sound as rupture, sound as revolt.

These were the expressions of the riot. These are the grammar of the riot. "Each voice blended with the others in a common tongue. Every utterance and shout made plain the truth: Riot was the only remedy within reach" (Hartman, 2019:301). Each unsilenced voice in that chorus screamed as if to claim *a right to have rights.*

Once again, the subject positioned within the social space of subalternity has spoken, acted, and made their presence known (Spivak, 2010a). The *arena of appearance* — that fragile space where political existence becomes visible — gains sharper contours when the chorus gathers, organizes itself, and dares to demand, assert, and disrupt.

In this light, the *chorus aquilombado* emerges as a refusal, a disturbance, an insistent act of solidarity in a setting where silence is structurally imposed. It is at once dissonant and collective, rebellious and sustaining. Drawing from Beatriz Nascimento's formulation, *quilombo* is not merely a historical form — it is an evolving idea. It transforms from an African institution into a living symbol of resistance, anchored in practices of recovery, self-affirmation, and insurgent memory. As Nascimento (2021:26) puts it, *quilombo* is "a form of reaction to cultural colonialism". It is also "a form of utopian desire", "a symbol for ethnic and political resistance", and "a powerful tool" to confront the logics of coloniality and raciality (Nascimento, 2021:25).

The *chorus aquilombado*, then, is a *quilombo* without heroism. In the terms of *Wayward Lives*, it is composed of those who are "able to bear the burden of what they have to bring". Because life itself cannot be taken for granted, they appear together and "gather in the circle and fall into the line where all particularity and distinction fade away" (Hartman, 2019:368). The chorus is not a spectacle but a plan — an ongoing strategy: to walk, to move, to escape, to transform, to insist, to create.

As Hartman recalls through etymology, the *chorus* — from the Greek *khoros* —was once a dance within an enclosure. The movement it names is collective, syncopated, and constrained, yet

nonetheless generative. The *chorus aquilombado* dances within enclosures not of its choosing, and yet, in that space, makes something else possible.

> The chorus is the vehicle for another kind of story, not of the great man or the tragic hero, but one in which all modalities play a part, where the headless group incites change, where mutual aid provides the resource for collective action, not leader and mass, where the untranslatable songs and seeming nonsense make good the promise of revolution (Hartman, 2019:369).

In this sense, the *chorus aquilombado* emerges as refusal, tumult, upheaval, open rebellion, and above all, as a gesture of collaboration and solidarity. It is part of a revolution in a minor key — one that does not rely on heroic figures from political parties or social movements to announce its arrival. When (and if) we are able to perceive and hear its frequency, there is no need to ask *who* the revolutionary subject is. The presence of the chorus demands a different stance: to pause, to listen, and to inhabit the ambiguity of insurgency rather than resolve it through familiar categories of agency.

The chorus was already taking shape in 1917, yet it remains unfinished — still resonating, still gaining form. It is sustained through a mode of political action that is subterranean, attuned to lower frequencies, without a fixed or legitimate place in the dominant political order. It draws its force from a radical political tradition forged within spaces of enclosure, where refusal is both a survival strategy and the seed of world-making.

The concept of politics at the heart of this vision aligns with Seyla Behhabib's (1986:13) notion of *politics as transfiguration*. Unlike the "politics of fulfillment", which centers on fully realizing the promises that contemporary society has left incomplete, *transfiguration* emphasizes nurturing a community grounded in shared needs and solidarity, thereby perpetuating forms of friendship and collective well-being. For Benhabib, transfiguration politics implies the emergence of qualitatively new needs, social relations, and modes of association that unlock utopian potentials within the old.

Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic*, reinterprets these two approaches—transfiguration and fulfillment—by proposing a distinct notion of politics rooted in a long-standing tradition of Black republicanism. This lineage includes, I would add, figures like Frederick Douglass and Luiz Gama[11]. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass defines African American politics as the collective dialogue, deliberation, and action of human beings, or "what some Black people do together" (Kateb, 2000; Gooding-Williams, 2009:9-10). This definition underscores the pivotal role of "communication and mutually supportive action" (Gooding-Williams, 2009:11), aligning closely with the reimagined concept of *politics as transfiguration* — a vision in which new forms of solidarity, debate, and reciprocity come to the fore, offering transformative possibilities for social life[12].

The *politics of fulfillment* is premised on the idea that a future society can realize the social and political aspirations left unmet by the present one. When invoked by the descendants of enslaved peoples, this politics demands that "bourgeois civil society" deliver on the promises embedded in its own rhetoric. It is an immanent critique of modernity — a counter-discourse often overlooked despite it being rooted in modernity's ideals. *Politics of transfiguration* emerges beyond the boundaries of bourgeois civil society and Western rationality. Paul Gilroy thus (1993) foregrounds the appearance of novel desires, social relations, and forms of association both within

[11] Regarding this republican lineage, I follow the interpretation developed by Lucas Petroni in his work in progress (Petroni, Working Paper).

[12] Drawing on Robert Gooding-Williams, I adopt Frederick Douglass's framework of politics as *collective debate, deliberation, and action* — as opposed to a politics defined by group leadership and rule, a model W.E.B. Du Bois articulates in *The Souls of Black Folk*. In this view, politics operates as a collaborative practice rather than an imposition enacted upon others. The former notion is grounded in Douglass's perspective, while the latter stems from Du Bois's post-Reconstruction argument that "black politics is primarily a form of governance" (Gooding-Williams, 2009:12). Gooding-Williams (2009) further suggests that Du Bois's concept of politics aligns with Max Weber's *Politics as a Vocation*, whereas the Douglass's approach bears resemblance to the ideas of Hannah Arendt and Sheldon Wolin. Like Wolin and Arendt, Douglass envisions plantation politics as a space of deliberation, debate, and joint endeavor—a practice undertaken collectively rather than imposed from above.

racial communities of interpretation and resistance, and in their fraught interactions with former oppressors.

In our context, the *politics of transfiguration* signifies the creation of a community shaped by solidarity, shared needs, and collective action—what we have characterized as the formation of a *chorus aquilombado*. Operating on a "lower frequency", this politics "is played, danced, and acted, as well as sung and sung about (…)" (Gilroy, 1993:37). It unfolds, in other words, through embodied practices of culture, joy, and resistance that elude the confines of formally recognized spaces.

Within this framework, actions that disrupt entrenched gender norms, the public sphere, and the racist-misogynistic contours of social life constitute direct challenges to the prevailing order. At the same time, by engaging in politics without a predefined locus or proper place, the framework enacts resistance through collaboration, reciprocity, friendship, and collective creativity. These practices foster mutual support and solidarity, pointing toward transfiguration rather than mere fulfillment.

Thus, mutual aid, collaboration, and reciprocity emerge as a shared mode of doing politics—an endeavor undertaken collectively rather than imposed through rules, norms, and institutions. Acting together means forging solidarities and alliances shaped by race and gender consciousness, assembling bodies into a *chorus* capable of radically reshaping our present racist and sexist polity. As a blueprint for what we might call a *wayward reconstruction*, the figures of Esther Brown and Natalina — brought forward through counter-narratives and *escrevivência* — do not seek to eradicate anomalies in existing public spheres; rather, they expose commitments that unsettle the core of what conventionally passes for democratic practice, public spheres, and political action (Gooding-Williams, 2009).

Here, I resonate with Hartman's (1997:61) proposition that *resistance and refusal* often arise in everyday practices deemed external to the "political proper". When agency is measured solely by the attributes of the unencumbered self, the rational citizen, or the autonomous subject, the myriad interventions and challenges posed by wayward lives are rendered invisible, silenced. Hartman reminds us that attending to these overlooked practices—the fugitive acts, the unsanctioned collaborations—reveals the capacity to act from spaces not recognized as legitimately political. Within this conceptual horizon, and in the quest for a radically transformed political sphere, we discover fertile ground on which a feminist–antiracist political theory can take root and flourish.

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