

Mobility, migrant mnemonics and memory citizenship: Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*

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Abstract

This essay, located at the intersection of memory studies and travel writing studies, examines a text in the genre of footsteps travel, Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007). As Hartman tries to retrace the routes slaves took when transported out of their villages in Ghana, she is performing acts of memory—and these acts are what the present essay studies. It first proposes that travel, movement and memory are intimately linked in Hartman's work. Later, it goes on to analyse memory itself as ethnic property and the problematic nature of Hartman's ethnic memory in order to argue a case for memory as multidirectional. It concludes by deploying Michael Rothberg and Yasmin Yildiz's idea of memory citizenship to read in Hartman's complicated attempts to situate herself within a particular memory of slavery.

If the past is another country, then I am its citizen. (Hartman 17)

No one had invited me. I was just another stranger, an academic from the States conducting research on slavery, which, in most people's eyes, made me about as indispensable as a heater in the tropics. (45)

Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007) is not, *contra* its title, about the Middle Passage, but rather about the places that served as the source-pool of slaves, specifically Ghana and more generally Africa. Hartman, a Professor of English at Columbia, is African American, and the author of work on subjection in African American writings.

Hartman, a little way into the narrative, declares 'dispossession was our history' (74). The statement in a sense captures her entire project, and sets the scene for the present essay. The problematic word in the declaration is 'our'. What or who constitutes this 'our'? What are its demographic parameters: Ghanaian, African, or African American? What is the shared cultural memory of slavery in Ghana and the USA? The 'our' here signals Hartman's aim, that of building a solidarity of memory between herself and Ghanaians, across space and time.

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Hartman's project of retrieving the memory of slavery from Ghana is directed at acquiring a citizenship alongside the historically dispossessed and the dispossessed of history. However, this citizenship, my essay argues, is not easy to come by. Memory-citizenship in slavery's traumatic history is exclusionary, just as slavery was made possible through the exclusion of particular ethnic groups and races from the category of 'citizens' and humans. Further, Hartman's problematic project of memory retrieval is complicated by the tension her mobility engenders, between her status as an African American of Ghanaian origins journeying out to Ghana *and* her awareness of the race-situation in the USA and other parts of the world. Mobility across spaces, times and differently scaled histories of the blacks (slavery in Ghana and racism in the USA) makes Hartman's a cosmopolitan and even global memory of atrocity and slavery in what is called 'multidirectional memory'. If the memory of slavery is the ethnic property of a particular group in Ghana, Hartman's project of acquiring a citizenship within this Ghanaian memory is woven into her consciousness of *other* similarly dispossessed groups, immigrant memories and racial contexts. All memory of slavery, Hartman discovers, thus aspires to the condition of multidirectionality and cosmopolitanism. *Lose Your Mother* therefore constantly seeks to negotiate between Ghanaian cultural memories—the ethnic property of the Ghanaians—and Hartman's own cosmopolitan mobility that, in turn, seeks an insertion into this and other memories. Her memory work, the essay demonstrates, is fraught with ironies due to the complicated nature of her own mobility. My essay focuses on these tensions of memory that permeate Hartman's text.

Hartman's narrative is in the genre of footsteps travel (travellers who follow, sometimes even centuries later, in the wake of predecessor travellers) where this journey is always in conjunction with an older journey available as memory. I argue that travel and memory are constantly intertwined in Hartman, with a palpable resonance of the Middle Passage in the individual and cultural memory she brings to the surface. Travel becomes a new form of memorializing for those who are entirely footsteps travellers. I also explore the question of memory as ethnic property in Hartman's narrative. Finally, I argue that Hartman's acts of memory are acts that seek a 'memory citizenship' in problematic and complicated ways.

Travel, Movement and Memory

Hartman presents herself as a courier of memories, where she ferries her memories— from the USA to Ghana, and hopes to reverse this within her memory-work when she acquires a first-hand experience of the popular memories in Ghana. She also ferries her expertise, as one who has researched slavery, and therefore as a cultural insider to slavery armed with discursive though not experiential knowledge of slavery, into Ghanaian spaces. This is travelling memory. Travelling memory is effected when couriers like Hartman ferry memories across spaces and borders, but also, in her case, when her well-researched and acquired (in the form of family stories) memories of earlier journeys drive her own in the footsteps genre of travel.

The very first incident narrated in the Prologue foregrounds the sustaining themes of the book, mobility and memory. Hartman writes that as soon as she disembarked from the bus at Elmina (Ghana), she heard herself being called 'Obruni'. The word means 'a stranger. A foreigner from across the sea'. Kids call her 'obruni' and Hartman is made intensely aware of herself right away: 'I imagined myself in their eyes: an alien ... I was the proverbial outsider' (3). The narrative opens with the conclusion of one segment of her travel, to Ghana from the USA. Hartman underscores the sense of displacement and movement when she writes: 'My too-fast gait best suited to navigating the streets of Manhattan, my unfashionable German walking shoes' (3). The Prologue itself is titled 'The Path of Strangers'. Her arrival, at the end of a journey, makes her a stranger to the place she disembarks at. She arrives as a stranger, even though, as she notes, she comes with the baggage of individual and cultural memory of the place her ancestors had left behind and were dislocated from. (Unrelatedly yet interestingly, she is also marked out by the sheer physical energy and style of her individual mobility.)

Yet her mobility itself was driven by a need to belong to an elsewhere. It was because she felt a stranger at home in the USA that she sets out on her travel, and ends up arriving, as noted above, as a stranger: 'weary of being stateless [...] want[ing] to belong somewhere' or 'at least [...] a convenient explanation of why [she] felt like a stranger' (4). She invents 'fictions of origins' for herself when growing up (5). This is the memory-work, albeit founded on myths and false memories, that inspire her mobility. What Hartman does here is to explain her travels as

a physical quest for origins and a quest into a past that was rooted in the shameful contexts of slavery. Two ‘conditions’ and contexts of travel must be noted right away: (i) there is Hartman’s travel to Ghana into her family’s and cultural past and (ii) that past itself is about travel, of the slaves out of Ghana at the hands of the slave traders. Thus Hartman constantly positions her own travel as an implicit reworking, repetition and refraction of an earlier, more horrific, travel. It is in travel that she needs to find her roots. And this is where Hartman makes her first major departure from the quest-for-origins story.

As Hartman makes clear her travel is not like the more celebrated one of Alex Haley, the author of the cult work *Roots*. Hartman writes:

unlike Alex Haley, who embraced the sprawling clans of the Juffure as his own, grafted his family into the community’s genealogy, and was feted as the lost son returned, I traveled to Ghana in search of the expendable and the defeated [...] I would seek the commoners, the unwilling and coerced migrants who created a culture in the hostile world of the Americas and who fashioned themselves again, making possibility out of dispossession. (7)

Hartman does not want her ‘roots’. She wants rather to ‘retrace the process by which lives were destroyed and slaves born’ (6), an ‘itinerary of destruction from the coast to the savannah’ (40). It is in the routes of the slaves rather than in the communities and families in Ghana that she would, she believes, find her own identity:

The routes traveled by strangers were as close to a mother country as I would become. Images of kin trampled underfoot and lost along the way, abandoned dwellings repossessed by the earth, and towns vanished from sight and banished from memory were all that I could ever hope to claim [...] the slave route [...] both an existent territory with objective coordinates and the figurative realm of an imagined past. (9)

As the narrative proceeds we see Hartman seeking out routes through which the slaves would have been forced to march, the dungeons where they were incarcerated, and the path to the ports from where they boarded the ships to the Americas for a life of slavery. Her roots are the slave routes. Her home is their mobility.

Hartman also notes another kind of travel, that of African Americans who went back to Africa, ‘cross[ing] the Atlantic in droves to do something momentous—to participate in an international movement for

freedom and democracy and to build a black nation' (36). But this is not the travel Hartman is interested in. These émigrés, writes Hartman, 'had faith that the breach of the Middle Passage could be mended and orphaned children returned to their rightful homes' (39). Here Hartman conflates memory with myth, and both enmeshed within travel. The myth of reconciliation and retrieval of origins ('rightful homes') works alongside memories of the slave-past, and the hope is of undoing an older journey through a new one, for a different purpose. It is almost as though this new journey—'the return to Africa'—retraces with a difference the older, more traumatic, journey. Hartman's trip to Ghana emerges from her memories of her family's travels and her recreation of this ancient and more horrific journey means that she is a courier of memories.

Astrid Erll (2011) has proposed that such a wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms and practices of memory constitutes a transcultural memory but one that is made possible through the *travels* of memory across spaces. That is, transcultural memory is a consequence of mobile, or travelling, memory. Hartman's narrative, as I shall now demonstrate, fits right into the category of such a 'travelling memory' that eventually leads to the making of a transcultural memory.

First, Hartman is a carrier of memory. She carries family, history, the researched materials on the slave trade, photographs, etc. She participates in the shared rituals of looking at family photographs, displays the inherited habitus of the slave descendant and has both explicit and implicit knowledge of slavery. She embodies in herself these memories, and transports them to Ghana.

Second, she also carries the memories in many media formats, several of which are placed strategically throughout her book as family photographs, facsimiles of historical records, but also oral traditions and stories that Hartman recounts. Travelling memories involve the use of multiple media formats, as Hartman demonstrates. It must be noted that Hartman's inventory of media and formats draw attention to the *materiality* of memory—a theme she will return to in a different way in her narrative, as we shall see.

Third, the content of these print and other media are shared, public narratives such as anti-abolition tracts, autobiographies and histories. Hartman's 'experience' of the past is mediated through the contents of the media she is using. (The term 'experience' is used advisedly, since

Hartman is only a footsteps traveller along the slave route.) Contents of cultural memory, Erll argues, cannot exist outside individual minds, and minds must actualize them. As we shall see, one way that Hartman does this is to somatise the memory.

Fourth, mnemonic practices are what Hartman seeks in Ghana. These practices are mainly memorials and the local rituals of recalling the dead. She finds that roads are named after heroic moments in Ghanaian history, but there are no rituals that deify the dead. As a footsteps traveller who has come prepared with a history of slavery in her head, Hartman now seeks concrete instantiations of the past she ‘knows’ is there. Here the footsteps traveller approximates to the identity of the neo-colonial traveller who, in Mary Louise Pratt’s reading, ‘does not claim the authority to represent, but only to express recognition of what he has learnt to know is there’ (2008: 228). The re-cognition of signs of slavery is what Hartman the footsteps traveller seeks: she knows the villages do carry memories of their dead ancestors, but this is not something that they are willing to share with Hartman.

Finally, mnemonic forms—symbols, icons—that enable repetition across contexts constitute an important aspect of travelling memory. Hartman hopes to track these icons across the landscape but ends up with Elmina castle with its dirt on the dungeon floor, cowrie shells (which played an important role in the barter/trade of slaves) but no icons. What icons there are, are meant to glorify particular myths of local/native heroism rather than defeat.

But what Hartman documents in her work is the repression of individual and cultural memory. In Hartman’s case, she travels back to Ghana with the memories of the slave trade along the route of the slave trade (but perhaps she flew) to the place where all memories (supposedly) began. In this place—Accra and its suburbs—memories have a different role to play.

What Hartman perceives in Ghana is ‘the apparition of slaves and sovereigns hover[ing] above the town’ (58)—but this is a perception that nobody else seems to share. As she traverses the city of Accra she discovers the grand and grandiose names of the streets and roads with names like ‘African Liberation Square’. Quickly Hartman discovers the irony of these names: ‘not one taxi driver in Accra could find his way to African Liberation Square, but almost all knew the location of the US

Information Service' (24). What Hartman then does is to personalize the geography of the city. She writes:

I began to map the city in my own terms [...] my signposts were Not Independence Lane and Obruni Road and Beggar's Corner and Shitty Lane. In a month I had become indifferent to the elusive glory of the age of independence as everyone else in Accra. (24)

She admits that this view of Ghana and Accra obliterates the utopian visions and ideals of the independence struggle but she is also emphatic that her traversal of the streets of Accra and her participation in the slave past cannot imply a participation in the utopianism of certain memory-cultures.

With this Hartman disconnects herself from another kind of memory culture that is in evidence in Accra, namely, the glorification and mythification of particular moments in Ghanaian history. Hartman seeks only a particular memory culture, but one that, as she discovers, Ghana does not want to keep or practice. When she writes 'except for the castle, no visible signs of slavery remained' (49), Hartman seems to suggest that Ghana should have had, if not commemorations, at least memorials to slavery and its history. She demands a particular trajectory of racial-cultural memory but finds that she cannot, by virtue of the direction of her own mobility (an African American returning to Ghana), determine it. She demands an archive, but this archive by necessity is local, rooted and ethnically bounded.

Memory as Ethnic Property

'Africans prefer to forget slavery'
—teacher in *Lose Your Mother* (190)

Michael Rothberg and Yasmin Yildiz propose that memory has often functioned as 'ethnic property'. If that is the case then variants of ethnicity emerge in the ways in which memories are retained, reinvented and forgotten. Hartman discovers, I propose, that memories have travelled out of Africa into the Americas with the slaves. The descendants there (in the USA) hold on to the precious cargo of these horrific memories of dispossession, while the Africans themselves wish

to forget the past. In a sense, then, Hartman's footsteps travel not only seeks to recreate the paths of the former slaves, it aims at calling the attention of the Africans to their own past. She needs to be, in other words, a reminder to the Africans of their own slave pasts. Hartman is at once only a footsteps traveller and a fellow-journey man to the Africans should they seek to retrace their historical paths. We see here a split between the function of a footsteps traveller and a fellow-journey man in Hartman's text, but one which is disallowed by the Africans because they do not wish to traverse their ancient paths with her.

Her complaint, reflected in the epigraph to this section, seems to suggest that while African Americans like herself 'haven't forgotten [their] dispossession' (87), the Africans do not wish to go down that path. Hartman is drawing a link between ethnicity and memory here, even if that memory is disavowed. Memory as ethnic property is the memory of travel but also the travels of memory between generations, and it is these travelling memories that determine their ethnicity and their sense of home.

Hartman declares that she is interested in the 'popular memory of slavery' (27). There are two ironies of memory-work in Hartman's text, both connected with this claim. The first irony occurs when she discovers that the descendants of slaves—and those who sold their fellow tribesmen and women, but also members of other tribes, into slavery—do not wish to retain this memory themselves. The entire 'retracing' of paths and retrieval of memories that Hartman embarks upon in the course of her footsteps travels is thwarted because the popular in Ghana is constituted by a deliberate cultural amnesia rather than a cultural memory (unless one argues that amnesia is also a form, albeit negative, of memorializing). The second ironic moment is when Hartman admits that African Americans retain their cultural memories of slavery. Hartman writes:

The transience of the slave's existence still leaves its traces in how black people imagine home as well as how we speak of it. We may have forgotten our country, but we haven't forgotten our dispossession. It's why we never tire of dreaming of a place that we can call home, a place better than here, wherever here might be. It's why one hundred square blocks of Los Angeles can be destroyed in one evening. We stay there, but we don't live there. (87)

Home and its loss for Hartman has ethnic memory written into it, as we can see here, almost like a chronotope where space-time fuse in the representation and the landscape consists of points in geography across which plots, histories, stories, events and people *move*. Hartman is making the linkage between place and racial memory here, and underscores the persistent denial of home: Africans historically displaced from Africa ('our dispossession') by virtue of a forced mobility, and the loss of home in Los Angeles in the race riots. Places are made through racial memory, suggests Hartman.

Cultural memories of slavery constitute the very ethnicity of African Americans today, and inform their sense of not-belonging and of ghettoization. But what is the popular memory of slavery that Hartman seeks in Ghana? The popular memory of slavery is one that the Ghanaians try to erase and the African Americans seek to retain, treasure, reinvent, and occasionally take out and air. The 'transience' of the slave's existence that Hartman speaks of is one that the Ghanaians—the theoretical resource pool for memories—do *not* acknowledge. As a chief tells her, 'it is still difficult for us to speak of slavery. One cannot point a finger and say he or she is a slave. It is prohibited to do so' (193). Cultural memories of certain kinds do not have the language for articulation. Therefore it is the denial of cultural memory that constitutes the ethnic property of Ghanaians. The Ghanians suggest that they, and maybe they alone, have the right *not* to remember. (This also does away with the problematic issue, one raised since the Holocaust, of authentic and inauthentic memory.)

Hartman argues that this denial of history extended back into the seventeenth century when 'it prevented the enslaved from speaking of a life before servitude and it abolished their ancestry' (193). Where Hartman seeks in her travel an 'antidote to oblivion' (193) the Africans seek the routes to oblivion.

There is yet another dimension to the denial of cultural memory as ethnic property that Hartman discovers. Exploring the nature of the slave trade, she discovers that the Ghanaians had sold their own countrymen and women into slavery. One man defends their actions from over a century ago by saying 'defensively': 'we were the middlemen, but others introduced us to the trade', before adding: 'those who sold the slaves are dead or have gone away [...] those who remain here, are the descendants of slaves' (188). Hartman notes how the ruling classes conquered the

area and ‘subjugated the original inhabitants, who first became their slaves and then their subjects’ (189). She discovers ‘a raiding empire fattened by the slave trade’ (190) where the ‘royalists and elites, like their European counterparts, envisioned the stateless and the sovereignless as suited for slavery’ (190). Suddenly acts of ethnic memory retrieval *today* realign the tribes of the *past*, of those who were sold into slavery and those who did the selling. What Hartman discovers is the complicated nature of ethnic memory. Nobody she meets wishes to revisit the past because the past is full of sordid alliances across ruling elites, the Europeans and the slave traders, and intensely divisive for today’s Ghana.

This ethnic memory that Hartman seeks to retrieve is personally available to her in the form of family records and photographs, as I have noted earlier. When she moves to Ghana she seeks similar materials of entire communities and tribes of people sold into slavery. It must be noted that as Hartman moves across Ghana in search of ethnic memories she discovers that there is a great silence over this memorialization. Puzzled and frequently frustrated by this discursive veiling of ethnic memories (a process further complicated by the discursive operation of naming and renaming of places in Ghana, as seen above), Hartman then turns to material artifacts.

Hartman begins to combine material artifacts with documentary history. This fits in with Susannah Radstone’s claim that ‘even when (and if) memory travels, it is only ever instantiated locally, in a specific place and at a particular time’ (2011: 117). In Hartman the instantiation takes very material forms.

First, I look at the materiality of memory. Hartman visits the dungeons whose floors are now covered with human waste solidified over the centuries—and never been cleaned: ‘eighteen inches of dirt and waste’ which she feels guilty walking over. This is a medium through which memories have sedimented over generations, and must be treated as technologies of memory. (Astrif Erll notes that memory is more than remembrance and involves bodily aspects such as habitus, (2011: 14).) But Hartman writes:

I refused this knowledge. I blocked it out and proceeded across the dungeon as if the floor were just that and not the remnants of slaves pressed further into oblivion by the soles of my shoes. I came to this fort searching for ancestors, but in truth only base matter awaited me. (115)

The materiality of memory troubles Hartman, who is more used to dealing with texts. Indeed she confesses as much:

I had entered the dungeon intending to do all the fine things stated in the marble plaque posted at the entrance: commemorate the dead, remember the anguish of the ancestors, and prevent such crimes against humanity from ever happening again. They were the kind of words encountered at sites of atrocity throughout the world, and, in all likelihood, men would continue to produce the occasions for such words. They were confident words, which promised justice and espoused faith in humanity.... (115-16)

She strives to 'hear the groans and cries that once echoed in the dungeon, but the space was mute' (116). Instead, what she experiences is a visceral reaction to the memories stored in the dungeons: 'my chest grew congested and my palms started sweating and I got light-headed. My skin became tight and prickly, as if there was too little of it and too much of everything else. The hollow inside my chest expanded. I could feel my torso swell...' (118). The castle's dungeons are the space of great physical suffering. Hartman's account of the space and her own physical discomfort there suggests a materiality of memory that somehow seeks to somatize the past, to record viscerally in a *present* body, the memories of a suffering from long ago. This somatization is an attempt to site, to locate the present, by a citation and instantiation of the past. It is also a crucial way of carrying the memory onward, for the contents of cultural memory exist within the individual mind, as noted earlier.

Second, in order to site the present Hartman cites the past in a clear case of what Mary Louise Pratt terms '*antecedent literarios*', or prior literary productions. In this act of citing *antecedent literarios*, the contemporary traveller 'express[es] recognition of what he has learnt to know is there' (2008: 228). This is precisely what Hartman does when she presents herself as one who knows the history of slavery ingrained in the very stones and landscape of Ghana. 'I had tried, desperately, to wrench tragedy from the landscape and had failed', writes Hartman (69). In several chapters Hartman combines a semi-archaeological mnemonics with documentary history. She traces family history, examines the material evidence in castles and dungeons (which constitute monuments to cultural memory), reads the tracts on abolition and accounts of slaves like Kwabena and Frederick Douglass (103), and of the slave girl tortured to death on a ship, and who became the subject of William Wilberforce's anti-slavery campaign. These texts constitute her

antecedent literarios, where she demonstrates knowledge of the slave trade, and a knowledge which she *thinks* qualifies her to perform acts of memory for the slaves. It is this *antecedent literarios* that positions the migrant as one with specific memories—memories that are not part of the mnemonic landscape of Ghana, but constitute a multidirectional memory where the contents consist of *shared* images and narratives. Hartman, who hopes for a specific trajectory of memories (as noted earlier) brings *these* memories into her study of Ghanaian culture today.

Multidirectional memory

It is her footsteps travel that constructs Hartman as a legitimate migrant—or so she thinks—to the archives of suffering. Her awareness of black dispossession, her memories of her own family's slave history, and her knowledge of the African American, all built on a discursive knowledge, compel her to seek an identity with Africans from Ghana. Approaching the cultural memory of slavery from an entirely different direction, as an African American whose personal history originates in Ghana (and not as a tourist of suffering-porn), she believes she is entitled to access this memory and thus build solidarities with those whose own ancestors had walked the path to the slave ships.

Migrant archives of memory, argue Rothberg and Yildiz, are multidirectional, where the migrants engage with the past and with a history and memory of which they are ostensibly not a part of. The archive of trauma is read from different vantage points, especially by those who are migrants to that archive.

In *Lose Your Mother* Hartman's lineage is complicated. Her family records reveal slave ancestors originating in Ghana and the nearby regions. Her project for Ghana is however more than a tracing of her individual lineage, as we have noted. ('Neither blood nor belonging accounted for my presence in Ghana. There were no survivors of my lineage or far-flung relatives of whom I had come in search', 7.) She wishes to trace the several routes that thousands of slaves, most anonymous and unrecorded, took out of Ghana.

Hartman makes two moves here. First, she locates slaves *as* strangers. Hartman writes:

The most universal definition of the slave is a stranger [...] Contrary to popular belief Africans did not sell their brothers and sisters into slavery. They sold

strangers: those outside the web of kin and clan relationships, non-members of the polity, foreigners and barbarians [...] lawbreakers... (5).

Here Hartman redefines the very nature of slavery as a custom where those outside the pale were designated as potential slaves and sold. This constitutes a re-reading of the entire archive of slavery as a history of making-foreigners.

Second, as a late-comer to the history of slavery and as a migrant to the archives of pain, Hartman categorizes herself as a stranger: 'I was born in another country, where I also felt like an alien and which in part determined why I had come to Ghana' (4). In order to 'belong', she says, she wished to enter the past of slavery:

I wanted to engage the past [...] If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery [...] I, too, am the afterlife of slavery.

(6)

This dual move constitutes the very structure of memorializing in Hartman's footsteps travel. Slaves were sold as strangers and left little record of their routes and roots. Hartman is a stranger to this history and hence wishes to retrace it for herself. The 'afterlife' Hartman mentions is a 'ghosting' of the slave archive.

Hartman is a migrant to Ghanaian history and its archives, and this she admits very early: 'If I had hoped to skirt the sense of being a stranger in the world by coming to Ghana, then disappointment awaited me' (17). Hartman's project is an instance of multidirectional memory where migrants to the memory project also contribute to and participate in it.

I propose that migrant memories of the kind Hartman is exploring here demands a 'biographical pact' (adapting it from Philip Lejeune's theory of an 'autobiographical pact').¹ This biographical pact, a key

¹ In Lejeune's theory the autobiographical narrative signs a referential pact, and it relies on at least two presuppositions: 1) the permanence of an origin, of the truth of a name, and 2) the belief in a history of the signatory's formation, defined as *ipseity*, the identification of the self with the self, all the more affirmed because it is repeated, uncovered, and recovered through a series of

component of memory work, is a memorial. The narrator of *Lose Your Mother* signs a pact to be the constant reminder and remainder that refers to a referent, slavery. It presents the observer-Hartman as a migrant to the archives of memory, but one who constantly participates in the fidelity project where slaves are remembered and memorialized. It posits the signatory of *Lose Your Mother* as an unchanging (but not un-moved) observing self as the monitor to the irrecoverable Other, but an Other to whom fidelity is owed.

The biographical pact of course has a tragic irony underwriting it because there are no biographies to be obtained. In a particularly poignant passage which reveals this pact Hartman writes:

My graduate training hadn't prepared me to tell the stories of those who had left no record of their lives and whose biography consisted of the terrible things said about them or done to them [...] how does one write a story about an encounter with nothing? [...] In reading the annual reports of trading companies and the letters that travelled from London to Amsterdam to the trade outposts on the African coast, I searched for the traces of the destroyed. In every line item, I saw a grave [...] To read the archive is to enter a mortuary... (17)

So how does the migrant participate in a memory project when there are no readable archives? And, how does the migrant participate in a memory project when the direct recipients of this memory—as we can think of the Ghanaians in Ghana—only wish for a tangential connection to this project?

Hartman finds that her biographical pact is with other African Americans who have 'returned' to Ghana. Referred to as the 'tribe of the Middle Passage'—descendants of Middle Passage survivors (103)—the African Americans have an interesting location in Ghana. Hartman describes it thus:

They possessed no kin, no clan, or a village home, all of the essential elements that defined belonging in the eyes of Ghanaians. The arrival of African Americans in Elmina could hardly be called a homecoming. Rather it was a continuation of a long local tradition of renting land to foreigners [...] No one envisioned [them] [...] as errant children who had returned or as chickens come home to roost. No one rejoiced that they were back [...] African Americans were tenants rather than sons and daughters. (104)

events. The autobiographical pact assumes the formal obligation to remain in one's place in the narrative capture of what is unique to the author's self.

Curiously, everybody in Ghana, Hartman says, 'recognize[d] me as the daughter of slaves' (154), although none of them wants to talk about slavery: 'most refused to follow me down this dangerous path and responded with studied indifference to all my talk of slavery' (154). And here lies the catch:

Despite the dictates of law and masters, which prohibited the discussion of a person's origins, everyone remembered the stranger in the village, everyone recalled who had been a slave and with a discerning glance just as easily identified their descendants. (155)

What Hartman is pointing to is the first contradiction in the memory of slave pasts: that there is a prohibition in Ghana, among actual descendants of slaves and slave traders, on citing from memory, not against memory itself. Approaching it as a footsteps traveller armed with enough discursive knowledge of the slave past, Hartman discovers that slave memory lies as a subtext to conversations, even as it is imprinted materially on dungeon floors and material artifacts (as we have already seen).

As a migrant to the archive she herself is free to cite from (textual) memories, but this is precisely what disqualifies her in the eyes of the Ghanaians (who perhaps see themselves as experiential insiders to the archive of memories) from entering the archive *they* built and shared. They recognize the archive exists. They also recognize that she is aware of the material memories of their slave past, but they would stand as the only legitimate archons to that archive whereas Hartman stays a stranger, outside of the archive. This is the second contradiction in the memory of slavery. The footsteps traveller arrives to revivify the memories of slavery (although, again ironically, Hartman admits that 'to read the archive is to enter a mortuary'), but ends up a weary re-tracer of footsteps that are vaguely imprinted in Ghana. Having come alone as a migrant, she had hoped to find people who would lead her through the archive. Yet, towards the end, she remains a lone stranger. The footsteps travel does not result in company when walking historical paths.²

² Yet, Hartman discovers, there is a way in which slave history is cited in Ghana: in the form of zombie or voodoo stories. There are accounts where slaves, through magic, have been transformed into automatons (155). The slaves themselves, of course, had to develop amnesia: 'to forget their origins and

Conclusion: Memory Citizenship

Hartman's narrative must be treated as one that simultaneously performs what I have called memory-work, of her own individual memory as well as a cultural memory. Cultural memory, as Marita Sturken defines it, is a

Field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history [...] a field of contested meanings in which [people] interact with cultural elements to produce concepts of the nation, particularly in events of trauma, where both the structures and the fractures of a culture are exposed. (1997: 1-3)

In *Lose Your Mother* memory-work is the imbrication, through mobility, of personal history with a cultural memory archive.

Hartman hopes to locate in the archive of suffering her (a) individual traumatic history, (b) memories of a family of slaves, and (c) the history of dispossession within an African context of similar memories. She seeks not identity but *identification*, a conscious and agential act of locating herself in a particular history and being recognized (i.e., identified) for her location within this history. With this she hopes to also attain/obtain a citizenship of sorts. Hartman's biographical pact with the history of every slave who left Ghana is messily merged with the autobiographical pact where she is keen on presenting herself as a more or less unchanging observer of her own life. It is her individual memory that she hopes to retro-fit into a cultural memory. This move, I have proposed, is what is denied her. Her attempts at a memory citizenship fail because Ghana does not wish to carry around a cultural memory of slavery. More importantly, as she comes to the archive as a migrant, she also travels to it with an entirely different identity: as a cosmopolitan African. Thus, her acts of memory citizenship with the Ghanaian archive of slavery do not merely *not* relocate her personal memory into the

accept their slave status' (156). But there is of course the commercialization of the past with tourist operations in the African continent. 'Every town or village,' writes Hartman, 'had an atrocity to promote—a mass grave, an auction block, a slave river, a massacre' (163). Hartman sees the state-sponsored attempts to remember slavery as a means of 'silencing the past' and 'curb[ing] all discussion of African slavery and its entailments' (164). She criticizes the present generations for 'want[ing] a past of which they could proud of [...] They preferred to overlook the fact that the Asantehene (king of Asante) had helped to shove their ancestors on slave ships' (164). In a sense, then, Hartman is proposing a particular responsibility to memory here.

Ghanaian one; it ends up cosmopolitanizing even the African archive. To this I shall now turn.

The set of questions (drawing from Hartman's statement, 'dispossession was our history', 74) that I began with—what constitutes this 'our'? What are its demographic parameters? What is the shared cultural memory of slavery in Ghana?—constitute the attempted imbrication of the personal with the communitarian. When Mary Ellen, Hartman's friend in Accra calls herself black American rather than African American Hartman asks: 'what connection had endured after four centuries of dispossession?' (29). The burden of dispossession, however, is different for Mary Ellen and Hartman. Mary Ellen wishes to stop carrying around the burden any more, while Hartman wishes to find her citizenship precisely in this burden. Where Mary Ellen is less interested in decoding the archive of slavery, Hartman believes that resurrecting the archive for herself by performing a kind of memory work will give her a location in the past which, as she has already declared, is a 'foreign country' of which she is a citizen.

In the US, Hartman says, the "legacy of slavery" is a way of saying that we had been treated badly for a very long time and that the nation owes us' (165). But Hartman wishes to expand the issue of slavery to beyond the blacks in America: she wishes the state to 'acknowledge that slavery was a crime against humanity' (166). This complicates the kind of memory and identification that Hartman seeks. By proposing that slavery be seen as a crime against *humanity*, whatever be the ethnic or racial identity of the victims, she is rewriting the history of slavery as a *global* history of atrocity. She states this more or less explicitly when she writes: 'my future was entangled with it [Africa], just as it was entangled with every other place on the globe where people were struggling to live and hoping to thrive' (233). (This is not substantially different from Frantz Fanon's famous and controversial declaration: 'Every time a man has contributed to the victory of the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellows, I have felt solidarity with his act', (2008: 176).)

What we have here is a cosmopolitanization of atrocity memory. This is another instance of multidirectional memory where the ethnic properties of different groups contribute to a global history of atrocity and trauma even though Hartman is simultaneously trying to find *local* memory projects in Ghana into which she can fit her own personal one.

When she retreads historical paths of slavery in Ghana she cannot seem to ignore global trajectories of slavery either. Her footsteps travel in Ghana is, in effect, messy because the map she carries on this travel is a global map of suffering and slavery. That is, the cosmopolitanization complicates her avowed attempt to recall *black* slave history in Ghana, a history into which she seeks insertion and with which she claims identification. Hartman, soon after making the pronouncement about history ('dispossession was our history') writes:

The solidarity I felt with other black people depended largely on this history, whereas in Ghana their identity as Ghanaians and as Africans depended on silencing a past in which elites sold commoners and southerners viewed northerners as disposable people and alienable goods. (74)

This solidarity she hopes to achieve through the sharing of history is a remembering. By 'Re-remembering', I want to suggest at once 'recall' but also the relocation of *members* and tribes within this history. 'Re-remembering' is an instantiation of memory that, as Susannah Radstone suggests, is localized and rooted in the bodies of individuals and tribes. A re-remembering is also, as Hartman discovers, a dismembering, an act of traumatic recall that she imposes on Africans who (i) do not wish to remember their slave pasts (ii) or, if they do, do not wish to share it with her.³

This is because memory in Africa, Hartman discovers, is divisive. It brings to the surface not a mere history of dispossession but a history of mutual exploitation, suspicion and treachery. Hartman therefore is doing two things: (i) she assumes that her being black enables her to tap into a Ghanaian history of dispossession, (ii) she assumes that there is no fracture between memories, and that memory cultures of slavery are shared. (She does speak of common myths—about Africa as 'home'—that sustains many African Americans in her chapter titled appropriately 'Afrotopia'.) 'It finally dawned on me,' writes Hartman,

that those who stayed behind told *different* stories than the children of captives dragged across the sea. Theirs wasn't a memory of loss of captivity, but of survival

³ To be fair to Hartman, she does speculate as to the nature of the Africa she and the other African Americans are seeking: 'was it the Africa of royals and great states or the Africa of disposable commoners? Which Africa was it that we claimed? There was no one Africa. There never had been' (30).

and good fortune [...] They had fashioned a narrative of liberation in which the glory of the past was the entry into a redeemed future. (232, emphasis added)

Many of the tribes wrote a 'story of slavery [that] was a narrative of victory a tale of resistance and overcoming' (233). The history here 'was a tale of fugitives and warriors, not of masters and slaves' (233).

The retrieval of a memory to which they are not direct descendants constitutes the migrant's act of 'memory citizenship'. Memory citizenship, as Rothberg and Yidliz define it, are performances of memory that are also acts of citizenship. These acts of citizenship are beyond the norms of citizenship and regardless of formal citizenship status. They define new ways of belonging. Hartman seeks to perform her citizenship in the country of slavery through acts of memory. The tension in the work is the parergons of her acts of memory: the frames in which she thinks she must perform these acts are erased, or blurred so that she is unaware of her exact citizenship status when she attempts to be less a stranger and to belong through acts of memory. These are essentially acts of memorialization and of solidarity she discovers to her horror that these don't matter anymore, if they ever did. So Hartman writes:

In Ghana, slavery wasn't a rallying cry against the crimes of the West or the evils of white men; to the contrary, it shattered any illusions of a unanimity of sentiment in the black world and exposed the fragility and precariousness of the grand collective *we* that had yet to be actualized. (75, emphasis in original)

Migrants are told to stay away from certain memories, and then attacked for being indifferent to those memories. When Hartman seeks memories of slavery, she is admonished. The Ghanaians also see her as a 'privileged American [...] required to perform regular acts of penance' (56). What to her are acts of memory in honour of the slaves, the Ghanaians see as penance!

Here Hartman also posits two kinds of re-membering and acts of memory. In the first there are the African Americans who wish to return to Ghana (or Africa) because they believe in the myths of Africa as home and returning they could 'break the chains of slavery'. Hartman, who represents a different type of returning migrant, does so 'doubting that I would ever be free of them' (41). Hartman seeks out signs of mourning, of memorialization of slavery: 'I would have preferred mourners with

disheartened faces and bowed heads and the pallor of sadness coloring the town' (50). But she does not find these signs of mourning.

We can as early as this moment discern that memory citizenship is itself schismatic. The returning myth-driven African Americans who enact national and racial identities that erase slavery from their histories and instead rehearse the glory of past Africas *versus* the re-membering of Hartman who clearly wishes to retrieve the slave past and recall the dead, to locate its members—to 'redeem the enslaved' (54)—among the bone-strewn archives. Slave families in Africa remember things differently, while footsteps travellers and migrants to the archives are excluded from the memories. The exclusion is at least partly because cosmopolitanization is *not* what is sought by Ghanaians here. Hartman remains a cosmopolitan whose memories and concerns are more global than local, more transnational than tribal or regional.

This means—and this is my thesis—memory citizenship is as exclusionary as substantive citizenship when attempted years after the historical fact of trauma. For Hartman who seeks belonging in terms of re-membering the past there is no citizenship because citizenship demands validation from a collective that is outside one's self. Citizenship is less about identity than about identification, and identification presupposes an external source or vantage point from which this identification is effected. Hartman in her travelogue has an identity—African American, *obruni*, slave descendent—but what she seeks is identification with the disempowered and the disenfranchised, and it is this that she never acquires. Identification also implies a certain *agency*, where one seeks out identification and affiliation (in this case of Hartman's with the other descendants of slave in Ghana). Hartman's memory work is an act of agency through which she hopes to establish the identification, but which does not obtain for her the affiliation she seeks.

In this case Ghana's historical record serves only as a façade in whose presence Hartman's re-membering is performed. It is an archive whose archons have abdicated, and which Hartman hopes she could be the archon of. As a migrant to the memory of slavery, she is given access to the archive, such as it is, but never acquires the power or authority of the archon. The archive defeats her, and acts of memory do not facilitate a citizenship.

It is therefore particularly interesting to see that Hartman ends not with memory but with a dream:

The legacy that I chose to claim was articulated in the ongoing struggle to escape, stand down, and defeat slavery in all of its myriad forms. It was the fugitive's legacy [...] It wasn't the dream of a White House, even if it was in Harlem, but of a free territory. It was a dream of autonomy rather than nationhood. It was a dream of an elsewhere, with all its promises and dangers, where the stateless might, at last, thrive. (234)

Hartman's mnemonic narrative ends on a note of irony, where knowledge from memory is not possible any more. But this does not mean that her memory citizenship is denied totally. Rather, we need to see memory citizenship as constituted within her shift toward a globalization and cosmopolitanization of atrocity memory ('autonomy rather than nationhood' as she puts it in the above quote), of moving beyond a history of slavery. Her 'mnemonic itineraries' as Astrid Erll calls them (2011: 14) take her to Ghana, but do not end there. It is in the perpetual, globalized and transcultural nature of mnemonic practices that Hartman discovers a citizenship.

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