

A Womanist Excavation of Black Spirituality Trapped in the Dungeons: In Memory of Katie Geneva Cannon¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper excavates black spirituality from the dangerous memory of black African women concealed in the dungeons below a Dutch Reformed Church in the Elmina Castle in Ghana. Dangerous memory is the irruption of liberating praxis that refuses to be dis-membered, a spirit of re-membering bodies of women to participate in the comprehensive historical project of black humanity. Concealed in the dungeons below a Dutch Reformed Church in Elmina Castle and erased through the Marikana massacre, black women's bodies continue to be trapped in the pervasive dungeons of democratic South Africa post 1994. The use of the word dungeon in this paper is both metaphorical and historical, to encapsulate the history of the commodification of black women's lives and their dispensability surprisingly even in the liberation history and struggles of black people. From a womanist perspective, this paper will argue that in the effort to excavate these dis-membered bodies from these dungeons, and for liberating spirituality from androcentric vessels of Eurocentric religiosity and spirituality of the West, women's bodies are epistemological sources. Faith that is central to African women plays a paradoxical role as it is the same faith that is core in the trappings of women's lives in Africa by justifying the dungeoning of black bodies. For black liberation to become reality the contextual dungeons of women's lives must occupy the top while the dungeoning church must be relegated below. This paper will excavate black spirituality from the memory of dungeoned bodies of black women, as a critique of the ideological frames that have shaped the liberation narrative that is indisputably patriarchal

Introduction

Black spirituality has, for many decades, and to some extent even today, been a contested category. To even speak about black spirituality is what Rothney Tshaka would call, a marrying of two notions that have for years been considered foreign

¹ This paper is a combination of thoughts developed from my Doctoral thesis developed and inspired by the Second Biennial Political Theology Network Conference at Union, and reflections on the contribution of one of the proponents of womanist theology Katie Geneva Cannon.