**Extracts from Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: a journey along the Atlantic slave route* (2007, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, pp. 119–121)**

It was hard to imagine a thousand or more men and boys imprisoned in the male dungeon or to grasp that of this company more than 150 were likely to die here. Among the dead might be ten men offered as tribute to a king, two brothers stolen from a garden, four young men captured while playing an arm’s reach from home, five debtors, forty whose village was attacked, three adulterers, twenty-five defeated soldiers, two teenagers kidnapped by neighbours, thirty farmers seized by mercenaries, a nephew pawned by an uncle but never redeemed, a father and son accused of witchcraft, a thief who had stolen a pig, a debt-ridden weaver and three gamblers.

Most had arrived at the castle in small lots conveyed by African brokers. Northerners comprised the majority of slaves crammed into the dungeon and shipped from the castle to the Americas. The coffles travelled hundreds of miles before arriving on the coast, and the bodies of the enslaved charted the arduous journey. Traders easily identified them by their bloated stomachs, wounds, and ulcers. Bruises covered their arms and legs, which had been cut and pricked on branches and thorns in narrow forest paths that admitted only one person at a time. Sunken cheeks and distended bellies were the clear signs of scant food and little water. Necks, wrists and ankles were abraded by the fetters that connected one coffle to the other.

Once inside the gates of the fort, the women and men were separated and marched to their respective prisons. Upon being delivered to the dungeon, irons were attached to their feet and necks, replacing the shackles and ropes and heavy logs used by African traders. Depending on the arrival and departure of ships, captives were confined in this chamber for a few weeks or as long as three or four months. The number of prisoners fluctuated with the trade. Sometimes the rooms were packed with as many as fifteen hundred men and boys, and when trade lagged, a hundred or fewer occupied the dungeon. Each slave was confined to his own place and prevented from moving about in the dungeon.

The slaves slept on bare floors. Excrement and food debris accumulated on the floor and soiled their limbs. Even when the captives were washed in the sea twice a day, the stench of the dungeon was unbearable.

To reduce the rate of death the surgeon at the castle recommended constructing a platform eighteen inches high in the dungeon for the slaves to rest on during the night, lining the bottoms and sides of the dungeon with boards half an inch thick to protect the slaves from the damp walls, reducing the stench by smoking and cleaning the quarters with citrus and green herbs, and placing tubs in the dungeon so the captives might ‘ease themselves at night’, rather than steep in their own waste. None of these representations was ever implemented.

The townspeople would have grown accustomed to the stench. Watching the canoes ferry the slaves offshore, some might have wondered why none who boarded those ships was ever seen again, and the curious might have speculated about what happened to them in the countries across the water. No doubt there were those who preferred not to think about them at all.

No one imprisoned in the dungeon of Cape Coast Castle had ever described it. There was no record left behind by the captives who entered and exited the underground. Not a single account. All the journals, reports, letters and trade documents belonged to merchants and company men… Was the scene too horrible to describe or too painful or both? Or was forgetting the price exacted by survival?