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SANTA CRUZ

**AT THE EDGE OF RUIN:
SEEING ART UNDER PERPETUAL CONFLICT**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

VISUAL STUDIES
with an emphasis in FEMINIST STUDIES

by

Rachel Nelson

December 2016

The Dissertation of Rachel Nelson is approved:

Professor Jennifer Gonzalez, Chair

Professor Elisabeth Cameron

Professor T.J. Demos

Associate Professor Anjali Arondekar

Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures iv

Abstract vii

Acknowledgments ix

CHAPTERS

Introduction: On the Plateau | 1

1. Dreaming Away Palestine: On Occupation and Interpretation in Emily Jacir's Art | 29

2. History, Immigration, and France's Present Tenses: Kader Attia's *Repair: 5 Acts* | 77

3. Between Sight and Insight: Race, Criminality, and the U.S. Prison Industrial Complex in the Photographic Practice of Chandra McCormick and Keith Calhoun | 131

4. Ecological Afterlives: Sammy Baloji and the Colonial Planning of the Contemporary Climate in the DRC | 174

Conclusion: One Last Look | 223

BIBLIOGRAPHY 229

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Emily Jacir. *Where We Come From* (2001- 2003).
- Figure 2: Emily Jacir. *Where We Come From* (2001-2003) detail (Mahmoud).
- Figure 3: Emily Jacir. *Where We Come From* (2001-2003) detail (Sonia).
- Figure 4: Emily Jacir. *Sexy Semite* (2000-2002) detail.
- Figure 5: Emily Jacir. *Sexy Semite* (2000-2002) detail.
- Figure 6: Emily Jacir. *Sexy Semite* (2000-2002).
- Figure 7: Emily Jacir. *Sexy Semite* (2000-2002).
- Figure 8: Emily Jacir. *ex libris* (2010-12).
- Figure 9: Emily Jacir. *ex libris* (2010-12) detail.
- Figure 10: Emily Jacir. *ex libris* (2010-12) detail.
- Figure 11: Emily Jacir. *ex libris* (2014) detail, mural.
- Figure 12: Emily Jacir and Anton Sinkewich. *Untitled* (2003)
- Figure 13: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Repair's Cosmogony* (2013).
- Figure 14: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 1, Culture, Mirrors and Masks* (2013) detail.
- Figure 15: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 3, Science, Repair Analysis* (2013).
- Figure 16: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 3, Science, Repair Analysis* (2013) detail.
- Figure 17: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt* (2013) installation view.
- Figure 18: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt* (2013) detail.
- Figure 19: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt* (2013) detail.
- Figure 20: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt* (2013) detail.

Figure 21: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt* (2013) detail.

Figure 22: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt* (2013) detail.

Figure 23: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt* (2013) detail.

Figure 24: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt* (2013) detail.

Figure 25: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, Repair's Cosmology* (2013) detail.

Figure 26: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, Repair's Cosmology* (2013) detail.

Figure 27: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, Repair's Cosmology* (2013) detail.

Figure 28: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, Repair's Cosmology* (2013) detail.

Figure 29: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 3, Science, Repair Analysis* (2013) detail.

Figure 30: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 4, Nature: Mimesis as Resistance* (2013) installation view.

Figure 31: Keith Calhoun, *23 Hour Lockdown, Chess Players* (1980).

Figure 32: Keith Calhoun, *23 Hour Lockdown, Chess Players* (1980).

Figure 33: Chandra McCormick, *Angola State Prison, Untitled* (2004).

Figure 34: Chandra McCormick. *Prisoners Going Back to Work* (2004).

Figure 35: Chandra McCormick, *Angola Inmates breaking wild horses, Angola State Prison Rodeo* (2013).

Figure 36: Chandra McCormick, *Waiting for the Bull* (n.d.).

Figure 37: Sammy Baloji. *Essays on Urban Planning* (2013).

Figure 38 & 39: Sammy Baloji. *Essays on Urban Planning* (2013) detail.

Figure 40: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire” Series (2006).

Figure 41: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire” Series (2006).

Figure 42: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire” Series (2006).

Figure 43: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire” Series (2006).

Figure 44: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire” Series (2006).

Figure 45: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire” Series (2006).

Figure 46: Sammy Baloji. *Sociétés Secrètes* (2013).

Figure 47: Sammy Baloji. *The Other Memorial* (2015).

Abstract
At the Edge of Ruin: Seeing Art Under Perpetual Conflict
Rachel Pusateri Nelson

At the Edge of Ruin: Seeing Art Under Perpetual Conflict engages four different art practices that are embedded in current political conflicts and struggles over abuses of power: the seemingly endless warfare in Palestine, the worsening refugee crisis in Europe, the racial injustices of the U.S. criminal court system, and the ongoing environmental catastrophe in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Focusing on artworks by Emily Jacir, Kader Attia, collaborators Keith Calhoun and Chandra McCormick, and Sammy Baloji, the project considers what insights these art practices can give into the current global conditions of both art and of social and political unrest.

At the Edge of Ruin offers a response to the recent thematic emphasis of global art discourse. Artworks shown at recent large-scale global art exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale or dOCUMENTA, and through museum initiatives like the new global art programs at the Tate Modern and the Guggenheim, have increasingly focused on the disasters and conflicts that roil the 21st Century. Yet contemporary art scholarship has largely failed to consider how global art is being linked to conflict and crises and to grapple with the challenges and possibilities this poses for art interpretation. Instead, artworks tackling different geopolitical issues, for instance, the racialized politics of the mass incarceration of African Americans or the economic and labor issues within immigration struggles in France, are being shown alongside

each other in international art venues with little attention paid to how these practices are producing and circulating knowledge about such disparate practices and crises.

This project utilizes the conflicted space of global art to better understand worldwide unrest and turmoil. It develops a model of interpretation that investigates unfolding current events and the histories from which they spring through the responses being made in art practices.

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This dissertation, as all such projects are, is an outcome of an immense collegial effort. The project has benefited greatly from the rich mentoring and intellectual generosity that sustained my graduate education at UC Santa Cruz. As part of the first cohort in the Visual Studies graduate program at UCSC, I received the benefits of a faculty and staff deeply committed to creating a thriving, intellectually demanding, and socially and politically aware program of study. I am deeply grateful to department for the ambitiousness of their ideas and their dedication to their students. I have been honored to be part of the inception of such a program.

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Beyond those individuals, I could list and acknowledge the contributions of the entire Visual Studies department. I want to particularly note a few. Derek Conrad Murray was an early and important influence on my ideas about global art. Martin Berger's input and mentorship throughout my studies inflects not only my scholarship but also my teaching and my commitments to academia. I am also appreciative of Maria Evangelatou's insightful comments on my project. Outside the department, I recognize the formidable influence that learning under David Marriott and Angela Y. Davis has had on my research. I also have benefited greatly from the support of John Weber, the director of UCSC's Institute of the Arts and Sciences (IAS). My gratitude to these people is profound.

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Introduction:

On the Plateau

Here we are, standing, puzzled, looking with scrutiny at the inscrutable; a plateau of debris stretching across the horizon. ~ Okwui Enwezor

In 2015, the longest running mega-exhibition of art in the world, the Venice Biennale, offered a poignant and dark overview of the state of the world and also of the contemporary concerns of art. The exhibition, curated by Okwui Enwezor and called *All the World's Futures*, featured artworks by 139 artists from around the globe. At the center of the exhibition, the artist Isaac Julien staged daily recitations of Marx's *Das Kapital*. And, around this reading, the "world's futures" unfolded. A visitor to the massive exhibition would at one moment be immersed into a sound piece by Emeka Ogboh, in which African refugees could be heard singing a stanza from the German national anthem in their own languages. With more than a million migrants and refugees entering Europe in 2015, the disembodied voices rendering the German song of belonging into Yoruba, Douala, Kikongo, and other languages evoked the chaos among EU leadership as they struggled to respond to the mass migration, the sprawling and disordered refugee camps that housed those fleeing from crisis, and the rising xenophobia that has gripped much of Europe as result. Later, biennale visitors would stand before Chandra McCormick and Keith Calhoun's documentary photographs taken within the United States prison industrial complex. The black and white images of primarily African American convicts offered a stark assessment of the racial dimensions of the criminal justice system in the United States and reverberated with the ongoing protests against police brutality and systemic racism in that country. Elsewhere in the expansive exhibition, Sammy Baloji's dome sculpture called *The Other Memorial* and made of copper plates imprinted with scarification materialized the dead and dying in the ongoing warfare and economic

predation around mining and resource extraction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC.) And, when people paused at Mykola Ridnyi's film installation of footage shot in the bustling streets of Kharkiv, the second largest city in the Ukraine, the soundtrack overlaid on the footage of everyday city life was from the riots and uprisings that served to oust the Ukrainian president only months before. In the sounds of people fighting, a man yelling, "This is Kharvoz, bitch, get the hell out of here," and a woman hysterical, "They beat the boys, they beat the boys," the unrest in the Ukraine was palpable.

Walking in between these and other artworks at the biennale, it was clear that the "world's futures" being imagined in the exhibition portended to (or were already enveloped by) perpetual environmental and political crisis as result of systems of consumption gone awry. The walls of the exhibition were made porous through these disparate artworks, with the protests and uprisings, horrific acts of terror (state-sanctioned or otherwise,) extended warfare, economic precarity, and environmental catastrophes that were rippling across the globe also sending echoes through the cavernous exhibition halls. Sixty million people were displaced in 2015— an unprecedented number— due to a combination of factors including brutal civil wars and political instability, increased environmental precarity in the face of climate change and the attendant struggles for resources, as well as rising inequality and scarcity. And with record high temperatures for ten months that year, including five months showing the highest departure from the average of any month on record, and global carbon dioxide levels hit a million-year high, there was no end in sight to

unrest, violence, and forced displacement.¹ Faced by such an apparition of catastrophe, perhaps it is no surprise that even inside the exhibition walls of the Venice Biennale, there was no avoiding that, as cultural historian James Clifford puts it, “signs of systemic crisis ... are everywhere.”²

In the face of such overwhelming crises, it is obvious that the boundaries— if there ever were any— between the conditions of art and the conditions of the world are increasingly tenuous. Yet, what this means for the current circumstances in art and the conflicts they are immersed in is much less clear. *At the Edge of Ruin* addresses this state of affairs as it emulates the epistemological demands that permeate current international exhibition practices. I engage four different art practices that are embedded in specific current and unfolding conflicts and struggles over abuses of power— specifically the seemingly endless warfare in Palestine, the worsening refugee crisis in Europe, the crisis around the racial injustices of the U.S. criminal justice system, and the ongoing environmental catastrophe caused by extractivist policies in the DRC. Focusing on artworks by Emily Jacir, Kader Attia, collaborators Keith Calhoun and Chandra McCormick, and Sammy Baloji, I consider what must we learn to ask when looking at art projects that are enmeshed in the ongoing and diverse conflicts that span the globe. And, I look for the insights these art practices give into the chaos and conflict that, whether gazing at the artworks in

¹ These numbers were reported by NASA and the NOAA. Dwayne Brown, Michael Cabbage and Leslie McCarthy. “NASA, NOAA Analyses Reveal Record-Shattering Global Warm Temperatures in 2015.” NASA January 20, 2016. <http://www.nasa.gov/press-release/nasa-noaa-analyses-reveal-record-shattering-global-warm-temperatures-in-2015/>

² James Clifford. *Returns: Becoming Indigenious in the 21st Century*. Harvard UP, 2013, 5.

the 2015 Venice Biennale or witnessing the current state of affairs across the globe, often makes it seem that we are standing at the very edge of ruin.³

How to see art under perpetual conflict

At the core of this project is an inquiry into how to see art under perpetual conflict. And, this raises problems at the onset: What— and when— is art *under* conflict? What are the epistemological claims made by rendering the struggles and conflicts that these art practices take as their subjects *perpetual*? Then, to take a slightly different focus, what does an emphasis on vision, on *seeing* art under these conditions, portend? I approach these three issues systematically.

1. Art under conflict

Whether walking through the 2015 Venice Biennale, or reading this text which brings together the divergent art practices of Jacir, Attia, McCormick and Calhoun, and Balaji— practices which are not only geographically diverse but also range from photography, video, performance, to installation— it is easy to wonder how art practices, scholarship, and exhibitions ended up here, with disparate art

³ The “we” used here signals the participation of this project in the intellectual coalitions formed around the specific political construction of global art, as discussed below. As I relate, global art was conceived of as an anti-colonial art discourse. While the original goals of this discourse seem to have succumbed to the catastrophic times we are living, as I claim below, I do not turn away entirely from the possibilities that were raised by the conception. Just as global art discourse embraced the possibilities of new social formations brought about by the supposed erosion of the nation-state caused by globalization, I similarly see alliances still to be made in the ruins of this formation. Those who continue to be committed to these kind of anti-colonial possibilities, despite the often-dire circumstances of the current climate of predicaments, are the coalition this text seeks to foment. For an early example of an expression of this anti-colonial hope (often maligned as naïve) see Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. 1996: U of Minnesota Press.

practices from around the globe being brought together to compose such a sprawling, complex vision of global catastrophe.⁴ It is over two decades since the term “global art” began to permeate art discourse, and *ruin* was not what those invested in this categorization of contemporary art were envisioning.⁵ The term signified a growing interest in academia, arts practices, and curatorship in thinking together the worldwide production of art. This was a response to the burgeoning notion of globalization (the development of new information technologies, the global production, distribution and consumptions of goods, the merging financial markets, and the changing transportation technologies of the waning twentieth century) as the geo-political transformation of the world. Artists, scholars, and curators recognized that the conditions of art’s production and “the possibilities of its diffusion and dissemination and presence,” as curator and art historian Hans Belting explains, were also being profoundly altered.⁶ Global art, a form of art practices, exhibitions, and scholarship in which art from around the globe could be brought together, was therefore conceptualized as a way to map out the contours of the changing global

⁴ My text does not make any claims about any unifying formal quality of global art practices that engage the conflicts that beset the 21st Century. As my selection of artists and practices in this dissertation suggests, critically engaged global art practices take a variety of forms and use many different mediums, as medium specificity has ceded to medium efficiency to convey the urgency of crisis.

⁵ For a history of the emergence of the term, see Hans Belting. “From Global Art to World Art: A View of a New Panorama” in *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*. Ed. Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel. MIT, 2013.

⁶ Belting 172. As Jonathan Harris points out, this state of affairs poses quite a challenge to the study of art. He edited an important volume of essays, *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, published in 2011. In his introduction to the thirty three essays included in this substantive book, Harris explains that all the essays included “examine how [art] agents, institutions and products may now function within a single global system that transcends both national boundaries and regional and continental systems of interactions between people and nations which have existed for thousands of years.” *Globalization and Contemporary Art*. Ed. Jonathan Harris. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 2.

positions and possibilities.⁷

If anything, global art discourse was imagined to counter how an idea of ruin (decay ... poverty ... cultural stagnancy) has been sutured onto parts of the world, particularly the global South.⁸ As Belting clarifies, the interest in creating this categorization of art was “in spirit postcolonial... guided by the intention to replace the center and periphery scheme of a hegemonic modernity.”⁹ The conception of a global art signaled an attempt to break out of the territorial boundaries imposed by a Eurocentric formulation of art and its history and to bring to an end the so-called Western dominance of art practices, exhibitions, scholarship, and even markets.¹⁰ The discourse, therefore, aimed to detach the image of ruin that had been sutured to the global South with the fall of imperial regimes and the turbulences of postcolonial

⁷ Perhaps art historian Terry Smith articulated this global vision for art clearest when he wrote, “contemporary art is--- perhaps for the first time in history--- truly an art *of* the world. It comes *from* the whole world and frequently tries to imagine the world *as a differentiated yet inevitably connected whole*” (his emphasis.) This remapping, this making an “art of the world”, in Smith’s turn of phrase, has taken two forms. First, exhibitions of global art attempt to be inclusive. To address asymmetries in art, these exhibitions are concerned with proportional representation. The second way this remapping emerges is slightly different. Asymmetries in art have not only been linked to who is included in exhibitions, after all, but also where art exhibitions are shown in the first place. So, under the rubric of global art discourse, large-scale exhibitions of art (biennials) are also organized around the globe in this attempt to decenter the art “world.” These biennials are held in from Senegal to Turkey, Taiwan to Mongolia, South Korea to Columbia. Terry Smith. *Contemporary Art, World Currents*. Prentice Hall, 2011, 8.

⁸ Many postcolonial scholars have discussed how the global South has been linked to ruin, poverty, and decay. In Western narratives of modernity and progress, much of Africa as well as parts of South America and Southeastern Asia that have not been enfolded into this Western timeline have been imagined to be instead the sites of modernity’s ruins. See, for instance: V.Y. Mudimbe. *The Idea of Africa*. Indiana UP, 1993; Achille Mbembe. *On the Postcolony*. UC Press, 2001. Dipesh Chakravorty. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton UP, 2000. Edward Said’s classic *Orientalism* (1979) also has insights in this regard.

⁹ Belting 178

¹⁰ For the development of the idea of global art as anti-hegemonic, see also *Critical Cartography of Art and Visuality in the Global Age*, ed. Anna Maria Guasch Ferrer, Nasheli Jiménez del Val. Cambridge, 2014; *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*. Ed. Okwui Enwezor et al. Duke, 2009; *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*. Ed. Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel. MIT, 2013. Lotte Philipsen. *Globalizing Contemporary Art*. Aarhus UP, 2011.

governance, and offer a lively, perhaps even restorative corrective.¹¹ Yet, globalization has not proven to be redemptive; instead it has primarily portended catastrophic *contagion*.¹² The things that move most easily across borders, it turns out, are economic collapse, terror, virulent disease, and CO2 emissions. In the global world, the collapse of investment banks in the United States in 2008, in the most well known example, quickly destabilized economies around the world.¹³ Viruses carried by mosquitoes are creeping across the globe. The extended warfare, drone attacks, and occupations carried out by the United States in Western Asia have put into effect a global chain of terror with large-scale attacks no longer confined to these designated battlegrounds but also waged (albeit in less deadly versions) from Belgium to Turkey, Nigeria to France. And, CO2 emissions clearly recognize no borders; the U.S.

¹¹ What I call ruin, Okwui Enwezor calls the “desublimation of other cultures.” And, in 2003, he issued a call for global art discourse to counter this “desublimation: “Unlike the apotropaic device of containment and desublimation through which the modern Western imagination perceived other cultures, so as to feed off their strange aura and hence displace their power, the nearness today of those cultures formerly separated by their distance to the objectifying conditions of modernist history calls for new critical appraisals of our contemporary present and its relationship to artistic production.” Okwui Enwezor, “The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition.” *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Winter, 2003), 57-82.

¹² I am thinking of geographers Warwick Murray’s and John Overton’s suggestion that globalization could also be defined as “social, environmental and political *contagion*” (their emphasis). Murray, Warwick E.; Overton, John. *Geographies of Globalization*. Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2014, 12.

¹³ It is worth noting the relationship between the tropes of ruin that have been linked to the global South and economics. For instance, Afro pessimism was a term that arose to diagnose how the idea of ruinous conditions in Africa was an impediment to globalizing markets. At least in its earliest usage, Afro pessimism referred to “the perception of sub-Saharan Africa as a region too riddled with problems for good governance and economic development.” Although later taken up primarily by black radical thinkers in the United States to think about the ontological connection of blackness to slavery in productive ways, it first was used to discuss and counteract the unwillingness corporations and creditors had to invest in the continent. In fact, “the earliest use in print of the word was in a 1988 article from the Xinhua News Agency in which Michel Aurillac, France’s minister of cooperation, criticized the prevailing pessimism in the West about Africa’s economic development and cautioned against what he referred to as an “Afro-pessimism” on the part of some creditors.” So, not only did global art discourse want to detach the idea of ruin from Africa; so did the globalizing economy. <http://science.jrank.org/pages/7475/Afropessimism.html>

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates some days 25 percent of the particulate matter in Los Angeles skies originates from Chinese coal-fired power plants.¹⁴ Since global art was intended to produce a global vision—a global re-vision—under these blighted conditions, this image is increasingly saturated by the imminent ruination and perpetual conflict that it had once intended to dispose of.¹⁵ As *ruin* has proven to be contagious, the vision of global art has become one of disaster.

Seeing art under perpetual conflict, my euphemistic shorthand for these circumstances, then, could seem like a dire state of affairs for art. It could mean that viewers of, for instance, Chandra McCormick and Keith Calhoun's photographs (discussed in Chapter 3) connecting the history of slavery in the United States to the current prison industrial complex, are merely gaping at the inevitable. Or that when people stand looking at Emily Jacir's project undertaking a careful excavation of the ethnic and racial dimensions of Israeli marriage laws (discussed in Chapter 1) they see only a spectacle of the disaster and despair in Palestine. Yet, my formulation of art produced and seen under these conditions suggests a different possibility is still being simultaneously created through this global vision; global art, now primarily art

¹⁴ Belinda Waymouth. "Emissions Without Borders: The Problematic Geography of Mitigation." Our World: United Nations University, June 12, 2014. <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/emissions-without-borders-the-problematic-geography-of-mitigation>

¹⁵ It might be the case that this global view of ruin could also have emerged at other periods of time in art exhibitions with such broad geo-political range. One could argue, for instance, *The Family of Man* exhibition at the MoMA in 1955, which brought together photography from around the world under the auspices of humanism and global commonalities, actually also portended ruin with its central image of nuclear devastation. What is exceptional now about this global vision is the critical mass of scholarship and institutions supporting it. Consider, for instance, the new Tate Modern's focus on what director Frances Morris calls a "fully global" view of contemporary art. I am, therefore, less concerned with claiming global art discourse is exceptional, than in examining what roles it plays in understanding a complex global world. <http://theartnewspaper.com/news/museums/new-tate-modern-to-focus-more-on-female-and-international-artists/>

under conflict, provides a way to study the struggles and dissensions that roil in the twenty-first century. Specifically, *At the Edge of Ruin* proposes that seeing art under conflict is to undertake what can seem an insurmountable task: to sort through and compile some of the vast and distinct histories, complex politics, and social conditions that compose the current picture of impending global ruin in which all of us are imbricated.¹⁶ And, it is to find in all that ruin that which could possibly produce a future otherwise.

2. When conflict is perpetual

My approach begins with the premise that seeing art under conflict creates the circumstances in which to interrogate the complexities of crises and conflicts which span the globe. This project follows directly in the footsteps laid by not only Okwui Enwezor but also art historian T.J. Demos whose work on contemporary art and issues of migration and, more recently, on art and political ecologies, as Demos puts it, “take[s] stock of the diverse ways artists... negotiate and analyze conflicts.”¹⁷ In his wide range of scholarship, Demos conceptualizes political roles for art within social and political unrest and is clear in the stakes of this: as artists interrogate

¹⁶ This is in keeping with what Okwui Enwezor wrote in 2003: “Bringing contemporary art into the context of the geopolitical framework that define global relations- between the so-called local and the global, center and margin, nation-state and the individual, transnational and diasporic communities, audiences and institutions- offers a perspicacious view.... [of] a set of arrangements of deeply entangled relations and forces that are founded by discourses of power. Okwui Enwezor, “The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition.” *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Winter, 2003), 57-82.

¹⁷ T.J. Demos. *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*. Durham and London, Duke UP, 2013. 171. See also T.J. Demos. *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*. Sternberg, 2016. Further examples of this kind of research can be found in Jill Bennett. *Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affects and Art after 9/11*. I.B. Taurus, 2012. Yates McKee. *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition*, Verso, 2016.

conflicts, they are, in his formulation, also intervening in them in “critical and creative ways.”¹⁸ According to Demos, globalization has reconfigured art’s connection to politics (a sentiment I echo above) and made it an “oppositional force” in geopolitics.¹⁹ Therefore, his project traces the ways in which art practices set out to oppose abuses of power. The focus of my research takes a slightly different point of departure; I look for how art *exposes* the abuses that undergird diverse conflicts that are put into relation through the configuration of the global.²⁰ This is a slippery slope. After all, despite the global contagion that I note above, different histories, ideological formations, and geo-political configurations undergird ongoing struggles and abuses of power. Articulating difference within a single text, or a single exhibition, can be difficult. The central problem that this dissertation addresses is how to approach an analysis of some of the different relations of power, and the different art practices that engage them, that compose the withered notion of the global. In order to attend to these differences, while rendering them still proximate, *perpetual* conflict is a framework that I use to negotiate the potential pitfalls of thinking together art practices embedded in conflicts as varied as those churning in Palestine, France, the United States, and the DRC.

¹⁸ Demos xv

¹⁹ Demos xv

²⁰ This project is also in response to critics, like curator and director of the Conflict+Conflict working group Michaela Crimmin, who have faulted art scholarship’s narrow approach to art and conflict. As Crimmin explains, scholarship and art analysis has done well “delving into a particular practice, and artists focusing on a particular context” but has struggled to reconcile the broader relationship being constantly created around art and conflict. As she puts it, “there is scant exchange between the different activities.” *Art and Conflict*. Ed. Michaela Crimmin and Elizabeth Stanton. Royal College of Art, 2014.

Perpetual conflict is a term that connects the analysis of Jacir, Attia, McCormick and Calhoun, and Baloji's distinct art practices and concerns to a devastating observation that philosopher and activist W.E.B. Du Bois made decades ago. In the preface to the 1953 edition of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois looked back over the fifty years since he wrote that famous tome diagnosing "the problem of the twentieth century" as the problem of the "color line."²¹ And he offered this revision:

I still think today as yesterday that the color line is a great problem of this century. But today I see more clearly than yesterday that back of the problem of race and color lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements it: and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen; that to maintain this privilege, men have waged war until today war tends to become universal and continuous, and the excuse for this war continues largely to be color and race.²²

Although Du Bois was speaking primarily of the United States when he references the "civilized people" willing to derive their comfort from the poverty of others, he was also making a broader—even universal—claim about how power works particularly under what now would be called global capitalism.²³ The comfort of

²¹ W.E.B. Du Bois. *The Souls Of Black Folk*. Jubilee Edition (50th Anniversary). Blue Heron Press, 1953. ix-xi.

²² Du Bois x

²³ Du Bois notes that in originally writing *The Souls of Black Folk*, he did not account for the impact of capitalism on "the modern world." As he explained, although Karl Marx was referenced to some degree in his education leading to the writing of that book "the lack of proper emphasis or comprehension among my teachers of the revolution in thought and action which Marx meant" in turn meant that he had not fully grappled with this impact. This is what he retrospectively wanted to attend to in the passage cited above. ix- xi

some, according to Du Bois, is directly related to the subjection of others. The line Du Bois isolates, “largely” composed around the construction of race, then, separates those who prosper under current constructions of power—and current economic configurations— from those who suffer. Twenty years later, Foucault made a similar argument in a seminar at the Collège de France, tracing the production of power to the production of permanent warfare. Foucault opened his seminar by asking, “If we look beneath peace, order, wealth, and authority, beneath the calm order of subordinations, beneath the State and State apparatuses, beneath the laws, and so on, will we hear and discover a sort of primitive and permanent war?”²⁴ For Foucault, power relations, which he defines in this seminar as “relations of inequality, dissymmetries, divisions of labor, relations of exploitation, et cetera,” could also be discussed under the terms of the waging of war. This would mean “civil order— its basis, its essence, and its essential mechanics,” Foucault continues, is “an order of battle” in which some live, some die, some suffer, and some thrive.²⁵

For Foucault as Du Bois, driving what I call perpetual conflict is the fundamental logic of partition that operates through what Foucault refers to as “the apparatuses of domination.”²⁶ Conflict is perpetual²⁷ because power in its current manifestations is a relationship of domination that revolves around the division— whether overtly or latently violent— of people through racialized or other biopolitical

²⁴ Michel Foucault. *“Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. Transl. David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003. 46-47

²⁵ Foucault 47

²⁶ Foucault 45

²⁷ I avoid adopting the term permanent because I want to resist constructing the conflicts under analysis as truly endless— perpetual seems more tentative, more permeable, as a construction.

means. This is what Foucault terms the “biological-type caesura within a population.”²⁸ The conflicts under consideration in this project really are seemingly perpetual— they all verge on being intractable and irresolute. For instance, the Israeli occupation of Palestine has no end in sight and neither does the production of institutional racism in the United States that sustains the criminal justice system, no matter how many lives are stunted through these conditions. Seeing art under perpetual conflict, therefore, is to look particularly for how art practices uncovers what Du Bois might call the shifting line— the specific relations of domination— in different geopolitical formations that allows conflicts and abuses of power to continue seemingly endlessly despite the forgone conclusion of pain, destruction, the countless costs of warfare, and even looming climate disaster.²⁹ *At the Edge of Ruin* focuses on the biopolitical divisions that the artists under analysis trace through the perpetual conflicts that roil in Palestine, France, the United States, and the DRC. Using Foucault’s general schemata of analysis outlined in his seminar, this study looks for how this domination “manufactures subjects” as well as for the “technical instruments

²⁸ Like Du Bois, Foucault is directly referencing the production of race as the creations of “caesuras” through which some people are differentially treated. This is one of the most direct and sustained reference to race Foucault makes in his scholarship, and he weaves it into his idea of permanent war. As he puts it racism “make(s) the relationship of war— “if you want to live, the other must die”— function in a way that is completely new... racism makes it possible to establish a relationship between my life and the death of the other that is not a military or warlike relationship of confrontation, but a biological-type relationship.” Foucault 254

²⁹ The basic tenet of conflict studies is that “how a conflict situation is defined or mapped out has an important bearing on the responses to it.” The analytical paradigms that have provided the leading models for conflict analysis are premised in the notion that within the causes and structural violences of conflicts lie the seeds of their resolution. Yet, the production of difference within conflicts seems to allow conflicts to evade resolutions, which makes focusing particularly on this production a necessary supplement to conflict studies. Eleanor O’Gorman. *Conflict and Development: Development Matters*. Zed Books, 2011, 20.

that guarantee [the relations of domination] function.”³⁰ I question how artworks envision the specific histories through which power relations become perpetual conflict, how they expose the institutions and practices which produce unjust biopolitical relations, and also how these divisions and relations have been naturalized within operations of power.

This study of art and power relationships follows a trajectory that has been conceptualized not only by Du Bois and Foucault but also by such theorists and historians as Frantz Fanon, Achille Mbembe, Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben and many others. I ask, for instance, how Sammy Baloji’s artworks (discussed in Chapter 4) expose why some (including people and places in my broad conception of biopower) have historically and continuously been sacrificed to the current environmentally and economically disastrous mining operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also consider how Attia reveals that the hard line drawn in France between citizens and immigrants can also be seen as incredibly historically tenuous (Chapter 2). I address the techniques Baloji, Attia and the other artists under analysis here use visualize the partitions made between those who derive “comfort” from power (to use Du Bois’s purposefully benign word), and those that are immolated by it in these different geopolitical scenarios. This is a framework that is necessarily partisan. Just as the artworks align themselves with those whom they picture on the *wrong* side of the line (and the wrong side is clearly demarcated in these works) this project is similarly aligned as it follows the histories the artworks

³⁰ Foucault 46-47

construct and the violences that they envision. Perpetual conflict as an interpretative formulation through which the works of Jacir, Attia, McCormick and Calhoun, and Baloji are analyzed, traces the politically charged line in disparate art practices around those who suffer and those who profit from different iterations of warfare, environmental exploitation, and economic oppression.

3. Seeing and art

This text, begun poised in the edge of ruin, looks for what art envisions about why some are easily sacrificed to this unfolding crisis. And subtly, cautiously, it levels a claim that art is attenuated to this kind of seeing/ showing. My intellectual formation is in visual culture studies (also called visual studies,) a field which takes the modern function of *visuality* as its subject. Visuality is studied not only as a biological ocular function but also as an exercise of power; therefore, the field presupposes that imaginatively envisioning the world is part of the authoritative *making* of the world as it is lived and experienced. Specifically, visuality is, as visual culture studies theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff explains (tracing the concept through scholars like Thomas Carlyle, Foucault, Frantz Fanon and Hal Foster,) an act of authority that names, categorizes and defines.³¹ It is what, Mirzoeff reminds us, Foucault called “the nomination of the visible.”³² It is how people are pictured along the line that Du Bois draws in societal construction of power: “Visuality separates the groups so classified as a means of social organization . . . Finally, it makes this

³¹ Nicholas Mirzoeff. *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011.

³² Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things: An Archeology of Human Sciences*. Routledge, 1966, 2004, 144.

separated classification seem right and hence aesthetic.”³³ What Mirzoeff calls “complexes of visibility” includes the historical mechanisms that prescribe “how we see, how we are able, allowed or made to see,” how these visions form classificatory and regulatory systems, and how these visions and the systems of authority they support become naturalized.³⁴ The central claim of visual studies in this formulation, then, is that the politics of power cannot be understood, described, analyzed, or resisted without an understanding of the dominant visions that it produces and that produces it.³⁵

Contemporary art is not necessarily the purview of visual studies. Visual studies is interested in visual culture broadly, looking across images and text archives, and even through political speeches, war tactics, and court judgments, in attempts to understand how the current visions of the world historically emerged and are continually politically and socially authorized.³⁶ However, this study of contemporary art within the field of visual studies proposes that when art is interrogated for how the

³³ Mirzoeff explains that this vision is created from much information, images, and ideas: so much so, in fact, that one person cannot actually see it all. However, the one who can imaginatively see a world assembling through all this data claims authority through this vision. Mirzoeff 3.

³⁴ Mirzoeff is quoting Hal Foster in this listing. See Hal Foster. *Vision and Visuality*. Bay Press, 1988.

³⁵ Examples of visual studies scholarship proliferate particularly in the U.S., which is where the field formed. Scholarship in visual studies or that use visual studies methodologies have proven to be particularly suited to the study of race and gender constructions. See for examples: Lisa Bloom. *With Other Eyes, Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1999. Martin A. Berger. “Race, Visuality, and History.” *American Art*. Vol. 24, No. 2, 2010.

³⁶ Mirzoeff not only defines the field, but also is an exemplar of its practices. His studies on visibility in the United States, particularly within contemporary warfare, the legal rulings that support racist injustices in the United States, and on the state response to Hurricane Katrina have come to define the field. See: Nicholas Mirzoeff. *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture*. Routledge, 2005; “The Sea and the Land: Biopower and Visuality from Slavery to Katrina.” *Culture, Theory, and Society*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2009: 289-30; “War is Culture: Global Counterinsurgency, Visuality, and the Petraeus Doctrine,” *PMLA*, special issue; “War,” edited by Diana Taylor and Srinivas Avaramudan. Vol. 124, No. 5, 2009: 1737-1746; “Invisible Empire: Abu Ghraib and Embodied Spectacle,” *Visual Arts Research*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Issue 63), 2006: 38-42.

world has been *envisioned* and *divisioned*, to recall Mirzoeff's definition of visuality, it is particularly well suited for this kind of critical inquiry.³⁷ This links Mirzoeff's political conception of visual studies to a long strand of social art history and aesthetic theory that connects art more broadly with criticality and political dissent.³⁸ Philosopher and political theorist Herbert Marcuse's writings in *The Aesthetic Dimension* elucidates this conception of art. In that mid-to-late-20th century text, Marcuse was intent on clarifying art's deep relation to the world and to radical praxis, despite prevailing Marxist sentiments about art's necessary autonomy from social relations. For Marcuse, art's autonomy was a very real condition that had to be reckoned with to theorize a role for art in political dissent. Autonomy was, according to the thinker, "forced upon art through the separation of mental and material labor, as a result of the prevailing relations of domination."³⁹ If this was a phenomena that began in the 19th century, art continues to be separated from life, in Marcuse's overview, through exhibition practices, the project of art history, art markets, and the material conditions of art—the walls of the 2015 Venice Biennale might have

³⁷ A visual studies approach also attempts to sidestep a disciplinary problem that scholar Jill Bennett has diagnosed in strong terms. She argues that "the study of art as a means of apprehending the world ... cannot occur 'inside' art history, or within any framework that privileges its own disciplinary concerns over external engagement. If there are skills of art and visual analysis that might be exported from art history" Bennett cautions, "there is also a disciplinary certainty that must be left behind." Bennett's concerns about the methods of art history being an impediment to "apprehending the world" is derived from the emphasis the discipline places on constructing a history of art. The visual studies approach is first and foremost embedded not in a history of art, but in the multiple histories of operations of power, so it is always outward looking. Jill Bennett. *Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affects and Art after 9/11*. I.B. Taurus, 2012.

³⁸ Mirzoeff's construction of visual studies, which I obviously subscribe to, is far more politicized than many of the other scholars that have been invested in the field. See Gillian Rose's overview of the history and methodologies of the field in *Visual Methodologies* for this distinction. Gillian Rose. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Materials*, 2nd Edition. Sage, 2007, 1-27.

³⁹ Herbert Marcuse. *The Aesthetic Dimension*. Beacon Press, 1978, xi.

seemed porous, but they were indeed walls. Yet, this has had an unpredictable outcome; as Marcuse writes, “Disassociation from the process of production became a refuge and a vantage point from which to denounce the reality established through domination.”⁴⁰ Instead of art operating at a remove from what Marcuse calls social reality, it came to be perceived as a critical space within this production of reality. In Marcuse’s thinking of aesthetics in relationship to radical political praxis, therefore, the history of modernity produces art as a unique space for critical thought. It constructs a space within social reality in which the nature of everyday perception is brought into question. According to Marcuse, this allows for political dissent to flourish. Actually, Marcuse goes so far as to say that artworks can break through “the mystified (and petrified) social reality” and open “the horizon of change (liberation).”⁴¹

This was not and is not, I want to make clear, a diagnosis of some sort of magical processes inherent to art. It is instead itself a vision for art and its social roles that other thinkers before and after Marcuse have also subscribed to (if less optimistically) and that has persisted despite—or even because of— the rampant market for contemporary art. And, as I argue throughout this dissertation, visions are powerful things. The idea that the arts can potentially provide a place for social and political criticality— even if it does not lead to liberation— has burrowed deep into art discourse and into arts and humanities education and scholarship more generally. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, although writing about literature, has perhaps articulated

⁴⁰ Marcuse xi

⁴¹ Marcuse x

this the most robustly in her large body of work arguing that “displacing belief onto the terrain of the imagination” can teach people to discover “the premise of the habit.”⁴² For Spivak, the criticality of fictive spaces (the spaces of literature and of art) has a slightly different, or supplemental, rationale to Marcuse’s proposal. In her schemata, criticality is intrinsically related to the arts and humanities alignment with the imagination. When one enters into a space defined and recognized as imaginative, according to Spivak, they can more easily recognize how imagination is also the basis for the operations of power that have been naturalized into habit. And because habit has led us to this precipice— with a world quickly warming, historic numbers of people displaced, and struggles over resources multiplying— it is ever more obvious that it is crucial to think critically about the twisted imaginaries that have been habitualized.

The point of glossing this particular history of aesthetic (and literary) theory is this: some theorists, critics, artists, and curators have conspired together to equate looking at art (and immersion in the arts) to sustained social and political engagement. And, this critical engagement is primed to be directed towards the visual. Consider how theorist Jacques Rancière has more recently defined the critical space of art and aesthetics.⁴³ As Rancière famously explains it, art can intervene in

⁴² In *An Aesthetic Education in the Era Of Globalization*, 2012 (see page 10) Spivak articulates ideas about a “humanities to come” that focuses on “training the imagination.” Similar ideas can also be found in essays that span from 1992-2002 in *Other Asias*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era Of Globalization*. Harvard UP, 2012. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Other Asias*. Blackwell, 2008.

⁴³ Herbert Marcuse and Jacques Rancière are only two of a myriad of thinkers that could have been discussed around this same point. But, I chose to use Marcuse as the intellectual forerunner of this kind of thought because of his commitment to social change and radical praxis. Rancière, after all, can be

the political by “modifying the visible, the ways of perceiving it or expressing it, of experiencing it as tolerable or intolerable.”⁴⁴ It is useful to quote at some length here:

Artists are those whose strategies aim to change the frames, speeds and scales according to which we perceive the visible, and combine it with a specific invisible element and a specific meaning. Such strategies are intended to make the invisible visible or to question the self evidence of the visible; to rupture given relationships between things and meanings and, inversely, to invent novel relationships between things and meanings that were previously unrelated.⁴⁵

In Rancière’s persuasive and incredibly pervasive theorizations about art, artists make material the processes of vision and can alter that perceptive field.

This articulates a clear connection between contemporary art and the study of visuality. Contemporary critical art practices, according to Rancière, take visuality as their focus; these practices “aim to” expose and “rupture” visual regimes. But while the connection made between the arts, perception and politics by thinkers as diverse as Marcuse, Spivak, and Rancière (many more scholars could be listed here) has inspired a wide spate of scholarship, most often the results have been studies of art and perception more generally conceived. A focus on art and visuality specifically, at

read of theorizing the possibility of change without this commitment to radical praxis. To quote Claire Bishop, “for Rancière the aesthetic doesn’t need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change, as it already contains this ameliorative promise.” While Bishop’s stakes here are clear- she believes art is sacrificed to the political when social change is the goal, I want to read beyond a theoretical potential in the stakes of visuality. I subscribe to the notion, after all, that those who are able to communicate their vision of the world are those who can create the world. Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents.” *Artforum* (February 2006), 182.

⁴⁴ “Art of the Possible: An Interview with Jacques Rancière.” *Art Forum*, March 2007.

⁴⁵ Jacques Rancière. *Dissensus*. London: Continuum International Publishing. 2010, 141

least when visibility is understood as an operation of power, has been less common.⁴⁶ Instead, most studies consider how, as art scholar Jill Bennett expresses it, “art can ‘self-consciously’ reveal and reconfigure how we feel in relation to events, bringing to the forefront the affective relationship.”⁴⁷ Affect and response—and how art relates to how we feel and act—are important areas of study. But, I do not know how to prescribe or describe what art—particularly given the breadth of art practices and art audiences collected together under global art discourse—can make anyone feel. Instead, I want to think specifically about what art tries to make us see.

Chapters

The first chapter of *At the Edge of Ruin* begins by exploring how the influential and widely circulated art practice of Emily Jacir reveals how vision and interpretation propels the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This chapter sets the stage for the critical inquiries that undergird this dissertation through a sustained focus on how Jacir’s art practice exposes the mechanisms through which the occupation of Palestine has become perpetual. “Dreaming Away Palestine: On Occupation and Interpretation in Emily Jacir’s Art” opens by considering how Jacir stages what Edward Said called the ‘struggle over interpretation’ between Israel and the Palestinian people, in the performance based piece (documented through images and

⁴⁶ A notable exception is Gil Z. Hochberg’s *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone*. Duke, 2015, which focuses on various artistic attempts to “distribute the visible” when it comes to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

⁴⁷ Bennett 21

descriptive texts) *Where We Come From* (2001-2003).⁴⁸ As Said made clear, the large-scale destruction of human lives in Palestine happens without any restrictions—or even remorse – because of how that death, destruction, and oppression is interpreted and envisioned. After seeing that paradigm enacted in this early artwork, the chapter turns its focus on how Jacir’s art practice exposes and contradicts the visions of Palestine that are used to validate Israel’s occupation generally and the State’s repeated attacks on Gaza, culminating with an extended period of warfare in 2014 which left more than 2,200 people dead and much of Gaza in ruins, more specifically. Analyzing *Sexy Semite* (2000-2002), I consider the tactics Jacir used in that conceptual artwork, composed of personal ads run in the *Village Voice*, to expose the “framing,” as Judith Butler evocatively phrases it, that justifies the destruction of Gaza and those that live there.⁴⁹ I particularly consider how Jacir’s work lays bare the biopolitical mechanisms used by the Israeli State to account for occupation and warfare, and find in *Sexy Semite* overt references to the racist and sexualized mechanisms that make it possible to oppress—or even kill—Palestinians without sanction. And then I trace in *ex libris* (2010) the avenues the artist creates to picture the conflict, and those who suffer most from its effects, outside of these discursive traps and visions that continue to interpret and produce the oppressive reality in Palestine. In doing so, I follow Jacir in asking, what would it take to remake (or revision) the sensibility of the conflict in Palestine?

⁴⁸ Edward Said. *The Question of Palestine*. Routledge, 1979, 8-9.

⁴⁹ Judith Butler. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable*. Verso, 2009.

Chapter One introduces the methodologies used throughout the body of this dissertation. Each chapter looks at an art practice first for how it reveals the particular contours of the conflict in which it is embedded. I trace how the artworks under analysis contextualize the power struggle both historically and currently. Then, I consider how people are made subject to the abuses of power that drive the conflict under question. All this while I also am always looking for how the art practices challenge these subjections. In Chapter Two, these interpretative techniques are applied to Kader Attia's art practice as it delves into issues of immigration in France and across Europe. "In Present Tenses: Kader Attia's 'Repairs'" considers how Attia's massive multi-media installation shown at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art called *Repair: 5 Acts* (2013) historicizes and contextualizes the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe. It outlines in Attia's sprawling artwork, particularly the repeated use of broken mirrors amongst artifacts from the African continent and archival colonial images and texts, the construction of the image of European white supremacy challenged by the current crisis of migration. In 2015 alone, over one million people crossed into Europe, fleeing from warfare and/or economic collapse. The responses by leaders of the European Union, even before the Brexit vote in England showed the extremes that countries (or at least the UK) were willing to go to staunch the flow of immigrants, were largely unwelcoming, at best. Therefore, I consider how Attia's installation positions these reactions as a continuation of the colonially produced vision of Europe. I contextualize the installation particularly according to the writings

of Frantz Fanon,⁵⁰ and I find in *Repair: 5 Acts* a sustained argument that the imagination born of the colonial project, powerful enough to turn people into commodity and cargo to be sold across oceans, did not dissipate with independence. Instead, this vision continues to inform particularly France's response, according to *Repair: 5 Acts*'s historical focus, to the worst migration crisis in history. And, not ignoring the title of the installation, *Repair: 5 Acts*, I consider how the artwork acts to repair this troubled vision.

Chapter Three, "Between Sight and Insight: Race, Criminality, and the U.S. Prison Industrial Complex in the Photographic Practice of Chandra McCormick and Keith Calhoun," looks at how McCormick and Calhoun's photographic practice exposes the insidious affects of color blindness in the United States. This chapter considers the artists' 30-year photography practice in relation to Michelle Alexander's influential reckoning with what she calls the "new Jim Crow," how the supposed abolishment of state-sanctioned racism through the Civil Rights Movement instead caused racism to sink into the shadows of the U.S. even as it thrives in the criminal justice system and the prison industrial complex.⁵¹ I concentrate on McCormick and Calhoun's photographic series titled "Slavery: The Prison Industrial Complex" (1980-2013) to consider what the artists' research and documentation of the Louisiana State Penitentiary, named Angola after the country in Africa, can teach about the historic and ongoing systemic racism of criminal justice system and the

⁵⁰ Particularly Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Marks*, Transl. Charles Lam Markmann. Pluto Press, 1986.

⁵¹ Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New Press, 2010.

prison industrial complex in the United States. I open with one image in this series, *23-Hour Lockdown*, which diagrams the obstacles to confronting power exercised through the guise of mass incarceration; I argue that this image shows how the institutional elements of racism have been made to disappear into the destructive and blinding abyss of the U.S. criminal justice system. Seeing McCormick and Calhoun's photographic series as exposing the current state of affairs in the U.S., I ask how it has come to pass that many people still cannot see the racist workings of the state in either the bodies of those shot by the police or in the millions of people that vanish into the prison industrial complex. This chapter attends to what McCormick and Calhoun's art practice exposes not only about racist practices of the criminal justice system in the U.S. but more particularly about the troubling obstacles involving both sight and insight into this system in the pursuit for racial justice.

My dissertation is intentionally humanist in its focus, exploring how people, both those who suffer from and those who practice the brutality of oppression, have been made to compose the ruins produced by the ongoing conflicts in the Palestine, France, and the United States, and, in Chapter Four, the DRC. However, Chapter Four widens the focus of my project to consider the larger, planetary impacts of these oppressive models of biopower. "Ecological Afterlives: Sammy Baloji and the Colonial Planning of the Contemporary Climate in the DRC" considers how Baloji's art practice constructs an entwined history for the contemporary economic and environmental disasters of the DRC. I particularly look at *Essays on Urban Planning* (2013), the "Mémoire" Series (2006), and *Sociétés Secrètes* (2015). In *Essays on*

Urban Planning (2013), for instance, Baloji reveals the colonial techniques of social engineering that produced the ruined economic landscape of the present. He traces policies of segregation administered through the colonial government through the current extraterritorial policies of land use. And, this work makes it clear that it is biopolitics that created the ongoing, and entangled, economic policies and environmental and social crisis in the DRC. Therefore, this chapter looks at how Baloji's art practice traces how the production of power and authority that Achille Mbembe theorizes in postcolony has led to destruction at a planetary scale.⁵² And, particularly in my analysis of Baloji's *Sociétés Secrètes* (2015), I ask how can such a history, and such a construction of power, be diverted. How can the devastating past, carefully reconstructed in Baloji's art practice, engender a present and a future otherwise?

Before moving on to the body of this text, I want to return for just a moment to where I started, the 2015 Venice Biennale. In the catalogue for that sprawling exhibition, Enwezor began by citing Walter Benjamin's evocative description of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, 1920. In what has become arguably the most famous art analysis in history, Benjamin looks at Klee's small painting and sees "the angel of history." The angel is "turned toward the past.... which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet" even as he is propelled "into the future to

⁵² Achille Mbembe. *On the Postcolony*. UC Press, 2001.

which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.”⁵³ After this citation, evocative in its image of ruin, Enwezor situated his project with the words I use to open this dissertation. He writes, “Here we are, standing, puzzled, looking with scrutiny at the inscrutable; a plateau of debris stretching across the horizon.”⁵⁴ This dissertation is also poised looking at this debris— this past and future in peril. However, I do so to resist the inscrutability of this vision and to insist instead that seeing what composes this wreckage is what we are tasked to do when standing at the edge of ruin.

⁵³ Walter Benjamin. *Illuminations*. New York: Knopf, 1969, 257-8. It is important to note that TJ Demos also cites this passage in the introduction to his 2013 text *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis*. Demos writes particularly about contemporary conditions of exile in his text, and uses the quote from Benjamin to clarify that the vision of modernity is one of catastrophe when seen “through the lens of exile.” Exile, for Demos as for Edward Said, is the forced postcolonial condition, born from failed projects of decolonization and utopic nationalisms, that caused Said to declare the twentieth century “the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration.” I am continuing that train of thought here, and following that vision of ruin and catastrophe that emerged in the 20th Century into its more recent iteration. This current vision decouples the idea of postcolonial ruin that Demos and Said evoke from exile to more general condition. It is now a vision unmoored from the specifics of migrancy. Edward Said. “Reflections on Exile.” *Granta* 13. Autumn 1984. 159-172.

⁵⁴ Okwui Enwezor. *All the World's Futures*. Rizzoli Universe INT Pub, 2015, 17.

Chapter 1

Dreaming Away Palestine: On Occupation and Interpretation in Emily Jacir's Art

Does it happen much, that you are awakened from one dream by another, itself the interpretation of the dream? ~ Mahmoud Darwish

Emily Jacir's most well known work, *Where We Come From*, 2001-2003, documents the actions the artist undertook across the militarized interior borders of Israel/ Palestine during a residency at the Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem. These actions were in response to a question posed to Palestinians living within enclaves and refugee camps under Israeli jurisdiction, in 'Bantustans' surrounded by walls or checkpoints, or in exile in the United States, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere around the globe: "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?"⁵⁵ Jacir used her United States passport to travel throughout Israel/ Palestine to complete the endeavors suggested by her collaborators.

Jacir originally produced *Where We Come From* as a publication that circulated in Palestine. Portions of the work appeared later in an issue of the magazine *Grand Street*, along with a text by Edward Said, the literary scholar and activist for Palestinian liberation.⁵⁶ Subsequently, the artwork has been exhibited in galleries, biennials, and museums from Istanbul to New York, San Francisco to Stockholm. But, in every form that it has been distributed, there is a dissonance in the artwork that is striking. Even a cursory glance at the thirty short texts in Arabic and

⁵⁵ Following the lead of Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon who reportedly said that the Bantustan model was the most appropriate solution to the conflict in Israel/ Palestine, film scholar Helga Tawil-Souri notably refers to fragments of land usually referred to as the Palestinian Territories, or the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as Bantustans. This word evokes the history of South African apartheid in relation to Palestine. Bantustans in South Africa were territories set aside for black inhabitants of South Africa that remained firmly under the control of the Apartheid government- the territories emulated separate 'ethnic' states within South Africa but without political or social independence. Helga Tawil- Souri. "Qalandia Checkpoint as Space and Nonplace." *Space and Culture*. 2011: 14, 4.

⁵⁶ Emily Jacir and Edward Said. "Where We Come From." *Grand Street Magazine*. Fall 2003.

English that alternate with photographs of varying although all relatively modest sizes which compose the piece, reveals what seems to be a fundamental disconnect between the texts and the images. The texts, shown framed in exhibitions, precede the images explaining what each collaborator asked Jacir to do and what restricted the person from performing the act him or herself (Figure 1). In the texts, then, the complicated mapping of borders, permits, identification cards, passes, and bureaucratic procedures that marks the Israeli occupation of Palestine loom large. However, these apparatuses of Israeli state control are notably absent in the images that follow these texts. What is most striking about this work is what it does not show. For instance, a framed text explains that Mahmoud, “Born in Fowar Refugee camp, Hebron. Living in Kufar Aqab. Palestinian Passport with West Bank I.D.” asks of Jacir:

Go to the Israeli post office in Jerusalem and pay my phone bill. I live in Area C, which is under full Israel control, so my phone service is Israeli. In order to pay my phone bill, I must go to an Israeli post office, which does not exist in my Area C. I am forbidden from going to Jerusalem, so I am always looking for someone to pay my phone bill.

And, instead of showing the insidious mapping of borders, the checkpoints, the passports, permits and I.D. cards, or the encounters with military personnel that are embedded in this text (all of which must be negotiated even to pay a phone bill,) the photograph Jacir exhibits alongside the text is strikingly ordinary, even mundane. It is of a line of people stretching in front of the photographer at the post office—a snapshot of the everyday act of waiting (Figure 2).

Another text explains the action suggested by Sonia (Born in Tamra, living in al-Ram, Israeli passport:) “Go to Gaza and eat sayadiyeh. As a citizen of Israel, I am forbidden entering Gaza” while the picture is of empty plates and discarded utensils, the remnants of a meal eaten (Figure 3). The snapshot seems to be an afterthought, a vague snippet of time frozen out of a quotidian routine— memorable only for its indistinctness. Actually, all the photographs that Jacir took to record the results of her actions, if seen without the texts, would be notable only for their insistent ordinariness. This affect is amplified by the intimate scale and lack of frames around the images, mounted, as they are, directly to cintra. However, the artist has made a poignant move in emphasizing the disjunction between the interpretative texts and the everyday images. For example, Rami (Born in Bayt Jalla, Palestinian passport and West Bank I.D) asks the artist, “Go on a date with a Palestinian girl in East Jerusalem that I have only ever spoken to on the phone. As a West Banker, I am forbidden entry into Jerusalem.” And, it is as if Rami has been caught (ensnared) within the frames of the text— it is only the stark words, after all, that make sense of how he has been “forbidden entry” into the snapshot that shows a woman sitting in shadows behind a table. The hard black lines of the frames, therefore, evoke the fences and walls that proliferate behind the short texts. And, they also amplify how the texts themselves emulate the complex immaterial obstacles that keep the Palestinian people locked away from the lives of which they dream. What art historian T.J. Demos has called

Figure 1: Emily Jacir. *Where We Come From*, 2001- 2003. American passport, laser prints, chromogenic prints mounted in board. Dimensions Variable. ©Emily Jacir. Installation view: 8th Istanbul Biennial, Tophanei Amire Cultural Centre, 2003. Photo: Gerhard Haupt & Pat Binder



Figure 2: Emily Jacir. *Where We Come From* (2001-2003) detail (Mahmoud). Laser print and digital photograph. 15x15cm, 38x38cm. Collection SFMoMA. ©Emily Jacir.



Figure 3: Emily Jacir. *Where We Come From* (2001-2003) details (Sonia). Laser print and digital photograph. 15x15cm, 38x38cm. Collection SFMoMA. ©Emily Jacir.



“an unbridgeable chasm” between the images and texts in *Where We Come* manifests the role interpretation plays within the occupation of Palestine.⁵⁷

In the quote that opens this chapter Mahmoud Darwish asks, “Does it happen much, that you are awakened from one dream by another, itself the interpretation of the dream?”⁵⁸ And, Jacir’s artwork could stand as an answer. For all Palestinians, to awaken everyday is to awaken always caught in a nightmarish dream of interpretation—the fantasy of Palestine as construed by the Israeli State. It has been decades since Edward Said similarly summarized the conflict in Israel/ Palestine by calling it “a struggle between a presence and an interpretation.”⁵⁹ For Said, 1948, the year Palestinians refer to as “Al Nakba”—“the Catastrophe”—because it was the year in which over 80 percent of Palestinians were expelled and approximately 80 percent of Palestinian land was seized for the Israeli state, also marks a ‘catastrophic’

⁵⁷ T.J. Demos points to this disjunction between the texts and images in his influential text about Jacir’s work “The Art of Emily Jacir: Dislocation and Politicization.” Demos elaborates one way this disconnect works; the structure of *Where We Come From*, with texts placed prior to, separate from, and inline with the images, means that the viewer can easily make the transition from “textual description to photographic realization” of the dreams and desires articulated in the texts.⁵⁷ However, according to Demos, the easy “resolution between description to realization” that is experienced by viewers as they move between text and image is in jarring contrast to how the relationship between text and image (between dream and fulfillment) functions for those “subjects caught up in the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” For Palestinians, the disconnect between texts and images is actually indicative of their experiences, they physically cannot fulfill their wishes— even one as simple as paying a phone bill— because of the restrictions places on them by the Israeli State. As Demos continues, this means “the project which is first of all divided between text panels and photographs” also “dramatizes the tragic impossibility for those Palestinian respondents to realize their desires themselves.” And, in Demos’ conception of this, this can awaken in the viewer a “yearning... to see some sort of resolution, to wish for an answer to the inequities of movement outside this piece” and, conceivably, even to desire an end to Israeli State control over Palestine. T.J. Demos. *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis*. 2013: Duke UP. PP103-123.

⁵⁸ Mahmoud Darwish. *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*. Translated from Arabic by Ibrahim Muhawi. University of California Press, 1995, 3.

⁵⁹ Edward Said. *The Question of Palestine*. Knof Doubleday, 2015, 8-9.

discursive moment in the history of the Palestinian conflict.⁶⁰ From branding Palestine as the “land without a people for a people without a land,” to vilifying the Arab population as terrorists, to chronicling warfare and land seizures as economic and developmental ‘progress’ in the Middle East, in the war of 1948 the narrative that continues to justify the Israeli occupation was firmly established.⁶¹ So, in 1969, two years after Israel’s further entrenchment and occupation into the small slivers of land left as Palestinian territories caused yet another horrific mass expulsion, when Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir claimed that the Palestinian people do not exist⁶² to resist a U.N. Resolution to withdraw from the territories, the interpretative mechanism was already in place that made Meir’s words more legible, more easily grasped and acted upon, than the plight of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who continued to be driven from their homes and stripped of their right to self governance, economic control, and political representation.⁶³ Or, much more recently, in 2014, when the Jewish-American scholar and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel took out a full-page ad

⁶⁰ These figures are as cited by Israeli Historian, Ilan Pappé. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oneworld Publications, 2007.

⁶¹ “The land without a people for a people without a land” is a phrase that has been ascribed to numerous sources. It has been traced to 19th Century writings with Keith Alexander’s 1843 text, *The Land of Israel According to the Covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob*, assumed to be the earliest published use. Keith Alexander. *The Land of Israel According to the Covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob* William Whyte and Co., 1843.

⁶² Specifically, Golda Meir made this statement: “There were no such thing as Palestinians. When was there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian state? It was either southern Syria before the First World War, and then it was a Palestine including Jordan. It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.” As quoted in *Sunday Times* (15 June 1969), also in *The Washington Post* (16 June 1969).

⁶³ In 1967, the UN Security Council Resolution 242 called on Israel to withdraw from the territories it occupied that same year. In 1973, UN Security Council passed Resolution 338 again calling upon Israel to withdraw.

“Palestine Remix: Timeline of Palestine’s History.” *Al Jazeera English*, 2014.
http://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/PalestineRemix/timeline_main.html

in multiple international newspapers during an outbreak of active warfare in Israel/Palestine to support Israel in what he terms "a battle of civilisation versus barbarism," the idea that the claim of 'barbarism' made palatable Israel's bombing of schools, civilian residents, and hospitals which was then underway was remarkably easy for the news organizations such as the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Washington Post* that ran the ad to implicitly support.⁶⁴ What Said has called "the process to reduce, minimize, and ensure the absence of Palestinians as a political and human presence" continues to simultaneously involve not only physical repression but a carefully constructed narration that provides the context that allows such repression to flourish.⁶⁵

What can be seen in *Where We Come From*, therefore, is this conflict between "interpretation and presence" in its current impasse. In the interactions between the text and image, the artwork mimics the ways in which, decades after the establishment of both the Israeli State and the narrative that justifies its existence, the insistent discursive framing of Palestinians has come to delimit presence; people have vanished within the confines of that interpretative framework. This offers a slight amendment to Said's appraisal of the struggle as one of "interpretation and presence;"

⁶⁴ As a slight caveat to my statement, the *NYTimes* did subsequently run an ad sponsored by Holocaust survivors and descendants of survivors condemning Israel's 'massacre of Palestinians.' However, the *NYTimes*, like all the publications listed here routinely 'accepts or rejects advertising at its own discretion,' and has a long history of refusing to run ads that have a politics they do not want to be seen as condoning. The *London Times* did in fact refuse to run Weisel's ad because, as that publication expressed it, "the opinion being expressed is too strong and too forcefully made and will cause concern amongst a significant number of *Times* readers." Matthew Kassel. "NY Times Runs Ad From Holocaust Survivors Condemning Israel, Attacking Elie Wiesel" *The Observer*, August 25, 2014. <http://observer.com/2014/08/ny-times-runs-ad-from-holocaust-survivors-condemning-israel-attacking-elie-wiesel/>
<http://www.haaretz.com/news/world/1.609096>

⁶⁵ Said 37

if presence, after all, is conditioned by interpretation (if Palestinians have been quite literally caught within a narrative, as the artwork suggests,) both struggle and presence can be said to exist now uncomfortably within the discursive. This does not negate the fact that people live and die in the continual escalation of violence and destruction in Israel/ Palestine. The spectacular counterpoint to Jacir's everyday images— that snapshot of the line at the post office or of the dirty serving dish— in only one of the most recent iteration of conflict in Palestine are those images produced alongside the three Israeli offensives and land invasions into Gaza, the slim swathe of land that is now home to 1.8 million displaced Palestinians, which took place just in the six years between 2008 and 2014.⁶⁶ These armed conflicts produced seemingly endless images of wounded or dying bodies, of the mass homelessness due to destruction of property, and of the extreme poverty of Gaza's residents. But, what Jacir plaintively materializes in *Where We Come From* is that no matter what picture (or life . . . or death) gets placed after the interpretative maneuver, from the most horrific to the most quotidian, the discursive operation of power has already cast its web; images— and people— are made meaningful (or meaningless?) within preexisting interpretative paradigms.⁶⁷ Thus, in the interaction between the images in *Where We Come From* and the militarized occupation embedded in the texts, Jacir

⁶⁶ As Demos also notes, *Where We Come From* is “pointedly distinct from the conflagration of militarized resistance and state violence” which normally provides the context for the conflict and which has “only spelled disaster for both sides and provided yet further opportunities for the prolonged state of siege that has allowed Israel to take advantage of its military superiority.” Demos 114.

⁶⁷ Tom Vanderbilt also quoted a line by Darwish in relation to Jacir's work that adds insight: “We are a country of words.” Tom Vanderbilt. “Openings: Emily Jacir”. *Artforum*. February 2004.

has visualized how Palestinians are caught within a long and atrocious struggle over mediation and meaning-making.

Within the space of conflict

The ‘struggle between interpretation and presence’ in *Where We Come From* provides a point of entry into thinking about what Jacir’s art practice has to tell us about a conflict that has become so entrenched that it is difficult to see its origins, conditions and operations. Most analyses of *Where We Come From* has been focused on what the artwork reveals about the lived experience of what Jacir has called “(im)mobility:” the political and territorial displacements and the travel restrictions which leave Palestinians immobilized.⁶⁸ Demos’ astute engagement with the work has set the precedent as it considers how *Where We Come From* reflects on the inequities of movement in relation to Palestinians and Israeli in an attempt to stimulate “the ethical and political consideration of the effect of the occupation on Palestinian lives.”⁶⁹ Demos offers an overview of how Jacir’s work has a “certain personal correlation” to the artist’s own experience of displacement.⁷⁰ He analyzes out how her work “confronts the oppressive apparatus of spatial control in which Palestinian subjects are enmeshed,” and considers how Jacir attempts to change the perception of these apparatuses of power by illuminating her own experiences of travel restrictions

⁶⁸ Emily Jacir (2002) “(im)mobility.” *What’s Up*. Issue No. 15. Jerusalem: Al-Ma’mal Foundation for Contemporary Art.

⁶⁹ Demos 114

⁷⁰ Demos 106-7.

and exile.⁷¹ This is a compelling analysis of Jacir's work. Many art historians and critics have followed suit by primarily considering Jacir's work in regards to how it illuminates and "dramatizes," to use Demos' turn of phrase, the travel restrictions placed in Palestinians (which are especially oppressive for people who live in Gaza or the West Bank) and in relation to her biography as diasporic.⁷² I look to add to these important analyses by considering what Jacir's practice reveals about *how* people have been made subject to these injustices. My approach particularly focuses on the often hidden operations of power used to subject people to the whims of the Israeli State as they emerge in Jacir's artworks. In order to do this, I ask what the artworks reveal about the exercise of power and production of difference (always a matter of interpretation) that keeps people displaced and dispossessed seemingly without end in Palestine.⁷³

In the interactions between the framed texts and images Jacir has schematized the strategies of containment of what theorist Judith Butler aptly calls the 'frames of

⁷¹ Demos 104

⁷² This combines also with another way critics and scholars respond to Jacir's work is through the prism offered by Edward Said's overarching critique in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. Said's thesis in that text is that people in the United States and elsewhere "have scant opportunity to view the Islamic world except reductively [and] oppositionally." Thus, scholars have fruitfully found in Jacir's work what Fereshteh Daftari calls "the lives of Palestinians whose relationships, life-styles, and above all their claim to an ordinary identity contradict the stereotypes propagated by the media." See, for instance, Sarah Rodgers, "Imagined Geographies Diaspora and Contemporary Arab Art," in *New Vision Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*, ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi, Salwa Mikdadi and Nada Shabout (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), Lindsey Moore "Minding the Gap: Migration, Diaspora, Exile and Return in Women's Visual Media" Fereshteh Daftari, *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006. Tina Sherwell "Topographies of Identity, Soliloquies of Place" *Third Text*, Volume 20, Issue 3-4, 2006. Stephen Morton. "The Palestinian State of Emergency and the Art Practice of Emily Jacir" *Performance, Politics and Activism*. Ed. Peter Lichtenfels, John Rouse. Palgrave MacMillan, 2009

⁷³ And, like Demos, as I elaborate further below, I am particularly interested in the tactics Jacir uses to change the perception of Palestine, particularly in how the occupation is interpreted and seen. Demos 119.

war’— the visual and discursive dimensions of conflict deployed by the state and media to regulate and constrict how violence and war is understood.⁷⁴ These are very intricate and convoluted operatives of power. They are the mechanisms that not only “control . . . and delimit public discourse,” they also, Butler explains (following Foucault), are “establishing and deposing the sensuous parameters of reality itself—including what can be seen and what can be heard.”⁷⁵ These frames are why the large-scale destruction of human lives (through death or through the more insidious tactics of occupation) can happen without any sanction, or even remorse— death, destruction, and oppression in Occupied Palestine is made *sense of, sensible, and normalized* in this version of reality in which we are embedded. It is impossible to resist the grasp of war, both the lure of its logic and its death wielding propensities, until we understand how it and its operatives manipulate our perceptions. It is worth quoting Butler at some length here:

If war is to be opposed, we have to understand how popular assent to war is cultivated and maintained, in other words, how war waging acts on the senses so that war is thought to be an inevitability, something good, or even a source of moral satisfaction . . . Waging war in some ways begins with the assault on the senses; the senses are the first target of war. Similarly, the implicit or explicit framing of a population as a war target is the initial action of destruction. It is not just preparation for destruction to come, but the initiating sequence of the process of destruction.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Judith Butler. *The Frames of War*. Verso, 2009. xi

⁷⁵ Butler xi-xii

⁷⁶ Butler ix- xvi

This means that the frames of war not only constitute the terms of conflict, how conflict will be perceived and understood, and condition the possible responses evoked by conflict, they also begin the process of destruction. As populations are imagined to be war targets, war inevitably follows. This is why, in the image and media-laden 21st century, as more and more information disseminates through mainstream and alternative media sources as well as through social media, the conditions in Palestine continue to erode. All of the violences notably absent in Jacir's poignant artwork, the numbers of Gazan casualties in the latest outbreaks of open warfare (over 2000 in Operation Cast Lead in 2014), the impoverished in Gaza (at least 90% of the population), those left homeless through the destruction of their residences (17,000 homes destroyed in the summer of 2014 alone), are well known both internationally and amongst the Israeli populace.⁷⁷ Images of, for instance, the bombing of a school in Gaza converted to an emergency shelter or of the air strike that damaged a children's hospital in the summer of 2014 proliferated across medias. And yet, it is possible to hear and see these images, this devastation, these statistics and, in Butler's words "set them aside . . . to not deny them, but to insist that they do not finally matter" or even to find in all that information the impetus for heightened warfare.⁷⁸

The frames that Jacir and Butler reference, whether obliquely or directly, are the imaginative conditions of politics— what scholars from Walter Benjamin to

⁷⁷ These statistics can be found in: Chris Hedges. "The Psychosis of Permanent War." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 44 No. 1, Autumn 2014, 42-51.

⁷⁸ Butler xxiv

Jacques Rancière have called the ‘aesthetics of politics’ in order to describe the processes through which the senses are put at the service of political authority.⁷⁹ The collective fantasies of states and publics have proven amazingly adept at imagining people out of their lives and into real exile, real poverty, real oppression or even real death while cloaking all these real effects. The imaginary is a remarkably powerful political force, and it also proves to be the most elusive aspect of conflict to understand. Tracing the acculturation of the senses that renders war and conflict an inevitability, something good, or even just, is a tricky task. And yet, the impasse between interpretation and presence that Jacir eloquently evokes, and the profound disregard for life that it engenders, proves intractable if we cannot learn to see “the frame that blinds us to what we see,” in Butler’s evocative phrasing— “the forcible frame, the one that conducts the dehumanizing norm, that restricts what is perceivable and indeed, what can be.”⁸⁰ But, standing in front of *Where We Come From*, straining hopelessly to see through the framed texts to those lost within them, a bind presents itself: how to see that which delimits the very bounds of seeing? How to see “the frame that blinds us” when we are blind?

This question is the hinge on which this chapter pivots. Having pinpointed the reference in *Where We Come From* to the often-invisible operation of the political imaginary in regards to Palestine and registered, albeit only glancingly, those trapped

⁷⁹ Walter Benjamin’s concern with the aestheticization of politics is the subject of one of his most famous piece’s of writing: “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Jacques Rancière’s large body of work, not only his book called *The Politics of Aesthetics*, also addresses the relationship between politics and aesthetics. Walter Benjamin. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” *Illuminations*. Schocken Books, 1969. Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Transl. Gabriel Rockhill. Continuum, 2006.

⁸⁰ Butler 100

in that construct, the focus now turns to how Jacir's larger art practice brings into view the stealthy and pervasive framing of Palestinians. The Israeli State and its proponents sustains its policies and practices through acting on the senses, ensuring that people apprehend what happens in Palestine selectively and that the responses to what are, finally, atrocities exercised by an occupying power, are deadened. This analysis considers Jacir's work in relation to this sensory bind, challenging the understanding of Palestine and the biopolitical mechanisms in play by questioning, exposing, and opposing the frameworks through which blindness proliferates around the actions of the Israeli State. Sorting through artworks that reference the sensory manipulations that undergird the Israeli occupation and that unearth the cloaking mechanisms deployed to mask these actions, this chapter follows the artist's practice as it unravels the complex components of the interpretative frameworks that have been constructed around Israel's operations of power. It traces the attempts the artist makes to find avenues to communicate the conflict outside of these discursive traps that continue to interpret and produce the oppressive reality in Palestine. And, it follows Jacir in asking, what would it take to remake (transform) the sensibility of the conflict in Palestine?

Making sense of the law

For the work that most clearly articulates the operative frameworks that have captured the political imaginary of the Israeli State and its supporters, on three separate occasions between 2000- 2002, Jacir asked Palestinians to take out personal

ads for Jewish partners in New York's *Village Voice*. The intervention is exhibited through its documentation: the newspapers in which the ads were displayed are shown. *Sexy Semite* is composed of ads that are at times uncomfortably hilarious in their mimicry of the sexual economy of dating in the United States, and at times actually (or aptly) poignant in their intense longing and simmering frustration. One reads "RED HEADED PALESTINIAN ARAB. Tall, dark eyed and homesick. 100% Semitic and proud. Loves poetry and chocolate. The sunset. Seeks JEWISH MALE (and race) for fun and travel to Israel." Another: "Palestinian Semite in search of Jewish soul mate. Do you love milk & honey? I'm ready to start a big family in Israel. Still have house keys" (Figure 4). One is even more direct: "YOU STOLE THE LAND. MAY AS WELL TAKE THE WOMEN! Redhead Palestinian ready to be colonized by your army. You: Jewish, Hot, Strong. U take me home + I'll let you win" (Figure 5). The logic of the ads rely on a loophole through which Palestinians could conceivably reclaim their homelands; according to Israeli legislation passed in 1950 and expanded in 1970 to include spouses, everyone of Jewish ancestry *or married to someone with Jewish ancestry* has the right to live in Israel and to gain citizenship.⁸¹ Under the terms of the Israeli 'Law of Return,' if a Palestinian finds a Jewish partner, through personal ads or otherwise, they obtain the ability to return to their homeland, to the homes and lands they were forced to abandon, to move freely throughout Palestine, and even to stay there under the protection of Israeli law—the

⁸¹ This loophole, although never directly addressed through Israeli law to which the marriage between Palestinians and Jews seemingly is untenable, was still closed in 2002 as a byproduct of the Citizenship Law that is discussed further below.

Figure 4: Emily Jacir, *Sexy Semite* (2000-2002) (detail). Personal ads placed in the newspaper *The Village Voice*. The artist asked 60 Palestinians to place personal ads seeking Jewish mates in order to return home utilizing Israel's "Law of Return." © Emily Jacir, Courtesy Alexander and Bonin.

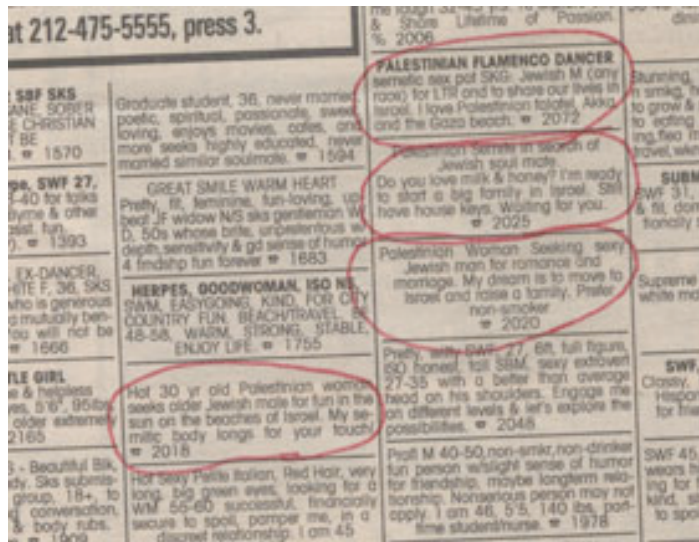


Figure 5: Emily Jacir, *Sexy Semite* (2000-2002) (detail). Personal ads placed in the newspaper *The Village Voice*. The artist asked 60 Palestinians to place personal ads seeking Jewish mates in order to return home utilizing Israel's "Law of Return." © Emily Jacir, Courtesy Alexander and Bonin.



same law which otherwise works to systematically deny them such rights and protections.⁸²

By highlighting this remote passage to Israeli citizenship, the ads point to the foreclosure of Palestinian assertions of their own 'right to return' along with a right to the property lost as a result of the 1948 war, the Six-Day War in 1967, and the resulting exoduses. This right was recognized by a resolution passed by the United Nations as early as 1948 although not in any manner binding by international law, but Israel and its supporters have long ignored this claim for equal rights.⁸³ As Jacir explains, she issued guidelines to everyone that ran ads on behalf of the project to bring attention to just this fact, asking that the ads highlight the inequality between Israel's Law of Return, which gives any Jewish person the right to immigrate and

⁸² The mode Jacir chooses for this artistic intervention, the classified personal ads, has a relationship to the mail art that developed in the U.S. out of Fluxus in the 1950s and 1960s. The idea for mail art, sending small-scale works through the postal system, emerged in the U.S. as a means to circumvent official art distribution and approval systems such as the art market, museums, and galleries. While this is one precedent, *Sexy Semite* has a more direct relationship how Eugenio Dittborn and other Latin American artists picked up this mode of art distribution under untenable political circumstances. During the time of Augusto Pinochet's military regime in Chile, Dittborn created what he calls "Airmail Paintings" in order to circulate art out from the control of that regime. Although there was not a systematic exercise of censorship under Pinochet, the violent suppression of dissent meant that what was known as "apagón cultural" ("cultural blackout") commenced during this period, with no openly political cultural practices. Dittborn began making "Airmail Paintings" during the early 1980s as a response, sending works to exhibits and artists internationally that reflected on conditions, both personal and social, in Chile. Cildo Meireles "Insertions into Ideological Circuits" Series produced in Brazil in the early 1970s under similar political conditions also loom large in Jacir's practice.

⁸³ The UN General Assembly Resolution 194, which was passed on December 11, 1948, recognized the Palestinian right of return for the first time. The Resolution reads: (The General Assembly) Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible. Although General Assembly resolutions have only a recommendatory character and are not binding on its states, the UN has voted to reconfirm the resolution every year since its original recommendation in 1948.

<http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A>

gain citizenship of Israel, and the lack of such laws and rights for Palestinians.⁸⁴ In ads that read “I need you to get me home” or “Palestinian F ready to stop roaming the world in exile,” *Sexy Semite* is interested in showing again the uneven balance of power, the travel restrictions, and potent spatial inequalities imposed on Palestinians. This work offers a blisteringly sharp critique, albeit couched in the language of love, of the inequities administered through Israeli State legislation. It does this by contrasting the restrictions placed on Palestinians who have been driven from their homes with the rights given to Jewish people from around the globe who are guaranteed citizenship in a land to which they, their parents and their grandparents, might have never been.

If this is the most obvious political critique to be found in the ads, there is a much more complex assessment of Israeli State politics and its supporters being splayed across the pages of the *Village Voice* with this project. *Sexy Semite* offers a glimpse into how the Israeli legislative apparatus and its administration of injustices is interpreted, perceived, and made sense of not only in Palestine but also in the United States. It reveals the production of prevalent sexual and racial social norms and their deviations that quell the indignation that should surely arise from such blatantly racist laws; it shows how perception drives state policies. After all, it is not only in the Law of Return referenced overtly in *Sexy Semite* that ethnic belonging and the production of biological difference facilitates discrimination in the Israeli State.

⁸⁴ Doris Bittar quotes Jacir as saying that she wanted to expose “the fact that Palestinians who are indigenous to that land do not have the right to return to their own country while any Jew on earth, from any country has the right to ‘return.’” Doris Bitter. “Artist Profile: Emily Jacir.” *Canvas Magazine*, Dubai. 2009.

The state has nationalized 93% of their land to control the ethnic makeup of its population; the state operates vetting committees, enshrined in law, in hundreds of rural communities to prevent Palestinians from living in these communities; and Israel has more than fifty-five laws explicitly discriminating based on which ethnic group a citizen belongs to.⁸⁵ In the 2015 elections, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud party ran under the slogan ‘It’s us or them,’ calling overtly forth Israel’s racist policies and, in doing so, ensuring the party’s successful reelection.⁸⁶ Against this backdrop, it is imperative that what the ads have to show about the systematic production of the biological and its sensory apparatuses which lies at the root of Israeli State’s ability to administer such explicitly unjust and racially conceived laws begins to be unpacked.

In ads that read “PALESTINIAN ARAB . . . Seeks JEWISH MALE (and race),” “100% Semite Palestinian . . . Seeking Jewish Male, any race,” or “SM Palestinian muslim (semetic) ISO SJF (any race)” (misspelling in original), after all, the production and perception of biological difference is overtly, uncomfortably, made subject. It is worth pausing a moment here to rehearse and clarify the

⁸⁵ This abbreviated list of the governmental policies of discrimination comes from the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. This center launched the *Discriminatory Laws Database* in March 2013 as an online resource to document the Israeli laws enacted since 1948 that directly or indirectly discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel in all areas of life, including their rights to political participation, access to land, education, state budget resources, and criminal procedures. “The Discriminatory Laws Database.” *Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel*. May, 5, 2012. <http://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7771>

⁸⁶ As the *Washington Post* reported in February 2015, both the Likud Party and its most formidable opponents the Zionist Camp used “It’s us or them” as their campaign slogan in the final months of the campaign. Sefi Keller. “Israel holds an election in three weeks. Here’s what you need to know.” *The Washington Post*. February 27, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/02/27/israel-holds-an-election-in-3-weeks-heres-what-you-need-to-know/>

relationship of the biological to the exercise of power. Achille Mbembe's influential writings in which the political scientist and theorist examines the workings of what Foucault called biopower, "that domain of life over which power has taken control," to find within them the conditions through which "the right to kill, to allow to live, or to expose to death" is exercised is particularly apt for this analysis.⁸⁷ This is what Mbembe terms 'necropolitics', the project interior to biopower that carries as its explicit function "*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" (italics in the original).⁸⁸ According to Mbembe, in order for people to be made dead, or even made into the living dead of contemporary politics (the stateless, homeless, and politically-void populations of which Palestinians are the current exemplar,) they must first be categorically split from those who 'must live' – and have the protection of the state. Mbembe synthesizes Foucault's argument on how this works through the production of a biological field that "presupposes the distribution of human species into groups, the subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the biological caesura between the ones and the others."⁸⁹ Mbembe notes that this is the function of what Foucault labels racism, and, as Jasbir Puar cautions us not to forget, what Foucault also linked to the history of sexuality.⁹⁰ Necropolitics works through those biological economies

⁸⁷ Achille Mbembe. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15(1) 2003, 12.

⁸⁸ Mbembe 14

⁸⁹ Mbembe 17

⁹⁰ See: Jasbir Puar. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke, 2007. Jasbir Puar. "Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking About the Sexual Politics of Israel." *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, 2011, 133–142.

which divide populations and deliver certain people up to what Mbembe eloquently calls the “murderous functions of the state.”⁹¹

Although Mbembe looks at various technologies of necropolitics, both historical and present, and catalogues, for instance, the varying exercises of power through slavery, colonial occupation, the apartheid regime on South Africa, and even the occupation of contemporary Palestine, notably, it is in the crafting of perception that Mbembe finds the common thread that carries this power across time and space. As Mbembe explains, “[t]he perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a moral threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security” is characteristic of the political imaginaries that have propagated blatant and deadly injustices throughout modernity.⁹² So, here is the framework that makes sense out of injustices; it is through the simultaneous manufacturing of fear and of biological difference that populations are made disposable, subject to unjust laws, and relegated outside of the parameters of care that state policies dictate. The trick, then, in Mbembe’s polemics, to understanding the working of the war machines and necropolitical agendas that continue to cause human lives to be repeatedly forfeited is in unearthing how populations are biologically marked and transformed into threats.

Looking at *Sexy Semite* through this lens, it is readily apparent that the artwork takes as its subject the nuances of how the Israeli State both manages the production of difference and fabricates the fearful apprehension necessary to make

⁹¹ Mbembe 17

⁹² Mbembe 18

sense out of the exclusions and inequities within its legislative apparatus. The artwork emulates the anxieties attendant to the current situation in Israel. For Israel to continue to exist as what it is now, what many human rights organizations as well as scholars and activists call an apartheid regime with a clear Jewish demographic majority, it has to keep the ever-growing Arab population in abeyance. Therefore, in the ads that say things like “Palestinian Semite in search of Jewish soul mate. . . ready to start a big family in Israel,” the implicit proposal for what could be termed ‘racial miscegenation’ issues a clear threat to the demographic makeup of Israel. In fact, the threat of *Sexy Semite* found an answer in Israeli law less than one year after Jacir’s project was complete. The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law was passed July 31, 2003 to prohibit Palestinian spouses from doing exactly what *Sexy Semite* portends: obtaining citizenship, permanent residency and temporary residency status in Israel by marriage to an Israeli citizen.⁹³ However, the Israeli State legislature was not actually worried that Jewish people would undermine the state through this loophole; obviously, with so much at stake to maintain the current demographic configuration in Israel, decades of political strife and occupation built on a racist regime will not be easily mitigated by the racially transcendent love...sex...desire advertised for in the pages of the *Village Voice*. The crux of Jacir’s project (Arab seeking Jewish Male/Female) replicates how the biopolitical engineering of a population entails what Foucault called the ‘order[ing] of desires.’⁹⁴ Consider the premise of the ads— they

⁹³ Bethany M. Nikfar. “Families Divided: An Analysis of Israel’s Citizenship and Entry into Israeli Law” *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights* Vol 3 2005, 2.

⁹⁴ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality*. Transl. Robert Hurley. Pantheon, 1978. 39-40

seem to propose a way around (or even a way out of) the discriminatory policies of Israeli State legislation in their attempt to get Jewish individuals around the globe to respond to a call to transcend the workings of the state through love, marriage, sex and desire. It is as if the ads are saying that personal, heartfelt, bodily connections are all it would take to bring an end to a war and conflict that has stretched on for decades. Yet, *Sexy Semite* actually shows why this an *impossible* solution and why the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law only inadvertently ended up regulating Jewish/ Arab intermarriages. The law was actually aimed at the Israeli Arab population— approximately one-fifth of Israeli citizens are Arab Palestinians— ensuring that those who marry Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza Strip either have to move to the territories or remain separated from their spouses. Strikingly, the measure does not affect any other ethnic or national group: any person other than a Palestinian who marries an Israeli citizen remains entitled to Israeli citizenship.⁹⁵

If the fear of so-called racial miscegenation and demographic encroachment of Palestinian Arabs into Israel is the obvious sensory framework revealed by *Sexy Semite*, there is a subtler framework also at work in the ads. Jewish and Arab populations and idealizations both have to categorically remain separate and contained for Israel to maintain its current configuration.⁹⁶ There cannot be any blurring of the boundaries between populations; the biological categories, ‘Jewish’ . .

⁹⁵ Nikfar 7

⁹⁶ This charge is based on the definition levied by the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in which an apartheid state is “committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.”

. ‘Arab,’ have to remain distinct, opposed, and normalized into the knowledge formations that make sense out of the current exclusions in Israeli State law. But, the ads offer insight into how this ethnic stability is threatened in ways that surpass even miscegenation. For instance, when race is attached to the word Jewish (Seeking Jewish Male, and race . . . Seeking Jewish Male, any race,) the art project begins to undermine what is, ultimately, the *security* of an ethno-religious, racially configured regime.⁹⁷ Race as a modifier renders precarious where the boundaries around Jewishness lie.⁹⁸ Jacir also asked participants to use the term ‘semite’ in the ads, attaching this word to Arab. Semite is a word that has been sutured to Jewishness; it has come to be emblematic of the very real current and historical racism and persecution directed against Jewish people – ‘anti-Semitism’ is, after all, rife in many parts of the world. Jewish communities have been made victim to discrimination, violent hate crimes, and rampant inequalities through the consolidation of politics and racism in too many instances to count. However, the genealogy of these racist politics is thrown into confusion in *Sexy Semite* because “Semitic” does not refer to Jewish people alone. The term actually refers to a family of languages native to the Middle East and the varied people who speak them. Palestinian Arabs are Semitic-speaking peoples.

⁹⁷ As Craig Buckley astutely points out, Jacir is also responded to the “subtle and overt forms of racism often couched within the language of personal advertisements” in the United States. She has found a medium already laced with racist references to reveal the racist elements encoded in Israeli State policy. Craig Buckley, “Turf.” from the *Homeland* catalogue produced by the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program, 2003.

⁹⁸ This helps explain why the Jewish population from Africa proves the exception to the Right of Return policy. According to the findings of Amnesty International, since 2009 17,778 Africans, mostly Jews from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan, have applied for asylum in Israel seeking refuge. Only 45 of these applicants have been granted refugee status. <http://www.mintpressnews.com/is-israel-denying-asylum-to-jewish-african-refugees-because-they-are-black/202604/>

Therefore, as the ads shift how this word has come to mean within the context of racial discrimination, they challenge how that racism and persecution has been made paradigmatic of the Jewish population and gesture towards the anti-Arab (and the implied anti-Muslim, anti-Islamic) racism that should be included within the category. Thus, the art project erodes the deep boundaries and separations between Arabs and Jews, Israelis and Palestinians, occupiers and the occupied that are absolutely necessary in the tainted political imaginary of the Israeli State.

As the ads reveal the entrenched imaginary of the Israeli State, with its racist ideologies and fear-mongering, they also make explicit the interconnections between race and sexuality within the discursive framing of the conflict; it is not happenstance that Jacir's examination of the biological production of Palestine happens within the context of dating. The ads serve as stark reminders that it is not only through race but also through gender and sexuality constructions that Palestinians are imagined to fall outside of the cultural norms that are the precondition to citizenship in Israel.

Actually, it may be in the glimpse *Sexy Semite* supplies of the *sexual politics* of Palestinian oppression that the ads most directly provide a window into the conceptual frames that solicits the U.S. public's participation in the perpetual destruction of Palestine. The ads, abounding with Arab women and men looking for Jewish mates in the U.S. 'to get [them] home,' are intent on revealing the presuppositions that drive the production of anti-Arab, 'anti-Islamic' sentiments in the United States. So-called sexual freedom or the freedom of expression for women and lesbian and gay people has, in the United States, become what Puar calls "the

symbols of civilisational aptitude.”⁹⁹ Sexual liberation has long been the means by which the U.S., and by extension Israel, has come to represent what Rahul Rao outlines as “the establisher of good society, championing women and queers as objects of protection from their ‘racial’ and national kind.”¹⁰⁰ From Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s exposition of colonial feminism as “white men saving brown women from brown men” to Rao’s contemporary addition of “white homosexuals saving brown homosexuals from brown homophobes,” the justification for foreign involvement (including colonization), particularly in Southwestern Asia and North Africa, has been through the pervasive framings of its actions against Arab populations as liberatory for women as well as, more recently, lesbian and gay people.¹⁰¹ In the deep relationship between the U.S. and Israel, the ‘progressive’ management of sexuality by the Israeli State (its policies that limit discrimination based on gender or sexuality) is used to garner support for their occupation of Palestine. This is too complex a subject to do it justice here, but suffice it to say that the ads in *Sexy Semite* reverberate with the framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which women’s sexual freedom and ‘progressive’ attitudes towards queer folk are central— with Israel as civilized, liberal, and progressive in relation to the backwardness of Palestinian society. That this dynamic has dire, deadly consequences

⁹⁹ Jasbir Puar. “Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking About the Sexual Politics of Israel.” *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, 2011, 133–142.

¹⁰⁰ Rahul Rao “Queer Questions” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 2014
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2014.901817> 5

¹⁰¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. “Can the Subaltern Speak” ” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, 1988, 271–313. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
 Rahul Rao. *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

to the Palestinian population is obvious; to borrow from Puar, the sanctioning of ‘sexual freedom’ (and queer subjecthood, in Puar’s insightful reading) in Israel and the United States is “condoned only through a parallel process of demarcation from populations targeted from segregation, disposal, or death.”¹⁰² Liberal attitudes towards gender roles and sexual proclivities become the logic through which ‘perverse populations’ (those with different sexual politics) are interpreted out of the parameters of care, restricting what can be felt about the violence and oppression they are made subject to.

Sexy Semite, then, has as its subject two seemingly impassable gaps, and two seemingly impenetrable interpretative frames, that assure that the biopolitical relationships between ‘abnormally’ raced and sexed Arab bodies and ‘normative’ Jewish bodies stays in permanent conflict. As the ads manipulate how bodies are apprehended and produced as information by the Israeli State and its protectors, they evoke that careful crafting of perception that is how the actions of the tyrannical structures of state power are made to thrive. *Sexy Semite* goes right to the *heart* of the matter; in order for the Israeli State to maintain its current uneasy racial logic, the logic of its project of exclusion has to not only make sense to its constituents (and to its intended non-citizen constituents), it also has to work its way even into their personal desires. Sexual desire and fantasies of love and marriage always already intertwine with the fantasies of the state. The ads lay out how biological “differences” are created (and preserved) as a discursive effect of a tainted political imagination

¹⁰² Jasbir Puar. “Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking About the Sexual Politics of Israel.” *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, 2011, 133–142.

that seeks to present the conflict in Palestine as both “natural” (if not unavoidable) and irresolvable.

On the narrow precipice

In what seems a deceptively simple and even slight art project (each personal ad composed of thirty words or less), Jacir exposes many of the components of the Israeli State imaginary and how it operates. *Sexy Semite* taps into the racial and sexual insecurity and attendant demographic fear-mongering that is at the very core of Israeli State politics— and the politics of its supporters— and also embedded deep into the collaborative public imaginary. However, whether the project could bypass the persuasive apparatuses that cloak these constructs and bring into plain sight the phantasmatic nature of the race and sexuality claims that have produced such a profound disregard for human life is another question. The sensory apparatuses built up around questions of race and sexuality, the fears and apprehensions that *Sexy Semite* tangles with, after all, are powerful things. Perhaps it is not a surprise, then, that on the third occasion of the ads being run in February 2002, still in the simmering aftermath of 9/11 in the United States, the ads were viewed as a potential terrorist act. Stories about this so-called terrorist activity appeared in three publications: *US News & World Report* called it ‘Fear Factor: Palestinian Valentines or Ambush.’ The *New York Post*’s headline read ‘West Banky Panky in Personal Ad Blitz’.¹⁰³ Even the Anti-

¹⁰³ Doris Bitter. “Artist Profile: Emily Jacir.” *Canvas Magazine*, Dubai. 2009

Figure 6-7: Emily Jacir. *Sexy Semite* (2000-2002) (Installation details). Personal ads placed in the newspaper *The Village Voice*. The artist asked 60 Palestinians to place personal ads seeking Jewish mates in order to return home utilizing Israel's "Law of Return." © Emily Jacir, Courtesy Alexander and Bonin.



Defamation league and the Israeli Consulate in New York addressed the ads, with the Consulate referring to them as “guerrilla warfare” (Figure 6-7).

Although there was evidently something seen as ridiculous about this threat unfolding in personal ads— this “West Banky Panky” in which advertisements for sexual relationships become the fodder of warfare— in the reactions that were poised between hilarity and terror, the hysteria spoke to the problems of the sensory bind. It seems the ads got caught against the hard line of the interpretative frame and in the deep conditioning of the senses which renders null the possibility of a loving end to the Palestinian conflict. The evocation of personal relations in the ads may even have become grist for a war that relies so heavily on the barrenness of contact between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews. Yet, the components to the frameworks through which blindness proliferates around the actions of the Israeli State are clearly on display in these ads— from the racial tropes to the sexual politics of oppression. Therefore, if Jacir’s careful wrenching apart of “the frame that blinds us to what we see,” to again recall Butler’s phrase, still finds eyes shuttered, the frame unrelentingly intact so as to allow us to remain blind, the question still remains. How can the training of the senses be overcome? How to amplify the frames that make sense of the violence against Palestinians without re-activating them?

Looking at these sensational responses to *Sexy Semite* is to be struck anew by how difficult it is for people to see through the social and political fantasies that stifle our ability to imagine a world not ordered by oppression and discrimination. And, it is also to see Jacir’s art practice struggling to balance on the narrow precipice between

showing the conditioning of beliefs about Palestinians and feeding the insidious convictions of that perceptual system. However, with the continual escalation of occupation and warfare in Palestine, this is a balancing act, a risk, well-worth undertaking. The nightmarish conditions in Gaza, after all, seem only to worsen. In 2014, the Israeli State killed more Palestinians than in any year since 1967. And, tellingly, the report issued by the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) found a sharp increase in the Israeli armed forces' use of live ammunition over the period of three years culminating in 2014.¹⁰⁴ This is evidence that more and more injuries and deaths are being sanctioned through the tactics deployed by the state and media to regulate and constrict how violence and war is understood. And, lest we forget, no one is truly spared in this intensification of violence and the increasing normality of warfare. Palestinian attacks against Israeli civilians – mostly settlers – and security forces also rose in 2014, with fifteen Israeli fatalities that year.¹⁰⁵ Violence inevitably permeates through even the frame made to contain and explain it.

With this proliferation of violence and the ramping up of warfare, the policies and practices that sustain the Israeli State through acting on the senses and muting the responses to the escalating atrocities of occupation are working overtime. And, as this intensification unfolds, Jacir's art practice has maintained a steady challenge to the

¹⁰⁴ Mairav Zonszein. "Israel killed more Palestinians than in any other year since 1976." The Guardian. March 27, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/27/israel-kills-more-palestinians-2014-than-any-other-year-since-1967>

OCHA(Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) "Fragmented Lives, Humanitarian Overview, 2014." https://www.ochaopt.org/documents/annual_humanitarian_overview_2014_english_final.pdf

¹⁰⁵ Zonszein

understanding of Palestine and the biopolitical mechanisms at play. Her artworks, however, increasingly seem less a direct confrontation of the frames and walls erected around Palestine and more a persistent attempt to find the instances where the frame is stretched the thinnest. After all, when confronted directly by either the Separation Wall in Israel or with the pervasive stereotyping of Arabs by both the state and the media, the taken-for-grantedness of the current reality, with Palestinians as the inevitable and justifiable losers trapped in an endless war, seems impenetrable, unshakeable. But, in the constant construction required to both erect and maintain the wall and the narratives that strengthen it, there are moments when this complicated structure seems tenuous indeed. If sensory apparatuses shift, even slightly, to let in other forms of knowing, other ways of sensing and perceiving, perhaps all that undergirds it will be pulled away. If the Israeli public and the U.S. public withdraw their support, after all, the structure will inevitably begin to crumble, and the perpetual conflict can stop being the only possible reality in the conception of the Israeli state.

Therefore, while *Sexy Semite* confronts the interpretative framing of Palestinians through emulating the fear-mongering through which stereotypes thrive, in projects like *ex libris* (2010-2012), Jacir's contribution to dOCUMENTA (13), the artwork takes a different tact. Originally conceived for the Zwehrenturm of the Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany and later exhibited at Alexander and Bonin in New York, *ex libris* includes an installation, a public billboard project and a publication. The artwork is comprised of 178 photographs Jacir took of books marked

‘Abandoned Property’ and held at the Jewish National Library in West Jerusalem (Figure 8). These ‘abandoned’ books were taken from the homes and libraries of Palestinians in 1948 when the majority of Palestine’s population was expelled and the state of Israel created. Within less than a year between February and October 1948, the Israeli army systematically uprooted and destroyed more than 500 villages and eleven towns and dispersed hundreds of thousands of Palestinian people, confiscating their homes and possessions and razing entire villages to the ground. The goal of this obliteration was, as the first prime minister of Israel David Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary on July 18, 1948, “to ensure they [the Palestinian refugees] never do return. The old will die and the young will forget.”¹⁰⁶ The images in *ex libris* are from some of the seventy to eighty thousand books taken from Palestinian homes, libraries, and institutions during this time in an attempt, then, to make Palestinians ‘forget’ their homes and their histories.¹⁰⁷

Only six thousand of these many thousands of books are catalogued in the Jewish National Library in West Jerusalem under "A.P." (Abandoned Property). For

¹⁰⁶ The exercise of state power, after all, is not restricted to the disciplining of bodies or the conscriptions of physical space. Political imaginaries, after all, are culturally produced and experienced, so they relate to the generation and control of ideas, not just bodies. As Gish Amit, a scholar at Ben Gurion University whom Jacir consulted in the course of this project explains, “the untold story of the fate of Palestinian ‘abandoned’ books clearly demonstrates how occupation and colonization is not limited to the taking over of physical space. Rather, it achieves its fulfillment by occupying cultural space as well, and by turning the cultural artefacts of the victims into ownerless objects with no past.” Gish Amit, “Ownerless Objects: The story of the books Palestinians left behind in 1948.” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 2008. P 8

¹⁰⁷ As Amit explains, although there are no comprehensive records of the full extent of the books taken by the Israeli State from Palestinian homes, it is recorded that the staff of the Jewish National and University Library at the Hebrew University collected some 30,000 books, manuscripts and newspapers just from western Jerusalem. Another 40,000-50,000 books were gathered from the cities of Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias, Nazareth and other places. Gish Amit, “Ownerless Objects: The story of the books Palestinians left behind in 1948.” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 2008, 7.

two years and over multiple visits to the small room in a library to which the vast majority of Palestinians have no access where the books sit gathering dust, Jacir photographed these books with her cell phone. As Jacir explains, she was interested in how some books came to be, as she puts it, “selected” by the Israeli State and marked abandoned while other books “bypassed the A.P. designation and became part of the library’s general collections” and still others “were deemed unimportant and insignificant and not worth collecting and preserving.”¹⁰⁸ Therefore, while Jacir photographed the ‘abandoned’ books, she also conducted a search through the library's Oriental Reading Room for those books which have been assimilated into the main library system and considered as well the huge quantity of books that never made it to the library. Just as *Sexy Semite* reveals the mechanisms through which people are sorted, *ex libris* similarly looks for how the books looted from Palestinian homes have been classified through state apparatuses.

And, *ex libris* exposes the contradictions embedded within these classifications. In marked contrast to the A.P. written in pencil on the title pages and inked on the spines of the books, the cell phone photographs in *ex libris* focus on the inscriptions and other personal marks left by people in these books seized by the Israeli State. One closely cropped image of a slightly wrinkled page, darkened with age, for instance, bears the handwritten Arabic inscription that translates as “This belongs to Adel al-Turjman. / Second year of commerce. / 3 March 1924,” while another thin white page, marked with a slight water stain and a “date due” registry

¹⁰⁸ Emily Jacir. *ex libris*. Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln. 2013.

from the library bears the neatly scribed inscription “I give this book as a gift to Nicola Farraj. Jerusalem, September 1st, 1873. Levitov.” The images of loose papers stuck among the book leaves, a prayer card left as a page marker and coffee stains intermingled with the inscriptions become testaments of ownership and use that belie the current status of the books (Figure 9-10). The inscription Jacir had painted both in Arabic and in English on the side of a building in Manhattan for the duration of the New York exhibition of the project that reads, “This book belongs to its owner Fathallah Saad. He bought it with his own money at the beginning of March 1893,” after all, stands in sharp contrast to the claim of abandonment that justifies Israel’s continued holding of these books— and, by extension, Palestinian lands (Figure 11).¹⁰⁹

Despite Prime Minister Ben-Gurion’s interdiction on memory, these images serve as proof that Israel did not – and cannot– simply eradicate the past and cause the Palestinian people to *forget* the violent terms of the current occupation. The books form an archive documenting historical ownership and Palestinian possession that, far from being erased, is preserved by the Israeli State. And, because *books* are the subject here, the categories of race, gender, and sex which typically engender the

¹⁰⁹ The use of a billboard in this project, to move outside of the exhibition that contains the photographs, recalls Feliz Gonzalez-Torres’ billboard projects made during the AIDS crisis in 1991 in the United States. To draw attention to the hundreds of thousands of people dying from the disease without eliciting a governmental response, Gonzalez-Torres placed an evocative image of the rumpled sheets and pillows of an empty unmade bed on billboards in Manhattan. An incomplete list of artists who used billboards for their political art practices in the late 1980s and 1990s in the United States also includes Barbara Kruger, Daniel Martinez, and the Guerrilla Girl. Another notable reference is the work of collaborators David Avalos, Elizabeth Sisco and Loius Hock who placed an artwork on the ad space on a bus in 1988 (“Welcome to America’s Finest Tourist Plantation” in San Diego as the city was hosting the Super Bowl to highlight issues in immigration and the undocumented workers within the tourist industry.

Figure 8: Emily Jacir. ex libris, 2010-12. (Installation view) Installation, public project and book. Photo Joerg Lohse. ©Emily Jacir. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin.



Figure 9: Emily Jacir. ex libris, 2010-12. (Detail) Digital c-print on aluminum. 30x40in. Photo Joerg Lohse. ©Emily Jacir. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin.



Figure 10: Emily Jacir. *ex libris*, 2010-12. (Detail) Digital c-print on aluminum. 30x40in. Photo Joerg Lohse. ©Emily Jacir. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin

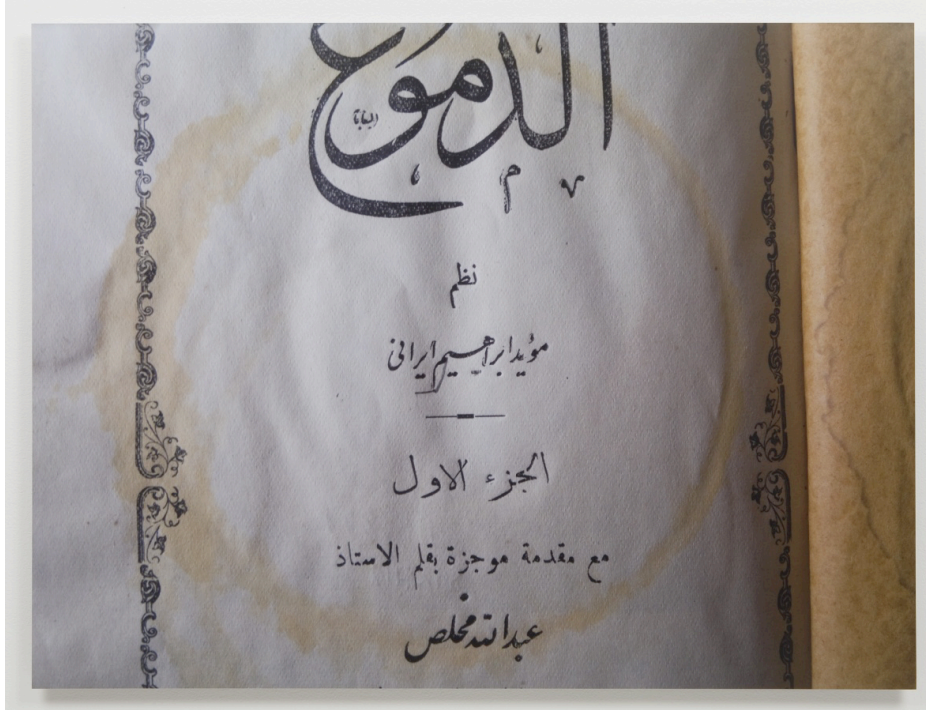


Figure 11: Emily Jacir *ex libris* (2014) (Detail, Mural) Translation and painted mural 25 x 50 ft. Photo: Joerg Lohse ©Emily Jacir. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin.



social panic necessary to justify the Israeli occupation do not easily obscure this archive. There is no clear reason, after all, why one book with a page marked with pencil scribbles and a child's signature ("Maria Saliba") was seized and marked as abandoned by the Israeli State (and thus "preserved") while tens of thousands more books were destroyed. Without the overt biological, necropolitical rationale for occupation which makes sense out of who, what, and where should be made subject of the destructive laws, policies and occupation of the Israeli State, these books evade the framing mechanisms which have proven adept at separating and sorting people and trapping them into frames of meaning. Thus, the cell phone photographs reveal the frailty of a system that depends on creating and maintaining a narrative that justifies the oppression of a people and the seizures of their lands; other information, other images, and other stories are always already threatening to leak out of the discursive framework in place to contain Palestine.

In fact, *ex libris* is evidence of the flaws and the small cracks that exist within the framing of Palestine. The picture of a love song handwritten onto a yellowing page, marked with scribbled revisions, or the photograph of math problems scrawled across a loose piece of paper stuck in between pages of a book reveals, in Jacir's deft handling, what Judith Butler calls the inevitable "breaks" in the construction of meaning around war and conflict. As Butler makes clear, while the frames of war "seek to contain, convey, and determine what is seen," there is always information, events, and images that call into question that which governs the perception of

conflicts.¹¹⁰ The frame, then, must constantly break at these *nonsensical* points and re-form making the information and events which threaten to expose the vitriolic politics at work in conflict sensible once more. In *ex libris*, the images printed on plexiglass and dibond and left carefully, insistently, unframed on narrow ledges resist this reformation— and attempt to hold open the breaks in the renditions of reality and lay bare “the orchestrating designs of the authority that [seeks] to control the frame.”¹¹¹

In the Fridericianum, the public museum in Kassel where the project was first exhibited, this takes on further resonance. The museum formerly housed the library of the state of Hesse-Kassel and was bombed in World War II. Only the manuscripts stored in the Zwehrenturm, the building of the Fridericianum where *ex libris* was shown, survived. In the postwar period, some of these books, manuscripts and archival materials were part of the largest book restitution in history when the United States orchestrated the repatriation of some of the over three million books which had been looted, confiscated or taken by the German army or Nazi government. When Jacir substitutes books for bodies to keep open the break in the frame of meaning that have trapped Palestinians into an endless cycle of conflict, she does so, then, within this loaded context of war crimes against European Jews and the reparations that followed. The break of the frame in *ex libris* opens up in this setting to the possibility of thinking past perpetual conflict to the restitutions— and *repatriations*, with all that means for Occupied Palestine— that would (as if inevitably) follow.

¹¹⁰ Butler 10

¹¹¹ Butler 12

And, there is something else to be seen through the break of the frame set in motion in *ex libris*. In the publication that accompanied the exhibition, Jacir writes:

Concurrent with this research [on the books in the Jewish National Library] were my explorations in the Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem . . . I was on the site a lot, photographing the various monuments, gravestones, and other structures. During the British Mandate it was declared a historical site and later an antiquities site. There is a strong relationship between the books and the land (especially that which has been designated “Absentee Property”)¹¹²

In a statement only a page and a half long, the parallel made between the books and the cemetery casts a reflection over the shelves of images. As the light glares off shiny plexiglass that encases each photograph, making the various rectangles seem to be in grayscale, it is not hard to see tomes become tombstones and the ghost image of the Mamilla Cemetery that Jacir evokes. In fact, the photographs reassemble under the hard plastic and the lights of gallery spaces into tombstones unmoored from the earth and left leaning against the white walls of the gallery space. The images overlap easily; after all, at the same time Palestinians were being driven from their homes and the books that compose *ex libris* were being ‘collected’ by the Israeli State, the Mamilla Cemetery suffered a similar fate. Despite its historical roots to the 7th century and its religious and cultural significance, the cemetery was devastated in the violent occupation as it unfolded in 1948. Graves were unearthed and tombstones shorn from the earth. The most dramatic image of the aftermath of this, contained in the records

¹¹² Jacir 6

of the Muslim Affairs Department, describes what a representative of the Foreign Ministry called a “deplorable scene” in the cemetery:

A pile of tombstones is being used by the guard appointed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs as a source of building stones for a hen house which he built next to his dwelling within the cemetery. A drainage canal runs among the graves. The bulldozer which is cleaning the ancient Mamilla pool is destroying tombs— including ancient tombs and those of great interest from an archaeological standpoint— without the slightest consideration.¹¹³

Jacir’s installation of photographs of books seized from the homes of people fleeing intermingles the images of looted books with this aching memory of the ‘pile of tombstones’ shorn from a decimated cemetery.

Through a careful slight of hand, then, the flaws and contradictions within the framing of Palestine (the marks of ownership on the pages of the books) revealed by the photographs in *ex libris* also play across the shadows of these tombstones. And here the idea of restitution and repatriation that hangs over the images in the Fridericianum takes on urgency; the cemetery is now the future home of the “Center for Human Dignity: Museum of Tolerance,” which is under construction by the government of Israel working in conjunction with the Simon Wiesenthal Center of Los Angeles, California. The tombstones stripped from the earth and piled to make a hen house in the historical accounting are still piling up, it turns out, held now in the ready to form yet another structure within the Israeli State apparatus. Construction on the museum continues although the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) and other

¹¹³ Alisa Rubin Peled. *Debating Islam in the Jewish State: The Development of Policy Toward Islamic Institutions in Israel*.

groups have filed a petition on behalf of the Palestinian descendants of those buried in the ancient cemetery to halt construction; investigate human rights violations attendant to the construction; rebury human remains; and declare the Mamilla Cemetery a protected antiquities site. Actually, Israel's Supreme Court found in its recent ruling that the Mamilla Cemetery, after 50 years of disuse (conveniently, a stretch of time notable for Israeli occupation) could be regarded as abandoned; as Rabbi Marvin Hier, the founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, explains it, the court supported its decision with the idea that “a cemetery not in use for 37 years is considered [by Muslim leaders] *mundras* (abandoned) and without sanctity.”¹¹⁴ The word abandoned returns to again justify new violences, new lootings.

Ironically, the museum is designed to “examine racism and prejudice around the world” with a strong focus on the history of Jewish persecution and the Holocaust.¹¹⁵ But, of course, it is exactly those social conditions which allow a cemetery to become abandoned (like the looted books) and ‘without sanctity,’ despite the violence of its seizure and those clamoring to reclaim it, and to become home to a museum of ‘tolerance.’ Here, if only we can hold eyes open against the pressure of the heavy lids of habit and inertia, we can see the sensory bind laid bare. With ‘racism and prejudice around the world’ tempering responsiveness, after all, the Israeli courts and government, Israeli citizens, and U.S. supporters can ignore that fact that ‘not

¹¹⁴ Marvin Hier. “A Proper Site for a Museum of Tolerance.” *Los Angeles Times*. Feb 12, 2010. <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/12/opinion/la-oe-hier12-2010feb12>

¹¹⁵ This is the goal, at least, of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Los Angeles Museum of Tolerance. <http://www.museumoftolerance.com/atf/cf/%7B0418cdf9-65c7-4424-955c-e30218530a20%7D/HOLOCAUST%20EDUCATIONAL%20RESOURCE%20KIT.PDF>

seeing' is actually the tacit aim of the museum. But, perhaps they should celebrate the museum for what it is: a masterpiece of the frame. The state policies and practices which are constantly at work on the senses, selectively filtering apprehension and limiting the range of available responses, when able to make sense even out of building a museum of tolerance on, or even, *out of* the racially construed bones of an occupation, have sensory power to wield with seemingly no bounds. And it is only when tombstones and tomes merge in *ex libris*, then, that there is even a possibility to see the irony and perversity of the construction at Mamilla Cemetery. The books are an attempt to avoid the bodies (both those within the cemetery and those that struggle on their behalf) that are used to justify the land's violent dismemberment. *Ex libris*, then, is a tactical approach to finding an opening in the blinding framing of Palestine.

If the exit is in sight

Shortly before his death in September 2003, Edward Said plaintively stated, "Whenever the facts are made known, there is immediate recognition and an expression of the most profound solidarity with the justice of the Palestinian cause and the valiant struggle by the Palestinian people on its behalf."¹¹⁶ In the same year, Jacir collaborated with the artist Anton Sinkewich on a sculptural installation of books about Palestine or by Palestinian authors. These books are wedged into the space between two walls, forming a floating, tightly packed row (Figure 12). The volumes are unreadable: the tension of the row would be broken if one book was

¹¹⁶ Edward Said. "Of Dignity and Solidarity: The Meaning of Rachel Corrie." *CounterPunch*. June 23, 2003. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2003/06/23/of-dignity-and-solidarity/>

removed or if anything caused the pressure holding the books into place to give. Then, the entire structure would collapse. So, if, as Said believed, knowing the facts about the Palestinian cause leads to resistance against the occupation, Jacir points to the entrenched resistance to forms of knowing that are not sanctioned by the Israeli State. Many scholars (not to mention artists, writers, and activists) have systematically compiled the information necessary to demonstrate how the constructions of ideologies and historical narratives in Palestine pave the way for social injustices; they have assembled the facts that Said saw as leading the way to justice. For instance, Israeli historians Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim, and even Zionist historian Benny Morris, to name only a few examples, have worked for decades to substantively reveal the flaws in the historical narration of the Israeli State.¹¹⁷ They point out the inaccuracies and ideologies that Israel has propagated to claim a land that has had a substantive Arab population for hundreds of years. However, all of this information has not been able to substantively penetrate the insidious framing of the conflict. Violence continues unabated in Palestine. In fact, it has settled uncomfortably into seeming permanency—decades of military maneuvers, encroaching Israeli settlements, and mass expulsions of people from their homes, and there continues to be no solution in sight for the fact that the Israeli State is predicated on the continued political and territorial dispossession of the Palestinian people. As Shlaim cautions, the Israel State has adopted a ‘doctrine of permanent conflict’ in

¹¹⁷ Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951*, I.B. Tauris, 1992.
Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine*. Clarendon Press, 1988
Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Palestine rather than cede the right to territorial and military control over the contested territories. For the Israeli State, there can be “no diplomatic solution, no compromise solution” to the entrenched and ideological fight over land.¹¹⁸ Despite all the work towards overturning the beliefs that propel conflict, Palestinians remains dispossessed, held in confines as tightly as the books Jacir suspends overhead.

However, walking underneath the suspended row of books, there is a sense that the tension between the facts and struggles contained within the texts and the ideological justifications for violence that holds them in stasis is building. As the viewer walks under the books, the tension is palpable. If something, or someone, did displace a book or the pressure holding the work in place, the result could affect everyone in the vicinity. It would, after all, take only the slightest shift in pressure for the entire structure to come apart. The release of all that information, and the ability to truly see it, would leave no one (and no place) unscathed or unaltered. For the viewer walking under the books, it seems easy, even tempting, to cause this cascade. Jacir’s practice offers another caveat, then, to Said’s pronouncement; whenever facts can be *perceived despite the preconditioning of the senses*, “solidarity with the justice of the Palestinian cause” is at least *possible*. Without this revision— this shift in perception, this reconditioning of the senses— justice remains elusive. In Jacir’s practice, the question of what exactly it would take to cause the structure to crumble remains always paramount.

¹¹⁸ Roger Gaess. “Interview with Avi Shlaim” *Middle East Policy Council*. Volume XVI, Number 3, 2009.

Figure 12: Emily Jacir and Anton Sinkewich, *Untitled*, 2003. Selected books about Palestine or by Palestinian authors. Dimensions vary. English Version. ©Emily Jacir



Chapter 2
History, Immigration, and the Present Tenses:
Kader Attia's *Repair: 5 Acts*

The aesthetic might enlighten to crisis. ~Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

In 2013, Kader Attia used the opportunity of a solo exhibition at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin to create a massive multi-media installation that spanned seven rooms titled *Repair: 5 Acts*. In an extension of the research from an already sprawling installation at dOCUMENTA (13) called *Repair from Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures*, at the KW Attia filled over 10,000 square feet with objects and images that documented the collision of cultures through European colonialism. These included African masks covered with broken mirrors, shelves of colonial government handbooks carefully stitched closed with surgical precision, rough wooden sculptures of European soldiers suffering facial injuries, vitrines of taxodermied animals alongside masks made to represent them, photographs and marble statues documenting body modifications common amongst some indigenous groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and historical anatomical drawings of facial injuries and surgical techniques.

The overwhelming first impression of the installation was of damage and latent violence— the facial deformities carved into the wooden statues and drawn on the pages of the surgical texts merged, if uneasily, with the shattered mirrors and even the images and statues of people with body modifications to leave a residue of brokenness on every object (Figure 13). Actually, all the broken mirrors in *Repair: 5 Acts* meant walking between the shelves and vitrines of the installation was like being submerged in the Lacanian mirror stage gone awry.¹¹⁹ In that famous schemata of

¹¹⁹ Ellen Blumenstein also evokes Lacan in a reading of another of Attia's artworks, *Holy Land*. In this work, 45 mirrors were positioned on a beach of Fuerteventura in the Canary Islands, facing the

Figure 13: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Repair's Cosmogony*, 2013. Installation View: KW Berlin. Metal shelves, teak wood sculptures (from Dakar), white Carrara marble, sculptures, archival documents and photographs. Dimensions Variable. ©Kader Attia, Photo: Uwe Walter, Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger



Moroccan Border 100 kilometers away over the sea. Blumenstein speaks to the impossibility of finding a whole image in these mirrors unless one is arriving from the sea— the stance of the immigrant. Ellen Blumenstein. “Randonnée: Objects and Quasi-Objects.” *Repair: 5 Acts*, Exhibition Catalogue, Kunst-Werke, 2013.

identification, remember, young children look into the mirror and see an image of themselves that is whole and complete and in marked contrast to their lived experience of their bodies as uncoordinated and imperfect.¹²⁰ According to Lacan, this discordance is resolved through an identification with the imaginary ‘whole’ body imaged in the mirror.¹²¹ The Ego is formed and the self is made whole, if only temporarily, as the child “assumes an image.”¹²² This is the triumph of the imagination, in Lacan’s purview; the representation becomes constitutive of the real, imbuing the body with authority. But in Attia’s installation, broken mirrors reflect only more brokenness. For instance, the African masks set in niches in a labyrinthian hallway towards the beginning of the installation are distorted by mirror fragments, leaving no whole image to identify with (Figure 14). Further on in the exhibition, mirrors that had been broken and stitched back together were hung on walls amid images from surgical textbooks of early facial reconstructions (Figure 15). These mirrors, already marred by the stitches which held them together, reflected back the images of faces disfigured: a drawing, for instance, of a cheek peeled back, or another of a neck splayed open, carefully notated and labeled. To ‘assume an image’ here would be a violent and violating act.

¹²⁰ Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience", from *Écrits, A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan. W.W. Norton & Co., 1977.

¹²¹ Or a misidentification—Lacan's term "méconnaissance" to describe this encounter implies that the identification children make with their imagined wholeness entails a false recognition. Lacan 503

¹²² Lacan 503

Figure 14: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 1, Culture, Mirrors and Masks*, 2013. Installation View: KW Berlin. Wooden masks, mirrors, steel. Dimensions variable. ©Kader Attia, Photo by Uwe Walter. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger



Figure 15: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 3, Science, Repair Analysis*, 2013. Installation View: KW Berlin. Repaired mirrors, lithographs, wooden mask. Dimensions variable. ©Kader Attia, Photo by Uwe Walter. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



And, this is the point. This feedback loop of broken mirrors is Lacan's developmental process rendered in shards. As such, the shards serve as a reminder of the important caveat Frantz Fanon made to the Lacanian premise. The Martiniquan scholar warned that the exercise of colonial technologies of power meant that even in a mirror there is no escape from the social production of meaning. Addressing the mirror stage directly in a long footnote in *Black Skin White Masks*, and indirectly elsewhere in that foundational text, Fanon explains, "historical and economic realities come into the picture" even at the moment of self-identification.¹²³ Because "perception always occurs at the level of the imaginary," as Fanon insists, what is seen in the mirror reflects (and reproduces) the social and political fantasies and relations one is embedded in.¹²⁴ For Fanon, in the colony the crafting of perception of both the self and of others—specifically, the twisted imaginings of race—was where the technologies of oppression were perfected and where colonial governance was made to thrive. This means that for black colonial subjects, the wholeness Lacan located in the mirror was unattainable; the image in the mirror was necessarily the racist image of white colonial power that 'shatters' the ego of the black subject.¹²⁵ For

¹²³ Fanon's psychoanalytic perspective on the colonized was heavily influenced by Alexandre Kojève's engagement with Hegelian dialectic of recognition. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel (1807: 229) writes, 'Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or "recognized." Self-knowledge, including one's sense of freedom and sense of self, is never a matter of simple introspection. Rather, understanding ourselves as an independent self-consciousness requires the recognition of another; we recognize ourselves as mediated through the other. As Sartre, who was heavily influenced by Hegel, wrote, 'The road of interiority passes through the Other' (Sartre, 1943: 236-7). Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Marks*, Transl. Charles Lam Markmann. Pluto Press, 1986, 124- 126

¹²⁴ Fanon BSWM 167

¹²⁵ As Fanon put it, "When one has grasped the mechanism described by Lacan, one can have no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And

Fanon, this meant that any authority found in the mirror was always already based on a racist fantasy of relationality; for one child to find wholeness in that reflection it is necessary for another to find only the sharp shards of oppression. So, in the masks and mirrors of Attia's installation is a reminder that if the imagination is powerful enough to turn people into commodity and cargo to be sold across oceans, even the seemingly innocuous mirror and the moment of self appraisal it contains is disfigured by a toxic and racist imagination and relationality. As Fanon plaintively wrote, "My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day."¹²⁶

Yet, in *Repair: 5 Acts*, the relational dynamic Fanon so viscerally experienced and documented is in pieces. The shards even catch all visitors into their sharp surfaces, making it clear that Attia is intent on creating an environment where nothing remains that is whole enough to find the authority that Lacan and Fanon alike located in the unbroken mirror of white supremacy. In this envisioning, then, the racist mirror of colonization casts an ever-widening path of destruction; here everyone is imbricated into the wreckage of the postcolonial aftermath and left shattered. And this is where *Repair: 5 Acts* makes a gut-wrenching move. Attia has attached the concept of 'repair' to this vision of a mutual shattering. This repair is materialized in the wire stitches that hold the shards of the mirrors together. A close

conversely. only for the white man the Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self– that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable." Fanon BSWM 161

¹²⁶ Fanon 86

Figure 16: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 3, Science, Repair Analysis*, 2013. Detail. Repaired mirrors, lithographs, wooden mask. Dimensions variable. ©Kader Attia, Photo by Uwe Walter. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



look reveals them to be actually careful surgical sutures. The notion of repair also emerges in the disfigured faces from the anatomical textbook caught into the reflective surfaces, which are from illustrations of surgical practices. One image, for instance, documents the appropriate technique to suture the inner cheek, another, the various tools used to perform surgery on a wound to the brain (Figure 16).¹²⁷ Despite the cutting edges of the mirrors, despite the disfiguring wounds of the illustrations, and despite all the implicit dangers of such widespread shattering, the installation insists that the incapacity to find wholeness in mirrors, objects, or images is (at least) a step to reparations to systemic racist oppression. What is being offered here is a reparative to the lingering perceptual and relational system of white supremacy. If people have been forced into a system of representation and recognition which requires some people to be always already in shatters, what could possibly *fix* this, at least according to the proposal in *Repair: 5 Acts*, is to find a mutuality in shattering—to finally recognize in the mirrors and images of white supremacy that no one can be left whole through the violent oppression of others.

On Mirrors and Migration

The reparative emphasis of Attia's Berlin installation came back into my mind in 2015 as Europe's worst migration crisis since World War II was first unfolding. By the end of August that year, over 350,000 refugees had already made the dangerous

¹²⁷ These illustrations are from an anatomical picture book that illustrator and scientist Nicolas Henri Jacob and anatomist Jean Marc Bourgerie spent twenty years (1830-1850) creating. The original publication, which included a total of 725 lithographs, was a standard reference work for surgical techniques. See: Jean Marc Bourgerie. *Atlas of Human Anatomy and Surgery*, New Edition. Taschen. 2005.

trip across the Mediterranean or by land into Europe and over 2,700 people were estimated to have died or gone missing in the attempt. The long summer (then the hottest ever on global record) saw dead bodies seemingly endlessly washing up on coastlines, smothered in the unventilated holds of boats, or even packed into an abandoned truck in Austria— a veritable horror show.¹²⁸ On only a single day of disaster, an estimated 800 people drowned in April 2015 when a boat capsized. The ceaseless accumulation of dead bodies was a harsh reminder of the desperation of families and individuals forced to flee from war, famine, poverty, environmental disaster, or some combination of all these factors; to be willing to risk dying on the journey speaks volumes about what people are trying to leave behind. In the face of increasing environmental precarity, the death and the desperation also gave a glimpse of a dire future that seems to have already engulfed us.¹²⁹

But, it was the responses by leaders of the European Union that called Attia's invocations to mind. Even before the Brexit vote in England¹³⁰ showed the extremes that countries— or at least the UK— was willing to go to staunch the flow of

¹²⁸ The bodies of 71 people from Syria, Iraqi and Afghanistan were found in the back of an unventilated truck in Austria in late August 2015. The people had asphyxiated in the back of the refrigerated truck that was supposed to smuggle them from Hungary to Germany in their search for asylum. Fazel Hawramy. "Migrant truck deaths: the untold story of one man's desperate voyage to Europe." *The Guardian*. Oct. 7, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/07/migrant-truck-deaths-untold-story-mans-desperate-voyage-europe>

¹²⁹ This surge in immigration can be traced to 2011, when thousands of Tunisians arrived at the Italian island of Lampedusa following the onset of the Arab Spring. The most recent surge in 2015 has been attributed to the growing numbers of people from Syria, Afghanistan, and Eritrea being forcibly displaced. While EU countries reeled from the influx, the amount of people who ended up in Europe was actually a relatively small share of the tens of millions of people displaced worldwide (59.5 at the end of 2014, the highest level on record). These numbers are only predicted to increase as environmental crises and the attendant conflicts over resources continue to escalate. Jean Park. "Europe's Migration Crisis." *Center on Foreign Relations (CFR) Backgrounders*, Sept. 23, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/migration/europes-migration-crisis/p32874>

¹³⁰ The election of Donald Trump in the United States is also part of the xenophobia (and its effects) which gripped the West as the crisis in immigration was unfolding.

immigrants, the prime minister of Hungary predicted the ‘demise’ of Europe in the ongoing crisis. During the negotiations around the collective response of the EU to the influx of people from Africa and Southwest Asia (the ‘Middle East’), the prime minister made his dire pronouncement: "Europe is at stake today" he warned; “Europeans’ way of life; European values; the survival or demise of European nations, or rather, their transformation beyond recognition." The increased inclusion of people of color and people of Islamic faith into Europeans’ ‘way of life’, in that leader’s polemics, would be the end of Europe. While the white supremacy this leader openly espoused did not sit easily with everyone in the EU— when he said "I think we have a right to decide that we do not want a large number of Muslim people in our country . . . because Europe and European identity is rooted in Christianity,” for example, there was a collective shudder amongst more left-leaning Europeans— it would be wrong to dismiss his fatalism as merely right-wing rhetoric.¹³¹ The prime minister had, after all, hit a political nerve ending. It was not hard to imagine frantic movements around a teetering mirror as the result.

¹³¹ While there are other examples of countries (primarily Germany and Austria) using more welcoming and humanitarian rhetoric in response to the crisis, the Hungarian prime minister’s polemics were not utterly out of keeping with other responses across the EU. Other leaders offered similar sentiments. For instance, Marine Le Pen, the extremist leader of the National Front (NF) called for an end to even legal immigration into France. She positioned her party as the guardians of secularism (*laïcité*), the separation of church and state, and defenders of beleaguered European minorities and victimized groups. As Marine put it — alluding to the “Muslim threat” — “in certain districts of cities it’s not good to be a woman, a homosexual, a Jew, or even French or white.” This led to the NF taking record high amounts of votes in French regional elections. Although the NF actually lost, the support they garnered through anti-immigrant rhetoric was unprecedented. And, far prior to the Brexit vote, David Cameron insisted that the UK would not get involved in any Europe-wide resettlement scheme for refugees.

Ian Traynor. “ Migration crisis: Hungary PM says Europe in grip of madness.” *The Guardian*. Sept, 3, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/03/migration-crisis-hungary-pm-victor-orban-europe-response-madness>. Hugh McDonnell. “How the National Front changed France.” *Jacobin Magazine*. Sept. 3, 2015. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/11/marine-jean-marie-le-pen-national-front-immigration-elections/>

After all, when he warned of the impending ‘transformation beyond recognition,’¹³² the polemical leader was touching upon the real social and political dilemma that was resonating across the continent. Taking in large numbers of refugees inevitably means having to modify, if even slightly, the perception of a nation, of the continent, and of the Union. This is the mirror shattering, in both Attia and Fanon’s overview: the demise of the image that unites Europe and gives it its authority.¹³³ This has consequences; if the current fantasy of the EU, with its white supremacist overtones, falls to pieces through changing demographics, and, as both Lacan and Fanon agree, the image and the imagination has a role in constituting the real, this means the inevitable erosion of the political and social structures that the fantasy has created. As Fanon cautioned, to “set out to change the order of the world,

¹³² The prime minister is also entering into a long history of debate around the politics of recognition. Contemporary political theories of recognition, which attempt to reconfigure the concept of justice in terms of due or withheld recognition, developed alongside the rise of multiculturalism, which attempted to develop a politics for focused on recognizing, accommodating and respecting difference. The PM was directly rejecting multiculturalism and signaling the death knell of the politics of recognition in Hungary. See Marton Dunai. “Multiculturalism doesn’t work in Hungary, says Orban.” *Reuters*. June 3, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-orban-idUSKBN0OJ0T920150603> . For more about the late 20th century configuration of multiculturalism, see Charles Taylor. *Multiculturalism*. Princeton, 1994.

¹³³ Of course, this fantasy of a nation is already worn thin. And this is not just because the memory of Naziism is a harsh reminder that such a fantasy leads to horrors. The conflict over national identity and immigration has been roiling underneath the surface in Europe for decades. Although most European countries, until the late 1960s and 1970s, were primarily sources of emigration sending large numbers of emigrants to European ‘settlements’ and colonies in the Americas and Australia, and South Africa, it has been years now that the movement has reversed leaving much of the continent largely unrecognizable through the homogeneous fantasies the Hungarian leader insists upon. In the 21st Century, spurred on by increased warfare, resource conflicts and environmental catastrophes in Southwest Asia, Africa and elsewhere, this movement has only hastened. Since the year 2000 the immigrant populations of many Northern and Western European countries have more than doubled. In France, Attia’s country of birth, for instance, as of 2008, an estimated 5.3 million foreign-born immigrants and 6.5 million direct descendants of immigrants (second generation born in France with at least one immigrant parent) representing a total of 11.8 million and 19% of the country's population. Perhaps the fragility of the illusion explains some of the panic that accompanied the mass migration in 2015. These statistics are from the European Commission, as published by Eurostat. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics

is, obviously, a program of complete disorder.”¹³⁴ Faced with such catastrophe and chaos, it was really no surprise that the Hungarian leader declared, “we have no option but to defend our borders” as the first large amounts of immigrants began to reach Europe.¹³⁵ And perhaps it is also not surprise that a year later the UK voted to leave the EU. The new Prime Minister, Theresa May, was clear that she took the vote to leave as a message that the British people wanted to see a reduction in immigration.¹³⁶

A year before the UK took that drastic step, however, much of the EU was attempting similar acts of population control. Hungary erected a razor-wire fence on its border with Serbia and Croatia and used water cannons and tear gas against families and individuals attempting to cross the border. Similarly, at the border of Greece and Macedonia, riot police shot people of all ages with tear gas and rubber bullets. In what was an eerie reminder of Europe’s past, refugees traveling through the Czech Republic even had numbers written on their hands and arms in felt tip pen as they were processed into temporary camps.¹³⁷ The leaders most amenable to providing asylum for the refugees still were not immune to this panic and hurriedly constructed legislation to limit and regulate who would be allowed to stay in their nations. As they worked to delineate and minimize who would be eligible for asylum,

¹³⁴ Franz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Transl. Richard Philcox. 1963/ 2004, 35

¹³⁵ Traynor

¹³⁶ May declared her intention to get migration down to a "sustainable" level, defined as being below 100,000 a year. It is currently running at 330,000 a year, of which 184,000 are EU citizens, and 188,000 are from outside the EU. Brian Wheeler. “Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU.” *BBC News*. Sept. 1, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887>

¹³⁷ Rob Cameron. “Migrants crisis: Unease as Czech police ink numbers on skin.” *BBC News*. Sept 2, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-34128087>

these leaders also attempted to stem the tide of people pouring into the EU. For instance, instead of formulating a plan to minimize the dangers refugees face when forced to find covert means to enter Europe in their search for asylum, leaders of the EU hashed out plans to destroy the boats off the coast of North Africa that were being used for passage across the Mediterranean, leaving people stranded. It seems that some (most) countries are willing to do almost anything to keep the illusion of a whole mirror intact, despite the lives that are destroyed in the process.

When, in the midst of this crisis, bombs and gunfire tore through Paris in November of 2015, what this meant for the destruction of lives only became more dire. In one evening, one hundred and thirty people across Paris were killed in the explosions and bullets that marked the worst attack France had experienced since the Second World War. This was part of more widespread destruction claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) that November; forty-three people in a market in Beirut had been butchered the day before. These acts of extremism, perpetuated in the name of Islam, ensured that the European leaders only heightened their anti-immigrant rhetoric. A “state of emergency” was declared in France, retaliatory bombings commenced, and debates raged about how to fight “Islam.” But, the attack also provided a cautionary against exactly this reaction. As political scientist Remi Piet warns, these responses play into the hands of ISIL and other militarized groups; when communities are polarized, marginalized people are

increasingly driven to identify elsewhere.¹³⁸ At the risk of oversimplifying, this means if some are convinced that Europe must remain recognizable, to echo the Hungarian leader, with a clear white and Christian (or even ‘secular’¹³⁹) majority and authority, it creates the conditions in which other people will be eager to go to war with that entity ... that idea ... that representation.

And so a long epoch of violence, of which the ongoing refugee crisis, the Brexit vote, and the death and destruction that permeates into France and Belgium and beyond, are only the latest instantiations, will continue without any foreseeable end. As long as the relationship between representation, imagination and lived experience is able to produce a fantasy of political belonging that was sprung from the colonial mirror, the racially constituted violences necessary to maintain this illusion will continue. This is what it takes to *preserve* the mirror. Some people must be fed to (shattered by) the global wars that threaten, the neoliberalism that consumes, the seas that claim, and the borders that catch. And, they will not all go quietly. Set as the obverse of this mirror, people will find political belonging in violent defiance of this image. To think seriously with the fragments and shards in *Repair: 5 Acts*, then, is to consider other options— however laced with instability and uncertainty— to this brutal looping system of reflection and representation. As death and destruction continues apace, it might even mean acknowledging that we have already succumbed to exactly what the prime minister fears— a transformation whose results cannot be

¹³⁸ Remi Piet. “France must remain a vibrant and plural democracy.” Al Jazeera English. Jan. 7, 2016. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/01/france-charlie-hebdo-attack-democracy-160103110118125.html>

¹³⁹ This is particularly in the case of France where policies bar the reporting of ethnicity and religion and enforce secularization.

known. This would mean that the current responses to immigration in Europe and the responding acts of violence are both desperate attempts at denial. Standing in the ruins of mirrors, then, questions take shape in the gaps between the shards. What, in Attia's compilation of historical objects and images, is unearthed to shatter the present fantasies of nations? How does his art practices propose reparations to the social body and relations disfigured by historical racist, imperial economies and fantasies, particularly in France? And, how does the form of this creative intervention reflect on what it will take to fracture such virulent and vitriolic political imaginaries?

This chapter traces the deeply ingrained conflict between immigration and nationalism (that breaking mirror) that the French-Algerian artist has condensed and aestheticized into the rooms of the KW, and follows Attia in asking what would it take to repair the increasingly fraught relationships between Europe and immigrants, particularly those of Islamic faith. Beyond asking what art can reveal about the operations of power that normalize the violences and biopolitics attendant to immigration, this chapter asks how an art practice can act on (or within) those operations of power. *Repair: 5 Acts* is only one of a series of recent projects by Attia developed under the auspices of repair. It is part of a compendium of works by the artist that includes *The Repair from Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures*, 2012, shown at dOCUMENTA (13), and *Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob's Ladder*, 2013, shown at Whitechapel in London. Attia has also published multiple volumes in tandem with these exhibitions, including *RepaiR*, 2014 (Blackjack Editions) and *Transformations*, 2014 (Spector Books.) All of these installations and

publications compile objects, essays, and images to focus an unrelenting eye on the historical relationships that, if disfigured by the colonial collision of cultures, seem to be further injured with each passing day of people pouring over the borders of Europe or dying in the attempt. And, all these works insist that repairs must be made to confront these ongoing catastrophes.

With this series of work, then, Attia is entering into current debates and lawsuits regarding reparations for formerly colonized countries that are rippling across Europe.¹⁴⁰ As of 2015, fourteen Caribbean nations had filed suits against Britain for slavery reparations. And, even outside the court systems, people have begun agitating through social media outlets, independent news journals, and other public venues for reparations to be made for slavery, the colonial plundering of resources, and the genocidal practices of colonial regimes. For instance, in 2015 former Indian government minister and Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor garnered massive amounts of public attention when he argued at the Oxford Union in London that substantive reparations owed by Great Britain to India.¹⁴¹ This analysis considers Attia's practice alongside these debates. It asks how the collections of images and objects Attia amasses from Europe's colonial and post colonial history—and the 'acts' the artist suggests lead to the present—are assembled to demand

¹⁴⁰ And the United States as well. See, for instance, Ta-Nehisi Coates widely-read essay, "The Case for Reparations." *The Atlantic*. June 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

¹⁴¹ Upending the usual narrative of development, Tharoor made clear that poverty in the global South is not a natural phenomenon, but has been actively created by colonial plundering. The wealth of European countries, then, is derived from exactly this poverty. The video of this talk is embedded in the following article: Doug Bolton. "Dr Shashi Tharoor tells the Oxford Union why Britain owes reparations for colonising India in viral speech." *Independent*. July 22, 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/dr-shashi-tharoor-tells-the-oxford-union-why-britain-owes-reparations-for-colonising-india-in-viral-10407997.html>

repairs be made to those formerly colonized by European powers. And, it considers what forms, what complex and chaotic *undoings* (if the mirrors that proliferate through the installation are any indication,) *Repair: 5 Acts* proposes that these repairs take.¹⁴²

Past Debts/ Present Unrest

Repair: 5 Acts was divided into five sections (*5 Acts*): Culture, Politics, Science, Nature and Repair. After the hallway of masks covered with broken mirrors in ‘Act 1: Culture,’ ‘Act 2, Politics,’ strikes a different tone; it begins to compile the archive of materials, images and objects that flesh out the sharp shards of the exhibition. Act 2 opens with a diptych of slide projections on a wall in an otherwise empty room. This slideshow called *The Debt*, which Attia has called the ‘thesis’ of the exhibition, includes photographs, drawings, and postcards which together create a history of the *tirailleurs*, the soldiers recruited in the French African colonies (Figure 17). The first African tirailleur regiment was formed in Senegal in 1857;

¹⁴² Attia’s notion of repair is, after all, obviously not only monetary. Instead, how he uses repair has a relationship to the shift Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick outlines in her influential essay “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading.” As Sedgwick describes, years of “paranoid” thinking, which exposes the inevitability of structural violence within systems built on and through the oppression of people of color, of women, of queer people— in art discourse, this has often taken the form of institutional critique— has necessarily bred more ameliorative responses that she calls “reparative thinking.” In Sedgwick’s appraisal, reparative responses to institutionalized oppressions are not only attuned to the material circumstances that shape lives, but are also invested in mapping ways to change these circumstances, and the lives they shape. While Attia’s body of work increasingly joins Sedgwick’s investment in the generative modality of repair, there is a crucial distinction being made here. For Sedgwick, following the work of Melanie Klein, when people find the “resources to assemble or ‘repair’” the self that has been shattered, the self is made “into something like a whole.” So, reparative thinking, for that scholar, is about leaving something intact. In *Repair: 5 Acts*, caught amongst the sharp fragments of mirrors, obviously something else is a stake in Attia’s mode of reparations. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke, 2003.

subsequently, soldiers were recruited throughout the French colonial empire.¹⁴³ These troops served to supplement the French army in the administration of the colonies; actually, they provided the bulk of French garrisons in West and Central Africa as French troops were spread thin.

If *The Debt* is the ‘thesis’ of *Repair 5: Acts*, it is worth spending some time thinking about how the history of the tirailleurs is being staged to reflect back on all the broken mirrors that surround the slide projections. The tirailleurs are a complicated part of colonial history— and colonial fantasy. In Fanon’s writings in *Black Skin, White Masks*, he refers to them as the “archetype” of the African subject so thoroughly colonized in psychological terms that they turn on their communities to become the militarized arm of the French government within the colonies.¹⁴⁴ Early in Attia’s slide projections, one drawing depicts this process (Figure 18). The drawing is neatly divided into two parts with a masquerade (or at least a sketched caricature of one) taking place in the middle. Along one side, community members stand as an integral part of the performed masquerade, driving the performance with clapping hands and drums. On the other, Black Africans in European clothing mix with White French officers amongst the tents of an encampment, watching the performance. While some of these men clap along, it is obvious that they are still at a remove; culturally alienated and no longer part of the performance, they are now the ones who watch. If we think in the terms of the installation’s larger polemics, the drawing

¹⁴³ This history is told by the French Ministry of Defense on their website:

<http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/senegalese-tirailleurs-campaign-france-1940>

¹⁴⁴ Fanon writes about the tirailleurs in the chapter called “The So-Called Dependency Complex” in *Black Skin, White Masks*, 64-88.

shows the social body of the colony being severed— its imagined wholeness shattered— as some colonial subjects became what Achille Mbembe calls the “flesh and bone” of colonial violence, administering French laws and codes of conduct on behalf of the colonial government.¹⁴⁵ Fanon called this the “racial distribution of guilt.”¹⁴⁶ However coerced, “men of color” became those who policed other “men of color” in the colony and “nullified their liberation efforts.”¹⁴⁷ Communities were ruled, then, as the picture shows, through their internal division— their *dismemberment*.

As the slide projections advance, photographs show the tirailleurs, now fully garbed in military uniforms, as part of the new social order of the colony. They stand at attention, neatly organized by the inspecting eyes of French officers (Figure 19). Yet, this social order produced through division is short-lived, at least in the quick projection of images in *The Debt*. It seems dismemberment (division ... shattering) is a catching condition as the neat lines of soldiers are replaced by image after image of grueling warfare with soldiers from Africa and from Europe fighting alongside each other. The slide projections trace the next stage of this history, then; tirailleurs not only served France in the colony, they also fought in a number of wars on the European continent. In the First World War, more than 135,000 African soldiers fought in Europe and over 30,000 were killed. In Senegal alone, 1/3 of males of

¹⁴⁵ Achille Mbembe. “Necropolitics.” *Public Culture* 15(1) 2003, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Fanon BSWM 77

¹⁴⁷ Fanon BSWM 77

Figure 17: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt*, 2013, Installation view: KW Berlin. Two-channel slide projection, color and black-and-white, silent, 9 minutes 33 seconds, ©Kader Attia. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



Figure 18: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt*, 2013, Detail, Two-channel slide projection, color and black-and-white, silent, 9 minutes 33 seconds, ©Kader Attia. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



Figure 19: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt*, 2013, Detail. Two-channel slide projection, color and black-and-white, silent, 9 minutes 33 seconds, ©Kader Attia. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



Figure 20: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt*, 2013, (Detail) Two-channel slide projection, color and black-and-white, silent, 9 minutes 33 seconds, ©Kader Attia. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



Figure 21: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt*, 2013, (Detail) Two-channel slide projection, color and black-and-white, silent, 9 minutes 33 seconds, ©Kader Attia. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



military age were mobilized to fight.¹⁴⁸ In the Second World War, the migration of Africans to Europe to fight on behalf of France only intensified.¹⁴⁹ By the Fall of France (May 1940,) at least 100,000 West African soldiers had been mobilized.¹⁵⁰ After France was occupied by Germany and Italy, the mobilization continued in earnest as people from North Africa (“Arab- Africa”) increasingly enlisted to fight on behalf of Free France, the government-in-exile led by Charles de Gaulle. The Free France forces that fought the Axis powers from Normandy to Indochina to North Africa were at times 65% African.¹⁵¹ As historian Gregory Mann explains, soldiers from Africa played integral roles in outcomes of these times of warfare; as he puts it, they “protected” France in the First World War, and in the Second, they were responsible for “liberating it.”¹⁵²

Having walked past so many broken mirrors to arrive at this history flicking by, it is not hard to imagine that the past is being compiled to push the idea of France and of empire to the breaking point with the images of North African, West African, and European soldiers standing together on battlefields littered with the bodies of the dead (Figure 20) or toiling alongside each other over canons and other weaponry

¹⁴⁸ For an overview of this history, see: Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Senegalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960*. Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1991.

¹⁴⁹ In fact, while the government-in-exile from 1940-42 was officially provisionally head quartered in London, in actually practice, Brazzaville was considered the symbolic capital of Free France due to the declaration of the Brazzaville Manifesto there. From 1942-44, the government was headquartered in Algeria.

¹⁴² Many of these soldiers also interned in German labor camps and thousands of black African Prisoners of War (POWs) were murdered by the Wehrmacht in 1940. Gregory Mann. *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the 20th century*. Duke UP, 2006, 18.

¹⁵¹ The Free French forces were 65% African on the eve of the Liberation of Paris. Muriel Chamberlain. *The Longman Companion to European Decolonization in the Twentieth Century*. Routledge, 1998/2013.

¹⁵² Mann 18

(Figure 21).¹⁵³ Dividing communities in Africa into soldiers and civilians did not keep the empire whole in this historical enactment. Instead, as those whom Fanon once called “the-good-soldier-under-command, the brave-fellow-who-only-knows-how to obey” are shown to *liberate* France, something comes undone in the construction of that nation-form as well.¹⁵⁴ What emerges in *The Debt*, then, *should* be another mirror in ruins. The images show that soldiers from Africa were fundamental to France’s world power; they earned France its continued political autonomy through their efforts. That this caused what historian Fredrick Cooper aptly calls “cracks in the imperial edifice of France” is no surprise here.¹⁵⁵ After all, ideas about political belonging and the category of citizen seem increasingly tenuous as the slides show image after image of tirailleurs fighting for France. Through pictures that depict the interdependence of military battalions composed of both European and Africa soldiers and those that show the obligations that resulted, for instance, in a picture of soldiers from Africa sitting wounded outside a makeshift hospital under the care of European nurses, *The Debt* envisions the distinctions between colonizer and colonized, conqueror and conquered, eroding through this extended period of warfare. Attia’s slide projections stage a history in which the interdependence and obligations that developed between the soldiers from Africa and the nation they fought and died

¹⁵³ As the slide projections reveal, this changing relationality was partially logistical. In contrast to World War I, when African troops remained in segregated battalions, in the Second World War, troops from Africa were integrated into French military units. The careful segregation was broken down due to troops spread thin and the demands of the unrelenting violences of battle.

¹⁵⁴ Fanon 77

¹⁵⁵ Fredrick Cooper .*Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa (1945-1960)*. Princeton UP, 2014. IX

for are a sharp counterpoint to the “I” and the “you” that is the lasting residue of colonization.

Is this the repair, then, that that the title of the exhibition refers to? *The Debt* constructs a moment of uncertainty in which the European ideas of citizenship, nationality, and sovereignty lose much of their meaning. It focuses on a time in which many futures were seemingly possible— France could presumably have assumed almost any form in the aftermath of this extended period of warfare that marked the crumbling of an empire. In fact, the slide projections assemble history in a way that renders the decision by de Gaulle’s provisional government to offer French citizenship to all the peoples of its African colonies in recognition of Africa’s contribution to the war almost inevitable.¹⁵⁶ It hints at how citizenship and nationhood had to be redefined in France because of what the country owed to the soldiers from Africa.¹⁵⁷ And, it provides a detailed glimpse of how immigration in Europe is determined by deep historical links and patterns of circulation between the immigrants’ countries of origin — in France’s case, particularly former French colonies in Africa — and the places of destination. *The Debt* recuperates a history that seems to opens doors for a more just future. And yet, something has obviously gone wrong. In *The Debt*’s archive of what could be —should be— a shattering

¹⁵⁶ This citizenship was, of course, short-lived and deeply flawed, but it still shows how deeply this extended period of warfare upturned ideas of French political belonging. The definition of citizenship relies deeply on ideas of nationalism. For a detailed overview of how citizenship and the nation-form were changed during this period, see Cooper.

¹⁵⁷ Citizenship was extended to a minority of Africans in French colonies before this period and required the renunciation of any other citizenship. After the wars, France got rid of this requirement and allowed dual citizenship. In 1947 the French government even granted freedom of movement between Algeria and France. Cooper 1-25.

history, is a contemporary image of ‘sans papiers’ (undocumented immigrants) demonstrating in Paris in late 2010. This group holds up a sign saying “Our ancestors died for France in 1914–18 and 1939–45. Did they have documentation?” (Figure 22) The image of protestors who could be, as Attia explains, the “grandsons and granddaughters of the tirailleurs” brings the possibilities which seemed to abound in those earlier images of interdependence and obligations to an abrupt halt.¹⁵⁸

Actually, the black and white image of the protestors clenching tightly to the sign that links them to both the past and the unattained future of *The Debt* reveals the surprisingly bleak relationship drawn between the past and the present in *Repair: 5 Acts*. This image was taken during the four months from October 2010 to January 2011 during which sans papiers occupied the Palais de la Porte Dorée in Paris.¹⁵⁹ The Palais, whose ornate facade features bas relief sculptures celebrating France’s colonial conquests are visible in the picture, has a history that in some ways parallels that assembled in *The Debt*. It was originally built for the 1931 World’s Fair (the ‘International Colonial Exhibition’) as a monument to France’s imperial might. Subsequently, the Palais was the home of the Musée de la France d’Outre-mer (Museum of Overseas France) in 1935, followed by the Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens in the 1960s and then the Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie (MNAAO), from 1990–2003. In 2007, it was transformed into the Cité Nationale de

¹⁵⁸ Kader Attia. *Repair: 5 Acts*, catalogue. Kunst-Werke, 2013, 17.

¹⁵⁹ This protest was part of a larger mobilization of activists demanding the regularization of 6000 sans papiers who had been working and paying taxes in France for decades without the benefits of citizenship and the protections of France’s labour laws. Sébastien Chauvin. “State categories and labor protest: Migrant workers and the fight for legal status in France.” *Work, Employment and Society*. 30(4), 2016.

Figure 22: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt*, 2013, (Detail) Two-channel slide projection, color and black-and-white, silent, 9 minutes 33 seconds, ©Kader Attia. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



l'Histoire de l'Immigration (CNHI) whose mission is to “represent positively migrants’ important contributions to France.”¹⁶⁰

Just as the history that *The Debt* constructs seems to open to a future in which the power relations of the past can be undone, the shifting historical focus of this building suggests a similar trajectory. Art historian Lawrence Gourievidis has explained “the instrumental role that national museums have played in the construction of unified and homogeneous national imaginaries, in projecting shared values and the forging of citizenship with its cohorts of rights and duties.”¹⁶¹ He has also linked this construction to “the erection of boundaries exclusive of ‘others.’”¹⁶² It is clear, then, that the building has had an integral role in processing (and creating) France’s colonial history. As an ethnographic museum, it played a part in establishing the “boundaries” that determine French identity. Conceivably, its latest iteration shows it productively grappling with the interdependencies and obligations born of the past in order to come to terms with how porous these boundaries have become. As the CNHI professes, its twenty-first century goals are:

to conserve and present collections on the history, arts and culture of immigration to the general public; to collect and make publicly available documents and information on the history and cultures of immigration, as well as on the integration of immigrants within French society; and to cooperate

¹⁶⁰ This history and mission is translated and explained in: Sophia Labadi. “The National Museum of Immigration History (Paris, France), re-colonialist representations, silencing, and re-appropriation.” *Journal of Social Archeology*. 12(3), 310-330.

¹⁶¹ Laurence Gourievidis. *Museums and Migration: History, Memory, and Politics*. Routledge, 2014, 3

¹⁶² Gourievidis 4

with diverse organizations, including academic partners working to achieve a better representation of the positive impacts of immigration in France.¹⁶³

With its emphasis on both the integration and contributions of immigrant communities into France's socio-political economy, the CNHI is intent on reconciling France with the realities of a population that includes almost twenty percent people of non-European descent.¹⁶⁴ The museum is even supposed to pave the way for future immigration. After all, the European Commission as recently as June 2015 issued reports about the population decline and aging population in France that suggest the country must supplement its workforce through migration to sustain its economy.¹⁶⁵

However, in one picture, *The Debt* captures the embedded obstacles to both its own historical recuperation and that of the government funded CNHI. The image of the occupation of the CNHI, set into jarring context with the bas relief sculptures of colonial domination that provide its background, is a reminder that the changing mission of the museum has no more reflected a substantial shift in immigration policies and attitudes in France, than it has altered the building that houses it.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Labadi 314, CNHI Communiqué de Presse. Fermeture au public de la Cité Nationale de L'histoire de l'Immigration. 2011 [default/files/musee-numerique/documents/communique_20110128.pdf](http://www.cnhimuseum.org/default/files/musee-numerique/documents/communique_20110128.pdf)

¹⁶⁴ Race-based and belief-based statistics are illegal in France, but it is estimated that there are twelve million Black and/ or Arab French citizens, totaling almost 19 percent of mainland France's 63 million people. Most are descendants of former French colonies in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and sub-Saharan Africa or former inhabitants of the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. An estimated 7.7 million (almost 10%) of French citizens are Muslim. UN Population Division. Country Results: France. <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/ReplMigED/France.pdf>

¹⁶⁵ "Population aging in Europe: Facts, implications and policies." *European Commission*. 2014. https://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy_reviews/kina26426enc.pdf

¹⁶⁶ The decision by the French government to create a publicly funded national heritage space on immigration is seemingly at odds with the tradition of universalism and attitudes towards diversity espoused by the government, which stress the need for immigrants to be integrated within French society. However, there was a strong political catalyst. In 2002, for the first time in the history of the

Rather, the museum has come to represent what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak would call the “limits” of historical knowledge— the “impasse” of historical recuperation.¹⁶⁷ In Spivak’s well-rehearsed arguments, remember, she confronts the historiographical convention of retrieval (that turn in feminist and post-colonial scholarship alike towards reclamation and recovery of the lost voices of history) to show its inevitable failings. As Spivak insists, there are those (figured as the Hindu widow, in Spivak’s telling,) whom cannot enter into a history that depends on their erasure; the production of history, after all, is the production of power. As such, its structure ensures power’s reproduction, always already silencing those versions of the past that do not adhere. Anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli explains how this effects the material conditions of historiography by referring to Jacques Derrida’s writings in *Archive Fever*; “Archival power,” the collecting and producing of history in the form of artifacts, documents, and narratives, Povinelli writes, is “the power to make and command what took place here or there, in this place or that place, and thus what has a place in the contemporary organization of a law that appears to rule without commanding . . . [It] authorizes specific forms of the future by domiciling space and

French Republic, the National Front, headed at that time by Jean-Marie le Pen, reached the second round of the presidential election with 16.86 percent of votes.³¹ The overt racism and xenophobia professed by the party with its focus on national identity, the rejection of diversity, and the stigmatization of immigration led to a backlash. In second round of the elections, Jacques Chirac win this election with more than 80 percent of votes. Chirac’s success was credited to the idea that the populace has come together against the threat the National Front posed to the French model of democracy, fraternity and republican equality; the defeat of the National Party was considered a defeat of the extreme racism and xenophobia espoused by that political party. However, by the time the CNHI opened, Nicholas Sarkozy had been elected president with a slogan similar to that of the National Front’s “France, love it or leave it.”

¹⁶⁷ Morris, Rosalind C., and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. 2010. *Can the subaltern speak?: reflections on the history of an idea*. New York: Columbia University Press.

time, the here and now relative to the there and then; us as opposed to them.”¹⁶⁸ As the image of protestors standing before the facade of the CNHI reminds us, the racist— and gendered — structures of the colonial past have provided what Povinelli calls the “compositional logics” to historical archives, which include “the material conditions that allow something to be archived and archivable; the compulsions and desires that conjure the appearance and disappearance of objects, knowledges, and socialities within an archive; the cultures of circulation, manipulation, and management that allow an object to enter the archive.”¹⁶⁹ This means that while past and present ‘objects, knowledges, and socialities’ can seem to contradict current structures of authority, the power of the archive is such that when objects and people are inserted into history, they will also duplicate and authorize the same power structures which subjugate them. Or, they vanish altogether, as Spivak would caution, unable to leave a trace in a fantasy made to subsume them. The impasse looms large, here. If we see even our reflection in the mirror through the relational fantasies of race and power, how can anything else gain a foothold in our stunted imaginations?

So, in *Repair: 5 Acts*, the image of the people who seized first national and publicly funded space to be dedicated to the history of immigration in France in order to demand the rights denied to them by the government, many of whom have lived in France for decades without the protections of citizenship or France’s labour laws, takes us to the very edge of this impasse; history (despite its debts and obligations)

¹⁶⁸ Elizabeth Povinelli, “The Woman on the Other Side of the Wall: Archiving the Otherwise in Postcolonial Digital Archives.” *Differences*. 22(1), 2011, 152.

¹⁶⁹ Povinelli 152

cannot *cohere* into a more just present because the political imagination of the past still plays a role in ordering the current moment.¹⁷⁰ The museum's archive of objects, images, and stories chosen to represent two hundred years of French history and normalize immigration does not break with the entrenched social and political legacy of injustice that decorates its facade. Rather, this history still produces current oppression. It is of little surprise when the protest image is followed by an image of a bound man being forcibly carried onto a plane for deportation (Figure 23). Still another image shows a protestor being led to an awaiting police bus (Figure 24).¹⁷¹ In this telling, history does not shatter once and for all the colonial relationships of power Fanon located in the mirror. Instead, *The Debt* shows the mirror somehow, desperately even, still imagined to be intact (and even dreamed fortified) in the form

¹⁷⁰ Despite the cheerful outlook of the CNHI, the political environment for immigrants in France, largely backed by popular sentiment, has been dismal, economically debilitating, and socially dehumanizing for a long time. The French President at the time of the occupation, Nicolas Sarkozy, was elected largely on the strength of his anti-immigrant platform and his promise to continue the work he had done as minister of the interior, setting ambitious quotas for the deportation of 25,000 undocumented immigrants per year and passing two laws to restrict immigration. And, despite his failure to be reelected, the anti-immigrant sensibility he represented has not lost its grip in France. The path to citizenship has gotten ever more convoluted in the past three decades, with new laws being passed regularly to define the criteria people must meet along the long path to French citizenship. Laws about language acquisition and other proofs of integration are accompanied by rules that regulate family reunification and government support programs in order to make it ever more difficult for people, particularly from Africa, to gain citizenship. Even people born in France to non-French born people are not immediately granted citizenship, but have to instead 'qualify' when they reach adulthood. See Kara Murphy. "France's New Law: Control Immigration Flows, Court the Highly Skilled." *Migration Policy Institute*. Nov. 1, 2016. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frances-new-law-control-immigration-flows-court-highly-skilled> ; Martin Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain and the United States*. Palgrave, 2008.

¹⁷¹ In 2012, Attia showed these images, the historical images of the *tirailleurs* and the contemporary images of *sans papiers* in protest, in an installation called *J'Accuse* in a group exhibition called "Newtopia: The State of Human Rights," in Mechelen and Brussels, Belgium.

Figure 23: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt*, 2013, (Detail) Two-channel slide projection, color and black-and-white, silent, 9 minutes 33 seconds, ©Kader Attia. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



Figure 24: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Debt*, 2013, (Detail) Two-channel slide projection, color and black-and-white, silent, 9 minutes 33 seconds, ©Kader Attia. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



of current immigration policies, which close Europe's borders— and minds— to the people of its former colonies.

A Cunning of History

After wandering out of the darkened room of the slide projections, there is a maze of shelving units that reach almost to the ceiling in the next room called *Repair's Cosmology*. The towering shelves are filled with books, newspapers, and other texts that could tell (resolve?) the history of the tirailleurs (Figure 25).¹⁷² These books are made mute, sewn shut with harsh metal stitches. In between starkly industrial shelf after shelf of these surgically altered books, one 3-dimensional sign in bright yellows, reds and oranges advertising Banania, a chocolate drink, stands out in sharp relief (Figure 26). This sign is broken; it has a crack that runs across its face. Yet, it still obviously features a caricatured image of a tirailleur, grinning with spoon in hand, and reads “y’a bon . . . Banania” (“Sho’ good eating”). Not coincidentally, this devastating caricature also makes an appearance in Fanon’s writings.¹⁷³ In fact, he

¹⁷² Attia’s installation in this room bears a striking relationship and an obvious reference to Renée Green’s *Import/Export Funk Office*, 1992. Even the shelving he uses is the same that Green used in her installation. Like this section of *Repair: 5 Acts*, *Import/Export Funk Office* resembles most a storage room, an archive, or a library in its assembling of books, VHS tapes, and other documentation. There is a relationship beyond the visual as well between Green’s early work and Attia’s more recent. The documentation in *Import/Export Funk Office* focused on U.S. hip-hop and its related culture, and how both were translated and transmuted in a variety of different contexts in Germany. Green, then, is also musing on cultural contact and collisions, and tracing what happens to culture as result of these (sometimes violent) interactions. *Repair: 5 Acts* adapts Green’s tactics to make a pointed critique about the current conditions of immigration in France.

¹⁷³ Thomas Reinhardt connects Attia’s use to of the Banania ‘totem,’ he calls it, to Fanon in an essay published in the Kader Attia Exhibition Catalogue : *Repair. 5 Acts*, 2013, at Kunst-Werke, Berlin, “The Cannibalization of the Other. Mirror, Art, and Postcolonialism in Kader Attia’s *Repair. 5 Acts*”, 2013

sees this figure when he looks at himself through the racialized schema of power: “I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, the grinning Y a bon Banania.”¹⁷⁴ For Fanon, this image which mars his self reflection “above all” represents the insidiousness of colonialism’s grasp. Here is the soldier who turned against his own community to administer violence on behalf of the colonial authority. Here is the soldier who fought on the battlefields of Europe, liberated France, and achieved citizenship— and at least a promise of equality (“Liberté, égalité, fraternité”)— as a result. And, yet here is the soldier made into a clown speaking pigpen French, used to sell chocolate drinks to children. And, despite the complicated history that should belie this fate, here is the soldier *still* made into an object (“an object in the midst of other objects,” as Fanon says) and *still* made to mean within a racist paradigm.¹⁷⁵ The sign, its colors garish next to the somber texts that line the shelves, then, is ‘above all’ the triumph of racist technologies; the popular image (used to market Banania until 2005!) shows history set uncomfortably, cunningly right according to the imaginary born of colonial ambitions.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Fanon BSWM 92

¹⁷⁵ Fanon BSWM 82

¹⁷⁶ Evoking Hegel’s writings, Fanon wrote about “a cunning of history which plays havoc with the colonies.” For Hegel, the cunning of history is in how it is able to be rational despite the irrationality of human behavior. In order to understand the rational of history, Hegel writes: “Two elements, therefore, enter into our investigation: first, the Idea, secondly, the complex of human passions; the one the warp, the other the woof of the vast tapestry of world history.” Fanon take up the phrase as both a criticism and a reworking of the idea that the violences of colonialism are rational to history, and that, thus, atrocities are inevitable. For Fanon, this philosophical formulation of history (and the Western ideology that it encapsulates) is part of the problem, and is evidence that the historical trajectory cast

Figure 25: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, Repair's Cosmology*, Detail, 2013, Metal shelves, teak wood sculptures (from Dakar), white Carrara marble, sculptures, archival documents and photographs. Dimensions Variable. ©Kader Attia, Photo: Uwe Walter, Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger



Figure 26: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, Repair's Cosmology*, Detail, 2013, Metal shelves, teak wood sculptures (from Dakar), white Carrara marble, sculptures, archival documents and photographs. Dimensions variable. ©Kader Attia, Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger



be colonialism must be ruptured for decolonization to be fulfilled. Fanon WOTE 29; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. Dover, 2004, 11.

Figure 27: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Repair's Cosmogony*, 2013. Detail: KW Berlin. Metal shelves, teak wood sculptures (from Dakar), white Carrara marble, sculptures, archival documents and photographs. Dimensions Variable. ©Kader Attia, Photo: Uwe Walter, Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger



This is a triumph, however, in *Repair: 5 Acts*' summation, that comes at quite a cost. Between the books with their harshly glinting stitches and alongside the sign with its gaping crack are roughly carved wooden busts (Figure 27). These statues were hand-chiseled by craftspeople in Senegal and the Republic of the Congo and are images of so-called "les gueules cassées" ("broken mugs,") the white European veterans who survived World War I with irreparable physical damage, in particular to their faces.¹⁷⁷ These 'broken' combatants are, in art historian Jacinto Lageira's apt phrase, the "open wounds" of history.¹⁷⁸ As Lagiera explains, when the soldiers returned home, they were active reminders of the horrors of war. As such, they had an uncomfortable social standing. In France, for instance, disfigured veterans were relegated into a facility some forty kilometers from Paris, and often excluded from public commemorations of the war dead. They were largely hidden from view because the wounded soldiers served as reminders that when war is waged, and lives lost, the cycle of violence and destruction has consequences for everyone involved. These veterans even became the 'face' of the anti-war movement in Abel Gance's film of 1938, *J'Accuse*. Susan Sontag provides the perfect evocative description of the emblematic role the soldiers took in this iconic anti-war film in *Regarding the Pain of Others*:

Abel Gance featured in close-up some of the mostly hidden population of hideously disfigured ex-combatants – les gueules cassées ("the broken mugs")

¹⁷⁷ Another collection of wood statues of the "broken faces" were shown as part of an installation by Attia called [Culture, Another Nature Repaired](#) (2014) at Middelheim Museum in Belgium.

¹⁷⁸ Jacinto Lageira

they were nicknamed in French— at the climax of his new *J'accuse*. . . Gance's film ends in a new military cemetery, not just to remind us of how many millions of young men were sacrificed to militarism and ineptitude between 1914 and 1918 in the war cheered on as “the war to end all wars,” but to advance the sacred judgement these dead would surely bring against Europe's politicians and generals could they know that, twenty years later, another war is imminent. “*Morts de Verdun, levez-vous!*” (Rise, dead of Verdun!) cries the deranged veteran who is the protagonist of the film, and he repeats his summons in German and English: “Your sacrifices were in vain!” And the vast mortuary plain disgorges its multitudes, an army of shambling ghosts in rotting uniforms with mutilated faces, who rise from their graves and set out in all directions, causing mass panic among a population already mobilized for a new pan- European war. “Fill your eyes with this horror! It is the only thing that will stop you! The madman cries to the fleeing multitudes of the living, who reward him with a martyr's death, after which he joins his dead comrades: a sea of impassive ghosts overrunning the cowering future combatants and victims of *le guerre de demain*. War beaten back by apocalypse.

And the following year the war came.¹⁷⁹

“Your sacrifices are in vain,” that desperate cry of the veteran, would resonate in this quiet room of *Repair: 5 Acts*. When the deformed wooden busts are paired with the broken advertising statue (that cracked evidence of racism's deep reach,) after all, brokenness reflects brokenness— so many sacrifices made in vain. Between the sign and the busts is a meditation on the widespread— if unequal— cost of imperial domination, racist policies, and continued geo-political violence. The disfigured busts are another mirror, then, set to reflect the cracked Banania sign. In this mirroring, what emerges are the consequences for this vicious cycle of racism and violence. The social and political strategies that are used to deny debts accrued to soldiers from Africa, or to keep migrants from entering Europe, are shown to create a corrosive (broken) core within a nation— and spanning nations. Between the actual

¹⁷⁹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

mirrors that surround this room and the more subtle mirroring taking place here, the ramifications are hard to avoid; when a country, or a continent, uses so many of their resources to systematically devalue human life, everyone is put in peril.

In fact, viewing these busts against the backdrop of the current immigration crisis acts as a harsh reminder. No matter how this history is told, in the aftermath of the attacks in Paris France's president François Hollande will use the policies that in *Repair: 5 Acts* emerge between the broken faces of wooden busts and advertising statues to allow this peril to flourish. He will close the country's borders and declare a state of emergency that leaves not only migrants and refugees but also citizens of France, particularly those of color, unprotected by the law. There is no telling of this history, even the one authorized by the national museum celebrating immigration history, that stopped authorities in France from carrying out more than 2,200 warrantless raids in the three weeks immediately following the Paris attacks, the vast majority of which targeted Muslims, many from North Africa. In those short weeks, hundreds of first and second-generation French citizens were detained and others placed on house arrest, while three mosques were shut down. The 'debts' accrued in the past that, in Attia's overview, should make an impact on France's foreign and domestic policies to preclude this kind of targeting, have not fundamentally shattered any mirrors. Instead, because of racism's insidious hold, history leads here, to borders closed regardless of the millions of people fleeing from war and environmental catastrophe, with French citizens of color persecuted and marginalized, and with un-

depleted funds of racism and xenophobia to fuel state policies of neglect and abandonment.

And with these policies increasingly criminalizing citizens within the EU, it is clear that EU migration policy: a three-pronged strategy of criminalizing migrants, militarizing border controls and paying non-EU states, from Libya to Turkey, huge amounts of money to act as Europe's immigration police, has only created a continent at war with itself. Even if we disregard that the European Union has come apart under the pressure of the internal border disputes and disagreements about the responsibilities of individual nations within this crisis, France's state of emergency is a case in point. That emergency tactic effectively serves to militarize the country and to strip the rights of all citizens, with its provision for additional security and armed guards in public places, the right of police to search homes without a warrant, and a ban on public demonstration. This is what Jean-Paul Sartre called the "relentless reciprocity" of oppression."¹⁸⁰ In order to guard against— or oppress— some, everyone has to sacrifice (to use a word which resonates with the busts of wounded veterans) the 'human rights' afforded to them by the French constitution. At the same time that the state of emergency was being extended in France for the third time, after all, amendments to the constitution to institutionalize exceptional measures after the state of emergency ends were also going before parliament. There was legislation to expand police authority, giving the government the ability to detain people without charges and to put people returning from trips to countries including Syria and Iraq

¹⁸⁰ Jean- Paul Sartre in Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Routledge, 2010, 24.

under house arrest for up to a month.¹⁸¹ Other measures extended the surveillance powers of the government. There was even proposal to strip the citizenship of people convicted of terrorism or even of ‘incitement.’¹⁸² Because France is bound by international law to not create stateless people, this proposal was about the creation of two categories of citizens, with only French born, dual citizens subject to this law. Between the broken sign and the broken faces, then, we see the breaks refract onto the principle of equality on which the French Republic is supposedly founded. The wooden busts and the broken sign reveal how such a vile institutional imagination (ideology/ actions) festers away at a nation and a Union. So, it is not in the history of debts and interdependencies that *Repair: 5 Acts* finds a crack in the mirror. Instead, it is in the consequences of that purulent history, where, if we focus, we can see the idea that is France come undone— or, rather, realize that it is eating away at itself. And it is here that Attia’s notion of repair returns.

A History in Pieces

Between the towering shelves, the shattered mirrors, the cracked sign, and the broken faces—and with the promises of the French Republic disassembling in the court system— it might seem like we are hemmed in all sides by the historical conditions of racism and systemic oppression that *Repair: 5 Acts* reveals. Yet, the exhibition asks us to think not only about the broken mirrors but all the repeating

¹⁸¹ Aurelien Breeden. “French Authorities Given Broader Powers to Fight Terrorism.” NYTimes. May 25, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/26/world/europe/france-terrorism-laws.html?_r=0

¹⁸² Krishnadev Calamur. “The End of the Plan to Strip French Terrorists of the Citizenship.” The Atlantic. March 30, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/03/france-citizenship-law-dropped/475980/>

cracks and breaks that proliferate in *Repair: 5 Acts* in another way: as openings for repair. Consider again the wooden busts in *The Repair's Cosmology*, those monuments to the corrosive cost of war and oppression. They actually are three-dimensional records of intricate advances in maxillofacial surgical techniques. As those disfigured wooden faces attest, World War I saw facial injury on an unprecedented scale; new types of weaponry and increased trench warfare meant that facial injuries were common. These new types of injuries meant there were corresponding unprecedented innovations in the surgical field. Surgeons working in the battlefields and in the war's aftermath pioneered techniques in facial plastic surgery. The rough wooden busts, then, are monuments to both the deformations of warfare and also evidence of innovations in surgical techniques. They are a reminder that as nations tried to mask the horrors of war, they were forced to think about how to repair its effects. So, the busts serve to signal something about the relationship between injury and repair. They are evidence that when injuries are manifest—in this case, when soldiers wear upon their faces the marks of a nation's inability to keep its population safe and whole—repairs follow. In fact, in such instances, techniques of repair are even developed to address injuries not previously known.

What is being conceptualized here is nuanced; if the perpetual state of conflict and racist policies surrounding immigration in Europe are seen as injuries, festering wounds, born of the violent past, there could be heightened impetus to fix these policies and conditions. This means that the past, although not recuperable in any real sense, can reveal the malignancies of the present. And seeing the injuries—

infections— in this way can propel repairs. This resonates with an observation Judith Butler made in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks on the United States. After hijacked planes and suicide attacks were used to perpetuate the deadliest international terrorist attack ever to take place on U.S. soil, and the largest attack on U.S. territory since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Butler suggested that the resulting injuries could be opening for a reconsideration of state policy. As she expresses this:

To be injured means that one has a chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanics of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear and in what ways. If nationally sovereignty is challenged, that does not mean it must be shored up at all costs. . . . Rather, the dislocation from First World privilege, however temporary, offers a chance to start to imagine a world in which violence might be minimized, in which an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged.¹⁸³

Butler could easily have been writing about the migrant crisis and the resulting political chaos in Europe. From the bodies washing up on the shorelines of Europe, to the sprawling refugee camps, to the breaking down of internal and external border policies (the erosion of the Schengen Agreement, for instance), and to the bombs and shootings in Paris, it obviously is time for a reassessment of how Europe imagines itself. In this sprawling exhibition, this reassessment is given a focus. As the current European policies are shown to have sprung from a broken past— the European

¹⁸³ Judith Butler. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2004, xii.

Union took shape around open wounds, in other words— it is this historically constructed, and still deeply embedded, system of racialized oppression that needs to be undone.¹⁸⁴

Of course, what this repair would be— could be— is of paramount concern in this installation. And beginning with the marble busts that also stand on the metal shelves in *Act: 2, Politics: The Repair's Cosmology*, this is increasingly the focus of the installation (Figure 28). If the wooden busts mirror the Banania sign, they also find their counterpart in these busts carved by Italian stonemasons out of Carrara white marble. The life-size busts are of men and women primarily from what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo and feature the body modifications and scarification enacted by some communities in that vast region. Set amongst the wooden busts which record early surgical techniques of facial reconstructive surgeries, this is a rather jarring mirroring, even compared to all other uncomfortable reflections that proliferate in *Repair: 5 Acts*. The roughly carved wounded faces of the soldiers, after all, are a testament to violence. But, the smooth white marble busts do not show similar damage; rather, they bare the marks of repairs without noticeable injuries. Consider the marble bust depicting a woman holding a small child. The pose might resemble the classic Madonna and child images that proliferate in art history but here there is a significant difference. This mother and child are Mangbetu, a group from the Orientale Providence in the DRC, and have underwent skull elongation

¹⁸⁴ There is an important corollary here in Lacan's theory of the ego. Lacan theorized an open wound in the formation of the ego. As he put it, there is "a certain dehiscence at the very heart of the organism." Dehiscence is a botanical term for the bursting of fruit at maturity and a medical term for the bursting open of a surgically closed wound. Lacan 21

Figure 28: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 2, Politics, The Repair's Cosmogony*, 2013. Detail: KW Berlin. Metal shelves, teak wood sculptures (from Dakar), white Carrara marble, sculptures, archival documents and photographs. Dimensions Variable. ©Kader Attia, Photo: Uwe Walter, Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger



through head binding, a practice common before 1950. To repair in this case is to alter, to change, even to deform by some standards. The marble busts decouple the idea of repair from restoration. Therefore, when they are positioned (refracted, reflected) into “repair’s cosmology” they begin to revise what repair means.

When the next ‘Act’ in Attia’s installation, *Act 3: Science, Repair’s Analysis*, returns us to the broken mirrors similar to those that mar the masks at the beginning of the exhibition, the idea of repair is revised even further (Figure 29). Amongst these mirrors held together with surgical stitches and paired with illustrations from surgical textbooks, discussed at the opening of this chapter, repair is linked directly to deformation. Yet, having led us here by way of the marble and wooden busts, alike, deformation and even destruction are not pejoratives. To turn again to Fanon, in his last book which seethes with the war for liberation in Algeria, *The Wretched of the Earth*, he said this of decolonization: “To wreck the colonial world is henceforward a mental action.”¹⁸⁵ In this room, sparse after having navigated the tangle of shelving units, the actions (*Acts*, in Attia’s turn of phrase) required to “wreck” the world as injurious as this one take shape. With only the stitched together mirrors and carefully framed lithographs of surgical practices hung on the walls, leaving space in both the room itself and between the broken pieces of the mirrors, it becomes clear that repairs should not fix borders torn apart through migration, or allow the European Union to unite around xenophobia amid the chaos of the refugee crisis, or even restore the idea of France, with its concept of racial blindness, after the trauma of the attacks on Paris.

¹⁸⁵ Fanon WOTE 40

Figure 29: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 3, Science, Repair Analysis*, 2013. Detail. Repaired mirrors, lithographs, wooden mask. Dimensions variable. ©Kader Attia, Photo by Uwe Walter. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



To repair, here, does not mean to make whole or coherent. Instead, because the wound is the image that unites Europe, reparations require the wreckage— the purposeful deformation of this image. After all, it is because we are trying to imagine the image (the mirror) whole that we remain stuck amongst its cutting shards.

In the conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon draws out this relationship by placing history in tension with invention. He writes, “I am not a prisoner of History. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.” For Fanon, history as a discipline is a European invention. It is always already racially coded and systemically oppressive. So, to be released from the prison of history requires, as David Marriott explains in his astute reading of this passage, both a confrontation with “the confined, institutional meaning in which power is violently exercised on colonial subjects” and a leap into “a space of endless self-creation, in which self and world can be reinvented.” For Fanon, then, only through a break with history— and the historical time seen in the mirror— can there be another future imagined. In *Repair: 5 Act’s* version of this, it is when we see history as broken, and even *irreparable* in the normal usage of the word, that the future becomes open.

The Final Shard

In *Act 4: Nature*, a large dark expansive room, nearly 600-square-meters, contains at first glance only a small, flat-screen panel suspended over visitors’ heads.

A two-minute-long section from David Attenborough's *Life of Birds* featuring an Australian Superb Lyrebird is looped on this small screen (Figure 30). This bird is distinguished by its ability to mimic a huge variety of sounds. It is, for instance, able to perfectly imitate the calls of other bird species. Increasingly over the last decades, the lyrebird has also begun to copy the sounds made by human encroachment on their habitat. It is therefore, Attia explains, "the only animal that incorporates the sounds of its own environment's gradual extinction."¹⁸⁶ In the looping footage shown on the screen in *Repair: 5 Acts*, a male lyrebird mimics a car alarm, chainsaw and various camera shutters. In the dark room, as the bird imitates the click and whirr of the camera filming it, then the roar of the chainsaw carving away at the forest around it, the space echoes with the dimming probability of the bird's survival.

As if in full circle, as the bird mimics the sounds of its habitat being destroyed, *Repair: 5 Acts* has returned to Lacan, if with the highly politicized lessons of Fanon still at hand. Lacan studied the phenomena of mimicry in the animal world through science historian and philosopher Roger Caillois' *Méduse et compagnie* in order to think about behavioral adaptation. In considering the behaviors of particular marine life, Lacan found, as Caillois also did, that mimicry is distinct from adaptation in its functionality.¹⁸⁷ For Lacan, adaptation is defensive and performs a utilitarian function; it is a strategy of endurance. Lacan and Caillois both argue that mimicry, unlike adaptation, is non-instrumental and does not contribute to survival. As Lacan

¹⁸⁶ Attia. 18

¹⁸⁷ In "The Light and the Line", an essay included in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan discusses mimicry and perception, and thinks through Caillois' observations. Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* London: Hogarth Press, 1977. p99 Roger Caillois' *Méduse et compagnie*. Gallimard, 1960.

glibly puts it, “one finds in the stomach of birds, predators in particular, as many insects supposedly protected by mimicry as insects that are not.”¹⁸⁸ Mimicry serves another purpose, in Lacan’s estimation. It demonstrates a certain capacity to perceive both the environment in which one is immersed, and one’s relations of immersion in or distinction from that environment. In Lacan’s words,

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled— exactly like a technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare.¹⁸⁹

While Fanon found mimicry “nauseating”, and sought to overcome the psychic grip colonialism had on its subjects which inspired such imitation, it is Lacan’s notion of camouflage, a “mottled background,” that resonates here. The bird’s song is not a bid for survival, but instead a call of warning. Immigration into Europe is projected to increase steadily for another 20 years. In fact, Eurostat, the statistical agency of the E.U., projects that immigration to Europe will not subside below its current level until 2069. Seventy-seven million people are predicted to immigrate into the continent between 2016 and 2069. Listening to the lyrebird against that *reality* is a reminder that trying to keep the current construction of power in France and across the Europe intact— rooted as it is in injustice and white supremacy— in the face of such demographic changes will lead only to ever more disaster.

¹⁸⁸ Jacques Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. London: Hogarth Press, 1977, 99.

¹⁸⁹ Lacan 99

In this dark room in *Repair: 5 Acts*, with the sounds of impending devastation resonating, Fanon gets the final word:

Come, then, comrades; it would be as well to decide at once to change our ways. We must shake off the heavy darkness in which we were plunged, and leave it behind. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent, and resolute. We must leave our dreams and abandon our old beliefs and friendships from the time before life began. Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Fanon WOTE 311

Figure 30: Kader Attia, *Repair: 5 Acts, Act 4, Nature: Mimesis as Resistance*, 2013. Installation view. Sound, video, 2:18 min. ©Kader Attia, Photo by Uwe Walter. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Galleria Continua, Galerie Krinzinger.



Chapter 3

Between Sight and Insight:
Race, Criminality, and the U.S. Prison Industrial Complex
in the Photographic Practice of Chandra McCormick and Keith Calhoun

Once the doors are opened into the house of the law, we find implausible metamorphosis that have the power to exploit and oppress. Once inside, we encounter historical fragments, legal fictions, and spiritual beliefs. We see humans turned into things, ghosts into persons, and corpses into spirits. ~Colin Dayan

Figure 31: Keith Calhoun, *23 Hour Lockdown, Chess Players*, 1980, archival pigment print, 24 x 30 in. © Keith Calhoun



On August 9, 2015, I stood in front of a black and white image in an installation by artist collaborators Chandra McCormick and Keith Calhoun. The photograph, titled *23 Hour Lockdown, Chess Players*, 1980, was hung on a long wall in the Arsenale at the Venice Biennale, the oldest large-scale exhibition of contemporary art in the world (Figure 31). It was shown as part of a larger installation of a documentary series undertaken by the artists over thirty years about men incarcerated at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, also called Angola. At the center of this image is a corridor that runs in front of a cellblock. The cells in which people live are not shown in this glimpse of the complex system of containment that thrives in the United States, a country that has the largest incarceration rates in the world. Instead, bars extend floor to ceiling along one side of the long corridor while a chain-link fence similarly restrains the other side. Fence and bars, cement ceiling and floor, create a forced perspective that catches the only person visible in the image, a black man who sits shirtless in the long hallway, into harsh angles. Although the man is in a corridor, which could lead out of the image, the bars and chain link fence conspire to collapse in on him— and to hold him tightly into place. An arm extends out into the corridor in front of the man, left hand open to grasp a chess piece from an ongoing game. The person playing chess is rendered invisible by the bars that keep them in “23 Hour Lockdown,” as the title of the image explains. Yet, they are still embroiled in the game which takes place outside of their cell.

On that hot August day in Venice, it was not hard to see an indictment of the United States criminal justice system in this black and white photograph. I was

looking at it, after all, exactly one year after Michael Brown Jr., an unarmed black teenager (18 years old) was shot at least six times by a white police officer on a street of Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014. Mass protests erupted around the nation against police brutality in the aftermath of this killing, particularly about the disproportionate number of African Americans bearing the brunt of the institutional homicidal streak rife in the United States. According to estimates, nearly 1000 people a year were killed by police officers between 2003 and 2011 in the U.S. with black people accounted for a disproportionate number of these police-involved homicides.¹⁹¹ In the year since Brown's death, the Black Lives Matter movement (following in the footsteps of decades of work by activists against anti-black racism and prison abolitionists) were intent on bringing widespread attention to not only these horrific acts of police brutality that destroy black lives, but also to how the entire criminal justice system conspires together in this pursuit.¹⁹² Although black people compose less than thirteen percent of the nation's population, a higher percentage of black people are pulled over for driving violations, a higher percentage imprisoned, a higher percentage sentenced on drug charges, a higher percentage killed in police-related homicides, and a higher percentage of black people sentenced to death in the U.S. than the majority white demographic. The fact that black men are

¹⁹¹ Although according to the Bureau of Justice, there is no hard data to determine exactly how many police killings there are every year across the country, all estimates suggests that nearly 1000 people a year had been killed by police officers between 2003 and 2011. Tom McCarthy. "The Uncounted: why the U.S. can't keep track of people killed by the police." *The Guardian*. March 18, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/mar/18/police-killings-government-data-count>

¹⁹² The Black Lives Matter movement actually began in 2012 after Trayvon Martin's (another unarmed black teenager murdered in Florida) killer was acquitted for his crime. "About the Black Lives Matter Network." Black Lives Matters Organization. <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

six times more likely to be incarcerated than white men, then, is one extreme result of the systemic racism entrenched in the criminal justice system.¹⁹³ Against this roiling backdrop, the perspective from which McCormick and Calhoun's image was taken, that angle which renders the man too large in the space left between bars and fence, seemed an apt portrayal of the excessive—oversized—role black people have been made to play in the U.S. criminal justice system. The lines of the photograph became a diagram of the insidious and quiet destruction of black lives that flourishes through mass incarceration and criminal *injustice*.

There is a more subtle critical insight in the photograph as well. The obvious problem of scale in this image finds a counterpoint in the chess players for whom the photograph is entitled. Rendered invisible by both the bars and the angle from which the image was taken, the players are formally linked to the forced perspective that holds the man in place. It is notable, then, that these people are embroiled in an intricate and ancient game of conflict and war in which moves for pieces ranging from pawns to the king are constrained by the constructions of power attached to their social and political positions.¹⁹⁴ The unseen prisoners are playing a game that

¹⁹³ "Criminal Justice Facts." The Sentencing Project. <http://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>

¹⁹⁴ Chess has been a consistent allegorical feature in works of art, literature and film from Albertus Pictor's 15th century wall painting showing a man playing the game against death to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. This is still true in more current cultural productions. For instance, chess is featured in one of the most famous scenes in *The Wire*, the television series set in Baltimore, Maryland that ran from 2002-2008. *The Wire* provides a close, dramatized look at the relationships between city institutions, such as law enforcement, city government, and the school system, the rampant drug trade in Baltimore, and the lives of poor black residents. In the first season of the show, a young black man explain the rules of chess to his friends through the hierarchies of drug dealing. The game becomes an allegory in the show for the relationships people have with the institutions that structure their world. The show is intent on showing that institutions such as the police force, the government, unions, the drug trade,

allegorizes their relationship to the institutions that structure their world. They have been made invisible (made to be pawns) through both the intricate workings of the criminal justice system and the framing of the image. This is a stark reminder that more than 2.3 million people are vanished into a prison industrial complex composed of 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 942 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,283 local jails, and 79 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, and the prisons of the U.S. Territories—again, disproportionately people of color.¹⁹⁵ A total of 7 million people are under some form of correctional supervision such as parole or probation, again, statistics that speak to the ravages this system has left on communities of color.¹⁹⁶ People on probation and parole might not be physically made invisible in buildings erected to contain them, but they remain out of sight politically, economically, and socially through an elaborate system developed to deny them of rights. Even after a person is released from prison, social isolation and political exclusion continue in the form of felony disenfranchisement (whereby almost 6 million US citizens have permanently or temporarily lost the right to vote), the permanent disqualification of people with drug felony convictions for social programs such as government subsidized housing and food assistance, and multiple social and economic structures that exclude

addiction, the education system have a far greater influence over the characters than they have over themselves. The chess game shown in McCormick and Calhoun's image suggests a similar critique.

¹⁹⁵ These numbers were reported by the Prison Policy Initiative in 2016:

<http://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2016.html>

¹⁹⁶ According to the U.S. Department of Justice, there were 6,851,000 people under the supervision of the U.S. Correctional systems at yearend 2014. Danielle Kaeble et al. "Correctional Populations in the United States, 2014." U.S. Department of Justice. Revised January 21, 2016.

<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus14.pdf>

formerly-incarcerated people from employment.¹⁹⁷ And as the careful framing of the black and white image insists— the prisoners unseen because of the angle from which the photograph was taken— this forced political invisibility, this structured blindness, is bolstered by *willful blindness*. It is not only the bars that trace across McCormick and Calhoun’s image that ensure that the racist workings of state power remain out of sight, in this visual enactment, but also a carefully staged complicity with this system. Looking at this image, then, is to see sketched out in the angles of bars and fences how people are made invisible by the prisons that hold them, the laws that disenfranchise them, and those that refuse to see.

In fact, the structural blindness shown in the intricate diagramming of *23 Hour Lockdown* is shown to be a combination of choreographed disappearance, concealment, and a marked refusal to see. This is a revision to Michel Foucault’s famous diagnosis of state power exercised through panopticism.¹⁹⁸ In that widely influential chapter in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault considers disciplinary power through Jonathan Bentham’s architectural conceptualization of the panopticon, a spatial design used in prisons in which an annular building sits at the base of a central tower. He finds in the principle of this architectural model “a diagram of power in ideal form.”¹⁹⁹ In his formulation of the operations of power, the tower is an apparatus through which vision becomes a method of discipline; the surveyor hidden in the tower can see everyone in the surrounding building. This visibility is

¹⁹⁷ Lisa Guenther. “Political Action at the End of the World.” *Canadian Journal of Human Rights*. 2015, 4:1.

¹⁹⁸ Michel Foucault. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, ed. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

¹⁹⁹ Foucault *Discipline* 205

internalized by the prisoners, so that even if no one is in the tower, the impression of constant scrutiny emanating from the tower has material effects; seeing and being seen, or even the perception of being seen, becomes a mode of systematically ordering and controlling human populations. While the workings of this system are invisible (quite literally, the surveyor cannot be seen,) those made subject to this power are in a “state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.”²⁰⁰ Yet, in this image, another dynamic of vision is being traced; *23 Hour Lockdown* shows that in contemporary reworking of the surveillance state, there are those who cannot be—and must not be— seen in the racist workings of the state. The criminal justice system now is maintained by, to rephrase Foucault, a state of conscious and permanent *invisibility*. Because vision is linked to power, (“the gaze that sees is the gaze that dominates,” in Foucault’s oft-cited formulation), it follows that invisibility and obstructions to sight— as well as those people that we fail or refuse to see— are also integral aspects in the maintenance of power.²⁰¹ McCormick and Calhoun’s image, then, diagrams the obstacles to confronting power exercised through the guise of mass incarceration; the struggle for racial justice, in this clear schemata, necessitates learning to see and expose that which has disappeared into the destructive and blinding abyss of the U.S. criminal justice system.

²⁰⁰ Foucault *Discipline* 234

²⁰¹ Michel Foucault. *The Birth of the Clinic*. Routledge, 2003,39.

Vision and (In)Justice

This chapter opens with the issues around what— and who— is seen and unseen in *23 Hour Lockdown* as a point of entry into McCormick and Calhoun's continuing research based practice spanning over three decades in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. The focus of this chapter is on what else the artists' practice reveals about the visual configurations of power— the conditions of visibility and invisibility— that must be addressed in any investigation into institutional racism in the United States. The artists have extensive bodies of work on other aspects of the African-American experience in the United States. They have, for instance, photographed dockworkers and sugarcane workers across rural Louisiana, documenting aspects about the labor conditions for black people in the South. McCormick and Calhoun have also photographed extensively the African-American neighborhood in New Orleans (the Lower Ninth Ward) where they live. As artist and historian Deborah Willis explains, the pair has “photographed Mardi Gras and second line dance, music and foodways ... businesses and churches and the activities of men, women, and children.”²⁰² This is a rich body of work, and far more than can be addressed here. I have taken a necessarily narrow focus. I concentrate on a selection of the photographs of Angola that were shown at both Venice Biennale in 2015 and at

²⁰² Deborah Willis. “Pratt Photograph Lectures: Keith Calhoun and Chandra McCormick” Published in Pelican Bomb Jan 9, 2013. <http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2013/pratt-photography-lectures-keith-calhoun-and-chandra-mccormick>

Prospect 3, the New Orleans Biennial held in 2014, in order to interrogate how these issues of visibility work particularly in regards to the U.S. penal system.²⁰³

Some of these same images I engage were included in a photo essay Willis constructed around McCormick and Calhoun's series of photographs and poems written by musician Aaron Neville for *Aperture* in 2006.²⁰⁴ In that essay, Willis weaves together the poems and the photographs to question how the songwriter and the artists together represent the people caught by the prison system.²⁰⁵ As she puts it, "the photographs uncover and depict the difficulties of incarceration; the poems explore the ideas of rejection and the loss of freedom."²⁰⁶ According to Willis, McCormick and Calhoun's photography along with Neville's poems are, then, "poignant reminders of the devastation" wrought on black communities by mass incarceration. As such, they (ideally) allow the broad public to see the conditions and realities of incarceration— and the humanity of those within it. This is most often

²⁰³ Because my inquiry is about the confluence between racism and sight, I have chosen not to include the portraits of prisoners that McCormick and Calhoun show alongside the images discussed here.

²⁰⁴ As Willis explains, originally, Aaron Neville was collaborating with the artist pair on a book called *Angola Bound*. However, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, McCormick and Calhoun lost many of their photographs intended for that project. When the images, poems, and essay was published in *Aperture* (a partial realization of the imagined book), Neville's house as well as McCormick and Calhoun's were still flooded and uninhabitable. Deborah Willis. "Angola Prison, No Place to Be." *Aperture*. 182 Spring 2006, 24.

²⁰⁵ Two poems by Aaron Neville are included with the photo essay, along with the lyrics to "Angola Bound," by Aaron and Charles Neville which begins: I got lucky last summer when I got my time, *Angola bound*/ Well my partner got a hundred, I got ninety-nine, *Angola bound*/ You been a long time coming but you're welcome home, *Angola bound*. Willis 22

²⁰⁶ Willis also wrote a photoessay for a series of images McCormick and Calhoun took in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina called "Heroes of the Storm," *Aperture*, 2010. That series of work is primarily portraits of some of the African American residents of New Orleans who carried out rescue operations and aided communities largely abandoned by the government in the weeks after the storm made landfall. The artists' work on black laborers in Louisiana as well as images from funerals and second line parades were included in Deborah Willis. *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photography 1840s to Present*. W.W. Norton and Co, 2002.

how photography in prisons is approached in the United States, for good reason.²⁰⁷ As Angela Y. Davis wrote in the foreword of a collection of work by another photographer who has photographed several state prisons, Michael Jacobson-Hardy, “Most people in this country do not have direct knowledge of the penal system, although the prison has inhabited the personal and political histories of black people and poor people continually. ... Instead, public perceptions about prisons and prisoners are shaped largely by media (mis)representations.”²⁰⁸ So, the lack of representation, and the misrepresentations, of people caught into the prison industrial complex has meant there is a lot of work to be done by photographers to simply to show the conditions of the prison system, and the realities of those caught within it. While these concerns overlap with mine, I approach the problematics of representation within the penal system from a different angle. I look at McCormick and Calhoun’s images not only for how they represent the experience of incarceration, but instead for the obstacles they reveal to what we see—and how we make sense of what we see— about the blatant practices of systemic racism in the United States.

²⁰⁷ Although Deborah Willis is the only scholar of art (or even art critic) who has written extensively about McCormick and Calhoun’s practice, they have been noticed by journalists. After they were displayed in the New Orleans Biennial, some of the photographs discussed in this chapter were included in an essay published in 2015 in the *New Yorker*. Thomas Beller. “Angola Prison and the Shadow of Slavery” *The New Yorker*, August 19, 2014. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/angola-prison-louisiana-photos>. The photographs were also discussed in an article in March 2016 in the New York Times: Sabine Heinlein. “Artists Grapple with America’s Prison System.” *NYTimes*, March 11, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/12/arts/design/artists-grapple-with-americas-prison-system.html>

²⁰⁸ Angela Y. Davis “A World unto Itself: Multiple Invisibilities of Imprisonment.” In Michael Jacobson-Hardy’s *Behind the Razor Wire: Portrait of a Contemporary American Prison System*. NYU Press, 1998.

The problem of vision that the artists' stage through this black and white image taken decades ago is, after all, one that legal scholar Michelle Alexander has since identified as one of the key components of the U.S. criminal justice system.²⁰⁹ What I call, after Foucault, "a state of permanent invisibility" is, in Alexander's summation, a result of state sanctioned *colorblindness*. To gloss a complex legal and political history that scholars from Alexander to Davis, Colin Dayan, and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva have cogently explained, colorblindness emerged as a social and political force in the post civil rights era with the recognition that the "biological and thus essentialist notions of 'race'" were inventions of history.²¹⁰ Because race is not biologically ascribed (not "real"), political and ideological initiatives followed to promote the idea that "equality can only be achieved when the law, as well as individual subjects, become blind to race."²¹¹ These initiatives gained significant force in the twenty-first century with the election of the first U.S. president to identify as African America.²¹² However, as scholars on colorblindness are quick to point out, such reasoning and legislation fails to consider how racism is embedded into the very

²⁰⁹ In Alexander's astute analysis, it is blindness that has facilitated the emergence of what the scholar calls the "racial caste system" in the U.S., a system whereby African Americans are "locked into an inferior position by law and custom." Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. The New Press, 2012, 12.

²¹⁰ Angela Davis. *The Meaning of Freedom and Other Difficult Dialogues*. City Lights, 2016, 169. See also: Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. *Racism without Racists (4th Edition)*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2013; Colin Dayan. *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons*. Princeton UP, 2011.

²¹¹ Initiatives were passed in states like California, Washington, and Michigan to prohibit state government institutions from considering race, sex, or ethnicity in hiring and in education. Perhaps more significantly, however, is the ideological hold colorblindness has had in the United States. The idea that someone can "not see race" has been quite potent, with colorblindness being held up as an aspiration for liberals in the U.S.

²¹² President Barack Obama's mother is a white U.S. Citizen while his father is a black Kenyan. He does, however, identify as African American / Black on both censuses and in speeches. Sam Roberts and Peter Baker. "Asked to Declare His Race, Obama Checks 'Black.'" NYTimes. April 2, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/03/us/politics/03census.html?_r=0

systems that have now been rendered blind to what Davis calls “the material and ideological work that race continues to do.”²¹³ Colorblindness, instead of promoting equality, has instead allowed racism to flourish unnoticed in institutional constructs—as a political and ideological apparatus, it enables people and systems to turn a blind eye to the racist workings of the state. Important for this analysis, however, is the fraught nature of this blindness. As Alexander explains, to not see the racism that festers at the center of the U.S. criminal policy requires “an optical illusion.” This optical illusion cloaks what Alexander calls “the embedded image” of racial inequality, which remains hidden “within the maze of rationalizations” that have developed around systemic racism.²¹⁴ That an embedded image remains in this illusion offers a vital insight. If, as *23 Hour Lockdown* suggests, the prison industrial complex requires invisibility, Alexander’s turn of phrase reveals the limitation to this necessity to the construction of power; as an illusion, blindness is not absolute. Thus, I look for the “embedded image” in McCormick and Calhoun’s work while also attending to how the artists expose the workings of the optical illusions at the center of the U.S. criminal justice system.

Throughout this dissertation, I ask what can close art analysis and close looking reveal about the origins, conditions and operations of specific current and

²¹³ Davis. *The Meaning of Freedom* 169

²¹⁴ Alexander 12

Alexander’s use of the term “optical illusion” resonated with Walter Benjamin’s earlier writings about the “optical unconscious.” The optical unconscious describes that which is not perceived even if it happens in front of our eyes. Importantly, For Benjamin, photography acts as an access point to the optical unconscious. As visual studies scholar Shawn Michelle Smith explains, photography allows us to tap into the optical unconsciousness and recognize “ordinary blindness—the revelation of an unseen world that photography does not fully disclose, but makes us aware of its invisibility.” Shawn Michelle Smith. *On the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*. Duke UP, 2013. 4-7; Walter Benjamin. “A Short History of Photography.” *Screen*. 12(1) 1972, 5-26.

ongoing socio-political conflicts. I also attend to how, and in what ways, art practices attempt to mediate what engaged viewers see in relation to the social and political injustices that seem to rage everywhere in the twenty first century. This is not a project about the relationship between photography as a technology and the construction of race as a disciplinary technique. Shawn Michelle Smith, Leigh Raiford, John Tagg, and Allan Sekula, among others, have drawn insightful and vital connections between the development of photography and disciplinary discourses, relating photography in the late nineteenth century to eugenics and considering the role of photography to the history of criminalizing blacks.²¹⁵ I have a different concern. Instead of looking at photography as a technology, I engage these photographs in order to analyze sight as one of the technologies that produces inequity within the U.S. legal system.

My interest in the links between vision and racial injustice in the U.S. emanates specifically from the aftermath of Michael Brown Jr.'s death. Brown was not the first unarmed black person to be killed by police officers in 2014. The killings of John Crawford III, Eric Garner, Victor White, and Yvette Smith, to name only a small number of the people who died at the hands of the police in the short days, weeks, and months preceding Brown's death, should already have provided ample proof that the historical specter of racialized violence and police brutality is

²¹⁵ Leigh Raiford. *Imprisoned in the Luminous Glare*. U of North Carolina Press, 2011; Allan Sekula. "The Body and the Archive." *October* 39: 3–64, 1986; Shawn Michelle Smith. *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture*. Princeton University Press, 1999; John Tagg. *Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

flourishing in the United States.²¹⁶ Yet, while those deaths happened primarily outside of the national consciousness—out of sight— something about Brown’s death focused increased attention on the undeniable relationship between race and the criminal justice system. His death became hyper-visible in both mass media and social media, systems that, as Alexander and Davis alike say, blinds people to the realities of race. Perhaps this is because Brown’s body, left for over four hours in the unrelenting summer sun on that street in Ferguson, Canfield Drive, lay too long exposed to be ignored. In those four bright, hot hours, as blood congealed around Brown, neighbors first looked on in horror, and, as the New York Times reported, “ushered their children into rooms that faced away from Canfield Drive.”²¹⁷ But Brown’s bleeding body lay there long enough to overcome people’s urges to look away and to shield their children. Images of Brown, face down in the street, first uncovered to all watching eyes and then under a white sheet too small to cover his long frame, were circulated on social media. A crowd gathered and watched as Brown’s mother begged police officers to move her dead son from the hard asphalt. Even then, hours still passed, and because Brown was killed at noon on a long summer day, the sun did not set. Instead, its harsh light on Brown’s bullet filled body allowed the neighborhood and, as the national media began to focus, the entire

²¹⁶ Although according to the Bureau of Justice, there is no hard data to determine exactly how many police killings there are every year across the country, by all estimates, nearly 1000 people a year had been killed by police officers between 2003 and 2011. Black people accounted for a disproportionate number of these police-involved homicides. McCarthy. <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/mar/18/police-killings-government-data-count>

²¹⁷ Julie Bosman and Joseph Goldstein. “Timeline for a Body: 4 Hours in the Middle of a Ferguson Street.” NYTimes, August 23, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/us/michael-brown-a-bodys-timeline-4-hours-on-a-ferguson-street.html>

country to see in gruesome detail the casual disregard with which police officers regard their own violence.

Whether it was those four long hours of blood spooling like ribbons out of the multiple wounds on Brown's body onto Canfield Drive or not, there is no denying that in the weeks and months that followed Brown's death, the elaborate system of racial inequities embedded into police departments became, at least briefly, and for some segments of the population, more visible. It was (at least seemingly) hard not to see the anti-black racism that undergirds the criminal justice system. In fact, the optical illusion, to again use Alexander's term, seemed increasingly precarious as journalists and activists revealed how information about police homicidal brutality, particularly as it is directed towards people of color, is concealed; incredibly, prior to this increased public attention, there were no records kept at local, state, or national levels about fatal police shootings.²¹⁸ Other readily available statistics were decried by news organizations both nationally and internationally and the people who took to the streets from Ferguson to Oakland, Brooklyn to Chicago in protest after Brown's death, and those that rose in solidarity from Palestine to Canada, paid increased attention to the connections between police brutality and the actualities about mass incarceration in the U.S. with some current estimates suggesting that one in three black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ The United States has no uniform count of people killed by police officers. In fact, the justice department investigation revealed that more than half the people killed by local and state law enforcement officers in the US were not included in the FBI's national statistics in the decade preceding Brown's death. McCarthy <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/mar/21/police-killings-us-government-statistics>

²¹⁹ "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet." NAACP. <http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>

There was even a careful governmental inquiry into how blatant white supremacy was maintained within the Ferguson criminal justice system, pervading through the local police departments and on up through the institutional structures. Investigators for the Justice Department found racial bias affecting “nearly every aspect of Ferguson police and court operations.”²²⁰ The population of Ferguson is 67% black, yet 85% of vehicle stops, 93% of arrests, and 88% of the uses of force targets black people.²²¹ The list of racist tactics identified within the operations of criminal justice goes on and on.

At the height of the protests and as the Justice Department released their findings, it seemed that because injustice could be seen refracting off of Brown’s body onto the systems that produced this death, reforms would— should— have to follow. In fact, to keep Brown’s body and the issues Brown’s death exposed firmly in sight, protestors against police brutality and institutionalized racism collectively lay in city streets across the United States silently for four minutes at a time. They lay down to recall that intense four hours that Brown’s body lay in the street— that long and appalling moment of scrutiny— and to keep in plain sight the systemic destruction of African American communities through police tactics and a rigged and racist judicial system. Yet, even with the outpouring of investigations and activism, not everyone could see the racism in the findings. In September 2015, six months after the findings of the Justice Department review of systemic racism in the

²²⁰ Wilson Andrews et al. “Justice Department’s Report on the Ferguson Police Department.” NYTimes. March 4, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/03/04/us/ferguson-police-racial-discrimination.html>

²²¹ Andrews <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/03/04/us/ferguson-police-racial-discrimination.html>

Ferguson police department was published, a Gallop Poll showed that fifty percent of white Americans persisted in the belief that black and white people share the opportunity for equal justice under the law.²²² Let me repeat, HALF of white Americans could not see the racist injustices even in the overt findings of the Justice Department. And, this was a harbinger of things to come; the racist violence wrought by the police was far from over. In fact, by July 2016 when the violent killings of Philandro Castile and Alton Sterling by police officers were videoed and widely circulated on social media, it was increasingly clear that the cultivation of blindness around systemic racism had not abated. People could watch footage taken seconds after Philandro Castile was gunned down in front of his daughter during a simple traffic stops and not see how deeply racist the criminal justice system is.²²³ What hope is there that the thousands and thousands of people of color disappearing into the prison industrial complex will ever be seen as victims of this system created through white supremacy?

It is against this persistent denial and willful blindness that the urgent question raised by McCormick and Calhoun's photographic series takes shape: How has it come to pass that many people still cannot see the racist workings of the state in either the bodies of those shot by the police— or tasered, or suffocated, or pummeled

²²² Brakkton Booker. "How Equal is American Opportunity?" NPR, September 21, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/09/21/442068004/how-equal-is-american-opportunity-survey-shows-attitudes-vary-by-race>

²²³ Although these 2 deaths drove protestors back to the streets in the U.S., many more people of color— including children—were killed by police officers in the months after the Justice Department released its findings of racism in the Ferguson criminal justice system, with Freddie Gray dying from injuries sustained while police custody in Baltimore, Tamir Rice shot while playing at a playground in Cleveland, Ohio and Walter Scott being shot in the back in South Carolina, to just name a few.

in the back of a van— or in the millions of people that vanish into the prison industrial complex?²²⁴ How can police continue their homicidal practices with full immunity? How can prisons continue to flourish through the mass incarceration of people of color? How does the blindness crucial to white supremacy cast its illusions? This chapter attends to what McCormick and Calhoun's art practice has to show not only about racist practices of the criminal justice system in the U.S. but to the troubling obstacles involving both sight and insight into this system in the pursuit for racial justice.

From Plantation to Prison

At the Venice Biennale, *23 Hour Lockdown* was shown as part of a larger series of images titled *Slavery: The Prison Industrial Complex*. The most striking of these images were two incredibly similar black and white photographs, one from 1980, another from 2004. In both of these images, men, the majority of whom are black, are shown working in long, orderly rows under the watchful gaze of an armed white man perched on a horse (Figure 32 and 33). If *23 Hour Lockdown* points to the racist workings of governmental systems made invisible behind the complicated angles of bars and fences in the prison industrial complex, these images point to what has been hidden in plain sight. The images of black prisoners working in fields is a shocking reminder that it is not happenstance that the Louisiana State Penitentiary is

²²⁴ And, for all the heightened focus on racial inequality after Brown's death, the officer responsible for Brown's death was not indicted for the murder, part of a larger trend by which of the thousands of fatal police shootings since 2005 had only seen 54 indictments. Kimberly Kindy and Kimbrell Kelly. "Thousands Dead, Few Prosecuted." *The Washington Post*. April 11, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2015/04/11/thousands-dead-few-prosecuted/>

called Angola. Located 140 miles north of New Orleans at the end of a long road that winds past pecan orchards and white-columned plantation homes set among groves of old oaks, Angola was a plantation. It was named after the country of origin of the majority of its slaves. And, Angola the penitentiary has seemingly left this system intact. As the photographs poignantly show, today the 18,000 acres that compose Angola are still farmed by primarily black “unfree” laborers as white armed guards on horseback, like the overseers of plantations, watch.

In fact, in two simple images, divided by decades, McCormick and Calhoun have created an evocative historical overview of prisons in the South, carefully rendering penal history continuous with the history of the plantation system and slavery.²²⁵ The artists overtly contextualize the contemporary photographs of the white men on horseback looming large against a background of black men laboring with the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in 1865.²²⁶ This amendment has a notable and infamous caveat. It reads: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime where of the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States.” At the very moment that slavery was abolished, then, a revived kind of slavery presented itself attached as tool of the legislative arm of the government. As Colin (Joan) Dayan explains, “The legal exception became the

²²⁵ Jessica Adams lays out this “continuous history” in “The Wildest Show in the South: Tourism and Incarceration at Angola.” *The Drama Review*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), pp. 94-108

²²⁶ The amendment was included in the interpretative material about the work included the catalogue and on the biennial website. <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/u/0/asset/slavery-the-prison-industrial-complex/8gFsfvRyS5bNQw?hl=en>

Figure 32: Keith Calhoun. *Angola State Prison, Who's that man on that horse, I don't know his name but they call him Boss*, 1980. Archival pigment print. ©Keith Calhoun. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 33: Chandra McCormick, *Angola State Prison, Untitled*, 2004 Archival pigment print. ©Chandra McCormick. Image courtesy of the artist.



means for terminological slippage: those who were once slaves were now criminal.”²²⁷ This slippage between slave and criminal is eerily visible in the images of men working the fields on the Angola plantation in the late 20th and early 21st Century. Even the impetus for ensuring such a slippage can exist appears in the photograph, for instance, from 1980, titled *Who's that man on that horse, I don't know his name, but they call him Boss* (Figure 32).

In this photograph, the man on horseback— called ‘Boss’— hold his gun held erect as he watches men hoe fields under a hazy sky. The role of the man, a combination of prison guard and overseer (a ‘Boss’,) suggests that prisons, like slavery, are related to labor history in the United States. The fields are rendered fallow in the grayscale of the photograph. The neat rows of freshly tilled dirt have been carefully leaked of color and all signs of growth, recalling a history in which the modes of production in the U.S. were made precarious. The economy in the South, after all, was left in ravages by the abolition of slavery and the extended and destructive civil war accompanied that resolve, with fields left untended and the plantation economy in ruins. But, because the 13th Amendment built in state authorization to use prison labor as a bridge between slavery and paid work, the criminalization of African Americans became an economic solution to the labor crisis in the South brought about by emancipation. “Black Codes” were created that, among other things, made criminal acts of vagrancy and loitering— primarily crimes linked

²²⁷ Colin (Joan) Dayan. “From Plantation to Penitentiary.” *Slavery in the Francophone World: Forgotten Acts, Forged Identities*, ed. Doris Kadish, University of Georgia Press, 2000.

to unemployment.²²⁸ In the early stages of creating and utilizing the resulting boom in prisoners, through what was called the Convict Lease system, the state actually sold prisoners caught in violation of these codes to landowners, local businesses and corporations desperate to rebuild the South's infrastructure.

Looking at these images of Angola is to see a case in point. In 1869, a former Confederate officer, Major Samuel Lawrence James, assumed control of the convict lease in Louisiana, personally parceling out prisoners to landowners in return for money.²²⁹ In 1880, he acquired the plantation called Angola to create his own penal colony and used the convicts to work instead for him. Only with the end of the convict lease system did the soaring population of prisoners of color lead to the construction of prisons. In Louisiana, this was an easy transition. In 1901, the state purchased the plantation from James and took control of the convicts and the running of the plantation. Former slave quarters became prison dormitories, and, as this image of the prison guard called 'Boss' shows, a transition was complete. The ownership and management of not only the plantations themselves but also large percentages of African Americans that supplied the unfree work force had been transferred from private landowners now to explicitly benefit and work for the state. As the men in the photographs attest, even today the prison still acts as a fully functioning farm, with

²²⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. Oxford UP, 1935.

²²⁹ Angola has a museum on site that tells the history of the prison through archival photographs and objects. They also narrate the history of the prison and its lands, including from the plantation past, on their website: <http://www.angolamuseum.org/history/history/>

inmates working fields of soybeans and cotton for wages of between four and twenty cents an hour.²³⁰

W.E.B. Du Bois drew attention to the continuation of the legal consolidation of labor and capital born of slavery at the very turn of the 20th Century. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he did not mince words about the role of the criminal justice system in the oppression of African Americans, writing: “when the Negroes were freed and the whole South was convinced of the impossibility of free Negro labor, the first and most universal device was to use the courts as a means of re-enslaving the blacks. It was not a question of crime, but rather of color.”²³¹ To look at these black and white images, then, is to see a truncated history in which people were transformed from slaves to prisoners and kept literally in the same place and doing the same unfree labor in a changing economy. Actually, it is to see how efficient the system has gotten in transforming black people into criminals. The earliest image the artists exhibit from 1980 was taken just as emergent get-tough criminal justice policies, emanating from Ronald Reagan’s War on Drugs, meant black men were locked up at even more unprecedentedly high rates. This image captures the beginning of a prison boom that saw prison population grow 500%, with, as I already noted, African American men bearing the brunt of that growth.²³² Although black men are less than seven percent of the population, they make up fifty percent of the prison population. In Louisiana, the state which imprisons more people based on population than any other state, the

²³⁰ Maya Schenwar. “Slavery Haunts America’s Plantation Prisons” *Truthout*. 2008. <http://truth-out.org/archive/component/k2/item/79840:slavery-haunts-americas-plantation-prisons>

²³¹ Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 66

²³² “Trends in U.S. Corrections: Fact Sheet” *The Sentencing Project*. 2014. <http://sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf>

numbers are even more stunning. Among black men from New Orleans, for instance, one in 14 is behind bars; one in seven is either in prison, on parole or on probation. The racial injustice— the racist balance— of Angola is the national extreme. Of the over six thousand prisoners in that state penitentiary, over 80% are African American. The legal system designed to recapture black people who escaped slavery on the largest scale, through emancipation, is still doing its job.

And, this system continues to thrive. As Alexander bluntly puts it, “Today there are more African-Americans under correctional control — in prison or jail, on probation or parole — than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began.”²³³ The parenthetical clause in the 13th Amendment, that bracketed opening for racial injustice, has become a fertile space for racist practices.²³⁴ In fact, just as it undermined the abolishment of slavery, the criminal justice system has similarly succeeded in dismantling many of the advances accomplished through the Civil Rights Act. Consider the following:

In 1964, Congress passed the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibiting discrimination in employment. Today, three out of every ten African American males born in the United States will serve time in prison, a status that affects their prospects for legitimate employment, their access to financial aid for schooling and job training, and even often bars them from obtaining professional licenses.

²³³ Alexander 8

²³⁴ I am echoing Dayan, who calls the clause in the 13th Amendment a “parenthetical expression” and a “bracketing of servitude that revived slavery under the cover of removing it.” Dayan LWD 195

In 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act. Today, 31 percent of all black men in Alabama and Florida are permanently disenfranchised as a result of felony convictions. Nationally, 1.4 million black men have lost the right to vote under these laws.

In 1968, Congress passed the Fair Housing Act. Today, the current housing for approximately 2 million Americans — a disproportionate amount of them African American— is a prison or jail cell.²³⁵

These are powerful statistics of the continuous inequity taking place behind the bars of the penal system. And, McCormick and Calhoun's photographs give a glimpse into this criminal justice system that has proven to be a powerful substitute for the social control of slavery.

Hidden In Plain Sight

For all the grey saturations in these photographs, these are stark images. They contain a focused indictment of the racist economic core of the prison system in the United States. As they should make abundantly clear, well over a century after the official end of slavery, and even over a century after Du Bois made the connections between slavery and criminalization, a plantation prison named Angola still has one main intent. Angola exists, as both its name and McCormick and Calhoun's carefully constructed imaging reveals, to house— exploit, oppress— African Americans, even

²³⁵ "Civil Rights 101: Criminal Justice," *The Leadership Conference*.
<http://www.civilrights.org/resources/civilrights101/crimjustice.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/>

if the economics of this arrangement has somewhat changed.²³⁶ And so, looking at these photos is also to see a line of questioning about racism's endurance: How can millions of black people²³⁷ continue to be the target of seemingly the entire legislative apparatus in the United States while the nation still pledges allegiance to liberty and justice for all? How can a country declare itself colorblind, post-racial, and free of its racist past while men toil on in the fields of a working plantation well into the twenty-first century? How can these racist economics be hidden in plain sight?

Looking at these photographs for that which allows such virulent persistence, there is a timely dimension to this optical illusion. Davis has said that the word "racist" now has an "archaic ring to it, as if we were caught in a time warp."²³⁸ And this "time warp" plays tricks on these photographs. The artists even seem to encourage this warping. In the image from 1980, for instance, if both the man on the horse and the image bear some traces of the technological advances of the 20th

²³⁶ The economics of mass incarceration have altered with the rise of for-profit prisons. The two largest for-profit prison companies in the United States – GEO and Corrections Corporation of America – have a combined \$3.3 billion in annual revenue. On over-emphasis on private, for-profit prison in prison reform rhetoric, however, ignores the fact that prisons, as these images reveal, have always been for profit. Even state penitentiaries still rely on prisoners to generate revenue, a fact that inmates in 2016 tried to bring attention to. In May 2016, a statewide prison work stoppage swept Alabama, a state with a similar penal history as Louisiana. The prison labor strike was coordinated by a group of prisoners at Alabama's Holman Correctional Facility, also a former plantation. A statement from this group, organizing under the name "the Free Alabama Movement" demanded the abolition of unpaid prison labor, which they linked to slavery. As they stated in their manifesto, the work stoppage is an "economic solution to an economic problem" that stems from "the 13th Amendment, the Alabama Constitution of 1901 and the Statutory Laws discriminatorily enacted from both." As the organizers put it "We will no longer contribute to our own oppression...we will no longer continue to work for free." Jack Denton. "Prison Labor Strike in Alabama: 'We Will No Longer Contribute to Our Own Oppression.'" *Solitary Watch*. May 5, 2016. <http://solitarywatch.com/2016/05/05/prison-labor-strike-in-alabama-we-will-no-longer-contribute-to-our-own-oppression/>

²³⁷ As well as other people of color particularly through immigration policies and so called 'gang laws.' For a detailed discussion of this, see Lisa Maria Cacho. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. NYU Press, 2012

²³⁸ Davis *The Meaning of Freedom* 172

century (although film photography, obviously, this is no laborious collodion wet-plate photograph, and the man's gun is not a muzzle loaded rifle) the photograph, and its economics, seems out of time. The men in this dreary world of black, white and grey occupy a space and a time that does not have to be recognized as now. It is instead easy to imagine that the men hoeing the fields by hand are laboring in an indecipherable long ago past. Actually, it is clear the lines of the field the men are working stretch back into slavery's past. But, in the shallow foreground of the photograph, it is much harder to follow these same perspective lines into the present. This is a mapping of one of the central illusions of colorblindness. In the workings of contemporary colorblindness, remember, narratives that emphasize the end of slavery and of Jim Crow and celebrates a post-racial society as evidenced by the presidency of Barack Obama leave issues of racism firmly in the past. The present, constructed through law and social conventions alike, resists connecting to that past; it acts instead as if all connections are severed.

This takes quite a trick of perception; the present and the past have to always be seen in contrast, not similitude. In that, colorblindness works similarly to a phenomena that Freud noted in his study of the workings of memory. Although the 1899 essay "Screen Memories" was written to think about the psychological makeup of individuals, it sheds some light on how perception operates within the larger U.S. social and political constructions of history. In "Screen Memories," Freud suggests that an early memory (what he calls a *mnemic image*) can be a "screen" for a later

event.²³⁹ It serves to mentally displace or detach successive events from earlier traumas. Screen memories are primarily methods of disguise, in Freud's appraisal. They act as substitutes (he interchanges "screen memory" and "substituted memory") to hide what he calls the most "important elements" of memory— which, in Freud's analysis, is their "continuity."²⁴⁰ This means a screen memory suppresses the "relationship between that content and some other."²⁴¹ For Freud, detaching an early memory from subsequent events and memories is an evasive move; it allows for the mind to detach from the meanings of the past.²⁴² When this formulation is put into context with McCormick and Calhoun's images, it does much to explain the perceptual resistance enacted by the photographs to being *time bound*. The images show how past memories of slavery and its abolition serves as a screen that disconnects the present political economy from that history. This means that the contemporary legal system is seen as divorced from the legal legacy of slavery, no matter how overtly the law shows its racial biases. Operating behind the screen of history, the contemporary racist working of mass incarceration vanish. So, even as these photographs document the economic and political relationships between contemporary conditions of mass incarceration and slavery, in an era of

²³⁹ Sigmund Freud. "Screen Memories." in *On Freud's Screen Memories*. Ed. Howard Levine and Gail Reed. Jarnac Books, 2015.

²⁴⁰ Freud 11

²⁴¹ Freud 11

²⁴² In Jennifer González's insightful reading of Freud, a screen memory allows "a retrogressive movement from the present into a reconstruction of the past" and allows representations to be "objects of forgetting. Jennifer González. "Autotopographies" in *Prosthetic Territories: Politics and Hypertechnologies*, ed. Gabriel Brahm Jr. and Mark Driscoll. Westview. 195, 133-150.

colorblindness, they have also become records of the evasive, perceptual maneuvering that keeps the force of contemporary racial injustices hidden from sight.

I have been reading these images and history progressively until now, as if the 1980 image leads to the 2004 image and history is linear. But, actually, when seen through the lens—the screen—of colorblindness, perception of these photographs actually works the other way. This means even as the photographs enact how slavery transformed into mass incarceration in neat frames, they also show how the workings of racism slip *back* and out of sight. The photograph from 2004 is succeeded by—or succumbs to—the photograph taken over three decades before, which in turn vanishes into a mental image from the plantation’s unseen past. To put it another way, because of the difficulty of seeing what people, the law, and history says no longer exists—and the past history of slavery has become that which represses the vision of the racist present—the photographs are made historical. The images conspire with the willing eye to leave the pictures—and the racial legacy (political and economic) they inscribe—firmly in the distant past. In the photograph from 2004, in which the prison guard is more clearly marked by the present, and the power lines and machinery in the background also attest to the relatively current periodization of the image, a similar illusion occurs (Figure 33). The prisoners, wearing white shirts and carrying wooden farm tools, occupy a liminal space in the middle ground in which they, like the lines in the fields that they work, can recede out of the present moment. When Roland Barthes claimed photography was a record of “what has been” in *Camera Lucida*, able to “make the past as certain as the present,” this is surely not

what he had in mind.²⁴³ For here, as the past has overlaid the present, the “what has been” is able to obscure entirely the “what is” in regards to the current entwining of institutional racism and criminal justice.

These photographs are intent on drawing this past into the present— to show the historical continuity of racism and racial oppression in the criminal justice system. They insistently reconstruct and visualize the prison’s plantation past, and the artists call the series *Slavery* as if to claim that it is only in grappling with the past production of white supremacy that the present can emerge out from under this history. The abolition of slavery did not end racism’s hold, so when these images connect to that vile institution, they seem to argue that the abolition of the prison industrial complex might complete that goal. Yet, as the past enters into the frame of the photographs, it is an obstruction even here under such intense scrutiny. Another image from 2004 also displayed as part of the installation in Venice drives home this obstinate time-slippage, this forceful screening. In this photograph, the prisoners occupy the foreground while the prison guard subtly blurs behind them (Figure 34). The contemporary details of sunglasses and hooded shirts, when rendered in the same grayscale as the rough white shirts worn by the inmates, the straw hats on their heads, and the wooden sling blades they carry, slip out of time. The past, signified not only through the black bodies of the laborers but also their tools and clothing in this photograph, is a thick residue through which the present is able to hide in this image. And this means that the view that the artists carefully give into the prison, that, as

²⁴³ Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida*. Trans. Richard Howard. Hill and Wang, 1980/ 2010. 85, 87-88

Figure 34: Chandra McCormick. *Prisoners Going Back to Work*. 2004. Archival pigment print. ©Chandra McCormick. Image courtesy of the artist.



McCormick puts it, its workings are “no different than what you see during slavery,” is also the insight to its flourishing. In these photographs, seeing something “no different” than slavery makes it possible to not (presently) see at all.²⁴⁴ In these pictures, then, it is not only the 18,000 acres of plantation lands that compose Angola that allow these prisoners, and the racist economics of the state, to stay out of sight. To the willing eye, the willingly blind, racism and its workings also appear only as if from a great distance. The triumphant narrative of emancipation and the U.S. obsession with freedom has provided the screen through which to bury contemporary evidence of racism into the past.

Invisible Visibility²⁴⁵

This visual recourse to history, however, is not the only explanation to how the racism endemic to the social ordering of the United States is screened. After all,

²⁴⁴ Alys Eve Weinbaum has pointed to a similar phenomena when she call the current negotiations around visibility and invisibility in regards to race “auratic” after Walter Benjamin’s influential writings. As she puts it, “the present denial of the biological existence of race shapes all invocations of race, effectively making biological race auratic each and every time it appears.” Although Weinbaum is interested in how race continues to structure genetic research and biotechnological procedures, her use of the term aura is helpful for thinking about racism’s tangential (un)attachments to the present. In Benjamin’s concept of ‘aura,’ after all, the word stands for exactly the kind of optical illusion, the aesthetic warping of perception, that Alexander has in mind. When Benjamin writes: “What is the aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance of distance, no matter how close the object may be” he illuminates a central component to the success of colorblindness. Because the history of slavery has taken in “unique appearance of a distance” (my emphasis) racism itself has also taken on the appearance of distance, and been made, to follow Benjamin’s thinking, “unapproachable.” Alys Eve Weinbaum. “Racial Aura: Walter Benjamin and the Work of Art in a Biotechnological Age.” *Literature and Medicine*. 26(1) Spring 2007, 207-239; Walter Benjamin. “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” (Second Version) in Jennings, Michael W (Gen. Ed.) *Walter Benjamin: selected writings Vol. 3 1935-1938*. Belknap Press, 2002, 104, 255.

²⁴⁵ It has been years since Avery Gordon theorized the “visible invisibility” of racism. Writing in the late 20th Century, Gordon suggested that the presence of racism in the United States makes itself known even as it “appears to be not there.” Here, I’m flagging my interest in the opposite phenomena: how the overt presence and appearance of racism disappears behind a veneer of visibility. Avery Gordon. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

as I made clear at the beginning of the text by evoking the circumstances of Michael Brown's death, sometimes the sick core at the heart of the criminal justice system emerges out from both the thousands of acres of land that surround its prisons and the trappings of historical time that cloak its workings. Sometimes it is laid bare to the eye.²⁴⁶ Another question, then, still stands: What is the relationship between the kind of hyper-visibility— encapsulated by Michael Brown's body laying in the street— and the invisibility that sustains institutional racism? This question comes into focus around other photographs in McCormick and Calhoun's Angola series. For instance, when *Slavery: The Prison Industrial Complex* was shown at Prospect 3, the New Orleans art biennial held in 2014/15, a color photograph called *Angola Inmates Breaking Wild Horses, Angola State Prison Rodeo*, 2013 provided a jarring juxtaposition to the black and white images of men working in the fields (Figure 35). The photo shows men wearing black and white striped shirts clutching taunt ropes, bracing themselves against the frantic pulls of wild horses. As these men struggle to control the horses, dust clouds around them, behind them are bleachers full of spectators. As the backs of the striped shirts worn by the men explain, what is shown in this photograph is the Angola Prison Rodeo. Every Sunday in October and one weekend in April, a cumulative 70,000 people flock to the plantation cum prison to see prisoners perform in an amateur rodeo and to buy crafts sold by inmates at the

²⁴⁶ For instance, it seems pretty spectacular that in the thousands of fatal shootings at the hands of police since 2005, in which black people were killed at a rate twenty-one times higher than white people, only 54 officers have been charged with any crime. And, despite this evidence of injustice, police killings continue apace. Kimberly Kindy and Kimbrell Kelly. "Thousands Dead, Few Prosecuted." *The Washington Post*. April 11, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2015/04/11/thousands-dead-few-prosecuted/>

Figure 35: Chandra McCormick, *Angola Inmates breaking wild horses, Angola State Prison Rodeo*, 2013. ©Chandra McCormick. Image courtesy of the artist.



accompanying craft fair. As the prison brochure proudly states, people come “from all over the world” to view the event that Angola promotes as “the Wildest Show in the South.”²⁴⁷

The rodeo shown in this photograph could also seem “archaic,” to recall Davis’s comments on racism. This odd spectacle of frontier (or gladiator) brutality caught on film could, or maybe even should, also recede into the past. However, there is a markedly different optics at work in this photograph. And this is not just because the image is in color. To look at this image is to be reflected by the thousands of spectators that perch on the bleachers who also watch the unfolding brutality of both the rodeo and the realities of mass incarceration.²⁴⁸ It is to join, if virtually, the stands of the rodeo spectators, the majority of whom are not black, who watch passively (or even, one would suppose, glutinously and gleefully) as the two black men at the center of the image perform their own subjection by criminal authority.²⁴⁹ Put into context with McCormick and Calhoun’s photographs of the men working in Angola’s fields, then, this photograph suggests that there is something about the contemporary hyper-visibility and the rampant spectatorship being constructed by both the rodeo

²⁴⁷ “Angola Prison Rodeo: ‘Wildest Show in the South.’” *Angola Museum*.

<http://www.angolamuseum.org/angola-prison-rodeo-wildest-show-in-the-south/>

²⁴⁸ In New Orleans, it’s not only friends and families of inmates that go to the prison rodeo each year. It is something that people also do for entertainment, packing into cars to drive hours out of the city to watch the spectacle. When I was in my early 20s, I, like most everyone I knew in New Orleans, was always eager for the event despite the ethical discomforts it also offered. Where else was I, well insulated by my whiteness and class, going to get to see men who had never been around bulls or horses in their lives struggle to ride them or to get money chips off the animals? Where else was I going to get a stark look into the both the state and spectacle of mass incarceration, even to indict it?

²⁴⁹ Actually, it is even to see a relationship with the spectatorship that is an integral part of lynching history.

and by the overt police targeting of black communities necessary to the racist workings of mass incarceration.

Consider the photograph called *Waiting for the Bull*, n.d. (Figure 36). This image centers on three black men who sit behind a fence in the bleachers of the stadium constructed for the rodeo. The area of the stadium where they ‘wait,’ according to the title of the photograph, is obviously a holding pen for rodeo participants. The men are carefully separated from the spectators that sit above them, glimpsed only as pale arms, by heavy metal bars. Even at the rodeo, then, the architectural vernacular of containment, those bars and fences traced in the earlier image, clearly designate the men as prison inmates. But, this segregation is not the only way these men are noticeably prisoners. The snap button western style shirts that signal that these men are participants in the rodeo also serve to identify the men as convicts. Although black and white striped clothing was discontinued as Angola prison uniforms in 1918, a century ago, the reoccurrence of the stripes on the western style shirts is an easy visual cue to the wearer’s status as criminal.²⁵⁰ So, like the photographs of the men working in fields, this image recalls how what sociologist Avery Gordon calls “the fundamental racial ontology of permanent slavery was

²⁵⁰ Although this is not seen in the photograph, the shirts are only one way the rodeo participants are branded as criminals. The announcer at the rodeo introduces each inmates into the proceedings not only by name, but also the length of their prison sentences. Their sentences are also noted beside their names in the programs. Most often, these sentences are “Life.” Because of draconian sentencing laws, Louisiana has the highest percentage of inmates serving life without parole than any other state.⁴⁹ Although compared with the national average, Louisiana has a much lower percentage of people incarcerated from violent offenses and a much higher percentage of people behind bars for drug offenses, roughly 73% of Angola’s 6,250 inmates are serving life without parole. The average sentence for the rest is 90.9 years.

Figure 36: Chandra McCormick, *Waiting for the Bull*, n.d. ©Chandra McCormick. Image courtesy of the artist.



transferred to the prisoner.”²⁵¹ The sly workings of the 13th Amendment, in which slavery and racial injustice were made past while blackness was reconfigured as criminal, is seen in the photograph of men wearing their criminality literally as clothing. The black body is kept imprisoned, according to these images, through the constant spectacle of black criminality.²⁵²

And, with this spectacle comes more colorblindness. In fact, *Waiting for the Bull* shows how the spectacle around seeing black as ontologically criminal allows people not to see racism at all. Because crime in its abstract form is supposedly race neutral, the linkage between blackness and criminality means any critique of the racial inequalities in the criminal justice system vanishes. In *Waiting for the Bull*, then, seeing the men sit clothed in their criminality, waiting to perform for an eager audience, is to also see how Angola’s racist workings are naturalized and normalized. When black criminality is imagined to account for the fact that at Angola black people compose 80% of the prison population while they only compose 32% of the state population, these disproportions become a necessary byproduct of this criminal aptitude. This ensures that to any critique of the racial inequalities in the criminal justice system vanishes.²⁵³ This is a powerfully blinding spectacle. After all, when black people are seen as criminals, it is not just the racist intent of the U.S. criminal

²⁵¹ Avery Gordon. “The Prisoner’s Curse.” *Towards a Sociology of the Trace*. Ed. Herman Gray and Macarena Gómez-Barris. U of Minnesota Press, 2010.

²⁵² This is a spectacle that scholars such as Erin Gray, Leigh Raiford, and David Marriott have all linked to the history of lynching in the United States.

²⁵³ To put this in context more clearly with the death of Michael Brown, surveillance video supposedly showing him stealing cigarillos from a corner store became evidence in both the minds of the public and of the criminal justice system of righteousness of his death. Brown’s supposed criminality became the focus of many discussions about the actions of the police officer.

justice system that is lost from sight. All facets of the racist social and political ordering of the United States—the structural white supremacy— also recedes from view. As Lisa Marie Cacho explains, “We can transparently recognize criminals (with their disreputable traits and deceitful natures) only if we refuse to recognize the material histories, social relations, and structural conditions that criminalize populations of color and the impoverished places where they live.”²⁵⁴ Seeing black people as criminal, then, requires that all the workings of systemic racism also disappear.

And, with it, the economic structures that profit by this system also vanish. Actually, looking again at *Angola Inmates Breaking Wild Horses*, *Angola State Prison Rodeo*, 2013, the image enacts this phenomenon. If one can look past the spectacle of men dressed as criminals to perform in a rodeo, McCormick and Calhoun’s framing of the scene has left the twisted economics of mass incarceration in sight. In the background of the image are the advertising banners that announce the fiscal supporters of the rodeo. Incongruously, these include not only places like Boot Barn but also Securus, a company which provided telephone service to inmates in US prisons at much inflated rates and the GEO Group. The GEO Group is the largest provider of what they call “correctional, detention, and community re-entry services” in the United States, with over 20,000 employees worldwide and annual revenue of over 1.5 billion dollars.²⁵⁵ That one of the two largest operator of for-profit prisons in

²⁵⁴ Lisa Marie Cacho. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotested*. NYU Press, 2012, 9

²⁵⁵ This information is found on the GEO Group’s website: <http://www.geogroup.com/>

the U.S. supporting a state run prison rodeo is might seem an odd thing, but actually they are heavily invested in maintaining exactly the kind of spectacular criminality being produced by the Angola Prison Rodeo. Since 2001, GEO Group along with Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) has spent over \$20 million lobbying congress. GEO and CCA have employed nearly 300 lobbyists in 17 states over the past decade. These corporations have also given over \$10 million to political campaigns over the past decade, including \$1.9 million in 2010 alone.²⁵⁶ What do they ask for? Just that the production of criminality of huge swathes of the U.S. public continue apace. In a 2007 annual report, this is made clear:

In particular, the demand for our correctional and detention facilities and services could be adversely affected by changes in existing criminal or immigration laws, crime rates in jurisdictions in which we operate, the relaxation of criminal or immigration enforcement efforts, leniency in conviction, sentencing or deportation practices, and the decriminalization of certain activities that are currently proscribed by criminal laws or the loosening of immigration laws. For example, any changes with respect to the decriminalization of drugs and controlled substances could affect the number of persons arrested, convicted, sentenced and incarcerated, thereby potentially reducing demand for correctional facilities to house them. Similarly, reductions in crime rates could lead to reductions in arrests, convictions and sentences requiring incarceration at correctional facilities. Immigration reform laws which are currently a focus for legislators and politicians at the federal, state and local level also could materially adversely impact us.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ These statistics have been widely reported. <https://www.thenation.com/article/how-private-prisons-game-immigration-system/>, <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2012/08/03/627471/private-prisons-spend-45-million-on-lobbying-rake-in-51-billion-for-immigrant-detention-alone/>, <http://www.justicepolicy.org/news/10110>

²⁵⁷ [GEO Group, 2007 Annual Report, Financials p.20.](#)

To look past the performance of criminality that clouds the eye, then, in McCormick and Calhoun's dramatic image, is to see the connection being made from slavery to the current state of mass incarceration. And, it is to see who profits from it. After all, the Geo Group, like other corporations, are actively lobbying to keep a system constructed around white supremacy firmly in place, as this telling end of year report reveals. They spend tens of millions of dollars to keep the government from decriminalizing both drugs and communities of color, lobbying for staunchly anti-immigration laws that target primarily Latino communities and to keep in place the draconian sentencing policies that have wreaked havoc on black communities. So, from the men working the fields to those made to spectacularize criminality for an avid public, these images trace out an economic history of black racialized oppression in the United States. And, from slavery to criminality, the images reveal that economic impetus to remain blind to institutional racism and racialized exploitation has led to many people willingly made blind. In fact, it is easy to see in this series of images that police violence and mass incarceration are both symptoms of sick economic policies. From the economics of slavery to the economics of mass incarceration, communities of color in the United States have been continually sacrificed for profit. Yet, as long as people turn a blind eye to these realities, there is no end in sight for the violence that is raging in the United States.

Chapter 4

Ecological Afterlives:

Sammy Baloji and the Colonial Planning of the Contemporary Climate in the DRC

And how can one live in death, be already dead, while being-there— while having not necessarily left the world or being part of the spectre— and when the shadow that overhangs existence has not disappeared, but on the contrary weights ever more heavily? ~Achille Mbembe

Sammy Baloji's research-based art project *Essay on Urban Planning* (or *Photographic Essay on Urban Planning from 1910 to the present day in the city of Lubumbashi*), 2013 consists of a grid of twelve photographs (Figure 37).²⁵⁸ These include six aerial views of Lubumbashi (formerly Elisabethville) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) interspersed with six images of large collections of flies and mosquitoes from the National Museum of Lubumbashi. The grid formed by these images echoes the intersecting streets in the photographs of the city. In five of the aerial photographs, however, a long, narrow strip of undeveloped land stretches and turns to segment the city, interrupting the neat lines of the urban grid. This green space is strikingly undeveloped, crowded by the roads and buildings on either side. At a glance, it could be a park within the crowded city that since 2006 has grown from 1.6 million people to nearly 4 million.²⁵⁹ But, hung next to the grid is a short text from 1931 called *The Development of the Congo*, which clarifies the use of the space:

The neutral zone avoids close contact between whites and blacks. An almost empty area measuring a minimum of 500 meters separates their two areas of settlement, this distance corresponding to that which a malaria-carrying mosquito will normally cover. The neutral zone thus divides the lives of blacks from those of whites: it keeps the latter safe from the sources of

²⁵⁸ *Essay on Urban Planning* was shown in the Belgian Pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale as part of a group exhibit called "Personne et les autres." Belgian artist Vincent Meessen was asked to represent Belgium for the biennale, but chose instead to break with the normal model of Belgium's representation in Venice, which has mostly featured solo or duo exhibitions of Belgian. Meessen collaborated with Brussels-based curator Katerina Gregos on the group exhibition. Katerina Gregos, *Personne et les autres*. Mousse. 2015 <http://moussemagazine.it/belgian-pavilion-venice-2015/>

²⁵⁹ In 2014, the provincial governor, Moïse Katumbi, gave these population numbers in an interview. There are no official census numbers reported. <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2014/10/13/lubumbashi-mall-shows-congo-opportunities-beyond-mining>

malaria, and from the rowdy activities of blacks, so creating completely independent living conditions for each race ... it is a true cordon sanitaire, placed at a right angle from the prevailing winds ... our urban planning contents itself with creating developments that satisfy conditions of hygiene, salubrity and security, giving the white and black races the opportunity to live according to the hopes and needs of each, however modest these might be.²⁶⁰

According to this evocative text, the division of the city crafted through this undeveloped space “at a right angle from prevailing winds” is the result of colonial social and medical apartheid. Leaving this land uninhabited and undeveloped was a mode of control not only for the mosquitoes that carry the virulently contagious malaria somewhat less than 500 meters, according to the text, but also for the social and cultural lives of the “white and black races,” firmly separate by this urban planning.

Between the strip of green space that segments the city and the bugs ordered in lines, then, Baloji has plotted out what curator Katerina Gregos calls the “sprawling cartography of control” in Lubumbashi.²⁶¹ The images reveal the biopolitical methods used for this control. Biopolitics, the “taking charge of life” that Foucault isolated in his famous studies of sanitariums and the medicalization of madness, the history of sexuality, and the birth of the modern prison in Europe, is what “gave power its access even to the body” in modern European nation states.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ According to the wall label, this text is from a special issue on the occasion of the International Exhibition at Elisabethville and was written by an engineer named R. Wins.

²⁶¹ Katerina Gregos, *Personne et les autres*. Mousse. 2015

²⁶² Although Foucault did not directly address colonial systems, in his terms, the blurred transition from a disciplinary society to a society of control is enacted through this biomedical and racial encoding. In this transition, biopower, a political technology that “brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge/power an agent of transformation of human life”

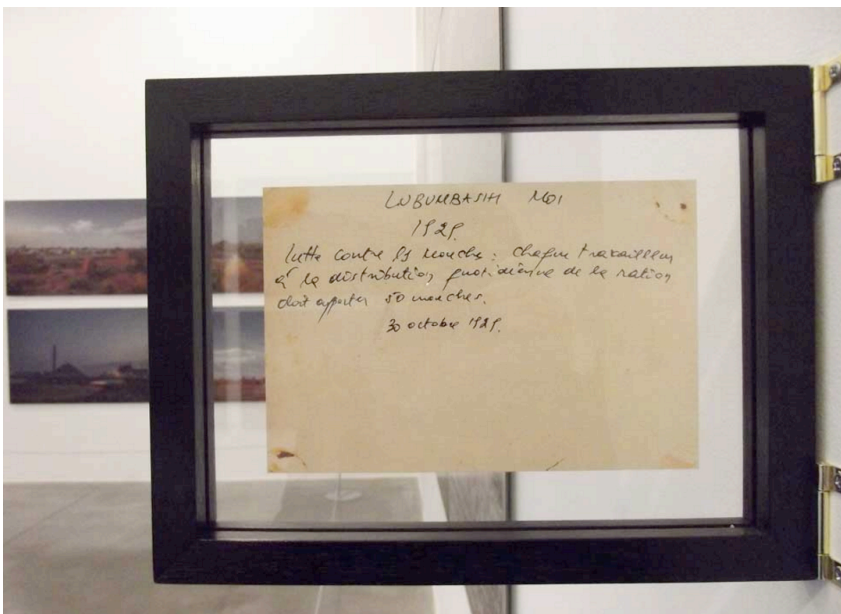
Figure 37: Sammy Baloji. *Essays on Urban Planning*. 2013. Essai photographique sur la planification urbaine de 1910 à nos jours de la ville de Lubumbashi, Innova Ultra Smooth Gloss 285gr/m2 (Baryt Paper). Printed on Epson Stylus Pro 11880.12 pieces each 80cm x 120cm.

© Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès.



supplements the more overt disciplinary methods of subjugation used to control colonial populations. For Achille Mbembe, who is directly concerned with colonial governance, different modalities of power are conterminous and complementary, meaning that the disciplinary society never gives way to the society of control, in any case. Michel Foucault. *History of Sexuality, Vol 1*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 2012, 143-44. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. UC Press, 2001, 13.

Figure 38 & 39: Sammy Baloji. *Essays on Urban Planning*. 2013. Detail. Photo: Ana Balona de Oliveira. © Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès.



In Baloji's use of image and text, it is clear that in the DRC diseases like malaria and sleeping sickness were used as an excuse by the Belgian colonial regime to regiment bodies, holding them separate and distinct in categories both medicalized and racialized.²⁶³ A small historical image that Baloji also displays alongside the image grid drives home how insidious this practice was. This image shows two young black boys sitting next to a pile of insects. It bears the inscription: "Lubumbashi MOI, Fly control campaign: each worker must bring 50 flies in order to receive his daily ration, 30 October 1929." (Figure 38-39)²⁶⁴ The same people who were forced to live in separate areas and to cross the cordon sanitaire only to labor for the Belgian colonial authorities had to also collect samples of insects studied in order to create the rationale for apartheid; they had to justify their own subjection.²⁶⁵ The cordon

²⁶³ In *Africa as a Living Laboratory*, Helen Tilley suggests that there are "parallel patterns" between biomedical undertakings and agricultural ones in the African colonies. But, *Urban Planning* actually suggests that this has to go one step further; the biomedical practices in the DRC as well as other biopolitical undertakings, in Baloji's neat grid, are shown to have been exercised over people and the land not in parallel, but together. Helen Tilley. *Africa as a Living Laboratory*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

²⁶⁴ Malaria was not the only disease that the colonial authorities were interested in containing in the DRC. As this image and the photographs of flies that Baloji shows attest, sleeping sickness, a wasting disease carried by tsetse flies, was similarly a concern. Sleeping sickness was used by the colonial authority to further exercise their power over the region. Entire villages were burnt under the suspicion that the disease was prevalent within them, and populations with the disease were held in camps. Only people who were forcibly submitted to rigorous, invasive exams and found free of the disease were given medical passcards that allowed them into the areas occupied by Europeans. This is despite the fact that colonial regimes were responsible for the epidemics. While sleeping sickness had been present in the region, it had not existed in epidemic proportions prior to colonization. Trade and colonial development facilitated the transfer of disease and resulted in epidemic during the first decade of the twentieth century as poor sanitation, lack of healthcare and proper nutrition, forced labor, and the transport of people and products along waterways made it easy for "people, pests, and diseases to travel." For more information, see Daniel Headrick. "Sleeping Sickness Epidemics and Colonial Responses in East and Central Africa, 1900–1940." *PLoS Negl Trop Dis*. 2014 Apr; 8(4): e2772. Published online 2014 Apr 24. [10.1371/journal.pntd.000277](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.000277)

²⁶⁵ In 1910, the following ordinance was issued by the colonial administration in the region (formerly called Katanga):

sanitaire is, therefore, the perfect example of biopower.²⁶⁶ For Foucault, modern technologies of power work “to make live and let die” subjugated bodies and populations.²⁶⁷ And, Baloji diagrams the spatial methods used to literally leave the racially produced and medically segregated population to live— and die— where disease carrying insect populations were thriving in their pestilence.

In *Urban Planning*, this virulent colonial system is not past. The photographs show that roads in Lubumbashi still veer and turn according to the racially and medically conceived regime. And, with one poignant image, the artwork reveals the devastating implications of this. In an aerial photograph of the city on the left hand side of the image grid, a 500-foot-high heap of slag, the waste of a century of copper

“A Preliminary Ordinance dealing with the repression of Sleeping Sickness has been issued by the Belgian administration of Katanga. In this Ordinance is given a long list of waterways where navigation of fishing by native means is prohibited. On these waterways all canoes are to be destroyed.... Those villages are to be removed which are situated on states portions of the rivers Luapula, Lufira, Dikulwe and Luvua, and the Lakes Mweru and Tanganyika. No carriers or workmen are to be recruited from villages to be removed. Any native so recruited will be sent back at the expense of his employer. Infractions of the Ordinance are to be punished by a fine of 100-200 francs or from four to seven days’ penal servitude. The Ordinance is dated from Elisabethville, September 21st, 1910.” *Sleeping Sickness Bulletin* London: Bureau of Hygiene and Tropical Diseases, Royal Society, Burlington House, 1911. https://books.google.com/books?id=s_8OAQAIAAJ&pg=PA42&lpg=PA42&dq=Elisabethville++sleeping+sickness&source=bl&ots=pH11f1AtBy&sig=jY7bjX7yokg2S6lMJGe1k4LPFoQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiBz6i_pu_NAhVH0WMKHcxCCZMQ6AEIMzAD#v=onepage&q=Elisabethville%20%20sleeping%20sickness&f=false

²⁶⁶ In Foucault’s terms, the blurred transition from a disciplinary society to a society of control is enacted through this biomedical and racial encoding. In this transition, biopower, a political technology that “brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge/power an agent of transformation of human life” supplements and, presumably, replaces the more overt disciplinary methods of subjugation used to control colonial populations. Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality*, Vol 1. Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 2012, 143.

²⁶⁷ For Foucault, this was the modern liberal amendment to the exercise of power. As he writes in “Society Must Be Defended” (March 3, 1976), “I think that one of the greatest transformations political right underwent in the nineteenth century was precisely that, I wouldn’t say exactly sovereignty’s old right- to take life or let live- was replaced, but it came to be complemented by a new right which does not erase the old right but which does penetrate it, permeate it. This is the right, or rather precisely the opposite right. It is the *power to ‘make’ live and ‘let’ die*. The right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die.” Michel Foucault. *“Society Must Be Defended” Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*. Picador, 2003, 241.

mining, towers over the smokestacks of a smelter. Although this is only one photograph in twelve, this black mountain looms as large in this image grid as it does in the cityscape of Lubumbashi. The roads and the long, low buildings, factories, and smokestacks of Gécamines (Générale des Carrières et des Mines), the state-controlled (formerly Belgian-owned) mining company headquartered in Lubumbashi, converge at the base of this gigantic black mountain of metallurgical refuse. The lines of the city and of the careful image grid that collapse in on these buildings and the black mound, then, are an apt visualization of the central role mining has historically and presently in the city and the region. The country has more than ten percent of the world's copper and a third of its cobalt. The vast majority of these resources are in what was formerly called Katanga, the large province in Southeastern DRC (Lubumbashi was the capital), which in 2015 was split into four separate provinces.²⁶⁸ The mining industry is estimated to account for twelve percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country and up to eighty percent of foreign direct investment. It supplies a third of all employment in the country, including formal and informal labor.²⁶⁹ It should be no surprise, then, that the slag heap is a monument in the city and is even featured on the Congolese one-franc note.

²⁶⁸ The DRC also historically provided the uranium ore used for nuclear weapons. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima contained radium extracted from uranium from the Congo. Josep Maria and Emmanuelle Devuyt. *King Leopold's Mines*. Cristianisme I Justícia, 2013.

<https://www.cristianismeijusticia.net/en/king-leopold%E2%80%99s-mines>

²⁶⁹ Oxford Policy Management. "The impact of mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo Performance to date and future challenges." Oct 2013.

<http://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/DRC%20mining%20report%20-%20OPM%20-%20Final%20Eng.pdf>

By putting this monument to the ongoing extractivist history of the area into context with the medical and racial biopolitics of the past, the artwork imbricates the colonial technologies used to discipline human bodies (to take “charge of life,” in Foucault’s turn of phrase) into the current economic and environmental conditions in the city and the region. And, this positions the slag heap as the aftermath of the “making live and letting die” of colonial rule. It stands as a dark reminder that the extractive industries in the region proceeds in ways that ensure that the land— and all that inhabits it— are being ‘let to die’ continually. After all, it is clear the abundant mineral wealth of the area failed to keep the country from being among the poorest in the world (or, that resource wealth might have even ensured this fact).²⁷⁰ According to the World Bank, its per capita GDP, which stood at \$442 in 2015, is among the lowest in the world.²⁷¹ More subtly, the shadow cast by the slag heap also provides a glimpse into the environmentally devastation mining has enacted on Lubumbashi and the surrounding area. In fact, the region is one of the ten most polluted areas worldwide.²⁷² The environmental degradation of the provinces formerly called Kananga caused by extractive industries is so severe that as early as 2005, in Greater

²⁷⁰ The mineral wealth and attendant abuses have also contributed to transforming a relatively small region north of the former Katanga province (called Kivu) into an international war zone spanning almost two decades. The ongoing war in Kivu is well known on a global scale. As I discuss below, it has been ongoing since 1996, and the horrific death rates and human rights abuses that have resulted are often analyzed in international news and media. What is less discussed in the circumstances in the rest of the vast country, which have been largely at peace in the same period, and which is the subject of *Urban Planning*.

²⁷¹ “Democratic Republic of the Congo Overview.” The World Bank. Oct 24, 2016. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview>

²⁷² R. Narendrula, K. K. Nkongolo, “Comparative Soil Metal Analyses in Sudbury (Ontario, Canada) and Lubumbashi (Katanga, DR-Congo)” *Bulletin of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology*, February 2012, Volume 88, *Issue 2*, pp 187-192 <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00128-011-0485-7#CR3>

Lubumbashi²⁷³ studies found that “the heavy concentration of mining concessions, quarries, and industries involved in refining metal (copper, cobalt, zinc, uranium, etc.) is responsible for the degradation of the soil and the ecosystems ... and the loss of the large areas of agricultural land which will be impossible to rehabilitate” (my emphasis).²⁷⁴ This has had devastating effects on the soil, air, and water of the area—and also the people and other animals that live there.²⁷⁵ In a 2009 study, children in Lubumbashi and other mining areas in the region were found to suffer from substantial exposure to several metals. Actually, the urinary cobalt concentrations found in the population from Greater Lubumbashi are the highest ever reported for a general population.²⁷⁶ Water conditions are deplorable, undrinkable and unable to sustain life, and the mass deforestation, air pollution, and the contamination of the soil means there is no end in sight for this environmental devastation.

Social anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has poetically written that imperial processes continue to “saturate the subsoil of people’s lives.”²⁷⁷ In *Urban Planning*, this is shown to literally be the case; the saturated subsoil in Greater Lubumbashi is a colonial legacy turned into a catastrophe. The racially and biomedically engineered

²⁷³ This particularly includes Kolwezi, Likasi, Kipushi, and Lubumbashi.

²⁷⁴ Devers D., Van de Weghe J.-P. (eds.), 2006. *Les forêts du Bassin du Congo : état des forêts. Partenariat des forêts pour le Bassin du Congo*, Comifac, EC, USAID, Coopération française, Kinshasa p54.

Cited in Jeremy Richards, Ed. *Mining, Society, and a Sustainable World*. Springer, 2009.

²⁷⁵ The pollution in Lubumbashi has been diagrammed by researchers as a cone emanating out from the Gécamines area seen in Baloji’s image. Interestingly, this cone traces onto the same area that was condoned off by the Europeans to contain the Congolese. This is due to the same “prevailing winds” that the colonial text reprinted by Baloji describes. As researchers note, there is a “uniform and large pollution cone downwind of the Gécamines plant.” I. Vranken et al. “The Spatial Footprint of the Non-ferrous Mining Industry in Lubumbashi.” *Tropicultura*, 2013, 31, 1, 22-29

²⁷⁶ R. Narendrula, K. K. Nkongolo, “Comparative Soil Metal Analyses in Sudbury (Ontario, Canada) and Lubumbashi (Katanga, DR-Congo)”

²⁷⁷ Ann Laura Stoler. *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*. Duke, 2013, 5.

past, in the accounting of *Urban Planning*, continues to drive the economy in Lubumbashi, and indeed, all of the DRC, despite the ecological disaster it leaves in its wake. And, what Kathryn Yusoff calls biopolitical aesthetics, the classificatory mechanisms that made sense of the destruction and violences of colonialism, continues to normalize environmental degradation and economic oppression in the DRC.²⁷⁸ This provides crucial insight for what it would take to resist this continual degradation. If environmental, economic, and biopolitical devastation are entwined, then to address the rampant poverty, the extraction of wealth, the current climate of pollution, and devastating ongoing warfare in the DRC requires the same jumping off point. Because it is biopolitics that created the ongoing, and entangled, economic policies and environmental and social crisis, in Baloji's schemata of devastation, only within a "biopolitical horizon," to borrow from Giorgio Agamben, can this destruction be grappled with.²⁷⁹

Biopolitics in a Warming World

In this chapter, I look for how Baloji's art practice, not only *Urban Planning*, but also the "Memoire" Series, and his more recent *Sociétés Secrètes* and *The Other*

²⁷⁸ Kathryn Yusoff. "Biopolitical Economies and Political Aesthetics of Climate Change." *Theory, Culture & Society* March/May 2010 vol. 27 no. 2-3 73-99

²⁷⁹ Agamben wrote: "The 'enigmas' ... that our century has proposed to historical reason and that remain with us (Nazism is only the most disquieting among them) will be solved only on the terrain--biopolitics--on which they were formed. Only within a biopolitical horizon will it be possible to decide whether the categories whose opposition founded modern politics (right/left, private/public, absolutism/democracy) ... will have to be abandoned or will, instead, eventually regain the meaning they lost on that very horizon." In Baloji's work, it is clear that the colonial biopolitical regimes were always multi-specied and land-bound, so this horizon is not bound to human bodies. Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford UP, 2003, 4.

Memorial, draws out connections between the biopolitics of colonial history and the present conditions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I ask how his artworks reveal the biopolitical aesthetics (vile imaginings, in this instance) that have produced the present. And, I ask how this past, overflowing with horrific models of resource extraction (both human and otherwise,) can engender futures that do not replicate past violences. As was clearly visible in the neat lines and grids of *Urban Planning*, past constructions of power are deeply embedded into current political and economic structures in the DRC. Tracing the history of present environmental destruction and oppressive poverty in the region through the colonial past in Baloji's artworks, it becomes clear that current modes of governance in the DRC have taken ruination and destruction to be necessary byproduct of exercises of authority. Therefore, I ask how his artworks propose to redress power's alignment with wreckage in order that there be other—or any— futures possible.

Amid the present and ongoing destruction in the DRC, I look at Baloji's body of work for the crucial insights it gives into an ongoing crisis. The link that can be made through *Urban Planning* between current economic and environmental conditions in Lubumbashi and the biopolitical engineering of the colonial past is, after all, one that writer and climate activist Naomi Klein has identified as a central concern to struggles for climate justice. Actually, when Klein delivered the 2016 Edward W. Said London Lecture, she used the forum to argue that scholars and

activists of the global ecological crisis need to attend to just this point.²⁸⁰ Specifically, Klein called attention to Edward Said's widely influential *Orientalism* as a crucial analytics of the economics of climate change. According to Klein, "reading Said in a warming world" is necessary to show how the prefiguration of difference, the "othering" that Said pinpointed as a central component to colonial violence, is related to environmental catastrophe.²⁸¹ In fact, Klein cautions, the struggle to confront the irreversible effects of climate changes—and particularly, as Balaji's practice makes clear, the economic systems that drive it—cannot take place only through studies of carbon emissions or the development of clean air technologies. Instead, it must entail a deep reckoning of the economics of differential belonging across the world. As Klein explained to her largely European audience:

We have dangerously warmed our world already, and our governments still refuse to take the actions necessary to halt the trend. There was a time when many had the right to claim ignorance. But for the past three decades, since the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was created and climate negotiations began, this refusal to lower emissions has been accompanied with full awareness of the dangers. And this kind of recklessness would have been functionally impossible without institutional racism, even if only latent. It would have been impossible without Orientalism, without all the potent tools on offer that allow the powerful to discount the lives of the less powerful. These tools – of ranking the relative value of humans – are what allow the

²⁸⁰ Subsequently, the talk was published in *London Review of Books*. Naomi Klein. "Let Them Drown: The Violence of Othering in a Warming World." *London Review of Books*. 38 (11): 2 June 2016, 11-14.

²⁸¹ Klein 11-12

writing off of entire nations and ancient cultures. And they are what allowed for the digging up of all that carbon to begin with.²⁸²

In Klein's evocative polemic, then, climate change and environmental destruction signals a potent second (third... fourth...) life for colonialist legacies and the economic policies they endowed. The ideological— and now neoliberal— production of differential values for people that Said diagnosed in his writings decades ago, that catastrophic history of imagining people into slave labour, into carriers of disease, and into social lepers that Balaji spatially diagrams in *Urban Planning*, has had dire effects. It explains why the global response to climate change leaves some populations abandoned to the rising sea levels, extreme droughts, and barren landscapes of a warming planet. And, difference is also, in Klein's words, "what allowed for the digging up of all that carbon to begin with."²⁸³

Klein's urgent point is this: since the production of difference that has been ontologically (and imaginatively) inscribed on people has also resulted in making environmental destruction and economic exploitation both profitable and socio-politically sanctioned, to tackle climate change, the violently inventive strategies and mechanisms through which human life processes as well as environmental 'resources' are managed must both be reckoned with. *Urban Planning*, and indeed Balaji's larger art practice, offers a way to begin to undertake this reckoning as it envisions how bodies of land and of bugs, the body of the mountain of metallurgic debris and those of the people unseen in the photographs taken from far above the city have all been

²⁸² Klein 12

²⁸³ Klein 11

made subject to violence for economic gains. And, this is critical. As Klein cautions, “without that knowledge, there is no way to understand how we ended up in this dangerous place, or to grasp the transformations required to get us out.”²⁸⁴ To see a future on a warming planet, then, according to Klein, the first imperative is to see how people and places have been imagined together economically exploitable and even destructible. As *Urban Planning* reveals, the “biopolitical horizon,” to again evoke Agamben, has moved far beyond the human. Baloji’s work, therefore, provides an opening through which to grapple with both how we got here and what this means for creating the future(s).

I take my lead in this kind of entangled thinking of postcolonial conflict—the thinking of people, economies, and environments together—again from Achille Mbembe’s writings connecting biopolitics and geopolitics into the system he calls “necropolitics... the contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death.”²⁸⁵ In this influential text, Mbembe articulated how the colonial exercise of power in Africa which co-produced places and people was an act of ecological warfare. As he cogently explains:

Colonial occupation itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area—of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations. The writing of new spatial relations

²⁸⁴ Klein 11

²⁸⁵ Of course, this line of thinking also owes a debt to Donna Haraway. Haraway insists that the fiction of separation between humans and nonhumans—and even the lands “critters” inhabit, in this reading—has to be abandoned. Instead, because multiple species and places are co-constituted in relationship with each other, they have to be thought together to find the ‘still possible futures’ that exist despite the current degradation wrought by people. See *Manifestly Haraway* for a recent republication of Haraway’s influential texts. Donna Haraway. *Manifestly Haraway*. University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

(territorialization) was, ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries. These imaginaries gave meaning to the enactment of differential rights to differing categories of people for different purposes within the same space; in brief, the exercise of sovereignty. Space was therefore the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carried with it.²⁸⁶

Although the coproduction of biopolitics, neoliberalism, and environmental degradation that results from colonial occupation is not the focus of Mbembe's project, in this passage, he reveals how the colonial enterprise prefigures the current politics of extraction that Balaji's work elucidates.²⁸⁷ In Mbembe's telling, colonial policies meant both space (that "raw material") and people were subjected to the classificatory mechanisms of biopolitics. In fact, they were paired through these classifications. He quotes Frantz Fanon's "vivid" description of the colonial occupation in this regard: "The town belonging to the colonized people ... is a place of ill-fame, peopled by men of evil repute."²⁸⁸ Place ("town" in this instance) and "men," in Fanon's writings, were entwined through reputation. When Mbembe defines colonial authority ("sovereignty") as "the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" immediately after he quotes Fanon, the effects of this entwinement is clear. The kind of destructive power Mbembe is

²⁸⁶ Achille Mbembe. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture*. 15(1), 2003, 26.

²⁸⁷ Mbembe defines necropolitics separate from economics, placing it firmly as the object of sovereignty and governance. In Balaji's work, however, it is clear the line between the current mode of capitalism and models of governance has completely blurred.

²⁸⁸ Mbembe 27; Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 39

concerned with also works spatially. Not only *people* are made disposable by this exercise of power, in Mbembe's reckoning, but *space* ("*territory*") is also subjected to this expendability. As Baloji visualizes how the colonial production of space and people informs the present, then, the current insistent entanglement between governance driven by economic exploitation and environmental destruction actually seems to be inevitable. If people have been continually made disposable in the DRC through the merging of economic and political "manufacturing," to use Mbembe's apt turn of phrase, inescapably the land used to maintain this system is similarly laid to waste. The neat grid of images in *Urban Planning* diagrams the deep challenge of contemporary ecological crises in the postcolonial context; when people are seen as expendable, so too is the world. And, when systems of profit require the world (or at least the most differentiated parts of it) to be expendable, some people—ultimately, maybe even all people— will always be made disposable in conjuncture.²⁸⁹

BioEngineering Disaster

For all the destruction alluded to in *Urban Planning*, and in this analysis of it, the sprawling aerial photographs of Lubumbashi that compose the project show a large city dominated by mining, but, shot from above, curiously still. The city is orderly and quiet; the streets are largely empty. And, this quiet is not an illusion created by the height from which the images were taken. As international news

²⁸⁹ Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee's writings about "Necrocapitalism," the contemporary forms of organizational accumulation that involve dispossession and the subjugation of life to the power of death, also loom large here. Baloji's work extends Mbembe's and Banerjee's critiques of the death wielding properties of power to the world killing mechanisms that are currently rife in neoliberal economies. Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee. "Necrocapitalism." *Organization Studies*. 29(12) 2008.

sources report daily, the DRC has been consistently embattled, with different factions (including armies from the DRC, Angola, and Rwanda) actively fighting to control its mineral riches since 1996.²⁹⁰ These battles have amounted to the deadliest conflict since the Second World War, estimated to have killed upward of 6 million Congolese people, with over 90 percent of these deaths due not directly to violence but to war-exacerbated disease and starvation.²⁹¹ Yet, these current armed battles and insurgencies have largely been confined to Kivu, the region northeast of Lubumbashi. The rest of the immense country, including the mineral-rich lands that are largely the focus of Baloji's practice (only two projects he has undertaken, one discussed in the final section of this chapter, broaches the war-torn areas in Kivu directly), has not been subjected to this kind of warfare. Instead, as *Urban Planning* alludes to, from extreme poverty and political disenfranchisement, to corrupt governance and the politics of corporate resource extractions, the devastating conflict over resources and power elsewhere in the country has taken many, often non-spectacular (and unarmed) forms.

It is the quiet devastation—that of economic oppression and environmental degradation—which continues to ravage Lubumbashi, even while war rages

²⁹⁰ There are other issues that undergird the armed conflict in Kivu. It has often been construed, in fact, as ethnic warfare. However, it is not a coincidence that this fighting is taking place in one of the most mineral rich areas of the earth. For the history of the armed struggle, see: Martin Doevenspeck. "Territoriality in Civil War: The Ignored Territorial Dimensions of Violent Conflict in North Kivu" in *Spatializing peace and conflict: mapping the production of places, sites and scales of violence*. Ed. Annika Björkdahl, Susanne Buckley-Zistel. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; Patrice Kabamba. *The Business of Civil War: New Forms of Life in the Debris of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. Codesria, 2013.

²⁹¹ Colin Kinniburgh "Beyond 'Conflict Minerals': The Congo's Resource Curse Lives On." *Dissent Magazine*, Spring 2014. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/beyond-conflict-minerals-the-congos-resource-curse-lives-on>

elsewhere, that *Urban Planning* elucidates. And, Baloji's earliest work provides additional insights into the history that produces this the quiet, if deadly, combination of weakened local economies, environmental degradation, and the exploitative labor conditions that form the current conditions in the DRC. From 2004- 2006, the artist superimposed black and white photographs gleaned from the archives of the Belgian mining company that was the origin of corporate mining in Lubumbashi with contemporary pictures of industrial sites.²⁹² The resulting large-sized photomontage series called "Mémoire" are dramatic images, connecting the current iteration of mining politics directly to the colonial past. For instance, a long horizontal image from the "Mémoire" series, photographed at a low angle shows the surface of dark expanse of a mining pit (Figure 40). In the background, present day Lubumbashi stretches across the horizon and disappears into a thick, grey, polluted sky. Four black men, rendered in black and white, have been inserted into this dire grey and brown landscape. Three of the men wear striped shirts and hold roughly carved wooden shovels. They are bound together by chains that loop around their necks, as they are made through this photographic splicing to dig a future pit. The fourth man is dressed in the guise of authority. He wears a uniform and stands as if at watch over the

²⁹² Baloji's work is an interesting counterpoint to Steve McQueen's 2007 video work *Gravesend*. *Gravesend* is an 18-minute HD video which focuses on the mining of coltan in the DRC. Coltan is a highly lucrative mineral used ubiquitously in electronics from cell phones to computers. For the video, McQueen travelled to the DRC to shoot footage of miners at work, and spliced these scenes with footage from a coltan-processing plant in Britain and abstract, black-and-white animation of the Congo River. The video is a non-narrative musing on the systems of exchange and connectedness of the mines to the British economy. While Baloji's work similarly shows the complex connections of the mining in the DRC to larger political economies, what is distinct in his work is the narrative of history he constructs for the current conditions. There is no ambiguity about the colonial history that has propelled the current state of affairs in the DRC in Baloji's engagement.

chained men. But, with his feet bare and his face turned towards the camera in this contemporary landscape, the small power afforded to this man by his alliance with the colonial government (signified by what he is wearing) has not managed to make the leap of time. Instead, what is made present in this montage of times is how colonial history has been dug deeply, and violently, into the region.

Overlaid onto the present landscape in Lubumbashi, this image shows what could be called the first stage in bio-engineering the contemporary ecological and economic disaster in the DRC. Remember, the history of the colonial period in Congo was particularly filled with atrocities exercised on the material resources (both human and non-human) of the immense country. This has largely been accredited to one man. During the “scramble for Africa” at the Berlin conference of 1884-85, what was then known as the Congo Free State was granted as a private preserve to Leopold II, the king of Belgium. Leopold II, like the Portuguese before him, had already been pursuing ‘development’ interests in the Congo for almost a decade. In 1876, he had convened a geographical conference in Brussels intent on determining how best to “open up the centre of the ‘dark continent’ to European civilization.”²⁹³ Although this expedition was labeled as humanitarian, intent on the “propagation of civilization

²⁹³ For more on this history, see: Roger Casement, *The Casement Reports*. Source: House of Commons. Accounts and Papers. Volume 62. 1904; Edmund Dene Morel. *King Leopold's Rule in Africa*. Belgium, 1905; Mark Twain. *King Leopold's Soliloquy: A Defense of His Congo Rule*. 1905. New Delhi: LeftWord, 2005; Adam Hochschild. *King Leopold's Ghost : A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1998; Martin Ewans. *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe: Leopold II, the Congo Free State and its Aftermath*. Routledge Curzon, New York, 2002.

Figure 40: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire” Series, 2006. .© Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès.



among the peoples of Central Africa,” Leopold II was on an economic mission.²⁹⁴ His objective was to open Central Africa to so-called Free Trade and exploit the lucrative ivory market by establishing a secure trade route. Leopold II was also aware the region was reported to be rich in other commodities as well, such as mineral resources and rubber, and by guaranteeing the United States and Europe access to trade in the country, he was able to garner support needed to be given authority over these resources. The General Act of Berlin, which was signed in 1885, recognizing the Congo Free State (CFS,) made Leopold II trustee for the country spanning almost one million square miles (the Congo is as large as Western Europe) as well as the guardian of the entire population of people who lived in this immense area. And, Leopold II reaped the rewards. Over time, the Congo Free State became the most profitable colony in Africa.²⁹⁵

The men in chains digging into the contemporary mineral rich dirt show the toll this development took on the region, and how environment exploitation, an economy of extraction, and particularly horrific disciplinary and biopolitical modalities of power came to be tangled together under Leopold’s rule.²⁹⁶ Baloji’s montage reveals that the triumph of *free trade* in the Congo required a labor force that

²⁹⁴ It is important to note that Leopold used the idea of “Arab” slave-traders imprisoning people across Africa’s east coast as the excuse to take control of an area he was eager to economically exploit. This early construction of an “Arab” threat to condone the abuses of so-called Free Trade policies is glimpse into a future of post-colonial landscape of conquest and development.

²⁹⁵ The Congo Free State proved immensely profitable when rubber became widely used in Europe in the form of pneumatic bicycle tires and subsequently hoses, tube, and eventually automobile tires. Rubber extraction became the colony’s most profitable industry.

²⁹⁶ As early as 1885, Henry Morton Stanley wrote of the need to “reduce” the Congo “into profitable order.”

Henry Morgan Stanley, *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1885.

was far from free. Another image from the “Mémoire” series similarly attests to this. The seven men, also barefoot, in striped shirts, are bound together by ox chains, carrying bundles of wood. They reveal how the population of the CFS had to be violently forced to work for Leopold’s regime as porters, miners, rubber-tappers, woodcutters, and railway builders to monopolize— and, if this image of a landscape in rubble is any indication, destroy— the area’s resources (Figure 41). As historian Adam Jones explains, “the result was one of the most brutal and all-encompassing [forced labor] institutions the world has known . . . rubber tappers and porters were mercilessly exploited and driven to death.”²⁹⁷ Policies of kidnapping, imprisonment, mutilation, robbery, and murder were used to extract labor and resources from the local population. Villages were burned down, and people were murdered and maimed to extract wealth from the CFS. From 1885 to 1908, it is estimated that ten million people died as a result of these policies, victim to mass murder and state orchestrated starvation, exhaustion and exposure, disease, and plummeting birth rates. Congolese historian Isidore Ndaywel e Nziem estimates the number to be even higher, at thirteen million.²⁹⁸

In an especially disturbing montage from “Mémoire,” the construction of difference that was produced to enable this genocide comes into sight (Figure 42). In this image, again seven men and boys stand in a decaying contemporary landscape. However, in this picture, the seven people are naked in a line with the fragments of a text inscribed onto their bare legs. The inscription the people bear on their bodies is

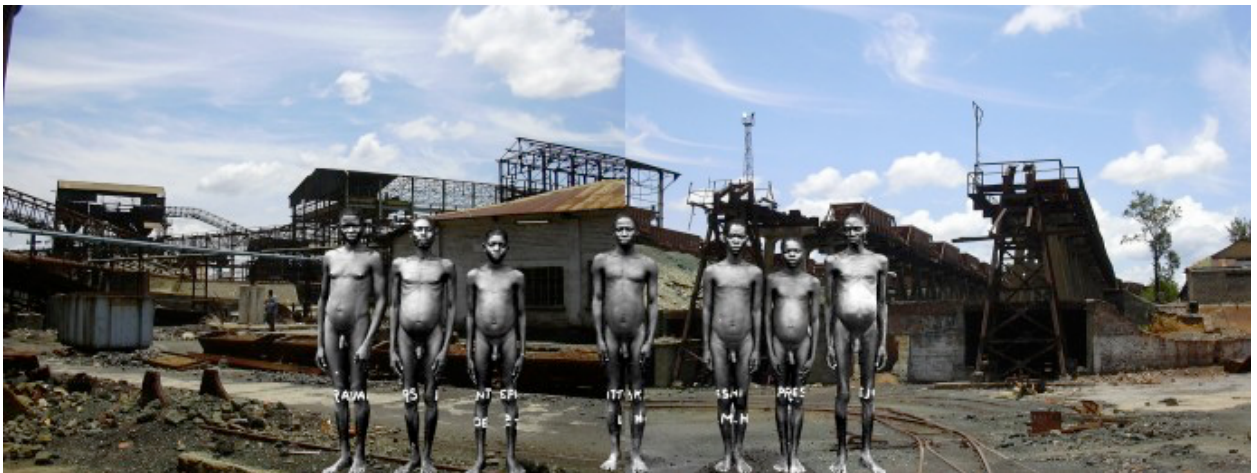
²⁹⁷ Adam Jones. *Genocide*.

²⁹⁸ Isidore Ndaywel e Nziem. *Histoire Générale du Congo*. Duculot, 1998.

Figure 41: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire Series”, 2006. © Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès.



Figure 42: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire Series”, 2006. © Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès.



largely illegible, cut into pieces during their move into the present landscape of ruination. However, if words are imagined to take shape out of the letters that form white shards against the dark skin of their legs, the letters could, would, shape into “travailleurs” and “Lubumbashi.” And so in their identical stances, shoulders squared to the camera, arms to their side, and their direct stares, the men and boys stand in the harsh line of physiognomic reckoning, transformed into specimens of labor. Thus, these children and adults, exposed to the camera’s unblinking eye and the ethnographic typology produced by the technology, have been made expendable. Under Leopold’s regime, after all, to be a worker was to be marked for death. This montage shows boys and men measured and classified into a deadly system of exploitation, and made disposable through the biomedical (pseudo-medical, eugenicist) production of difference. It is a reminder that in the origin story of colonial violence in the Congo, people had to be pictured as criminals, miscreants, savages, and mindless labor (differentially produced) for the colonial political economy to thrive.

Digging in the Politics of Difference and Destruction

If colonial regimes relied on images such as the ones Baloji has gleaned from the archives, the image of ethnographic typing and even the images of forced labor, to provide the rationale for the genocidal practices of resource extraction in the CFS, however, they could not control entirely all the ways such photographs came to mean in the European imagination. Leopold’s regime of terror in the CFS lasted for over

two decades, fueled by tales— and images— of a dark continent. Similar tales and images brought it to an end, particularly after photographs like the ones repurposed by Baloji in “Mémoire,” began to circulate in Europe. In fact, reports and images far more graphic than the pictures of men in chains or the image with its eugenic overtones, of people being whipped and maimed into subservience, revealed the atrocities in the CFS to the European public. There was an outcry over the genocidal practices of Leopold II, resulting in what some have called the first human rights campaign in the world.²⁹⁹ The Congo Reform Association formed to mobilize people on behalf of what the popular writer Adam Hochschild refers to as the “crimes against humanity” practiced in the CFS. Yielding to international pressure, in 1908 the Belgian parliament annexed the CFS as the Belgian Congo, effectively removing Leopold from power.

“Mémoire” recalls the successes of this human rights campaign as the photomontages of forced labor under Leopold give way to an image which shows neatly clothed men receiving honors from the Belgian authorities cut out of the colonial past and inserted into a contemporary shattered landscape (Figure 43.)³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Sharon Sliwinski offers an insightful overview of the images and history that inspired the campaign for human rights in the CFS in her article “The Childhood of Human Rights: The Kodak on the Congo.” *Journal of Visual Culture*. 2005. Vol 5(3) 333-363.

³⁰⁰ This connection between Baloji’s use of archival photographs and the images circulated by the Congo Reform Society to garner international support to end Leopold’s regime of terror was made in an exhibition at Autograph ABP in London in 2014. There, Baloji’s *The Album*, 2013 was shown in conjunction with a collection of Alice Seeley Harris’s images taken in the Congo in the late 19th and early 20th Century. *The Album* appropriates and reworks photographs from colonial photographs attributed to Cdt. Henry Pauwels and made in the eastern regions of the then Belgian Congo between 1911 and 1913. These photographs include images of hunting scenes and animal carcasses along with ethnographic portraits of racial ‘types’, as the contextualizing caption of Baloji’s *Album* explains. Baloji uses similar photomontage techniques from *Mémoire* for this project, overlaying the earlier images into the contemporary photographs taken in the same places, now war torn and devastated. *The*

Here, Baloji shows how colonial subjects were transformed from prisoners into recipients of the state, or at least the Belgian holding company that administered the state's mining interests. "Mémoire" records the biopolitical reordering that took place subsequent to Leopold's rule. While Belgium, along with the private interests it represented, was in control of the Congo, the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK), originally a private holding controlled by Leopold II in partnership with a British company, became Belgian-run, with shares still held by private individuals and enterprises.³⁰¹ And the Belgian holding company operated the Union Minière with a policy far different from that of Leopold II; they maximized the profit potential of the extractive industry, massively expanded in this period, by what they called "stabilization"—keeping the Congolese labor force alive and laboring.³⁰² Forced

Album includes also photographs by the journalist, photographer and activist Chrispin Mvano, who has documented the war in the east extensively, driving home the connection between that early ethnographic imaging and the contemporary conflict in the DRC. In this exhibition, called "Congo Dialogues," Baloji's artworks were paired with photographs used, as TJ Demos noted in his review for *ArtForum*, as "evidence of human rights violations in African colonies. Published in anticolonial newspapers and displayed at public gatherings of the activist group Congo Reform Association, they captured the imagination of Europe's emerging civil society and contributed to the international outcry that ultimately forced Leopold II to transfer his personal African fiefdom to the Belgian state in 1908." According to Demos, this illuminated the activist potential in Baloji's work as well. T.J. Demos. "Sammy Baloji and Alice Seeley Harris" *ArtForum* May 2014.

³⁰¹ The Union Minière du Haut Katanga was formed as a result of a merger of a company created by Leopold II and Tanganyika Concessions Ltd., a British company created by Robert Williams which prospecting for minerals as early as 1899, and was granted mining concessions in 1900. When Belgium bought the region from Leopold, the mine was then owned jointly by the *Comité spécial du Katanga*, a joint venture company controlled by the Belgian Congo government, the Société Générale de Belgique, Belgium's largest holding company (which controlled 70% of the Congolese economy) and Tanganyika Concessions Ltd. Christine Mauris. "Scramble for Katanga." 2001. http://www.africafederation.net/SCRAMBLE_KATANGA.htm

³⁰² In 1947, a study of the "Social Policy of Union Minière du Haut Katanga" found that the Belgian policy of stabilization in Katanga was "a remarkable achievement." As the study explains, "the policy involves organised camp settlements of permanent workers with their families. The main reason for adopting it in 1926 was the lack of man-power in the Belgian Congo, made worse in the mines on the Katanga uplands high, sparse, bare, and cold, with a population 'malingre et degener par hyponutrition.' It has secured the following results. It has maintained the principle of freedom of choice; it has made long contracts popular and indeed compulsory; it has increased marriages from

Figure 43: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire Series”, 2006. © Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès.



18% in 1925 to 60% in 1932; it has secured incidental social advances- above all, it has secured better output an end of wasteful recruiting, and a remarkable fall in deaths and rise in births.” Social Policy of Union Minière du Haut Katanga Source: African Affairs, Vol. 46, No. 183 (Apr., 1947), pp. 87-89

labor and the resulting genocide had proven to only be short-term solutions to the problem of extracting wealth from the region, so Union Minière instead reorganized labor camps, built hospitals and schools, and adopted in 1927 the motto, “Good health, good spirits and high productivity.”³⁰³

Bogumil Jewsiewicki, the influential scholar of Central African history, has written extensively on Baloji’s “Memoire” series.³⁰⁴ He also curated an exhibition of the photomontages from “Memoire” in 2010 at the Museum of African Art, New York called *The Beautiful Time*. For that exhibition catalogue, Jewsiewicki offers a complex overview of the history of mining in the region and interprets the recent conditions in Greater Lubumbashi that compose the backgrounds of Baloji’s photomontages through an abbreviated overview of colonial and postcolonial history. He focuses particularly on the historical period encapsulated in the image above of Congolese laborers, neatly dressed and receiving commendations, for his analysis of how the images reflect on the era of Belgium rule. As he explains, this is the period remembered by people in Lubumbashi as a “beautiful time.” According to the historian, the era between 1920 and 1960, when “three generations of migrant workers built the Katanga mining industries and its urban societies,” acted in some

³⁰³ A summary of this history and how it traces into the violent present is found in Madelaine Drohan’s *Making a Killing: How and Why Corporations Use Armed Force to Do Business*. Random House, 2010.

³⁰⁴ See Bogumil Jewsiewicki. *The Beautiful Time: Photography by Sammy Baloji*. New York: Museum of African Art, 2010; Bogumil Jewsiewicki. “Denial and Challenge of Modernity: Suffering, Recognition and Dignity in the Photographs by Sammy Baloji.” *Suffering, Art and Aesthetics*. Ed. Ratiba Hadj-Moussa and Michael Nijhawan. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; Bogumil Jewsiewicki. “Leaving Ruins.” *African Arts*. 49:1, 2016

way as a salve for the horrors that preceded it. The financial prosperity, the rising birth rates and falling mortality rates, the stable work, and the construction of hospitals and schools in the Belgium Congo, according to the scholar, gave “meaning to the suffering endured” in the earlier, horrific time of Leopold’s rule. Poignantly, Jewiesicki describes the atrocities shown in the photomontages as revealing “suffering as the price of access to modernity” in the DRC.³⁰⁵ Yet, for Jewsiewicki, the current state of the mines, shown in conditions of idle destruction in the images of “Memoire,” reveal how current governance in the DRC has made a mockery of this past suffering. Contemporary governmental mismanagement and corruption has left state-owned mines inoperable and the population without jobs, even as foreign-owned countries continue to extract the wealth of the nation. Thus, Jewsiewicki argues, the “Memoire” series illustrates how this suffering has been robbed of its meaning and its redemption.

This is a compelling analysis of the series and the history it constructs. It responds to the images of the idle factories and also the political urgency to confront contemporary circumstances and governmental corruption in the DRC that obviously roil in these images. However, when Jewsiewicki concludes that the “Mémoire” series reveals “the nostalgia” which older residents of the DRC have for “the former prosperity” the region experienced during this extended period, and calls Balaji a “photographer of absence” who captures in his layering of images this nostalgia for a “form of modernization achieved in the colonial context, and then lost in postcolonial

³⁰⁵ Jewsiewicki. “Denial” 52

society,” the analysis overlooks how the ruin and devastation troubles even the montage that shows the time of relative prosperity and peace.³⁰⁶ The *nostalgia* Jewsiewicki associates with the image is hard to locate in and amongst this damaged landscape. Instead, in the ruined landscape that contains the region’s history, the future looms dark even during what might have been a “beautiful time” (the time of “good health ... and high productivity”).³⁰⁷ This suggests another reading is possible for these montages. However hidden by the success of the human rights campaign, and while the Belgian development of a labor force took precedent over active abuse in the region, the devastation wrought by the production of difference around both the people and places in the Congo was far from done.

Actually, the images suggest that the extractivist policies begun by Leopold II, what Mbembe would call the “founding violence” of the nation, continued to be deeply embedded in the country’s political economy, and into the ground itself.³⁰⁸ To return for a moment to the image of the seven naked men and boys discussed prior, this transference is visualized. Those gaps left in the inscription in Baloji’s montage is where the missing letters which turned men and boys into expendable labor have been left lodged— if invisible— into the landscape. The landscape, then, has assumed the

³⁰⁶ Bogumil Jewsiewicki. “Denial and Challenge of Modernity: Suffering, Recognition and Dignity in the Photographs by Sammy Baloji.” *Suffering, Art and Aesthetics*. Ed. Ratiba Hadj-Moussa and Michael Nijhawan. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. P 52

³⁰⁷ Baloji makes clear that his work is in fact an indictment of the colonial past, and the “Mémoire” series was made to contradict this nostalgia. As he explains, “I felt the story of the colonial period hadn’t been told. It was never taught in our schools. Even now you can find people in Katanga who will say the colonial period was better than the present. When I saw the archive pictures, with workers in chains, they shocked me.” Stephen Moss. “It’s Art Not a History Lesson.” *Mentor and Protege*. <https://medium.com/mentor-prot%C3%A9g%C3%A9/it-s-art-not-a-history-lesson-ab263a8e50da#xi6slog04>

³⁰⁸ Achille Mbembe. *On the Postcolony*. UC Press, 2001, 25.

disposability that was once firmly attached to the naked bodies of those forced extract the resources from the land. In the progression of images in “Mémoire” that trace across devastated backdrops, it is obvious that the human rights campaign, and Belgian's policies of what could be called paternal benevolence that were the result, only served to *bury* the flourishing violence of extraction in the years subsequent to Leopold's despotic rule. “Mémoire” makes it clear that even if people were not expendable in the same way in the Belgian logic of capitalist accumulation, the region was.³⁰⁹

Therefore, as the image of the naked men and boys marked as those who labor—and die—for Leopold II in “Mémoire” is replaced by another image of “travailleurs,” the background of contemporary devastation is a reminder that the mining industry was simultaneously expanded relentlessly, accompanied by mass deforestation, the devastation of farming lands, and incredible pollution (Figure 44). This group of men, fully clothed, arranged in tiers behind a sign marking their ten years as workers might have been kept alive, healthy, and productive under the stabilizing regime of the Union Minière. However, their disposability was now just measured in longer increments of time—here, ten years. They sit, after all, in the shadows of contemporary environmental and economic devastation, the scene of their own eventual destruction. Thus, the image reveals how the politics of disposability established by Leopold II managed to persist despite the human rights campaign and

³⁰⁹ The narrative of human rights is indelibly connected with the ascent of global capital in the 1980s and 1990s. Neoliberal policies used so-called human rights violations to open borders and force free trade agreements onto countries. What we see in the DRC is how global capital and human rights were entangled even at the beginning of rights discourse.

Figure 44: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire Series”, 2006. © Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès.



the subsequent change in colonial administration. Because human oppression was separated from the environmental exploitation that engendered it in that campaign, exploitation was able to continue apace.³¹⁰ The immediate destruction of human bodies could be transferred onto other bodies, bodies of land, bodies of water, ensuring the long-term destruction of *all bodies*.

In Mbembe's incisive recoding of biopolitics as necropolitics, he argues that from "contemporary experiences of human destruction ... it is possible to develop a reading of politics, sovereignty, and the subject."³¹¹ For Mbembe, because "*the generalized instrumentation of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" (his emphasis) is the end limit of sovereignty (and the absolute authority of state governance,) it is possible to read from "Memoire" a story of political formation.³¹² In Baloji's photomontages, however, the political economy of extractivism—the blossoming of the neoliberal model of capitalism shown to span well over one hundred years in the DRC—has importantly altered this. The end limit of power is no longer bound solely to the destruction of *human* bodies. Instead, in the ruined landscape of capitalist development, the end limit to

³¹⁰ Demos summarizes the economics of wholesale environmental destruction, following the terms set by Neil Smith, in this way: "The financialization of nature, whereby biotic forms and Earth's resources are subjected to an economic calculus, Smith points out, is integral to the larger project of neoliberalism. Dedicated to creating new fields of capital rather than protecting natural reserves, neoliberalism constitutes the key political-economic driver of the globalization of fossil-fuel capitalism that is responsible for anthropogenic climate change, environmental despoliation and the worldwide growth of socio-economic inequality, especially since the mid-twentieth century." In Baloji's work, the past overlay on this contemporary economy shows how colonization in the DRC prefigured this kind of financialization. TJ Demos. "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology: An Introduction." *Third Text*, 27(1), January 2013. 1-9.

³¹¹ Mbembe *Necropolitics* 14

³¹² Mbembe *Necropolitics* 14

power is now dug deep into the earth. In “Mémoire,” then, it is from the contemporary destruction of the ground— the space mined in Greater Lubumbashi— that the complex entangled history of biopower, necropower, and economics in the DRC must be unearthed. To put this another way, the background in ruins— those polluted skies, factories in rubble, and the earth rendered infertile— in Baloji’s work “develops” (again, Mbembe’s terms are appropriate) the story of a virulent political economy that deals out death even when people seem to be thriving.

And, this means that postcolonial governance, without a significant reworking of the ideas of authority, was bound (as surely as the men in chains in those earlier images) to contribute to this disaster. When the destruction of a region— here for the extraction of resources— is the end limit to power, all subsequent authority will take this as their goal. So, it is not surprise that a final large-scale montage from “Mémoire” shows Mobutu Sese Seco, the dictator who was president of post-Independence DRC, (which Mobutu renamed Zaire in 1971) from 1965 to 1997 (Figure 45). Against another backdrop of a factory in ruins, and under another heavy grey sky, Mobutu stands gesturing to the white businessmen that accompany him in this apocalyptic landscape. Mobutu’s dealings here, in which he seems to be offering this devastation up to the highest bidder, is a reminder that his infamous rule was a study in the economy of extraction. He came into power after Belgian forces helped him carry out a coup d’état against the nation’s post-Independence democratically

Figure 45: Sammy Baloji. *Untitled* from the “Mémoire Series”, 2006. © Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès.



elected leader Patrice Lumumba.³¹³ And, that was only the first example of the destructive nature of his governance and the global financial schools and hospitals built by the Belgian mining company were left in shambles.³¹⁴ Although the mines were nationalized under Mobutu, they were operated by a network of private sub-contractors. In Baloji's eloquent series of montages, Mobutu's destructive rule, under which foreign investors and Mobutu and his closest advisors were the only ones to profit, is merely the next stage in the catastrophic economic and political trajectory that colonialism unleashed on the region. With destruction cast as the absolute act of authority, Mobutu is shown in "Mémoire" as adhering closely to that construction of sovereignty. It, like the metal debris and skeletal ruins in this evocative image, looms and crowds around him.³¹⁵

At the End Limit of Power

In the history compiled in "Mémoire," the mode of postcolonial national sovereignty adopted in the DRC is necessarily catastrophic; it is an exercise of power that ends only with utter destruction. And this explains why even after Mobutu was removed from power in 1997, conditions in the DRC have continued to erode. It is not only that the World Bank continually insists on lower taxation and deregulation to

³¹³ "The Congo, Decolonization, and the Cold War, 1960-65." U.S. Department of the State, Office of the Historian. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/congo-decolonization>

³¹⁴ A history of the mining industry in the DRC can be found in: Wolf Radmann, "The Nationalization of Zaire's Copper: From Union Minière to Gécamines," *Africa Today* 25:4 (Oct. - Dec., 1978): 25-47

³¹⁵ Mobutu's tenure was marked by the insistent deregulation of the mining industry. This has not ceased. A further drastic deregularization campaign in 2003 reshuffled and re-appointing existing mining licenses, with trades and profits benefiting private corporations.

entice foreign investments in the area, or that international governments and corporations alike have attempted to force the DRC into subscribing to their neoliberal worldview, although this is a crucial part. It is also that extraction and destruction continues to be part and parcel— the end limit— of governance in the DRC. This means instead of the Congolese government opposing the violence of neoliberalism, what the World Bank and the industries that undergird it want from the region— to violently extract resources until nothing is left but a barren land— has instead been transposed into a model of absolute authority. Thus, Joseph Kabila, president of the DRC for the last fifteen years and often referred to as another, less competent dictator, has increased deregulations for industry, easing taxes and encouraging predation.³¹⁶

The environmental damage that has resulted from the mode of governance has been immeasurable. For example, the Congo Rainforest, the second largest rainforest in the world, over two thirds of which is located in the DRC, is in extreme peril from both the mining and logging industry.³¹⁷ This forest stores eight percent of the world's carbon; it is the fourth largest carbon reservoir in the world.³¹⁸ Yet, some studies have found that the gross annual rate of deforestation is twenty six percent.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ *Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History*. Ed. Richard M. Juang et al. ABC- CLIO, 2008.

³¹⁷ “Neoliberalism and the Environment in Africa and the Congo Rainforest.” *Development in the 21st Century*. Sept 29, 2014. <https://skeltonsays.wordpress.com/2014/09/29/neoliberalism-and-the-environment-in-africa-and-the-congo-rainforest/>

³¹⁸ <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/forests/africa/>

³¹⁹ The Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) and members of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, released a report in 2012 found that the region's annual gross deforestation rate doubled from 0.13 percent to 0.26 percent between the 1990s and the 2000-2005 period. Deforestation rates in the Congo Basin remain well below those in Latin America and Southeast Asia, but the region is seen as a prime target for future agroindustrial expansion.

This means that not only the tens of millions of people that rely on the ecosystem for food, shelter, medicine and water are suffering the consequences. The forest is also home to many critically endangered species; of the hundreds of mammal species discovered there so far, 39 are found nowhere else on Earth, and of its estimated 10,000 plant species, 3,300 are unique to the region. And, perhaps most crucially, it also means that what has been called the “lungs of Africa” is being decimated. The grey, polluted skies that loom in Baloji’s images are now increasingly commonplace not only in the DRC but also throughout Central Africa with the corresponding rising temperatures. Even in Lubumbashi and the surrounding provinces, far from the rainforest, woodlands have been cleared, including the region’s protected woodlands.³²⁰ The kind of destruction happening in the DRC, then, now moves effortlessly between human bodies and land bodies. The question is, when looking at the prefiguring of this disaster in “Mémoire,” how can such a history, and such a construction of authority, be diverted? How can the past, carefully reconstructed in these photomontages, engender a future otherwise?

Both the “Memoire” series and *Urban Planning* show a biopolitical horizon ever expanding. Not only human bodies, but bodies of land and bodies of water, bodies of trees, and multi-specied bodies in the DRC are being subsumed, according to these poignant projects, to the conception of authority born from the destruction

<https://news.mongabay.com/2012/03/deforestation-increases-in-the-congo-rainforest/>

³²⁰ For instance, mining concessions for the Basse Kando Reserve, an annex to Upemba National Park in the district of Kolwezi, have been granted to multiple companies. The testing, drilling, and deforestation that resulted have essentially destroyed the reserve. Chantal Peyer et al. “PR or Progress? Glencore’s Corporate Responsibility in the Democratic Republic of the Congo” June 2014. https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2016/03/Study_Glencore.pdf

and violences of colonialism. All life has been rendered precarious, or even doomed, in this dim overview, from this destructive construction of power. This is a dire outlook. Yet, all hope is not lost. Remember Klein's cautionary; in her overview, understanding "how we ended up in this dangerous place" is what will allow us "to grasp the transformations required to get us out."³²¹ So, both the history constructed through "Memoire" and in the city mapped in *Urban Planning*, provides an outline for what it will take to make what Judith Butler would call a "livable" life in the DRC.³²² Power has to be disconnected from destruction (and the extractive industries that require it) and other models of authority have to take the place of these modalities. And, Baloji's artworks also suggest another question: how do we turn away when we have reached the end limit of power?

This is the point of inquiry from which Baloji's recent artworks derives. In works spanning from 2013-2016, Baloji has increasingly created sculptural installations composed of copper plates. These plates are imprinted with patterns drawn from archival records of the practices of ritual scarification that proliferated in the region before the Belgian government outlawed the practice.³²³ Thus, these works

³²¹ Klein 12

³²² Livability is a concept which Butler increasingly engages beginning in the early 2000s. It reflects her perception of the world through notions of shared precarity and that leads her to question "what makes a livable lives." See: Judith Butler (2006) *Precarious Life* (2nd ed) (New York: Routledge); Judith Butler (2009) *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso) 25.

³²³ Baloji has gleaned images of scarification from ethnographic research undertaken by Belgium scholars in the DRC; he uses archival images collected by Belgium ethnographers as the source material for his copper bas-relief plates and now held at the library of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren. The scarification examples he uses are not from any one source or population. And, he does not attempt to attach specific historical meanings to the patterns or to read them for what they reveal about specific cultures. The patterns in Baloji's work form a more ambiguous connection to the production of knowledge about the people who bore the designs, in contrast to how the same designs were studied by the ethnographers that collected the images.

evoke a past (or pasts) that is not always already encoded with destruction. *Sociétés Secrètes*, 2013, for instance, is composed of eight copper bas-reliefs, each imprinted with different scarification pattern, shown alongside three photographs of medals, and a handwritten letter framed with another small photograph, called *Secte Punga: Report of a Congolese Detective to the Assistant Director of Security of Kivu (Congo)* (Figure 46). The copper plates, the size of large book pages, render in the same size and as an exact reproduction a particular example of scarification as gleaned from archival photographs of different Congolese communities. These bas-reliefs are displayed side by side on a long narrow ledge, their shiny surface made the enfleshment of modes of being that prefigure colonial invention of Africa.

There are many levels of interpretation to this work and its careful negation of current constructions of power in the DRC. First, *Sociétés Secrètes* unearths a history of resistance to the destructive construction of authority that has now been normalized. In his research Baloji discovered that the Belgian Secret Service kept Congolese secret societies (according to Gregos, sects “identified by scarifications indicating a specific tribe or group”) under strict observation.³²⁴ The intent of these observations, as gleaned from the short archival report included in the exhibition, were to keep these sects from rebelling against the colonial state or officially sanctioned religion; resistance to colonialism was to be closely monitored and persecuted. And this was not paranoia on the part of the Belgian State. The three images of the medals that hang over the shelf of copper plates are a reminder that

³²⁴ Katerina Gregos and Vincent Meessen, Ed. *Personne et les Autres*. The Belgian Pavilion at the 56th La Biennale di Venezia, 2015.

Figure 46: Sammy Baloji. *Sociétés Secrètes*, 2013. Installation view, 2015, Venice Biennale. © Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès.



even while the Belgian authority was producing the population into a labor force—remember the “good health, good spirits, and high productivity” discussed previously—underneath, resistance was fomenting. Actually, it was already ongoing. The Luba, the people indigenous to the area, had staged a major rebellion to Leopold’s governance in 1895.³²⁵ After the rebellion was suppressed, many Luba were sent to work as forced labor in the copper mines.³²⁶ And, the uprisings did not cease.

At another level, then, the copper plates show it is not only devastation that has been dug deep into the region. A history of resistance is also burrowed into the mines of Greater Lubumbashi, a history that Gregos glosses on in the catalogue that accompanied the installation.³²⁷ As she quickly notes, subsequent rebellion among the Luba spanned from 1907 to 1917.³²⁸ Even within the structures that colonialism had created, like Christianity and the colonial army, resistance thrived. The colonial army led the largest uprising in the area’s history. And, Simon Kimbangu (1887-1951) founded Kimbanguism, a radical and emancipating version of the Christianity espoused by missionaries.³²⁹ Kimbangu used his preaching to spread the ideas of Pan-Africanism and liberation. He was considered a threat to the colonial regime and

³²⁵ The Luba are one of the communities that practiced scarification in the Congo, although Baloji’s bas relief sculptures depicting the practice are not only taken from Luba references.

³²⁶ Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja. *The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila: A People's History*. Zed Books, 2002.

³²⁷ Katerina Gregos and Vincent Meessen, Ed. *Personne et les Autres*. The Belgian Pavilion at the 56th La Biennale di Venezia, 2015.

³²⁸ Nzongola-Ntalaja 47

³²⁹ Nzongola-Ntalaja 48

sentenced to life imprisonment for the emancipatory rhetoric of his sermons, spending thirty years in prison in Lubumbashi until his death.³³⁰ The Kitwala sect, another religious sect which denounced all forms of coercive colonial rule, revolted on several occasions.³³¹ *Sociétés Secrètes* materializes this oppositional history.

And, thus, a more complicated undertaking is happening in between the archival text, the images, and the copper bas-relief of *Sociétés Secrètes*. An attempt is made to erode, if slightly, the kind of authority that “Mémoires” traces through colonial times to the present. In fact, connecting the surveillance activities of the Belgian Colonial Secret Service, the practice of scarification banned by the colonial authority, and the copper trade, the project reveals a history that has to be actively repressed in order for the colonial history of the DRC to trace to conception of absolute power that produces the current catastrophe. *Sociétés Secrètes* shows, after all, that there were—and are— other ideas about how power should be wielded in the DRC, other ideas about the construction of authority, and other social structures that do not take destruction, but rather resistance to such violences, as their end goal. The exercise of authority wed to destruction consolidates power in making itself, as Mbembe explains, the sole power to judge its laws.³³² The repression and suppression practiced by the colonial regime, the Belgian Colonial Secret Service kept busy subverting alternative claims to power, serves as a marked contrast to this devastating construction of sovereignty.

³³⁰ Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja suggests that this prison term, 3 years longer than the time Nelson Mandela spent jailed in South Africa, is the longest for any political prisoner. 47

³³¹ Nzongola-Ntalaja 52

³³² Mbembe On the Postcolony 67

And, there is another, more visceral way in which these copper plates, made fleshy through the deep imprints of scars, finds meaning. Among the Luba, scarification was used as a mnemonic.³³³ According to visual culture scholar Mary Nooter Roberts, it was a way “of encoding memory” (she also calls it “memory embodied”).³³⁴ As she expresses it, scarification “transform[s] the body into a lieu de memoire and a microcosm of the Luba world. The body’s surface becomes a textured text, both ‘written’ and ‘read.’ In this way, the past is perpetually reified through the embodiment of memory, lived and enacted in the present.”³³⁵ When Baloji uses this mnemonic, another transformation takes place. Copper is transformed into the body that holds these resistant memories of a people. This is a profound move. Because the DRC is the world’s largest copper producer (and copper is the country’s largest export), this means these memories travel far and wide.³³⁶ Copper is everywhere, in wiring, plumbing, appliances, heating and cooling systems. Copper is in car motors, radiators, connectors, brakes, and bearings. Copper, then, is indicative of how the DRC relates to the rest of the world; it materially enacts the nation’s entwinement in not only global economics but also the most rudimentary trappings of modernity.³³⁷

³³³ The archival images that Baloji uses to create his copper bas-relief are not necessary all records of Luba scarification: the artwork does not make any overt historical claim about the people who used this means of encoding memory and resistance onto their bodies. Scholarship on Luba scarification practices, however, still helpfully elucidate how the patterns come to mean in Baloji’s artwork.

³³⁴ Mary Nooter Roberts and Allen F. Roberts. *Audacities of Memory. Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History* (1996) <http://viralnet.net/radicalcosmologies/essays/roberts.html>

³³⁵ Roberts and Roberts

³³⁶ As I mention above, the DRC is the largest exporter of copper in the world, with the top export destinations being China, Zambia, Italy, South Korea and Finland.

³³⁷ It is interesting to consider that artworks made to sell to tourists and to expatriates in Lubumbashi now often take the form of embossed copper plates. Historically, although used to accent some sculpture, copper was not utilized as the primary material for practices of representation. But, increasingly portraits and images of figures are hammered into copper for the tourist trade. So, Baloji’s

And if all of this copper, in Baloji's deft handling, is made to carry the memories of the bodies that labor to extract copper from environmentally devastated sites and that suffer the economic oppression on which extractive industries thrive, there is not getting away from all these bodies.³³⁸ Or the memories they carry. *Sociétés Secrètes*, then, shows the bodily consequences of the modes of consumption that this moment of capitalism insists that we, all of us, if differently, must live. And, it also asks us to find that which is hidden in all this consumption that cause us to remember that there are ways to live and maybe even resist this all-consuming system.

The stakes to this are made obvious when Baloji also materializes the complex connection between bodies, memories, and mineral extractions in another work. *The Other Memorial*, 2015, is composed of copper panels again imprinted with scarification patterns similar to those in *Sociétés Secrètes* (Figure 47). These panels have been welded together to form a dome based on a church in Liège, the city in Belgium that was the first site of battle in World War One. The dome in Liège was built in the 1930s as a memorial to the German assault that launched the war, and those that died in the process. It also was constructed with 13,000 kilos of copper brought from the former Katanga province.

The Other Memorial, a small-scale replica of the war memorial in Belgium, is another war memorial. According to Baloji, "There are seven memorials to the Western war dead in Liège. This will be an eighth memorial—to the African war

practice also has a critical engagement with this current phenomena: art is another form the export of copper takes in the DRC. See <http://www.hearcongo.org/arts-culture-scene-drc/>

³³⁸ And, of course, that die from the wars that wage around this process in Kivu.

Figure 47: Sammy Baloji. *The Other Memorial*, 2015. Installation view, 2015, Venice Biennale. © Sammy Baloji. Courtesy of the artist and Imane Farès.



dead” in the ongoing conflicts in the DRC over its mineral riches.³³⁹ *The Other Memorial* is a somber sight, with its scarred copper skin commemorating those lost to this war. When looking at the surface of the fleshy dome, it is easy to imagine the people whose backs were marked with scarification patterns bowed together to form the dome; the shape emerges from this collective body welded together out of memories and suffering. And those bodies, marked with intricate patterns and assembled into the dome, blur into other bodies as the memorial evokes the current, and most overtly deadly manifestation of this war, the armed struggle that is raging in Kivu.

Yet, these are not the only people (or the only manifestation of struggle) who compose the shiny surface of *The Other Memorial*. The reference to all that copper in Liège means that what is being commemorated here is the even larger war, of which the armed struggle is only one facet, which has been waged since the first onset of colonial contact. This is a war fought with the intent of permanently destroying not only the people and the places in the DRC in order to extract wealth, but also the memories that contradict the inevitability of this destruction. Art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu states that *The Other Memorial* references what he calls the nation's "rich cultural histories, and the traumas resulting from the violation of land and people."³⁴⁰ To restate his evocation slightly, the memorial, imprinted with the scarification patterns gleaned from historical records of people who lived throughout

³³⁹ Olafur Eliasson and Sammy Baloji. "Sammy Baloji: The Present in the Past." *Mentor and Protégé Journal*. July 2015. <http://www.rolexmentorprotege.com/journal/6742>

³⁴⁰ Lauren Said-Moorhouse. "Why Africa is the buzz at this year's Venice Biennale." CNN. June 29, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/13/africa/africa-venice-biennale/>

the region, commemorates the traumas enacted on the cultural histories of the region through the violation of land and people. It is the cultural histories, after all, which have to be forgotten in order to continue to justify the destruction of both the people and the land in the DRC. And so, *The Other Memorial* commemorates the ongoing destruction of not only people, but also of possibilities.

In Klein's 2016 re-reading of Said in the face of climate disaster, she emphasized a point that has been also made by scholars including James Clifford, Donna Haraway, and many others. Simply put, there are still things to be learned about the ways people co-exist in/ with the world, particularly ways that do not make destruction inevitable. As she states:

We often hear climate change blamed on 'human nature', on the inherent greed and short-sightedness of our species. Or we are told we have altered the earth so much and on such a planetary scale that we are now living in the Anthropocene – the age of humans. These ways of explaining our current circumstances have a very specific, if unspoken meaning: that humans are a single type, that human nature can be essentialised to the traits that created this crisis.... Diagnoses like this erase the very existence of human systems that organized life differently ... These systems existed and still exist, but they are erased every time we say that the climate crisis is a crisis of 'human nature' and that we are living in the 'age of man.'³⁴¹

In the *Other Memorial* and in *Sociétés Secrètes*, it is clear it is time to *remember* other ways of organizing life as well as to acknowledge the consequences of this one.

³⁴¹ Klein 13

Conclusion:

One Last Look

Moving through the prior chapters, engaging art practices from Palestine to France, from the United States to the DRC, what sometimes threatens to emerge is a bleak picture of rampant global greed and human destructiveness. These art practices analyzed alongside of each other as a means to study some of the vast and distinct histories, complex politics, and social conditions that compose the current global state of affairs, could form an unrelentingly dark outlook. All the violences wrought by and on people across such wide swathes of the globe discussed here could even lead to the conclusion that the ruin that surrounds us should hasten and have done with these horrors. Yet, looking at art produced under these conflicts for what they show about some of the dissensions that roil in the twenty-first century, another image also forms. It is possible to see in between the lines of Emily Jacir's personal ads or amid the jumble of objects and photographs of Attia's installations, for instance, the formation of a collective struggle shared by those who wish to contribute to the lessening of human destructiveness.

My hope is that in navigating these disparate art projects across the chapters of this dissertation, this can be the vision that is left as the afterimage to the text. One of my goals in bringing together these art practices was to make clear that contemporary conflicts are not produced in isolation from each other. In closing, I want to emphasize that neither must be resistance. It is important, then, to think a little bit about what composes this final image of collective struggle and how it connects to the image of global ruin with which I opened. To do so, I want to

consider how what Angela Y. Davis calls the “intersectionality of issues and struggles” illuminates this vision of ruin and resistance.³⁴²

In Davis’ long history of scholarship and activism, she has carefully articulated that no struggle is detached from the rest of the world. In fact, she has argued that activists must take “a global perspective” in order to understand both the material and discursive connections between struggles.³⁴³ To pull this formulation apart—and begin with the material connections—this means that one must consider how the economics of destruction that Baloji exposes in his artworks, for example, ties the conflicts wracking the DRC to the economic and political structures of Belgium and the United States. In her own extensive writings and speeches, Davis often refers to the links between U.S. law enforcement agencies and the Israeli military. As she points out, the Israeli military is enlisted to trained U.S. sheriffs, police chiefs, and FBI agents on combatting terrorism.³⁴⁴ She makes this connection to elucidate the deep and necessary global ripples of resistance. When the Israeli military is challenged, for instance, the current militarization of the police departments in the U.S. is also necessarily part of what must be resisted and vice versa, according to Davis’ global perspective. Or, to return to the lesson of Baloji’s art practice, to join in solidarity with the current struggle in the DRC for presidential

³⁴² Angela Y. Davis. *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. City Light Press, 2016, 18-19.

³⁴³ “Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Angela Davis on Ferguson, Palestine & the Foundations of a Movement,” Amy Goodman interviews Angela Davis for *Democracy Now!* March 28, 2016. http://www.democracynow.org/2016/3/28/freedom_is_a_constant_struggle_angela

³⁴⁴ Justin Gardner. “U.S. Police Routinely Travel to Israel to Learn Methods of Brutality and Repression.” *The Free Thought Project*. August 30, 2015. <http://thefreethoughtproject.com/u-s-police-routinely-travel-israel-learn-methods-brutality-repression/>

elections to replace the current president who continues to expand the constitutionally defined limits of his term in office, is also to begin to resist the predatory economics of Europe and the United States.³⁴⁵ Conversely, to take part in the struggles against U.S. racist environmental and economic predation it is also necessary to be aligned with the resistance against the government in the DRC.

Tracing and connecting the different material manifestations of abuses of power is a vital part of progressive struggles, then. However, it is connecting the discursive that Davis suggests is most integral to collective struggle. Her use of the term intersectionality, after all, draws on a history of black feminist thought³⁴⁶ in the United States that insists because different forms of injustice and discrimination overlap each other (for instance, poverty, gender, racism, transphobia, etc.,) it is “not possible to effectively create radical consciousness by focusing on a single issue.”³⁴⁷ According to Davis, even if material connections between struggles are not always apparent, a global perspective reveals the intersections between how capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy has produced enduring structural violence around the world. In particular, to return to the point I make throughout this dissertation, such an

³⁴⁵ On September 20, 2016, 17 people were killed during clashes between police and anti-government protesters in the Democratic Republic of Congo's capital, Kinshasa. The protest called for presidential elections and for President Joseph Kabila to step down. “Protesters killed as anti-government demos erupt in DRC.” Al Jazeera. Sept 20, 2016. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2016/09/protesters-killed-anti-government-demos-erupt-drc-160920053458903.html>

³⁴⁶ The term intersectionality was first used in 1989 by American civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw to refer to the intersecting forms of discrimination in the United States. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139–67.

³⁴⁷ “Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Angela Davis on Ferguson, Palestine & the Foundations of a Movement,” Amy Goodman interviews Angela Davis for *Democracy Now!* March 28, 2016. http://www.democracynow.org/2016/3/28/freedom_is_a_constant_struggle_angela

outlook reveals how biopolitical mechanisms have been developed across conflicts to coerce everyone into being participants in destruction and violence. This is what drives perpetual conflict, and the production of racism, gender inequities, sexism, homophobia, poverty, etc, that makes sense of suffering, neglect, or even horrific deaths and environmental catastrophe. It is in seeing these discursive, ideological connections across the globe that “consciousness,” to return to Davis’ phrase with all its Marxist history, is possible. To put it another way, when the connections between conflicts—the multiplications of disaster—become visible, the shared *ideas* that carry this destruction emerge.

And, so too the shared and collective *struggles* against these insidious and immeasurably harmful ideas. We are back at the global picture of ruin where this dissertation started. But, having seen the discursive and material connections through the artworks, having seen the biological production of difference refracted across these distinct practices, no longer does this ruin and wreckage seem so impenetrable, “inscrutable,” to use Enwezor’s word, or unknowable.³⁴⁸ Instead, the mechanisms of disorder and conflict within this ruin have become utterly recognizable, even familiar, despite the different forms they assume. What else has become clear is in that exposing these mechanisms, the art practices discussed here are all engaged in a collective struggle against this violent production. The vision of ruin in this text, then, is also a vision of resistance.

³⁴⁸ Enwezor 17

This leads to one final point about this global perspective. Davis often quotes Antonio Gramsci in saying that “optimism is an absolute necessity, even if it is only optimism of the will and pessimism of the intellect.”³⁴⁹ For Davis, part of taking a global perspective on struggle is to find communities who share struggles and who work in solidarity. Seeing people—or art practices— across the globe struggling against state-sanctioned violence, against racism, against poverty, against injustice and destruction in all its forms, is to see that no one is struggling alone. Davis is eloquent that this is where “reservoirs of hope and optimism” can be found.³⁵⁰

And this means that somehow standing staring at this wreckage, it turns out what we have been looking at is hope all along, no matter how faint.

³⁴⁹ I took a graduate class with Davis in the 2013 at UC Santa Cruz, and she quoted this to the class as a repeated caution against defeat. She also uses the quote in speeches including one published in Davis, *Freedom*, 49. The actual quote is usually translated as “I am a pessimist because of intellect, but an optimist because of will.” Gramsci Letter from Prison (19 December 1929).

³⁵⁰ Davis *Freedom* 49

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