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BODIES OF EVIDENCE:
THE IMAGE, THE FLESH, AND THE MODERN CRISIS OF THE HUMAN

by

JENNA R. BRAGER

A dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Women's & Gender Studies

Written under the direction of

Judith Gerson

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

MAY, 2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Bodies of Evidence: The Image, the Flesh, and the Modern Crisis of the Human

By JENNA R. BRAGER

Dissertation Director:

Judith Gerson

Bodies of Evidence is a study of the transnational optics of anti-blackness across German and U.S. settler colonial projects, with a particular attention to the afterlives of visual discourses in present-day politics and memory. This dissertation analyzes case studies from the U.S., Germany, and German South West Africa, what is present-day Namibia, to track the trace of settler colonial and racial ideologies across seemingly discrete and ruptural violences. Rather than continue to treat these histories and archives as distinct or hierarchical instances of violence, I argue for the importance of interpreting them as part of a broader, uninterrupted narrative. *Bodies of Evidence* adopts a transnational scope that places settler colonial violence—including the Herero and Nama genocide in German South West Africa—alongside European genocide, framing these events as part of the same ideological and scopic regime. My interdisciplinary analysis builds upon critical race theory, critical visual studies, postcolonial and Black feminist scholarship, museum studies, biological anthropology, among other interdisciplinary and theoretical threads. I critically interpret visual and material evidence with a methodological emphasis on

framing the positionality of the viewer in relation to questions about the gaze and modes of looking. Thinking through the looped gaze, parallaxic witnessing, and the ethics of looking, I argue that we can transform the act of looking if we understand how the circulation and containment of colonial violences continue to shape ways of seeing.

Acknowledgements and Dedication

To my family of origin, especially my parents Jerel and Jacquie Brager, to my tireless mentor and friend Vivianne Salgado, my partner B Dyson, and the pups Cricket and Sadie, who carried me through.

Thank you to all my friends, teachers, and interlocutors along the way. My greatest thanks to my dissertation director Judith Gerson, my committee members Sylvia Chan-Malik and Ethel Brooks, and to my outside reader Tina Campt, as well as all the amazing faculty I had the opportunity to work with at Rutgers, particularly Kyla Schuller, Marisa Fuentes, Ed Cohen, Jasbir Puar and Michael Levine. I owe everything to my graduate colleagues and friends at Rutgers University— Katy Gray, Alexandria Smith, Louise Tam, Tim Morris (and Stephanie and Louisa Morris), Lindsey Whitmore, Enmanuel Martinez, Ashleigh Greene Wade, Stina Soderling, Carolina Alonso Bejarano, Dale Booth, Dilara Demir, and many others; and my colleagues at other institutions and beyond the academy, including Max Fox, Malcolm Harris and many others. And so much gratitude to the faculty and instructors at the University of Maryland College Park who set me on this path, especially Psyche Williams-Forsen, Christina Hanhardt, Marilee Lindemann, Sangeeta Ray, Damion Clark, and Christopher Perez; and before that, the teachers at Towson High School, especially Bill Jones and Karen Waters.

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Bodies of Evidence: The Image, the Flesh, and the Modern Crisis of the Human
JB Brager; Department of Women's & Gender Studies; Rutgers University New Brunswick

Thinking Images in the Flesh

"However the image enters/ its force remains within/ my eyes" —Audre Lorde, "Afterimages"

"This is Black life in the wake; this is the flesh, these are the bodies, to which anything and everything can be and is done." —Christina Sharpe, In the Wake

"'But what on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it?' Then always, somehow, some way, silently but clearly, I am given to understand that whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!" —W.E.B. Du Bois

Bodies of Evidence is a transnational study of how racial optics circulated through visual and material evidence across German and U.S. settler colonial projects, with a particular attention to the afterlives of these visual discourses in present-day politics and memory. *Bodies of Evidence* applies interdisciplinary visual studies approaches to research on the Herero and Nama genocide—the visual archive of which is understudied—and adopts a transnational scope, which places settler colonial violence alongside European genocide, rather than viewing these histories and archives as distinct or hierarchical. Looking at images critically not only exposes the existence of particular kinds of violence within historical conflict, but also makes clear the foundational role of the visual in conceptualizing the human, and categorizing who is marked as not human. In this introduction, I trace the genealogies of thought which structure and enable *Bodies of Evidence*, and name some of the key interventions of the project.

I am writing this dissertation from within a historical moment that seems like a crisis, but is the ongoing effect of a system set up precisely to work in this way. It is then the responsibility of scholars to think through the systemic nature of violence and responses to it, to trace the long genealogies that the present is a part of. The foundational

violences of racial capitalism, chattel slavery and indigenous genocide operate within a scopic regime—that is, an embedded order of visual truth which demarcates the boundaries of the human as a privileged class based on visual markers. These visual discourses continue to structure sight as a vector of power. In this project, by looking at the visual and material evidence of racial violence across sites, I argue that we can transform the act of looking if we understand how colonial knowledges continue to shape images and bodies.

In his 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Afro-Caribbean philosopher and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon frequently returns to moments of being violently “fixed” in the embodied identity of *Negro*, not by looking at himself (in the mirror) but via the gaze of another. He writes, “the white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am *fixed*. Once their microtomes are sharpened, the Whites objectively cut sections of my reality. I have been betrayed. I sense, I see in this white gaze that it’s the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact!”¹ Fanon’s observation here defines the “white gaze” in a transhistorical context as a dominant and disciplining gaze—“the only valid one,” the scopic regime which defines race as natural and hierarchical.² In Fanon, the language of dissection, the microtome which slices the

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 95.

² Kaja Silverman, writing about this moment in *Black Skin, White Masks*, argues that when Fanon “discovers [his] blackness,” he “clearly differentiates the white look from the gaze,” which “evaporates as he attempts to approach and specify it...at the same time everywhere and nowhere” In contrast, the white look assumes “powers which it does not in fact possess...the white male look [is represented] as the privileged ‘functionary’ of the camera/gaze.” Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 28.

body not only for observation but for microscopic observation, evokes the material sciences which shaped and were shaped by racial ideology, via the sensory knowledge of sight.³ The hegemonic nature of this gaze in establishing a hierarchical and scopic truth regime in which whiteness is privileged and blackness is abject must be studied and denaturalized. Here, I turn to the work of black visual studies as a mode of looking differently.

In particular, Black scholars that contend with visual representation unpack the one-sidedness of the gaze that Fanon experiences as fixing him within the species “Negro.” bell hooks, for example, writes, “In white supremacist society, white people can ‘safely’ imagine that they are invisible to black people...As fantastic as it may seem, racist white people find it easy to imagine that black people cannot see them if within their desire they do not want to be seen by the dark Other.”⁴ In this passage, hooks observes the power that is attached to the perception of the gaze as singular, as a function of power that is attached to the embodied designation of whiteness. James Baldwin wrote in *I Am Not Your Negro*, addressing an imagined white audience, “You never had to look at me. I had to look at you. I know more about you than you know about me. Not

³ David Marriott further argues that the body becomes spectral, “disembodied by image,” made ghostly through the process of becoming only a screen or medium for the projected gaze, (3). The materiality of the body as a social and cultural process, that is relational and has identity, fades in favor of the image that already exists on the retina of the viewer. David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

⁴ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. (Boston: South End Press, 1992). 168.

everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”⁵

Transversing the fantasy of invisibility, both hooks and Baldwin gesture towards the power of looking, in disrupting the microtomes of the all powerful white gaze, which is fictional yet has real effects. *Bodies of Evidence* works to deconstruct that white gaze in memory and practice by attending to resistant practices of looking back, as a practice of memory and gaze. In tracing a history of race and racism as a scopic regime, I argue for the importance of looking differently as part of crucial anti-racist struggle.⁶

In examining case studies from the United States, Germany, and Namibia, I draw on critical race theory, visual studies, and postcolonial scholarship that argue, in different frames, that the human represents a protected and exclusive constructed category, informed by a long history of violence that precludes some from being considered fully human, along racial lines. This project heavily engages Black Studies as a field that, as argued by Alexander Weheliye via the work of Sylvia Wynter, “materializes [the human] as the object of knowledge.”⁷ Following the work of Weheliye and Wynter, among others, I make a distinction here between blackness as a site of inquiry, as a lens of critique; the material effects of anti-blackness on Black people in a Western context— in a U.S. and German context; and the ways in which Black people live their lives, as real individuals

⁵ James Baldwin, *I Am Not Your Negro*. (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2017). 103.

⁶ Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.” Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 28.

⁷ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2014), 21.

who engage, are affected by, subvert and resist and are not subsumed by racism, and further, are spectators and creators of images. A challenge of writing about population level violence is retaining an attention to agency; a challenge of writing about representation is the multiplicity of the gaze, the complications of shifting context, spectatorship, consumption and engagement. Taking up these challenges within a genealogy of existing scholarship and struggle, I look at moments of the making and unmaking of the human and construct a complicated history of images as a site of ideological contestation, by turning to archival and cultural case studies in the United States, Germany, and present-day Namibia—historically the site of German South West Africa (*Deutsch Südwestafrika* or DSWA). These case studies, put into conversation while attending to their specificity, opens up understanding of historical and ongoing violences as relational and at times, interconnected. Through assembling a visual archive with a deep attention to history, my dissertation contributes to an understanding of the human as a visually constructed category and to an awareness of contemporary human rights struggles as operating within a politics of visual legibility. I intervene in Critical Ethnic Studies through a transnational and trans-temporal project that contends with anti-blackness and settler colonialism in ways that complicate binaries that, for example,

render Black indigeneity as illegible or unthought.⁸ I further intervene in Visual Studies in interrogating the power of the ethical look in the framework of racialization and white supremacy, and in looking at the technologies of the visual—especially photography—and the human as co-produced.

In order to complete this project, I employ a number of methods and sources, including archival photographic research, critical media analysis, and site-specific observation. In constructing archives of evidence that cross space and time, I am able to follow the scaffolding of ideologies in past centuries and the ways in which those ideologies are captured in the pixels and code of the new millennium. In this, I am beholden to M. Jacqui Alexander's methodology of revealing the ideological commerce between seemingly distinct histories—deliberately jumping sites to connect seemingly ruptural events.⁹ Naomi Klein also offers a useful example of connecting case studies to

⁸ In citing blackness as unthought I refer here to Saidiya Hartman and Frank Wilderson's 2003 conversation, titled "The Position of the Unthought," in which Hartman describes the impossibility of imagination in thinking the positionality of the slave. *Qui Parle* 13, 2. 183-201. I further engage here Iyko Day's intervention into indigenous studies and Afropessimism in the 2015 article "Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, Antiracism, and Settler Colonial Critique" in *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, 2. 102-121. In engaging a transnational and trans-temporal project which contends with indigenous genocide and dispossession in an American and African context, and engages anti-blackness in the United States, Namibia, and Germany, while looking at settler colonialism as an ongoing process—to quote Patrick Wolfe, as a "structure not an event" and further contending with the present-day treatment of Black African and Arab refugees in white supremacist national spaces—I necessarily destabilize the indigenous/Black binary that Day disrupts in her article. This is not to collapse meaning in different contexts but rather to preserve the uniqueness of cases while putting them into generative conversation. Day notes that "the very content of black racialization [in the U.S.] has been based on the exclusive and transferable condition of racial enslavement" (Wolfe 1999, 2; Day, 106).

⁹ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

build a history of the present, not via comparatives or geographic bounds, but through an ideological rubric. Klein writes “In the attempt to relate the history of the ideological crusade that has culminated in the radical privatization of war and disaster, one problem recurs: the ideology is a shape-shifter, forever changing its name and switching identities.”¹⁰ In this project, rather than track the textual path of racial ideologies by name, I seek their visual trace, which is less slippery, which looks strikingly similar across iterations, as the context and the caption shifts. What emerges is a question and nascent venture, of identifying the ways in which the optics of dehumanization are reiterated, and then asking whether we can learn to look differently.

Literature Review: Who is Looking? What is the Human?

As one returns to hooks’ and Baldwin’s observations about the white gaze, a psychological as well as a historical framework is revealing of the ways in which racial ideologies shape sensory perception. Multiple contemporary studies conducted in a U.S. context have shown, for example, that white people are more able to recognize pain in white people than in Black people. There is a conception, these studies show, that Black people on the whole are more tolerant of pain. In some cases, white people—including doctors—believed that higher pain tolerance was linked to biological difference between Black and white populations. In a study published in 2011, researchers examined the

¹⁰ Naomi Klein, *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. (New York: Picador, 2007), 14.

“racial empathy gap”¹¹— the study showed “faster associations of ‘Caucasians’ with positive concepts and ‘Africans’ with negative concepts, thus a stronger racial bias against ‘Africans.’” Further, the study showed that “the strength of the implicit race bias correlates with the reduced empathy for Africans’ pain.”¹² Beyond the obvious implications for equitable medical treatment, these studies reveal a deeper problem of a visual bias, which has effects that exceed medicine.¹³ The very concept of humanity operates on the logic that the recognition of shared humanity necessitates particular modes of treatment, that might be described as *care*. Therefore, a hierarchical ladder of access to the human enables a different application of the ethics of humanity, allowing not only an inattention to pain and grief but also, for example, killing or ownership.

While the idea of the “human” might be literally defined as a shared species status, the

¹¹ “Although pain has been considered an intimate and private feeling, experimental data indicate that when people witness or imagine the pain of another person, they map the others’ pain onto their brain using the same network activated during firsthand experience of pain, as if they were vicariously experiencing the observed pain.” In a study in which participants were shown video clips while their reaction was measured, it was determined that “the moderation of empathy is correlated with the individual implicit racial biases.” Trawalter S, Hoffman KM, Waytz A. “Racial Bias in Perceptions of Others’ Pain.” *PLoS ONE* 7, 11 (2012).

¹² This bias has a long history— Laura Briggs describes how the ideological belief that Black women were more animal than white women “had material effects, rendering the ostensibly insensate ‘savage’ woman fit material for medical experimentation.... Innovations in gynecological and obstetrical surgery depended on the belief in black and poor women's “underdeveloped” nervous systems, with a resulting inability to feel pain,” and the subsequent experimental procedures performed, without anesthesia, often on enslaved Black women. Laura Briggs, “The Race of Hysteria: ‘Overcivilization’ and the ‘Savage’ Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology” (*American Quarterly*, 2000), 262.

¹³ The impact of this study on equitable care does not, of course, contend with the systemic problem of racial inequality in access to healthcare.

state of being human as defined by a sense of shared humanity, is unevenly accessed and based, at least to an extent, on a process of recognition, as evidenced by the 2011 pain study. There is a long history of associating the Other with the non-human; from medieval claims that Jews and Muslims (as Europe's internal Others)¹⁴ were literally monstrous, to the polygenesist claim that Africans were more closely related to apes than to Europeans. In 1904, at the onset of the genocide in German South West Africa, the German general Von Trotha "declared the Herero inhuman, proclaiming in the 2 August 1904 *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* that 'no war may be conducted humanely against non-humans.'"¹⁵ As the Herero were not human to the Germans, there was no need to act humanely. This disassociation of the Other from the human is reiterated through language and visual projects that present the Other as pre-human, in the status of savage or barbarian, or in proximity to nature and therefore animal—all modes of removing the Other from a protected status, towards a status of killability.

Sylvia Wynter presents these divisions as being between the human, which she uses to in fact describe the Othered, species-level human regardless of other status, and Man, this privileged class of the human characterized most profoundly by whiteness.¹⁶

¹⁴ See Wynter's tracking the historical temporal shift from the sacred to the scientific as a mode of categorization; further, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1978).

¹⁵ Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe. *European History Quarterly* (2005). 442.

¹⁶ Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument" *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003). 257-337.

Wynter's work is foundational to understanding the construction of the human as a protected and exclusionary class, that is shaped by the sedimented belief in the naturalness of race. Wynter, drawing on Foucault's *The Order of Things*, argues that Man has been a recent invention within the human.¹⁷ Wynter's essay defines the invention of Man, through two epochs (Man I and Man II) in a revolutionary project of struggling against the overrepresentation of Man, which has emerged in the contemporary moment as a "systemic pattern" of anti-blackness, of "incoming new nonwhite/non-Black groups...coming to claim 'normal' human status by distancing themselves from the group that is still made to occupy the nadir, 'nigger' rung of being human within the terms of our present ethnoclass Man's overrepresentation of its 'descriptive statement.'" ¹⁸ Wynter tracks the execution of a global split along the lines of race and class, producing a hierarchy of access to the human as an ontoepistemic state. She argues that "race—unlike gender...is a purely invented construct" which no "biogenetically determined anatomical differential correlate."¹⁹ However, race takes on the supernatural role previously

¹⁷ Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being." She writes, "the argument proposes that the struggle of our new millennium will be the one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e. Western bourgeois) conception of the human. Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ ourselves" (260).

¹⁸ Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being," 261-2.

¹⁹ Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being," 264. This is not to say that gender is natural or that the attachment of gender to sex is "correct," but rather that gender is mapped onto a system of anatomical sex that, although overstated and falsely made binary, is in existence. In contrast, race is mapped onto a set of factors that do not correlate neatly or reflect any biological reality beyond physiognomic markers. While race has, in different contexts, become the basis for real community and identity, this is not then an indicator of race as a biological truth, only an effect of the invention.

occupied by earlier sacred distinctions of the human, to create a division of the “human/subhuman” along secular, racial lines. Race can be understood as a way of hierarchizing the human within a scopic regime—a dominant truth that operates visually, in which racialized physiognomy is tied to a “natural” order—the idea of skin color as meaningfully tied to the concept of race as biological and innate, ahistorical rather than constructed.²⁰ Wynter proposes that race is foundationally based in representation, in Wynter’s work being a relationship of power, a “descriptive statement” in which the human is taken to be “Man,” i.e. the unmarked universal subject of Western conception—white, male, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied. In another work, titled “No Humans Involved: An Open Letter To My Colleagues,” Wynter protests police violence against Black and brown bodies and the status of non-human ascribed to those bodies at the site of police violence. She writes that the “category of young Black males can be *perceived*,

²⁰ Mitchell notes the anxiety of “intermixture” in colonial society; “To govern these new forms of disorder, colonial discourse became preoccupied with establishing distinctions of race, sexuality, culture, and class” (Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity, 5).

Physiognomy as a taxonomic science “analytically isolated the profile of the head and the carious anatomic features of the head and face, assigning a characterological significance to each element: forehead, eyes, ears, nose, chin, etc....this interpretive process required that distinctive individual features be read in conformity to type” (Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” 11). While I don’t extensively attend to 19th century conceptions of criminality in this project, Sekula discusses the early meeting of “photography and phrenology” in creating a visual archive of criminality—the author cites Civil War photographer Mathew Brady’s daguerreotypes of inmates at Sing Sing; “it was only on the basis of mutual comparison...that zones of deviance and respectability could be clearly demarcated” (14). Galton later used composite photography to attempt to classify a criminal type— Sekula writes, “Galton attempted to construct a *purely optical* apparition of the criminal type. This photographic impression of an abstract, statistically defined, and empirically nonexistent criminal face was both the most bizarre and the most sophisticated of many concurrent attempts to marshall photographic evidence in the search for the essence of crime” (19).

and *therefore behaved towards*, only as the *Lack* of the human, the Conceptual Other to being North American.”²¹ In response to the 1991 beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police, Wynter (drawing on Ralph Ellison) argues that people look at each other via an “inner eye,” and questions what makes that inner eye—she asks, “Why is this ‘eye’ so intricately bound up with that code, so determinant of our collective behaviors, to which we have given the name, *race*?”²² Of course, there is no human involved in cases of police violence against Black men, because within Western modernity, blackness has been constructed and codified as Other to the human, as sub-human, as dysgenic. The idea of the eye, of representation, integrally ties race to the visual, to a logic based on sight. Alexander Weheliye refers to this as the “visual truth-value” by which race coheres, through an assemblage of disciplining processes.²³ The concept of *racializing assemblages*, via Weheliye, builds off of Wynter’s historical framework and turns to the processes by which hierarchies of the human are created and upheld, including the ways in which dehumanization is visually written onto bodies, “visual modalities in which dehumanization is practiced and lived.”²⁴ Racializing assemblages, then, refuse both the tendency in scholarly work on biopolitics—especially work that turns to the Holocaust as

²¹ Wynter, “No Humans Involved,” 43, emphasis original. Wynter’s point of comparison, citing Zygmunt Bauman, is the way in which German Jews were “made into and behaved towards as the Conceptual Other” in Nazi Germany. The aspiration to the constructed, privileged positionality of “American” has complicated implications as well within the ongoing settler colonial projects of the United States as well as Canada.

²² Wynter “No Humans Involved,” 47.

²³ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 40, 4.

²⁴ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 6.

exceptional historical violence—to ignore race, as well as liberal discourses of racism that reify race as “natural,” (thereby reifying the truth regime named by Wynter) or dismiss race as merely incorrect (both fictional and having no real or material effect).²⁵

Paradigmatic Shifts: The Human after The Holocaust

The disparity of access to the human comes into view particularly as the concept of human rights becomes increasingly accepted and protected in the 20th century. While it has a longer Enlightenment genealogy, the modern idea of human rights arose largely out of World War II, motivated by widespread horror at the atrocities of the Holocaust and broader Nazi war crimes.²⁶ The history of the development of international courts and human rights largely follows a Western, and often more precisely Anglo-American, legal model that evokes and reifies legacies of imperialism, colonialism, and epistemic violence even while seeking justice for victims of atrocities that may stem from these same historical formations. For example, Colin Dayan, in *The Law Is A White Dog*, shows how Western law produced personhood and conversely produces legal ostracism from the body politic. Dayan makes the useful point—

“the terminology of human rights is not natural...Despite claims to universality, humanity and rights are not shared. Unseemly tensions characterize the rhetoric of human rights, and nowhere do the duplicities or the claims of civilization become more obvious as in the recent uses of such terms as dignity or decency to justify the

²⁵ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 8.

²⁶ I refer to the event of the Nazi genocide of Jews, Roma-Sinti and other groups as the Holocaust throughout this paper, though the term “Holocaust” is used often to refer only to the genocide of Jews, which is also known by the Hebrew *Shoah* and the Yiddish *Khurbn*. These events are referred to by Roma communities as the *Porajmos*.

most extreme suffering...Humanitarian claims and benign moral rectitude have always permitted the torments of continued servitude.”²⁷

The period after World War II produced the category of “crimes against humanity” at the Nuremberg trials in 1945. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was written and adopted by the United Nations, to protect the rights—cohered as a global dissemination of rights as inaugurated by French and American revolutions in the 18th century, and to the extent that international law is enforced— of “all members of the human family...without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” Despite the assurances regarding genres of the human, following the enlightenment genealogies from which the conception of human rights as a post-war formation was codified, “universal” here can be understood as the unmarked white subject of Western culture and law.²⁸ As Keith P. Feldman points out, “in the face of the Holocaust, a mammoth organizational, bureaucratic, and legal apparatus was built to

²⁷ Colin Dayan, *The Law Is A White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) 185.

²⁸ Robert Meister, in the 2011 book *After Evil*, offers a useful post-Cold War critique of human rights. “...the present political character of Human Rights Discourse is distinct from the broader concept of human rights associated with 1789, which was the topic of debate and struggle between the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That earlier conception, carried forward in the twentieth century welfare state and heavily represented in Eleanor Roosevelt’s 1948 conception of a Universal Declaration of human rights, is now almost gone...the post-1989 politics of human rights...presents itself as an *ethical* transcendence...” Robert Meister, *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 7.

encode liberal norms through which to practice international human rights,” which nevertheless failed to dislodge the exclusionary status of the category of human.²⁹

Within this line of critique, it is important to note that many of the same nations which codified human rights and denounced Nazi atrocities and imperialist aims in 1948 sat down together half a century before to codify the legal procedures for colonizing Africa as a *terra nullius* at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. This conference codified the European right to African lands and resources, in the absence of indigenous actors—this included the authorization of King Leopold of Belgium’s ownership of the Congo Free State, with the affirmation and charge that Leopold’s rule would improve the lives of the natives in the Congo—Leopold’s rule in fact resulted in the deaths of approximately 10 million Congolese and a wholesale destruction of the lives of all the indigenous subjects of the so-called Free State.

The failure to acknowledge the atrocities of Europe’s colonial wars in the codification of human rights after World War II did not go unnoticed. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1947, “There was no Nazi atrocity—concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood—which Christian civilization or Europe had not long been practicing against colored folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world.”³⁰

²⁹ Keith Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America*. (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2015), 10.

³⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa* (New York: International Publishers, 1969; Originally published 1947). Du Bois’s argument was echoed by many Black anti-colonial thinkers of the time, and yet extensive conversations about this reality were subsumed by ongoing structural racism, in which some victims of racial science gained privilege access to whiteness while others remained at best second class citizens.

Aimé Césaire similarly observed in 1955, that “before [Europeans] were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it,³¹ legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples.”³² Césaire further writes, describing what he called the “boomerang effect,” that “a nation which colonizes, that a civilization which justifies colonization—and therefore force—is already a sick civilization, a civilization which is morally diseased, which irresistibly, progressing from one consequence to another, one denial to another, calls for its Hitler, I mean its punishment” (39). This notion that the violence of World War II represented a spatial return of colonial violence is echoed by many thinkers of the period—notably primarily Black and Jewish writers including Fanon, Hannah Arendt, W.E.B. Du Bois,³³ and Ralph

³¹ The metaphorical statement that Europeans “shut their eyes” to the genocidal violence of colonialism is complicated by the popular circulation of images of colonial violence, as I will discuss in Chapter 2.

³² Aimé Césaire. *Discourse on Colonialism* (Paris: Editions Réclame, 1950), 36.

³³ “I knew that Hitler and Mussolini were fighting communism, and using race prejudice to make some white people rich and all colored people poor. But it was not until later that I realized that the colonialism of Great Britain and France had exactly the same object and methods as the fascists and the Nazis were trying clearly to use”; “There was no Nazi atrocity—concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood—which Christian civilization or Europe had not long been practicing against colored folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world” (Du Bois, *The World and Africa*).

Bunche.³⁴ In his introduction to Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, Robin D.G. Kelley notes (citing Cedric Robinson) that many “radical black intellectuals...understood fascism not as some aberration from the march of progress, an unexpected right-wing turn, but a logical development of Western civilization itself...imperialism gave birth to fascism” (20). By attempting to construct genealogical assemblages that contend with these violences in concert, I work to attend to the relationship between the Herero and Nama Genocide in German South West Africa and the Holocaust without centering the Holocaust in such a way as to “give in” to the hierarchical treatment of population-level violence in much of the scholarship on the subject. This approach also lays the groundwork for the latter half of this dissertation, which contends to a greater extent with the treatment of histories of violence in present-day memory practice.

Within the Western legacy of the human, and claims to rights based on this category, the Holocaust as an event has been produced as the paradigmatic example of modern violence, over and above colonial and imperial violences. As Michael Rothberg argues, claims to genocide operate in a mode of “competitive memory—as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources.”³⁵ While the lawyer and Polish-Jewish refugee Raphael Lemkin's original conception of genocide, coined in 1944, encompassed a broader set of

³⁴ “The doctrine of Fascism, with its extreme jingoism, its exaggerated exaltation of the state and its comic-opera glorification of race, has given a new and greater impetus to the policy of world imperialism which had conquered and subjected to systematic and ruthless exploitation virtually all of the darker populations of the earth” Ralph Bunche, “French and British Imperialism in West Africa,” *The Journal of Negro History* 21, 1 (1936). 31-46.

³⁵ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

violences,³⁶ the political strategy and popular tendency of comparing all violence to the Holocaust has framed genocide as a contest.³⁷ Genocide as a legal and ethical framework was developed by Lemkin partly in response to Winston Churchill's 1941 statement in response to the Holocaust; "We are in the presence of a crime without a name." Accepted as international law in 1948 and made active in the 1990s through the development of criminal tribunals, the retroactive designation of genocide has a material effect in making cases for reparations, but otherwise is largely important in the ethical weight of the category—a mode of historical condemnation that seems attached to the value placed not only on individual lives lost or even loss of life generally but the unnatural loss of a way of life, a people, a culture. In Lemkin's view, this framework was certainly not limited to those events. In contrast to the ways in which genocide has been taken up, Lemkin's conception of genocide included both episodic and ruptural violence, as well as normalized, "extended process[es]" such as the ongoing and structural genocide of settler colonialism.³⁸ In his work on genocide, Lemkin offers a genealogical pre-history to

³⁶ Lemkin fought for the inclusion of cultural genocide in the convention, which would, for example, describe the forced assimilation of indigenous groups through practices such as forced conversion, coerced adoption and residential schools.

³⁷ See for example Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; Cheyette, Brian. *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

³⁸ John Docker, "Raphael Lemkin's History of Genocide and Colonialism" (2004), *USHMM*. Retrieved from <https://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/speakers-and-events/all-speakers-and-events/raphael-lemkins-history-of-genocide-and-colonialism>. This includes, of course, massive population loss; "Las Casas claimed that the total of Indians killed in Spanish America exceeded twenty million" (Docker). There is a generative body of work on the subject of colonialism and genocide, including Patrick Wolf, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8,4 (2006). 387–409.

Weheliye's response to Agamben; that in deconstructing the foundations of modern politics, we cannot take the Nazi death camp as "an exceptional ontological screen (both as end point and as a site of origin)" but rather "the concentration camp, the colonial outpost, and slave plantation suggest three of many relay points in the weave of modern politics, which are neither exceptional nor comparable, but simply relational."³⁹ In fact, referring back to Césaire, the event of each of these violences is reliant on the others for its existence. Further, the concentration camp is not a functional synonym for the Nazi Holocaust; as I show, the German project in German South West Africa was not only a precedent for the Holocaust but also a *relay point* in which the concentration camp, the colonial outpost, and the slave plantation in fact, in effect, coexisted.

Despite the original intent of Lemkin's concept, as well as claims like those made by Du Bois and Césaire, only recently has scholarship emerged that takes a broader view of genocidal violence. In a large body of work on trauma, violence, and bare life, the Holocaust has operated as a kind of "standard," the lens through which other violence has been interpreted, through which the possibility for intervention is gauged. Following the work of scholars that include Michael Rothberg, Bryan Cheyette, and Alexander Weheliye,⁴⁰ I trace the paradigmatic nature of the Holocaust while seeking to decenter it as a paradigm within genocide and human rights scholarship as well as memory and trauma studies, to place it in relationship to history. In re-centering the Atlantic slave

³⁹ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 36-37.

⁴⁰ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; Cheyette, *Diasporas of the mind*; Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

trade, chattel slavery, and settler colonialism as foundational norms of Western modernity, race must be recentered as a heuristic.

Despite or perhaps because of the persistent logic of “Never Again”⁴¹ (which often presents itself also as a protected and exclusionary claim), constructed categories such as victimhood emerge as unevenly accessed, often towards the aims of a state-building project and along lines of racial, gender, and sexual privilege—and increasingly (or re-iteratively), religious privilege as tied to racialization. For example, the 2017 “Muslim Ban” in the United States, as an iteration of an Orientalist and xenophobic trope, constructs desirable and victimized refugees as Judeo-Christian, and Muslim refugees as terrorist threats and illegal immigrants. The structure of juridical intervention into atrocity allows certain humans to become subjects while retaining the hierarchical structure of who has access to the status of human.⁴²

⁴¹ The phrase most often associated with Holocaust remembrance, “Never Again,” was in fact coined by an ultra-nationalist, Zionist militant, Meir Kahane. The failure of this phrase or projects around it to prevent the proliferation of mass killing and genocidal violence cannot be surprising when taken in the context of ongoing settler colonialism—in Israel, and also in the United States, Canada, and Australia among others. Despite or perhaps because of the persistent logic of “Never Again,” which often presents itself also as a protected and exclusionary claim, constructed categories such as victimhood are unevenly accessed, often for the aims of a state-building project and along lines of racial, gender, and sexual privilege. Scholars who write about the power of this utterance include Robert Meister, *‘Never Again’: The Ethics of the Neighbor and the Logic of Genocide*, The Johns Hopkins University Press (2005).

⁴² I am also beholden here to Chandan Reddy, *Freedom With Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the U.S. State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Reddy makes a historical materialist argument that freedom and violence are co-constitutive elements of “a contemporary political culture” (2) and that the citizen subject is formed through the demarcation of a racially different, non-heteronormative Other.

This argument is further supported in the present moment by stark absences in public memory. For example, in Berlin, the Charité Museum has a section of the exhibits acknowledging the Charité hospital's history with eugenics in a later Nazi context. However, as of 2016 when I did my research in Berlin, there were no exhibitions or public acknowledgement in the museum of the theft and display of skulls of Herero victims in the museum collection. Reinhart Koessler describes the absence of acknowledgement of Germany's colonial crimes before or outside of the Nazi era as "a colonial amnesia" in contemporary German society.⁴³ Colonial forgetting, with its attendant racial un-seeing, rehabilitates the category of whiteness in present-day politics.⁴⁴

The Photograph and the Flesh

A project that is largely about two-dimensional images is nevertheless indebted and deeply concerned with another kind of materiality and embodiment, the flesh and blood body that is reproduced as image, as human or less than human along racial lines. For Hortense Spillers, the body is the site upon which meaning becomes layered; "hieroglyphics of the flesh" are written into the skin by history.⁴⁵ This body, the body subject to violence, that bleeds, is one that we cannot "discourse away."⁴⁶ Spillers

⁴³ Norimitsu Onishi, "Germany Grapples With Its African Genocide," *The New York Times* (2016) Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/29/world/africa/germany-genocide-namibia-holocaust.html>

⁴⁴ I will return to this idea in Chapter 5 of *Bodies of Evidence*.

⁴⁵ Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* (1987), 67.

⁴⁶ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

clarifies the distinction between body and flesh as that between “captive and liberated subject-positions.”⁴⁷ The body is a site of meaning making, with a long genealogy pointing to the ways in which the body is constructed as a distinct “private and particular space” but also that which is not necessarily a person, which can take on personhood or be reduced to an object. Spillers locates this extreme othering in the captive body in chattel slavery; “the captive body reduced to a thing...and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general ‘powerlessness,’ resonating through various centers of human and social meaning.”⁴⁸ That reduction, or the body before it becomes a body, is the flesh, the physical substrate upon which meaning is written, a site of possibility as well as of wounding. The flesh is that which is injured, the body is the discourse that allows the dominant gaze to see or not see that injury. The flesh is the site of the specifications of torture, the “objective description of laboratory prose.”⁴⁹ I draw on Spillers’ theorization of flesh to describe the ways in which actual violence against the body creates a racialized other that is naturalized in Western modernity via the optics of skin color.⁵⁰ By thinking images in the flesh, I note the ways in which the technologies of

⁴⁷ Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe,” 67.

⁴⁸ Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe,” 67.

⁴⁹ Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe,” 67.

⁵⁰ Via Nirmala Erevelles, the flesh as analytic holds as central both the body as subject to debility and a historical-materialist approach which holds that “racialized violence ... becomes the originary space of difference” (26). Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Amber Musser complicates Spillers’ concept of the flesh through the lens of masochism in her book *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

imaging, particularly photography and film, undergird the violence of racialization and also operate as a kind of vestibule of their own (drawing on Spillers' description of "punctures of the flesh" as cultural vestibule), a liminal site of interaction and possibility as well as closure and disjuncture. Thinking images in the flesh both re-introduces viscosity to the archive—the importance of the body in histories of atrocity—and offers a lens through which to parse what—and who—is or is not pictured.

What is the relationship between the bleeding flesh and the image made of the bleeding flesh, that keeps the wounds open across time in the archive, from the moment the whip hits skin to the moment my eyes view the image? The symbolic order carved into the flesh through the violences of chattel slavery, and I would extend, through the practices of colonization, write the origins of an "American grammar."⁵¹ Spillers both attends to and deconstructs the role of gender in an intersectional analysis here—the captive body as flesh is ungendered, it is divorced from the positive investment in gendered bodies as having individual characteristics, desire, futurity, reproduction in the mode of generations. She writes that a "profitable 'atomizing' of the captive body provides another angle on the divided flesh: we lose any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions. To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living

⁵¹ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 68.

laboratory.”⁵² The relationship between dehumanization and authorization arises frequently, for example, in recurring scientific testing on people of color. In German South West Africa, this atomizing is evidenced in part by the proliferation of postmortem examinations in the concentration camp at Shark Island and the sending of body parts to Germany for study.

Building on the work of Spillers and Wynter, Weheliye introduces the concept of *habeas viscus* as a theoretical tool in order to understand that the flesh represents more than a reduction to bare life, that *habeas viscus* is, rather than a state of exception, a state in which many live and live creatively—when individuals and groups are denied access to the status of human (under the descriptive statement of Man, via Wynter), new modes of being human are formed. *Habeas viscus*—“you shall have the flesh”—is a play on *habeas corpus*, or “you shall have the body,” the legal writ to be presented before a court to determine whether one is being legally detained (the right to a trial). Weheliye uses Spiller’s concept of the flesh both to mark the pornotropic excess of violence on the body and to retrieve the flesh as a site of resistant politics of the oppressed. The flesh is the site of living through and after bare life. Rather than arguing for the wounding that *viscus* represents, in this vision, the flesh as constitutive outside does not mean death but rather the possibility of a different manifestation of humanity outside of the fantasy of Western Man and its epistemic regime. The flesh, via Spillers’ vision of the vestibular wound, is both the racialized violence within the regime of modernity and also the way out, towards another mode of being. While Weheliye also gestures towards a utopian vision of the

⁵² Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe,” 68.

time/space after/beyond Man, he emphasizes the already existing freedoms within *habeas viscus*, against the liberal conception of freedom. He writes against the easy legibility of full agency, towards imagining freedoms in the lack of resistance. Notably Weheliye's new flesh does not seem to follow the death-as-subaltern-resistance narrative often present in similar arguments, but rather thinks through living in the flesh as a way of heralding new genres of the human. The flesh is vestibular—reading Wynter and Spillers together, alongside Weheliye's reading, the flesh is the crack in the armor of the over-representation of Man, it is the site of making and therefore of unmaking man. One can imagine putting one's fingers in the crack and peeling back to the flesh, as a site of trauma, yes, but also of potential, of the making of a new language, the end of the world as we know it that Wynter calls for. The human, after Man.

The Photograph "In Time, Over Time"

In a December *New York Times* 2016 article, Ruprecht Polenz, Germany's special envoy to negotiations with Namibia, acknowledged the Herero and Nama genocide as a genocide (rather than a massacre or dismissing the deaths as part of a mutually brutal war), but denied that Germany would pay reparations to Namibia, with the concern that "compensating descendants in Namibia would subject Germany and other nations to an endless stream of new claims."⁵³ Polenz was quoted by the *New York Times* as saying, "Maybe even the United States would ask us now what to do with the Indians?... You cannot restart history. You cannot rewind time, not in your private life, not in public

⁵³ Onishi, "Germany Grapples With Its African Genocide," 2016.

life.”⁵⁴ Polenz’s claim to the inevitability of history is stunning in its conception that the goal of reparations would be to undo time—that somehow reparations claims represent an empty hope of undoing genocidal violence, rather than forward motion. Polenz’s comment belies the sense that Indigenous Africans, like American Indians and other Indigenous peoples in settler colonial spaces, have no place or claim on that future and that any attempt to make amends constitutes an impossible moving backwards in time, a drag on the relentless futurism of modernity that does not want to attend to its own violent origins or contend with ongoing violence.⁵⁵ Tina Campt describes this temporal drag in ethnographic photography of Indigenous Africans—the “stylization of statuesque Africans as producing a sense of nostalgia that positions its subjects in the past, in ways that tempted viewers at the time to believe they were seeing figures from a bygone era.”⁵⁶ It is impossible in this sense, visually and in the imagination of the colonizer, for Indigenous peoples to exist in the present, even within the moment of colonization.

Cesaire describes the project of colonization as a process of “thingification,” the extreme dehumanization of colonized peoples into natural resources, fossils, the already

⁵⁴ Onishi, “Germany Grapples With Its African Genocide,” 2016.

⁵⁵ One could look here at Ta-Nehesi Coates’ case for reparations, first published in *The Atlantic* in 2014, and responses to it. Ta-Nehesi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” (*The Atlantic*, 2014) Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>; additionally, the lawsuit brought by Kenyan Mau Mau resistance activists against the British government and the reluctance to open the archive. Like in the case of the Mau Mau, the sense that there is a scandal, or a secret, is only true for those who have not had to look.

⁵⁶ Tina Campt, *Listening to Images*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 56.

dead or marked for death.⁵⁷ To be a thing, “an inanimate material object as distinct from a living sentient being,”⁵⁸ takes one outside of the motion of time as something experienced by living beings. James Baldwin, in a debate with anthropologist Margaret Mead in 1970, argues against a linear sense of time as chronological and universally experienced, particularly in relation to the construct of history. He insists that he, figurally representative of colonized and racialized peoples, has been dispossessed of a history by the West, noting particularly the “history written on [his] brow,” in reference to the sedimentation of physiognomy as definitional; “According to the West I have no history [yet] my life was defined by the time I was five by the history written on my brow.” This dispossession of history speaks to a body of scholarship which tracks the ways in which history has always been the story of the West, that non-European peoples are not only without history but are relegated to the space of history, that is, the past.

The relegation of indigenous peoples as living fossils, always already long dead, in the past—undergirds indigenous dispossession. Wynter makes her argument around the human/Man emerging along racial lines through coloniality by turning to the history of human knowledges as well as imperial violences—discourses of Western knowledges systemically constructed non-Europeans as the “physical referent” to which the “new ‘descriptive statement’ of Man as a political subject” was contrasted.⁵⁹ In the “wake of

⁵⁷ Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 42. This will be particularly relevant moving in to Chapter 3 and the discussion of indigenous people as fossils which will be dealt with there.

⁵⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁵⁹ Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” 266.

the West's second wave of imperial expansion"—into Africa, beyond the Caribbean and Americas—"pari passu [side by side] with its reinvention of Man now in purely biologized terms, it was to be the peoples of Black African descent who would be constructed as the ultimate referent of the 'racially inferior' Human Other" while so-called "Native Others were now to be classified" as "the savage Other, the fossil Other, the abnormal Other, the timeless ethnographic Other."⁶⁰ Natural selection as a science that serves the episteme of Man describes these humans as "dysselected," legitimizing the extreme stratification of well-being between the colonizers and the colonized peoples of the world.⁶¹ Kyla Schuller asks, "what does it mean to categorize the human as media, to render life into a recording and communicative device of prehistory...what and who is naturalized as earth, as part of prehistory and lacking a temporality of its own, relegated to the role of a resource."⁶² The native, in photographs, in life, and in disinterred and stolen bones, must be rendered atavistic, less lively, a part of the past, in order to support the political project of settler colonialism, of empty land that is for the taking. Schuller draws on the work of Native Studies scholar Gerald Vizenor to note that the demand of photographs of Natives was perpetual disappearance—to be made visible in the moment as that which once was, a colonial magic trick.

⁶⁰ Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 266. This formulation does not, however, adequately contend with Black indigeneity.

⁶¹ Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 267.

⁶² Kyla Schuller, "The Fossil and the Photograph: Red Cloud, Prehistoric Media, and Dispossession in Perpetuity." *Configurations* 24, 2 (2016), 231.

For European colonizers, the space outside the metropole was seen as always already without history, frozen in time, incapable of marching forward into modernity—a perpetuating myth. Timothy Mitchell and M. Jacqui Alexander both take up the concept of time/space particularly in terms of coevalness, the idea that the metropole marches ever forward in a telos of modernity while the periphery remains in a premodern past. Mitchell remarks that, in order to “disrupt the powerful story of modernity...it is not enough to question simply its location. One also has to question its temporality...an understanding of history in which there is only one unfolding of time.”⁶³ This singular narrative of world history is simultaneous, in which the West and its outside are not coeval, but rather exist simultaneously in different times—modernity and its savage before, which is also a non-space, *terra nullius*—empty and colonizable.⁶⁴ In this formulation of time/space, the metropole and the colony are not only differently located, but incommensurably do not exist in the same time.⁶⁵

Mitchell’s historical arguments are useful here regarding the representation of the Other that produces the colonial order—he argues that “the modern is always staged as representation,” which is to say that “the colonial-modern involves creating an effect we

⁶³ Timothy Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity,” *Questions of Modernity*. Ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 7.

⁶⁴ Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity,” 16.

⁶⁵ Against this impossible divergence, Edward Said deconstructs Orientalism as a concept that perpetuates a binary between “Orient” and “Occident” and depicts the “Orient” as unable to represent itself. Therefore, the reproduced construct of the “Orient” has more to say about the Metropole—the colonial center—that produced it, than the “Orient” as such. In this reading, rather than being asynchronous, the metropole and the periphery are discursively produced in concert.

recognize as reality, by organizing the world endlessly to represent it. Representation does not refer here simply to the making of images or meanings. It refers to forms of social practice that set up the social practice...Colonial European modernity stages the endless set-up that pictures and promises us this complete, unmediated, self-present, immediate reality.”⁶⁶ For example, Mitchell argues that Orientalism was not (merely) a representational problem but rather is essential to the division created within modernity, the ways in which the modern world has been ordered and what is considered truth within it. Writing on the colonial exhibition in relation to histories of French and British colonization of Egypt, Mitchell argues that the Orient could never be as Oriental as the European representation of the Orient that European explorers sought. Only the Orient as represented in the metropole satisfied the European explorers’ desire for the spectacle of the Orient. Because of this simulation, Europeans arrived in colonized places as if they already knew what they would find, expecting a particular construction of reality. The processes of objectification (literally making object) and ordering (sometimes through the forcible re-ordering and reconstruction of places and populations by colonial forces) through the lens of the colonial exhibition acts as a process of framing an idea of the colonized place as contained and legible, and therefore literally manageable under colonial administration.

The European imperialist often enlisted the photograph as a tool of representing the world as picture, but also in order to create a panoptic point of view. Mitchell writes, “to see without being seen confirmed one’s separation from the world, and corresponded at

⁶⁶ Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity,” 17-18.

the same time to a position of power.”⁶⁷ This echoes bell hooks’ assertion of the fictional belief that whiteness is a kind of paradoxical invisibility— that while whiteness is over-represented as the privileged category of the human, whiteness also acts as a mode of invisibility in the vein of impunity. Again, that “white people can ‘safely’ imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people, accorded them the right to control the black gaze.”⁶⁸ The colonial gaze, which is of course a white supremacist gaze, is deeply tied to temporality—technologies of imaging are technologies of temporality—the image

⁶⁷ Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity,” 26.

⁶⁸ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: South End Press, 1992), 168.

is the trace of time, the capturing of a moment.⁶⁹ What does the photograph do but attempt to freeze time, returning to Fanon's utterance, "I am *fixed*"?⁷⁰ Spillers writes, "Ethnicity in this case freezes in meaning, takes on constancy, assumes the look and affects of the Eternal."⁷¹ The photograph is often read as a freezing of time, just as the space outside the metropole was seen as always already frozen in time, incapable of

⁶⁹ Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, writes: "A paradox: the same century invented History and Photography. But History is a memory fabricated according to positive formulas, a pure intellectual discourse which abolishes mythic Time; and the Photograph is a certain but fugitive testimony; so that everything, today, prepares our race for this impotence: to be no longer able to conceive duration, affectively or symbolically: the age of the Photograph is also the age of revolutions, contestations, assassinations, explosions, in short, of impatiences, of everything which denies ripening." Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 94. Ulrich Baer argues that rather than the taking of a photograph capturing a single, true moment—a freeze frame of reality, a stopping or capturing of time—or conversely the shutter snap as shattering time, as a ruptural moment "in which time is splintered, fractured, blown apart," one might take the moment of the photograph and read from "*within* the illusion of an isolated moment rather than simply regard them as interruptions in the evolution of time." Baer reads "the photograph not as the parceling-out and preservation of time but as an access to another kind of experience that is explosive, instantaneous, distinct—a chance to see in a photograph not narrative, not history, but possibly trauma." Baer argues that the "absence of relation" and the ways in which "photographs go beyond extrapictorial determinations" is key to analyzing the photograph. While I disagree with the devaluing of context, I agree that "In some photographs, the impression of timelessness coincides with a strange temporality and contradictory sense of the present surrounding the experiences depicted" and that a particular attention must be paid to this uncanny sense of being unmoored from context, although without removing the importance of attending to the *studium* of the image. Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 4, 6, 11).

⁷⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 95.

⁷¹ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 66. I read Spillers use of ethnicity here as the information that precedes the freezing, the fact of belonging to a group which takes on the quality of natural truth, which precedes from a sociocultural relationship and becomes a biological fact.

marching forward into modernity. In this sense, the colonial photograph doubly freezes the colonized subject, always already caught in time.

The Camera as Apparatus of the Technology of the Human

The ideological scaffolding that produced modern constructs of race through the violent practices of settler colonialism, and through the ideological knowledge production of the sciences, traveled between sites in what cohered as the West.⁷² The photograph served both as commodity and instrument of classification. Susan Sontag writes, “To photograph...means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and therefore, like power.”⁷³ The first photograph that contains a recognizable human form was taken in 1838, introducing the ability to capture what is perceived as a mimetic reproduction of reality in a relation of ownership. Vision as a sense has been privileged throughout the history of the West; the “European hierarchy of the senses” privileged sight as “essentially masculine: dominating, rational, orderly in its discrete categorization of the world...empowered...to see and oversee the world.”⁷⁴ The photograph quickly became an instrument of this discrete categorization—the naked, racialized and gendered body posed against a grid of legibility as pioneered by anthropologists and eugenicists such as British anthropologist John Lamprey, who pioneered the use of a grid for anthropometric portraiture and Francis Galton, who

⁷² M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 192.

⁷³ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977), 2.

⁷⁴ Constance Classen, “The Witch’s Senses: Sensory Ideologies and Transgressive Femininities from the Renaissance to Modernity,” *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (New York: Berg, 2005), 70.

innovated composite portraiture as a way of defining racial “types.”⁷⁵ Lamprey recommended in the 1869 article “On a Method of Measuring the Human Form,”—“that the scientific study of race should be based on observations of the nude human body, so that differences in skin color, hair texture, physique, and the like would be recorded. This strategy strengthened the belief that there were basic differences among human races, observable through distinctions in physical appearance.”⁷⁶ The method published in “On a Method” recommends “a system of measurement which posed the body against a backdrop divided into two inch squares by means of silk threads.”⁷⁷ In Lamprey’s photographs, the body is posed naked, albeit still rather than in motion, before a grid.⁷⁸

Long before Lamprey’s attempts to standardize physiognomic photography, in the 1840s, calls for the use of photographs to create a “photographic archive of human specimens, or types,” circulated in European scientific journals⁷⁹. These modes

⁷⁵ Amos Morris-Reich, *Race and Photography: Racial Photography as Scientific Evidence, 1876-1980* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 2016); Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David and Dominic Thomas (Eds.), *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2014); JB Brager, “Seeing Things,” *The New Inquiry* (Feb 3, 2014). Retrieved from <https://thenewinquiry.com/seeing-things/>

⁷⁶ Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (New York: Pearson, 2006), 153.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Edwards, “Ordering Others: Photography, Anthropologies and Taxonomies.” *In Visible Light: Photography and classification in art, science and the everyday*, Ed. Chrissie Iles and Russell Roberts (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1997), 55.

⁷⁸ A colleague of Lamprey’s. Thomas Henry Huxley, known as “Darwin’s Bulldog” for his avid support of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. serving the Colonial Office of the British Empire, “devised a more complex scheme...for the ‘formation of a systematic series of photographs of the various races of men comprehended within the British Empire.” Edwards, “Ordering Others,” 56.

⁷⁹ Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerreotypes,” *American Art* 9, 2 (1995), 45.

proliferated— early photographers across locations worked in temporally overlapping projects with similar goals; to categorize the human, often in support of existing or developing belief systems around racial hierarchy, white supremacy, and cultural evolution.⁸⁰ As Brian Wallis argues in his work on Louis Agassiz’s daguerreotypes, “The typological photograph is a form of representational colonialism. Fundamentally nonreciprocal, it masks its subjective distortions in the guise of logic and organization.”⁸¹ Like Mitchell’s argument regarding the colonial exhibition or Fanon’s microtomes, the subject of the photograph is pictured through the screen that already exists on the retina, on the camera’s lens.

In an early and famous example of these typological portraits, Swiss zoologist Louis Agassiz, in conjunction with American paleontologist Robert Gibbes, had “slave daguerreotypes” taken in South Carolina in 1850 by photographer Joseph T. Zealy. The daguerreotypes were “designed to analyze the physical differences between European whites and African blacks, but at the same time they were meant to prove the superiority of the white race [and] as evidence to prove his theory of ‘separate creation,’ the idea that the various races of mankind were in fact separate species.”⁸² These images, as Allan Sekula points out, via Wallis, depend on a “shadow archive.”⁸³ These photographs of the

⁸⁰ “Cultural evolutionism—the idea that human groups differed in the stage of evolution which they had obtained...was captured in anthropologist Edward Tylor’s notion that humankind progressed in evolutionary steps through the stages of ‘savage,’ ‘barbarian,’ and lastly, ‘civilized’” (Briggs, “The Race of Hysteria,” 248).

⁸¹ Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science,” 57.

⁸² Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science,” 40.

⁸³ Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science,” 47.

“Other” are meant to be self-explanatory visual evidence of difference and degeneracy, in contrast to an absent visual archive of a white norm. When Agassiz visited the plantations of South Carolina, looking for human specimens that could authentically represent “native Africans of various tribes,”⁸⁴ he did not also take nude photographs for comparison of their white owners (unlike Galton’s later composites, which attempted to define normal and deviant types in contrast—Sekula describes Galton’s “utopian image” of “a combination of portraits of twelve officers and eleven enlisted men of the Royal Engineers”).⁸⁵ Christina Sharpe argues that these daguerreotypes “arrest and set in motion how all Black images will be seen in their wake,” inaugurating a visual grammar of Blackness.⁸⁶ Agassiz was mentored by Georges Cuvier, the French naturalist who both examined Saartje Baartman while she was living and was responsible for dissecting her body, putting her skeleton and preserved brain and genitals on display in the French National Museum of Natural History. The dismantling of the body into flesh as fetish objects, whether via the daguerreotype or the specimen in a jar—is read usefully through Anne McClintock’s work on the colonial fetish, and through the shifting contexts and multiple gazes I discuss later in this introduction.⁸⁷ The project of rational classification is, as it turns out, driven by feelings that include desire, pleasure and fear. For example,

⁸⁴ Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science,” 45.

⁸⁵ Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (1986). 50.

⁸⁶ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 44.

⁸⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995).

one of the earliest photographic ethnography texts was produced by Hamburg photographer Carl Dammann, who was commissioned by the Berlin Society for Anthropology in 1870 to make a series of photographs. The text was published in 1876 as *Anthropologisch—Ethnologisches Album in Photographien*.⁸⁸ However, the album operated between the tensions of “photographic conventions and scientific method” and represented “inconsistencies...as a particular kind of scientific document. Dammann’s use of commercial material” including “re-photographed cartes-de-visite and cabinet prints” in conjunction with explicitly anthropological images, reveals the artifice of the typological project, in which the lurid gaze of the exotic spectacle always already informs the supposedly objective scientific gaze.

Color Photography and the Color Line

The twentieth century was the century both of the Color Line (à la Du Bois) and the color photograph.⁸⁹ Though in this project I focus on colonial photography that pre-dates color photography, and then fast-forward to contemporary smartphone photography, I index this technological moment as important to the history of photography and visual racial biases in concert. In “Looking at Shirley, The Ultimate Norm: Colour Balance, Image Technologies, and Cognitive Equity,” Lorna Roth argues that there is an inattention in scholarship to the reproduction of skin color biases in representation,

⁸⁸ Russell Roberts, *In Visible Light: photography and classification in art, science and the everyday* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1997), 9.

⁸⁹ In 1924, W. E. B. Du Bois said, “The problem of the 20th century will be the problem of the color line.” Sylvia Wynter turns to W.E.B. Du Bois’s Color Line as a kind of ultimate slash in the ordering of humans in modernity, the creation of a discursive and structural line between whites and non-whites, especially drawn on the line of blackness, as the line of Otherness within a white supremacist episteme.

through the “technological apparatus” of imaging.⁹⁰ Roth’s work focuses on early histories of color photography, beginning in the 1940s, and the use of white women models to calibrate film technologies to skin color—rendering illegible darker skin tones on film, particularly in the same frame as a white subject— at best, a problem to be solved. “What had become a ‘White’-biased international standard for the ideal flesh tone had been used as a barometer against which the flesh tones of Blacks, Asians, First Peoples, and other ‘peoples of colour’ had been read negatively as an aggravation—a deviation from this invisible norm.”⁹¹ The underlying argument here pre-dates color film; that the ideology and the technology of imaging are co-productive in reifying racism as a visual project, in which Blackness is undesirable, abject, and illegible. Roth argues that technologists “have likely acquiesced to what Joyce E. King has called ‘dysconscious racism’... This kind of racism ‘tacitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges... an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race.’”⁹² She calls for a project of “cognitive equity,” which, while based in visual representation and product development, also for Roth includes “an enabling socialization process that first aims to open up narrow and distorted cognitive associations around skin colour to close

⁹⁰ Lorna Roth, “Looking at Shirley, The Ultimate Norm: Colour Balance, Image Technologies, and Cognitive Equity,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34,1 (2009), 113.

⁹¹ Roth, “Looking at Shirley,” 117.

⁹² Joyce E. King, *Dysconscious Racism, Afrocentric Praxis, and Education for Human Freedom: Through the Years I Keep on Toiling: The selected works of Joyce E. King* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 295; Roth, *Dysconscious Racism*, 128.

scrutiny.”⁹³ This attends to the deep socialization and psychological training that exists around race, not as individual or group identity but as structural basis for inequality. Cognition is an important battleground against racism, as is representation.

In an interesting coincidence, Earl Kage, the former manager of Kodak Research Studios, tells Lorna Roth in a personal correspondence that, “it was never Black flesh that was addressed as a serious problem that I knew of at the time,” noting the solutions offered for re-calibrating film to capture nuances in brown tones was primarily a response to commodity advertising needs.⁹⁴ Read alongside Spillers, Kage’s naive comment here reads as jarring rather than in good faith— Kage does not consider the desires of Black subjects as customers of the camera as a consumer good, or as customers of portrait photography studios as (not) “a serious problem,” but rather Black flesh— the body without subjectivity. This purported ignorance is further belied by the explicit industry development, although by Polaroid, not Kodak, of Polaroid flash technology in response to demand from apartheid South Africa for the racial pass card system; the need to capture clearly the faces of Black people for biopolitical management. Further, as Teju Cole writes in “A True Picture of Black Skin,” although Shirley cards are a somewhat antiquated tool, “even now there are reminders that photographic technology is neither value-free nor ethically neutral. In 2009 the face-recognition technology on Hewlett-Packard webcams had difficulty recognizing black faces, suggesting, again, that the

⁹³ Roth, *Dysconscious Racism*, 127.

⁹⁴ Roth, “Looking at Shirley,” 120.

process of calibration had favored lighter skin.”⁹⁵ While these calibration questions may have shifted with the move to smartphone photography, these questions are related to the racialization of algorithmic social media technologies, and skin tone calibration continues to be a problem with face-recognition technologies, which I discuss in Chapter 5.

Evidence and The Looped Gaze

In order to argue that photographs are always already shaped through and by this inscribed flesh, by these discursive metrics that shape the meaning of the body along lines of race, one must contend not only with the history of racialization and imaging, the psychological and cultural sedimentation of racism as a conscious and subconscious mode of operating, but also the shifting gaze—who is looking at the photograph and how this changes how the image is read. This returns to the conception of the white gaze and the Black look that I begin this introduction with, and also speaks to the power of context. The *studium* of the photograph (that which creates interest), which Barthes quickly dismisses in favor of the *punctum* (the gut feeling), is recovered and extended by scholars like Shawn Michelle Smith and Tina Campt in order to argue the importance of the context in which an image is produced.⁹⁶ Further, the context in which an image is consumed, the ways in which an image circulates or is forgotten, is essential.

The camera is an unreliable witness—faith in the indexicality of the photograph has been an open question from the beginning, even as it is lauded. Sekula argues that

⁹⁵ Teju Cole, *Known and Strange Things* (New York: Random House, 2016), 146.

⁹⁶ Campt, *Listening to Images*, 2017. Shawn Michelle Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

“claims...for the powers of optical realism” are exaggerated, that even in the 19th century, “we find plentiful evidence of a crisis of faith in optical empiricism.”⁹⁷ Teju Cole reminds us that despite our occasional faith in the photograph, in which “images, unlike words, are often presumed to be unbiased,” the photograph is tricky; even a photograph which faithfully reproduces what is in front of it represents a selection, a partial rendering of a scene, an artful cropping selected by the photographer. The style of the photograph is in of itself able to manipulate the viewer.⁹⁸ Cole cites Bertolt Brecht’s 1931 quote from *War Primer*: “the camera is just as capable of lying as the typewriter.”⁹⁹ While certainly photographs are shaped by just as they shape ideology, the photograph still represents a certain magic in its deictic reproduction of the world.

Susan Sontag, in *On Photography*, describes the relationship of the photograph to evidence—literally stating, “Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph of it.”¹⁰⁰ And yet, following an intervention by Gil Z. Hochberg—what do we do with visual evidence (of violence, in particular), when we have it? “What kind of seeing (or compromised seeing) is required in order to see that which remains invisible, or that which remains visible in its

⁹⁷ Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” 16.

⁹⁸ The difference for example between illustrating an article with a mug shot versus a glamorous headshot—the aesthetics of which Cole critiques as evoking sympathy for the French Front National darling Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, inviting a view of her as an attractive celebrity rather than a xenophobic right wing politician. Cole, *Known and Strange Things*, 216.

⁹⁹ Cole, *Known and Strange Things*, 216.

¹⁰⁰ Sontag, *On Photography*, 3.

invisibility?”¹⁰¹ As Smith argues in *At the Edge of Sight*, often photographs, like categories, are defined by the spectral evidence of what is not pictured, what is outside the frame.¹⁰² The meaning of photographs is always shaped by who is looking, refracted through the lens of ideology— this is a multiplied and diffracted project, via the parallaxic gaze of the photographer and then the gaze of spectators as the image moves through different contexts. I contend with parallaxic looking primarily in the third chapter of this project, however, in general, I use this terminology to refer to the ways in which the appearance of a scene or subject is different based on the positionality of the spectator, the eye of the beholder.

The failure of camera as objective witness has particular implications for the image as a site of ethical demand and the photograph as evidence in making human rights claims. The circulation of image as appeal—the fervent belief that if only what was happening was made visible, those who saw it would have to make it stop—represents a trap of visibility that extends from slave portraits to body cams. Visual scholars such as Ariella Azoulay assert that images contain their own injunction, a demand to the viewer for justice, or action. The concern with this belief is that much work in visual studies that contends with the gaze and ethical looking assumes or requires a shared positionality—a shared site of looking—between the author and the reading audience. For example, Marianne Hirsch critiques the violence of the Nazi gaze in Holocaust photography, but fails perhaps to consider what other fascists are looking at the image. Whether the

¹⁰¹ Gil Z. Hochberg, *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 48.

¹⁰² Smith, *At the Edge of Sight*, 2013.

photograph functions as trophy or appeal depends largely on the gaze of both the photographer and of the audiences that view the photograph. Hochberg responds to Azoulay's assertion that the "political promise" of photography lies in the ability of the spectator to respond to the appeal of the subject of the photograph—Hochberg cautions that this political potential "depends on the spectator's ability to perform a correct or ethically responsible looking."¹⁰³ In seeking a different way of looking, I struggle with how to contend with these disjunctures of looking (at the same thing), the incommensurability of the gaze from different places.

Because the photograph is a medium that is easy to reproduce, is meant to be reproduced, the context in which images are viewed may shift quickly. This is particularly important when looking at images of atrocity and the pornographic tendency in white supremacist culture to fetishize images of Black and Brown injury and death. Amber Musser writes about historical renderings of the black body in pain, which engenders white sentimentality and conversely black objectification in viewership, and with it a kind of passive spectatorship enabled by and enabling white liberal guilt.¹⁰⁴ This builds on and offers an ancillary to Spiller's pornotropic viewing, the pleasurable spectatorship of wounding, as well as Fatima Tobing Rony's "fascinating cannibalism" and Jane Jacobs' methodological concerns as a feminist ethnographer looking at

¹⁰³ Hochberg, *Visual Occupations*, 111.

¹⁰⁴ From a talk titled "Carrie Mae Weems, the Performance of Witnessing, and Brown Jouissance" given by Amber Musser at Rutgers University, February 2017. See also Amber Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

photographs of violence, taking her own photographs and enacting the epistemic violence of her own researcher's gaze.¹⁰⁵

I offer the looped gaze first, as I have discussed in previously published work, as “the effect of a photographic event in which the subject of the image occupies the space of the photographed and the photographer at the same time.” In some cases, “the means of the photograph's production are visible in the image: we literally see the camera.”¹⁰⁶

Photographs that contain evidence of the image's making— the photograph taken in the mirror, where the camera is clearly visible; the photograph where the shadow of the photographer or his tripod is cast over the subject; the selfie stick or the tell-tale arm jutting into the frame—represent a peculiar genre that, perhaps, offers a difference in the gaze, a different way of contending with representation. Spillers writes, “In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness.”¹⁰⁷ Arguably, the looped gaze is an entry point into the visual language of these marvels, to look at oneself rather

¹⁰⁵ Fatima Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). Jane Jacobs, “Women, Genocide, and Memory: The Ethics of Feminist Ethnography in Holocaust Research.” *Gender & Society* (2004). 223-238.

¹⁰⁶ JB Brager, “‘Unknown Woman’: The Visual Politics of Looking Back,” *The Holocaust in History and Memory* 7 (2015), 155, 162.

¹⁰⁷ Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe,” 65.

than to be looked at, to invent a self in the image, and to be seen as one sees themselves.¹⁰⁸

In my previously published work on a self-portrait found on the grounds of Auschwitz at liberation, I argue: “the looped gaze liberates the spectator from the positionality of the ‘lethal’ Nazi gaze.”¹⁰⁹ We are free to feel the irony and longing even while we sense the proximity of the image to catastrophe. In contrast to the likely contemporaneous identification card portraits [from Nazi-occupied Europe], the portrait of the unknown woman evades biometric and eventually necropolitical classification... The gendered dynamics of this looped gaze are crucial; this evokes histories of the particular victimization of women both as targets of gendered and sexual violence during the Holocaust and the continuing victimization of women through the reproduction of fetishizing images...[even] in the aftermath of the photographic event, the unknown

¹⁰⁸ Like Spillers’ truer word, scholars including Wynter and Jacques Derrida have called for a new language. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967); If the over-representation of Man is part of a scopic regime of truth, to what extent is this new language imbricated with a new mode of seeing? Wynter’s coloniality of being refers to the epistemology that underpins ontology—that our sense of our very humanness is ascribed by structures of power that must be dismantled in order to free the human from the regime of Man. Wynter concludes by arguing for the need for a new science—following Césaire and the physicist Hans Pagel (331), that can contend with the range of problems confronting humans—“This would be a science in which the ‘study of the Word’—of our narratively inscribed, governing sociogenic principles, descriptive statement, or code of symbolic life/death, together with the overall symbolic, representational processes to which they give rise—will condition the ‘study of nature’” (328). She further calls for a new language, because of the impossibility of abolishing man using the disciplines and languages which have arisen within and to reify the episteme of Man (229-230). This is a question of the creative potential of the human, of opening a “new frontier” and “introducing invention into existence” against the so-called natural order of the current description of the human.

¹⁰⁹ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 135.

woman is looking at herself. She must have printed the image, and even if she intended to give it to another, she must have examined her own photographic image, which she had taken, trying to recognize herself in this Lacanian other in the photograph, in the mirror... the artist makes the tools of her agency known, rather than employing an assistant or timer, or otherwise working to hide the camera in the image. It is possible that the unknown woman is echoing [contemporary women artists such as Lotte Jacobi, Marianne Breslauer, Ilse Bing], or has come to turn her camera to the mirror for a similar reason, enacting a desired self in the face of multiple restraints. And across time I am compelled to witness this woman who is in charge of the scene, who pulls the trigger, who denies me her look.”¹¹⁰

Methodologies of Looking

The project of looking differently is often approached through the ethical question of the effect of looking—particularly the effect of looking as an act refracted by the white gaze, as a violence against bodies of color. In *Bodies of Evidence*, I walk uneasy lines between the desire to look closely and to look away, and to work to think through a methodology that acknowledges the dangers of the researcher’s gaze, as complicit. At times, I explicate the minutiae of images of violence to acknowledge and describe the kinds of atrocity encountered in the visual archives of chattel slavery and Indigenous genocide. I do not reproduce many images of violence in this project, because of the pornotropic quality of such images, in circulation. In revisiting the looped gaze in this project, I think through who has access to the looped gaze at to what end—what does one

¹¹⁰ Brager ““Unknown Woman,”” 163, 165.

see when they look at themselves, as a mode of critical positionality? What resistance is to be found in this looping for the African subjects in photographs that I write about, particularly in Chapter 2 of this project?

I further offer the looped gaze as a methodological way of thinking through the spatio-temporal loop of picturing historical photographs, as a researcher looking at images in the archive. Musser's affective approach—sensation as an analytic, as well as Jasbir Puar's "focus on affect [which] reveals how actual bodies can be in multiple places and temporalities simultaneously, not (only) tethered through nostalgia or memory but folded and braided into intensification" are useful in approaching the looped gaze on this level, as a mode of secondary spectatorship which operates through the lens of individual and collective experience.¹¹¹ In this mode, the looped gaze operates as a kind of visceral witnessing.¹¹² Zeb Tortorici, in the article "Visceral Archives of the Body" defines viscosity as the "experience of intense and highly mediated bodily feelings or affective responses that manifest themselves through conflicting corporeal and emotive reactions,"¹¹³ following Elizabeth Freeman's "haptic historiography" and Tina Campt's "haptic temporalities."¹¹⁴ I extend this definition in relationship to Weheliye's heuristic

¹¹¹ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 51.

¹¹² I draw on the methodological viewing practices of Gordon's following the ghosts (1997), Muñoz (2009), Freeman's "haptic historiography" (2010), Hirsch (2012), Azoulay's "ethic[al] spectatorship" (2008), Smith's looking outside the frame (2013).

¹¹³ Zeb Tortorici, "Visceral Archives of the Body: Consuming the Dead, Digesting the Divine." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20,4 (2014). 407.

¹¹⁴ Campt, *Listening to Images*, 72.

habeas viscus— *viscus* here as the Latin root of viscera, the internal organs, the gut, or, as Weheliye interprets it, the flesh. Tortorici works to link extreme reactions to the archive to “the production of historical ...the relations between affective and bureaucratic impulses— embodiment and documentation.”¹¹⁵ Musser writes in *Sensational Flesh* that “using sensation as an analytic tool...emphasizes the connections between reader and text/object/assemblage...invocation of the readers’ world [via Deleuze] not only introduces contingency and multiplicity but also invites us to examine the fleshiness, or experiential dimension, of the text.”¹¹⁶ Musser proposes “empathetic reading” which “relies on fostering a connection between the corporeality of the reader and the structures of sensation.”¹¹⁷ Other scholars, notably including Leigh Raiford, discuss the ways in which the meaning of images is shaped by the context of the moment in which they are being consumed rather than the moment of their production. I consider both the historical image as evidence in, even of, the present as well as an affective conductor; meaning is made in the interaction between myself as an embodied reader and the image as a site of information.

The Structure of this Project

In *Bodies of Evidence*, I engage contestations around the *look* through an examination of colonial media and artifacts—photographs, bones, and art—which are held or fabricated in Western institutions. These objects and the discourses that surround

¹¹⁵ Tortorici, “Visceral Archives of the Body,” 408.

¹¹⁶ Musser, *Sensational Flesh*, 23.

¹¹⁷ Musser, *Sensational Flesh*, 24.

them open questions about how these objects and texts play an ongoing role in the construction of the human as a racial, rather than universal, category. In moving from the historical to the contemporary moment of image and ideological production together, I argue that these sedimented constructs continue to shape the production and consumption of the visual. The chapter structure of *Bodies of Evidence* follows a historical and technologic arc— from images taken and human remains stolen during the period of colonial genocide in German South West Africa and contemporaneous thefts in the United States, to present-day struggles for repatriation and redress, and contestations over the circulation of images and bodies in art, performance, social media and public space.

In this introductory chapter, I have examined the human as an exclusionary category constructed through violence against an Other. When that violence is captured with photography as a reproducible technology of racialization, the ideology of race as a visual truth is reiterated and travels. In the second chapter of *Bodies of Evidence*, “The Incorruptible Kodak: Photography as Trophy and Appeal in German South West Africa, Germany, and the United States,” I work with photographs from the settler colonial genocide of the Herero and Nama people that occurred at the beginning of the 20th century in German South West Africa. This chapter builds a history of the development of photography as a mode of categorizing the human, as an ideological project that circulated between sites. I trace ideological movement between Germany, South West Africa and the United States, through images. I look at photographs that span from the colonist’s souvenir photograph, to commercial postcards, to official images from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, which represent a continuation of German racial science as

developed through and within its colonial project in South West Africa, and further, the German iteration of an ideological project that circulated throughout the Western world, including the United States. I close read photographs of racial violence, tracing contestations through images into the mid-century via the circulation of lynching photographs from the United States and German South West Africa as trophy and appeal. Photographs taken as trophies by the colonial photographer are recast as evidence through human rights questions that chronologically post-date the image, and also through present-day post-colonial and anti-racist demands. Some are intentionally repurposed by activists; the trophy is amended as appeal. The location of witnessing—how the identity of a spectator shapes their consumption of the image—is central to my argument about the possibilities of looking at images; the power of evidence is often dependent on the idea of a shared site of looking.

The third chapter, “Ezekiel in the Valley of Dry Bones: Returning the Body, the Bones and the Meat,” turns from photographs towards a different kind of evidence which is nevertheless visual—the physical remains of indigenous peoples collected by colonial soldiers and anthropologists and put on display in the United States and Germany. Returning to German South West Africa, I study how bones were collected as material evidence by German soldiers and scientists, through genocidal violence and gravesite theft, for the purposes of racial research. The investments of this research mirror and were directly in conversation with the theft and collection of the bones of indigenous and Black people in the United States. I further move into the present moment to contend with claims to repatriation of remains—for example, claims of the Namibian government

to the Herero skulls housed in German university archives, and claims by the family of Nat Turner to his skull, passed down by descendants of his murderers—and what these contemporary debates tell us about racial dispossession and embodiment, as well as the investment in empirical proof that echoes claims of indexicality in the photograph. These claims both expose the investments of Western curatorial practice and offer a different way to think through the idea of reparations, against histories of dispossession.

I move from thinking about images in the flesh to thinking about those images as representations of flesh, the flesh as body matter that becomes corpse. The deceased body represents a strange site for study of the making and unmaking of humans, as it is always near-human but not quite. Questions of representation and ownership of the body are complicated by death, as are questions of race as a visual project, especially the racialized body that has been stripped to bone. By focusing on bones as material artifacts and subjects of photography, I am able to think more deeply about the flesh that is literally not there; I will look at the ways in which the scopic regime of raciality is steeped into bone, the ways in which bones in particular become a site of contestation around violence, mourning and memory in the aftermath of mass killings and population-level violence.

In Chapter Four, “Black Death Spectacle: Contemporary Art and the (Un)Making of the Human,” I move more starkly into the contemporary moment, tracing the same old and ingrained racial ideologies as they re-emerge within a moment of perceived but increasingly normalized crisis—an impasse of crisis.¹¹⁸ In this chapter, I expand the

¹¹⁸ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

conversation about visual evidence into contemporary art and museum curation with a discussion of Dana Schutz's painting "Open Casket" at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, a portrayal of the mutilated body of the murdered Black child, Emmett Till. The fourth chapter looks at contemporary art and image making through the lens of the previous chapters engagement with the flesh and the body—as a mode of consumption (in the sense of reception, of using a resource, but also of ingestion, to consume as a mode of eating) or visceral spectatorship. I read the spectacle of Dana Schutz's failed witnessing through the idea of parallaxic witnessing, and extend the debates over this particular work into a broader conversation about ownership and intimacy to work about racial embodiment and violence. With this case study, I think through the idea of parallax, the difference in the perceived position of an object viewed along different lines of sight—in order to consider what happens when we look at things from different places. In my previous chapters, I have described how the same images may circulate as both trophy and appeal; in this chapter, I look at the parallaxic gaze by which an image can circulate as both at once, and by which the image is re-cycled and iterative.

Parallax is a way of understanding the participation of the spectator in making meaning in visual texts, when looking from different positions. In this chapter, I also think through the desire and possibility of looking differently, the strange ways that visual ideologies travel, and how making images might engage and reshape historical violences for present-day consumption. Thinking through parallax here requires a careful look at intimacy and ownership in the consumption and production of images, particularly of violence against Black and brown bodies, against the fetishistic spectacle and ownership

explicit in the white gaze. To see differently is to imagine differently, with material implications. If the present moment is a continuation of a regime in which Blackness is antithetical to humanness, and the eye is the purveyor of that truth, then we must learn to look differently.

Chapter Five, “Selfie Possessed: Representational Politics from the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and other sites of Holocaust Memory,” moves into digital technology, namely, the smartphone and algorithmic social media. The co-production of the visual logic of the human and photographs as products operates in relationship to new digital technologies on a massive, increasingly ephemeral, and hyper-temporal scale. This post-scarcity media environment feels hard to grasp, and for this reason seems even more important to scrutinize and place within a historical framework. This chapter engages the ownership of memory and looks at how networks of individuals are implicated in the act of witnessing via social media photography and video sharing. Through an analysis of bodies in memorial space and the sharing of images from the Berlin Holocaust Memorial on the social networking app Instagram, I argue that this circulation of Holocaust memory, oft dismissed as inappropriate, is important to understanding contemporary ethno-racial configurations and racism in Germany, and the transnational circulation of whiteness as a visually privileged construct. I tie these debates to broader conversations about contested memorials and racialized bodies in public urban space.

In putting these texts and histories into conversations, I build a narrative that illustrates the ways in which truth as a scopic regime coheres through the process of

creating images, how the human is burned onto film or built into digital data. I want to trace a history of empathy and dehumanization, of gazes meeting, of what the lens produces and denies. Along the way, I hope to attend to cultural and contested memory, to forgotten photographs in archives, to the affective resonances of images that move us, to questions of visibility and the politics of awareness, to contemporary crises and challenges to the foundational violences that foment these crises. Rather than view histories of population level violence as ruptural, outside of history, or relegated to a distant past, I follow scholarship and activism that calls for a clear intention and attention in relation to the ways in which colonization is an ongoing practice. Further, I write from the knowledge that violence against targeted populations is not only ongoing but is foundational to Western modernity. *Bodies of Evidence* contributes to a growing body of work that takes an intersectional approach to population-level violence by considering not only the function of structural categories in the logic of violence, but also the ways in which gender and sexuality operate within that violence, against the totalizing effect of looking at populations targeted for death as undifferentiated masses. This is not a pessimistic project, rather it is one that seeks to contribute to the denaturalization of the hegemonic nature of whiteness as a visual language of power, and to the project of seeing differently.

The Incorruptible Kodak: Photography as Trophy and Appeal in German South West Africa, Germany, and the United States

In Mark Twain's 1905 satire *King Leopold's Soliloquy: A Defense of His Congo Rule*, Twain's Leopold, scion of the infamous Belgian rubber trade, looks at photographs of "mutilated negroes" and complains, "The kodak has been a sore calamity to us," noting that all other witnesses could be bribed or denounced, and only the camera remains "incorruptible."¹¹⁹ Cameras with the capability of taking "snapshots" were first available in the late 1870s, and the first commercially available portable film camera, the Kodak, was introduced by George Eastman in 1888. The Brownie camera, known for its role in exploding mass market photography, was introduced in 1900. The availability of these mobile cameras shifted the logic of visual categorization out of the photographer's studio and into the hands of consumers. The height of European colonial power coincided with the first photography boom, allowing settlers to document their lives like never before, with a verisimilitude that seemed to represent an uncorrupted reality. The timing of these developments also supported the ascent of anthropological photography as well as what might retrospectively be described as the genre of atrocity photography. As Twain wryly points out, the camera, brought to the colonies to capture settlers' great adventures, also captured the horrors of colonial violence.

Genocide in German South West Africa

¹¹⁹ Mark Twain, *King Leopold's Soliloquy: A Defense of His Congo Rule* (Boston: Warren Company, 1905).

The region that became known as German South West Africa, then Namibia, was colonized by Germany under the Second Reich, in 1884—“Otto von Bismarck proclaimed German possession of an enormous section of Africa stretching from the Orange River, in the south, to the Kunene River in the north.”¹²⁰ This became Germany’s largest colonial holding in terms of number of settlers by 1903.¹²¹ This area was and is home to many peoples preceding the German colonists, including the Ovambo, Herero, Nama, Kavango, Damara, Lozi, San, and Tswana nations. In 1904, the Herero people rose up against colonial rule and were defeated. In the aftermath, between 40,000 and 70,000 Herero people were killed or died as a result of German policy—approximately 80% of the Herero population. This was followed by another failed uprising and mass killings of the Nama nation—in which approximately 50% of the population died.¹²² The colonial general Lothar von Trotha’s 1904 extermination order holds a particular place of historical infamy; he ordered his troops: “The Herero people must however leave the land. If the populace does not do this I will force them with the *Groot Rohr* [Cannon]. Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle,

¹²⁰ Benjamin Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe,” *European History Quarterly* (2005), 451.

¹²¹ Germany also had colonial holdings in East Africa, Cameroon and Togoland, and New Guinea and Samoa in the Pacific.

¹²² The Nama, notably, were referred to by colonists as *Hottentots*—the figure of the Hottentot will come up throughout this project, due to the proliferation in eugenicist writing and imagery of particularly salacious and sustained attention to the Hottentot as racial mythology, especially the figure of the Hottentot woman as subject of hyper-sexualized racial stereotyping. See, for example, Siobhan Somerville, “Scientific Racism and the Emergence of the Homosexual Body” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, 2 (1994), 243-266; Briggs, “The Race of Hysteria,” 2000.

will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at.” In addition to direct killings by both colonial troops and individual settlers, the Herero and Nama were forced into the desert to die by thirst and starvation (a tactic of expulsion and pursuit through hostile environment which pre-dates but evokes the Armenian genocide); survivors were rounded up and sent to forced labor and concentration camps—*Konzentrationslager*—such as the Shark Island camp in Lüderitz Bay.¹²³

These mass killings have been described as the first genocide of the 20th century;¹²⁴ this label has been contested partly because of a lack of documentation (particularly in comparison to the massive bureaucratic archive of the Holocaust) and the context of colonial war—some historians argue that genocidal intent must be proven even in the

¹²³ In an attempt to focus on the ideology rather than reiterate the violences in extreme detail in this project—even while sitting with and close reading images of extreme violence—I do not extensively or systematically present evidence of German treatment of the Herero and Nama people, but direct readers to texts beginning with *Words Cannot Be Found: German Colonial Rule in Namibia*, an annotated reprint of the 1918 Blue Book assembled and later rescinded by the British colonial government, which documents in intense detail abuses by the German government in South West Africa. As Jeremy Sarkin points out, the Blue Book was published in the context of war between Britain and Germany, which must be considered when approaching the text. See Jeremy Sarkin, *Colonial Genocide and Reparations Claims in the 21st Century: The Socio-Legal Context of Claims Under International Law by the Herero Against Germany for Genocide in Namibia, 1904-1908*. (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2009).

¹²⁴ The claim to being first is a strange honor, but one that has been claimed by the Armenian genocide in 1915 until more recent historiographic interventions. See David Olusoga, “Dear Pope Francis, Namibia was the 20th century’s first genocide,” *The Guardian* (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/18/pope-francis-armenian-genocide-first-20th-century-namibia>

face of genocidal effect.¹²⁵ I hesitate to “buy in” to the common language of “first genocide of the 20th century,” while citing its widespread use, because of the implication of novelty in contrast to acknowledgement of ongoing genocide that precedes and also is contemporaneous with the Herero and Nama genocide. This follows Raphael Lemkin’s assertion that Western colonialism itself constitutes genocide, and that “slavery may be called cultural genocide par excellence. It is the most effective and thorough method of destroying a culture, and of de-socializing human beings.”¹²⁶ This is nevertheless a retroactive designation—genocide was defined in 1948 by the United Nations as “...acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”¹²⁷ Germany first apologized to Namibia for colonial atrocities in 2004 but refused to recognize these atrocities as genocidal. By 2016, Germany had only begun to officially acknowledge the events of 1904-1908 as a genocide, and has since regressed, as claims are made for reparations.¹²⁸ In a study of the provenance of skulls in German collections (the presence of which I approach in Chapter 2 of this project), the authors

¹²⁵ For example, Isabel Hull, “The military campaign in German Southwest Africa, 1904-1907 and the genocide of the Herero and Nama,” *Journal of Namibian Studies* 4 (2008), 7-24.

¹²⁶ Lemkin’s unpublished work, cited by Docker, “Raphael Lemkin’s History of Genocide and Colonialism,” 2004.

¹²⁷ United Nations, “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.html>

¹²⁸ See Norimitsu Onishi, “Germany Grapples With Its African Genocide,” *The New York Times* (Dec. 29, 2016). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/29/world/africa/germany-genocide-namibia-holocaust.html>; Justin Huggler, “Germany to recognise Herero genocide and apologise to Namibia,” *The Telegraph* (July 14, 2016). Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/14/germany-to-recognise-herero-genocide-and-apologise-to-namibia/>.

note, “the minister of development, Heidemarie Wiecezorek-Zeul, publicly apologized in Namibia on the 100th anniversary of the Waterburg battle...but argues today that it will not evaluate historic events that predate the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.”¹²⁹ The current stance of Germany is defensive; the refusal to openly apologize for genocide might be taken as culpability in the Herero case for reparations.¹³⁰

Archives and Methods

In this chapter, I turn to the understudied visual and archive of German colonialism in South West Africa, with an emphasis on colonial photography. The visual history of German South West Africa is saturated with markers that unfold like coincidences and cohere into a legible portrait of the foundational role of visual technologies in producing the human and demarcating its others. The visual archive establishes the human as a privileged category of whiteness through both eugenicist categorization and the normalization of images of violence against non-white bodies. By assembling this archive, approaching it from an intersectional and interdisciplinary perspective, and

¹²⁹ Wittwer-Backofen, Ursula. Kastner, M, Moller, D, Vohberger, M, Lutz-Bonengel, S, Speck, D., “Ambiguous provenance? Experience with provenance analysis of human remains from Namibia in the Alexander Ecker Collection,” *Anthropologischer Anzeiger* 71, 1-2 (2014), 69. The tying of apology without material substance to the project of development via this apology is telling when examined through the widespread project of development as economic colonialism in post-colonial Africa. See James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Additionally, see Sarkin (2009) for the legal argument for retroactive claims to genocide.

¹³⁰ Henning Melber and Reinhart Kössler, “Germany is backpedalling on calling its century-old Namibian genocide a genocide,” *Quartz Africa* (January 13, 2018). Retrieved from <https://qz.com/1178317/namibia-genocide-germany-is-trying-to-protect-itself-from-a-widening-legal-liabilities/>

putting it into conversation with a transnational discourse, one comes to understand Germany's role in the development of "pan-European colonial ideologies" and transnational discourses of anthropology and racial science which supported these projects.¹³¹ German South West Africa is usefully placed both in a larger history of European colonization, as well as studies of photography as a colonial apparatus and technology of picturing the scopic regime of the human as physiognomically European.¹³² While often dismissed because of the relatively short period of time in which Germany was a colonial power, the horrors perpetrated by Germany in South West Africa occurred in a broad landscape of colonial "extermination," mass murder and genocidal ideology proliferated not only in German colonies but also, for example, in British, Belgian, and Italian colonial projects, and certainly in the United States as a settler colony.

This chapter moves between sites of image production and circulation in the U.S., Germany, and South West Africa, in the volatile time during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Over the course of this chapter, I look at the ways in which emergent racial and colonial ideologies cohere in images—primarily quotidian images taken by German participants in the colonial project, but also police photography as well as popular advertising and novelty images that circulated in Germany. In making these connections, I close read archival images in conjunction with historiographic research,

¹³¹ Steinmetz and Hell, "The Visual Archive of Colonialism: Germany and Namibia." *Public Culture* 18, 1 (2006), 150.

¹³² "Scopic regime" as a term was introduced by Christian Metz in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975).

with a deep attention to the gaze and what shapes the ways we look, over time and across space. I connect these images to related archives—images made in the service of anthropology and racial science, but also a broader archive of contemporaneous colonial and atrocity photography, focusing primarily on lynching photographs in the United States. I consider what is particular to photographs in thinking about processes of racialization in colonial contexts; both the United States and German South West Africa represent sites of settler colonialism invested in relational and circulating ideologies, subjugated black labor forces, and Indigenous genocide. This is not to dismiss the particularities of each of these sites or to collapse anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racisms in the United States in particular, but to note their resonances and more so, the ways in which—just as “black” and “white” are constructions that have little bearing on the inextricably imbricated histories and lineages of people in the United States, Indigenous and Black histories since colonization and during and after chattel slavery overlap and weave together in ways that exceed categorization. Further, tracing these connections works to destabilize the conception of the United States as a nation apart from its history, that is not a settler colony by writ of its genocide of the Indigenous peoples on what many Native activists today call Turtle Island. I finally turn to images from the Third Reich, which show the ways in which images taken and ideologies formed in the colonial setting of German South West Africa shaped propaganda and policy in Nazi Germany.

The photographs that I look at here primarily come from the photographic collections of the Prussian Secret State Archive in Berlin and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. I have additionally accessed images

held in archives in Namibia and elsewhere through secondary sources—especially Jeremy Silvester and Jan-Bart Gewald's *Words Cannot Be Found. German Colonial Rule in Namibia: An Annotated Report of the 1918 Blue Book* as well as Wolfram Hartmann's *Hues Between Black and White: Historical Photography from Colonial Namibia 1860's to 1915*. Methodologically, while visiting these archives, I looked at hundreds of photographs that were collected under the search terms of *Deutsche-Südwestafrika* in Berlin, and “German South West Africa”, “Herero”, “Kaiser Wilhelm Institute” and even “skulls” at the USHMM. Beyond these search terms, I entered the archive uncertain of what I was looking for, but with an open question about the power and use of these images. In selecting which photographs to write about, I depended on a mix of historiographic information and gut feeling, trusting my own sense as a participant in the process of discovery and as an active maker of meaning in the images that I was reading.

Histories of German South West Africa are largely written by German and German-Namibian historians—even those histories which I take up here. By naming this I do not intend to over-burden researcher identity in the writing of history, but to note an absence in the field and also to think about the larger silences and elisions in German and U.S. understandings of their own settler colonial histories. Many of the histories of German South West Africa fail to contend with anti-blackness and settler colonial ideologies as part of the bedrock of Western modernity— thus, the Herero and Nama genocides are treated as an aberration rather than part and parcel to the project of colonialism. Searching for individual fault over structural intent, as historian Isabel V. Hull does for example, belies the central settler colonial project of *terra nullius*. The Germany military

and settlers were deeply invested in the dream that Indigenous Africans would either provide docile sources of cheap or free labor, or disappear altogether, providing Africa as the *Lebensraum* sought by the German people, bounded only by borders set in conference with other Europeans.¹³³ Hull, in the *Journal of Namibian Studies*, argues that while a genocide did effectively occur, racism was not at its root. Hull writes that the language of racism was not introduced until after a failed or sloppy military campaign led to the ad hoc mass death of masses of Herero women and children in particular; “Adducing racism at this juncture of his argument helped von Trotha over the dishonor caused by breaking a fundamental taboo. ‘Race war’ dressed up as purposive principle justified the mass killing of civilians which had actually occurred through the repeated use of conventional methods in a failed military campaign.”¹³⁴ Strangely, while calling von Trotha a “textbook example of a colonial racist” who “interpreted the conflict from the beginning as a ‘race war,’” Hull argues that “people for the most part actually died in the course of a conventional military campaign. It was the logic of military practice more than the logic of ideology that killed them.”¹³⁵ She cites the Boer War as a good example of the usual excess of European military action of the period, and notes a general and particularly German failure to draw lines between civilians and non-civilians at the time. To an extent, Hull’s argument evokes the justifications of the Second Reich and the colonial

¹³³ The German settler colonial concept of *Lebensraum*, or living space, was first described and applied to Second Reich colonial projects; “the practice of *Lebensraum* theory [was] part of a lived collective German experience” (Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz,” 433).

¹³⁴ Hull, “The military campaign in German Southwest Africa,” 14.

¹³⁵ Hull, “The military campaign in German Southwest Africa,” 16.

government itself; “During Reichstag debates Colonial Minister Dernburg spoke euphemistically of how the prisoners ‘died off [*eingehen*],’ on Shark Island, thus suggesting that a natural selection process...was responsible for the deaths, rather than German policies.” Hull’s dismissal of ideological racism presents a picture of a single-minded, victory and honor driven German military, which slipped and fell into committing genocide against an enemy that just happened to be African and to be Black.¹³⁶

German South West Africa and Nazi Germany

A number of scholars have worked to connect the nascent ideology and genocidal practices of German South West Africa under the Second Reich to the Nazi ideology and systematic genocide of the Third Reich, including Jürgen Zimmerer, Benjamin Madley, Sven Lindquist, and Enzo Traverso.¹³⁷ Madley, in his argument that German South West Africa was the “incubator” for later Nazi ideology and practices, uses the language of “borrowing.” While language and practices such as the word *Endlösung* (Final Solution) and anti-miscegenation laws were first present in German South West Africa, they were not merely a practice round for the Holocaust. Madley also fails to contend with anti-blackness and the experiences of Black victims of the Nazi regime—the history of African colonization and German anti-blackness did not disappear after the Herero

¹³⁶ Hull, “The military campaign in German Southwest Africa,” 2008.

¹³⁷ Jürgen Zimmerer, *From Windhoek to Auschwitz: On the Relationship Between Colonialism and the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 2018); Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz,” 2005. Sven Lindquist, Joan Tate, trans. “*Exterminate All the Brutes*”: *One Man’s Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide* (New York: The New Press, 1997); Enzo Traverso, Janet Lloyd, trans. *Origins of Nazi Violence* (New York 2003).

genocide, and was not replaced by anti-Semitism and a focus on Slavic land for the project of *Lebensraum*. Madley concludes that “German South West Africa should no longer be overlooked as an important antecedent to Nazi colonialism and genocide.”¹³⁸ However, Madley’s failure to contend with postcolonial critique and anti-blackness as distinct within Nazi racial ideologies, limits his historical analysis to surface reading. A deeper interrogation of the ideological travels not only from the Second to the Third Reich is certainly called for, in addition to attention to the ways in which the events in the German colonies shaped German identity in the metropole. This includes the assimilated Jewish bourgeoisie, who served in the German military and invested in a number of ways in German colonial ventures. This elision in Madley’s work is similar to the tendency Weheliye identifies and critiques in Agamben—that the “colonial prehistory of concentration camps” only becomes leveraged in order to “argue that the camps’ true telic significance becomes apparent when they are annexed into the legal state of exception during the Third Reich...Nevertheless, the effects of colonial eugenics carried out in South West Africa during Germany’s colonial period were not confined to this locale, but, more crucially, helped establish German bourgeois society during colonialism and after.”¹³⁹ The visual culture that came out of the colony and circulated to the metropole was key in cohering this idea of the German as imperial master, of national pride based on conquest and colonial opportunity. Scholars such as Steinmetz and Madley point out that “South West Africa’s first German governor, Heinrich Goering, was the father of the

¹³⁸ Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz,” 458.

¹³⁹ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 36.

Nazi Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering” and that “the majority of German Namibians were enthusiastic Nazis during the 1930s and 1940s,”¹⁴⁰ yet seem to operate on a conception of generations as separate iterations rather than overlapping and ceaseless. Key ideologues of Nazi Germany, most notably Eugen Fischer, did in fact directly develop the racial beliefs that they would circulate within Germany while in the colony. A visual language links colonial history to later Nazi expansionist and racial policies—including anti-blackness in eugenicist work as well as the camp system—that carried from South West Africa to Germany, in conversation with racial science and popular racist imagery being produced especially in the United States. While scholars have tracked the routes from Shark Island to Auschwitz, the differential treatments in collective memory practice and policy alike represent a deep failure to contend with the ongoing effects of the history of German South West Africa in Namibia, Germany, and the Herero and Nama diaspora.

The idea that there is a separation between German colonialism in Africa under the Second Reich and German colonialism in Europe and attempts at colonialism in Africa under the Third Reich is dependent upon a view of history as episodic, that generations and regimes represent a palimpsest of forgetting. Against this sense of historical forgetting, my project develops a visual genealogy of German settler colonialism in

¹⁴⁰ Steinmetz, “The Visual Archive of Colonialism,” 173.

South West Africa, operating to recover the traces in that “field of...documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.”¹⁴¹

Colonial Atrocity Photographs

The photographs of atrocities that exist in the archive from German South West Africa were not taken by those astounded at colonial violence or attempting to gain the sympathy of Europe against the brutality of colonial rule. An example of these are the contemporaneous photographs taken by British missionary Alice Seeley Harris in the Belgian Congo starting in 1904, Harris’s subjects included the hacked off limbs of the victims of Leopold’s rubber trade. Harris took her images with a Kodak brownie camera, the first commercially available portable camera and the same one with which the German lieutenant Düring took photographs of the Shark Island camp. I do not contend here with white womanhood in relation to missionaries and colonial paternalism, but I note the presence of these dynamics even while using Harris as a sympathetic foil. Rather, the images from German South West Africa that I have encountered were taken as trophies and/or within the early 20th century fervor of documentation. Colonial narratives, in the mode of recounting German exploits in the colony, were frequently illustrated with photographs of brutality. For example, “In 1905, Conrad Rust’s memoir [*Krieg und Frieden im Hererolande*] featured a photo of three Herero men stripped naked and hanging dead from the branches of a tree.”¹⁴² Captain Maximilian Bayer, in a 1909 book

¹⁴¹ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Ed. D.F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 76.

¹⁴² Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz,” 437.

titled *The War in South West Africa (Der Krieg in Südwestafrika)* “displayed naked and partially clad men, women and children with the caption ‘Captive Hereros.’ Another photograph featured a prisoner, surrounded by German troops, held on a leash.”¹⁴³ Erich von Salzmann, in *Im Kampfe gegen die Herero* in 1912, “presented a two-page photographic spread depicting naked, emaciated female African prisoners,” and a “photo of a ‘mass grave at Owikokorero.’”¹⁴⁴

Photographs that were used to disparage Germany for its behavior in the colonies had the same origins as those circulated as trophies. The photographs in the 1918 Blue Book—a British report on the atrocities of German rule in South West Africa—though not captioned with their sources, are largely taken by German colonial officers or settlers. The Blue Book both exists as invaluable document of colonial atrocity and a kind of elision in place—both written and then quickly hidden away after the capture of South West Africa by South Africa, under British command, in World War I, “destroyed [in 1926] with the aim of achieving reconciliation within the white settler community.”¹⁴⁵ The book was recovered and published in 2003 as *Words Cannot be Found: German colonial rule in Namibia—An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book*.

Perpetrators have long captured their own violence against dehumanized Others, a visual

¹⁴³ Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz,” 436.

¹⁴⁴ Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz,” 436.

¹⁴⁵ Jeremy Silvester and Jan-Bart Gewald, *Words Cannot be Found: German colonial rule in Namibia—An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book* (Boston: Brill, 2003), xiv. This has particular resonances with the exposure of Britain’s own colonial archives and colonial atrocities—though a later example, the court case which revealed evidence of the Mau Mau encampment in Kenya comes to mind.

calculus that extends beyond the case of German South West Africa. As I will demonstrate later in the chapter, American lynching photos are a key contemporary point of comparison in order to contend with the transnational logic of Black suffering and death captured and circulated as spectacle. The atrocity photograph in this mode performs multiple functions—moving between contexts as trophy and appeal, between the economy of perpetrator pleasure and the calculations of humanitarian demand.¹⁴⁶ The images taken by Harris are not necessarily less gruesome, if this is a calculus that one can entertain, than those taken by professional photographers at lynchings in the United States, or the German military officer in South West Africa, yet one set of photographs operates, in post-memorial viewing, as chilling evidence of the dehumanization of a group of people by the photographer, and the other is a lauded appeal for the humanity of a group of people, to make colonial rulers tremble. Representation and identification in the space of the atrocity photograph is further complicated by positionality. For spectators who might be victims, the image might contain a reminder that they are still living, but also the possibility of death, indeed, the threat of death as a function of control, or the status of having been always already marked for death.¹⁴⁷ Ideology and positionality belie the indexicality of the image without caption.

Regular Everyday Colonial Photography

¹⁴⁶ The desire for images to act as evidence of or in the face of atrocity is captured in Ulrich Baer's *Images In Spite of All*, as well as Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁷ On the quality of "still living," see Leigh Raiford, "Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory," *History and Theory* 48, 4 (2009). 121.

In looking at colonial albums from German South West Africa, pictures which appear to show nothing at all are easily read as ominous, marked by the genocidal history of the colony. I look at individual photographs as texts in addition to reading the album as an artifact, and nevertheless note the difficulty of reading the album as an assemblage of photographs. Often, photographs seems to be preserved in archives in a more haphazard manner than documents, with less metadata. In encountering the album, questions arise; who is its creator? Has it been assembled as a mode of preservation, randomly, or constructed purposefully? In what ways has the album been amended since its original assembling? In previous studies of German colonialism, images are often presented as illustrations of historical fact rather than texts in their own right. In this context they are removed from their original situatedness; the image of the exceptional violence, such as the lynching, exists in the same album as the coquettish portraits of German soldiers having a naked swim party. Colonial albums present an archival challenge, sometimes their provenance is not documented, it's unclear who assembled them and for what purpose. Among the albums that I looked at in the Prussian Secret State Archives in Berlin, examples included what appeared to be a pre-assembled purchased souvenir album, and the more personal snapshot album.

These albums likely belonged to members of the *Schutztruppe*, the volunteer colonial forces—because they reside in German archives and because of the proliferation of images of men in uniform and prisoner of war photographs.¹⁴⁸ It is difficult to place the

¹⁴⁸ In continuing to work on this project, I hope to be able to visit archives in Namibia, where many more albums are housed.



On the Left: Page 35 of the photo album GStA PK, IX. HA, SPAE, IV Nr. 41 Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Enthält u.a.: Otawi; Outjo; Tsu-meb-Mine; Rietfontein; Grootfontein; Namutoni; Waterberg, ca. 1904 – 1909. Prussian Secret State Archives, Berlin, 2015. On the Right: The cover of the album.

specific dates of many of the images beyond a range of years, in some cases, the full span of Germany's brief colonial reign. Men and women in German-style clothing who are African Christians, who might be Ovambo or San, are in the same albums as images of Herero and other groups of Indigenous people in traditional dress or whatever has been afforded to them—sometimes burlap sacks—in the carceral archipelago of the camp system and the servitude that preceded and followed.¹⁴⁹ Images of Indigenous Africans are often located on the same page or in the same image as hunting trophies. In some cases, images of Herero men in chains or hanged were in the same albums as wildlife photographs or hunting photographs. These co-exist in beautifully bound photo albums—in a gray cloth-bound, arts and crafts style album with gold metallic and floral design details from circa 1904 –1909, photographs include images of naked German officers

¹⁴⁹ The concept of the carceral archipelago appears originally in Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Random House, 1975).



A colonial education in process; photograph from page 27 of of the photo album GStA PK, IX. HA, SPAE, IV Nr. 41 Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Enthält u.a.: Otawi; Outjo; Tsu-meb-Mine; Rietfontein; Grootfontein; Namutoni; Waterberg, ca. 1904 – 1909. Prussian Secret State Archives, Berlin, 2015.

relaxing, one posing coquettishly in just his military cap beside a swimming hole. These images are not visibly captioned. Perhaps the caption has faded or is written on the back of the photograph, but to the researcher's eye in the archive, there is no textual index.

The 1904 –1909 album includes a photograph of an African man with a chain around his neck in front of a whitewashed brick wall. The links of the chain are looped over his arm, his hands are clasped but do not appear to be bound, he holds his hat in his hands. A German officer stands next to him in uniform, hands on his hips, looking at the camera. The chained man looks at the ground. On the left side of the photograph, a

corrugated metal door stands open. A Black boy, marked as *Bambusen* (a position of servitude entered into by African male youth, enabled by genocide) by his mix of military and non-military dress, leans slightly against the door, one hand to his chin as if in contemplation, looking at the scene. Details such as these mark the photographs as different from those biometric images collected in police albums, as written about by Lorena Rizzo. In France in the 1880s, Alphonse Bertillon, as the director of the Identification Bureau of the Paris Prefecture of Police “invented a classifying scheme” in order to identify criminals, to build an archive and figure out how to pull individuals from the aggregate. The colonial album is marked by histories of classification but also exceeds them, following Lorena Rizzo’s argument that police photographs from German South West Africa, taken around 1911, were “entrenched with historically contingent processes of colonial state constitution, socioeconomic and racial stratification, and the institutional integration of photography as a medium and technology into colonial policing.”¹⁵⁰ The expansion of the frame to include spectators, other witnesses, an attention to composition over classification while nevertheless trafficking in the aesthetic languages of these classificatory images, mark images such as the one from the 1904-1909 album as a different but related genre of colonial photography. The same album includes several pictures, in portrait style, of European dog breeds as well as hunting photographs. These include a leopard tied by its feet and hanging from a wooden

¹⁵⁰ Lorena Rizzo, “Shades of Empire: Police Photography in German South-West Africa.” *Visual Anthropology* 26 (2013), 328. In 1912, the “central government in Windhoek issues a directive” regarding new and specific standards for arrest, which included “fingerprinting...and *Bertillonage*, i.e., a standardized anthropometric description combined with a portrait photograph and a...spoken portrait” (336).

pole, carried by two men; a pile of antelope surrounded by German officers; two officers flanking five dead wildebeest strung from a tree; and on the same page, a photograph of Herero men lined up for the camera.¹⁵¹

There is overwhelming evidence “that the images [taken by colonists] produced a dynamic rhetoric of racial and ethnographic difference between white Europeans and Americans and non-European ‘races’ and ‘places.’ The photographers expressed distinctions between colonized peoples and themselves ambivalently; as agents of colonial culture, they most often envisioned their subjects as objects of both racial inferiority and fascination.”¹⁵² This logic spans both sites and genres of photography in the broader (imagined) archive of colonial image making. I note this same project of production in the images that I look at here, which exceeds the grid of legibility produced in universities and photo studios, and seeps into images which portray the everyday life of German settlers in South West Africa as an exotic land.

The colony of German South West Africa, as a site of visual production, only produced colonial images—this is to say, the photographers were German and later British soldiers, administrators, settlers, missionaries; scholar Joachim Zeller writes, “Questions about African self-representation during the war simply do not arise.”¹⁵³ This

¹⁵¹ The proximity of African men and animals, especially dead trophy animals, in these images, is usefully read through the lens of work on blackness and animalization, the intersections of critical race theory and animal studies. See Che Gossett, “Blackness, Animality, and the Unsovereign,” Verso Blog (Sept. 8, 2015). Retrieved from <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2228-che-gossett-blackness-animality-and-the-unsovereign>

¹⁵² Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson, *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

¹⁵³ Zeller, *Genocide in German South-West Africa*, 317.

is read both as an indictment about the attention of scholars and a dearth in the archive.

The camera as a weapon of colonization remained in the hands of the colonizer, the German and the African alike were captured only by the settler's gaze. Sander Gilman further "described German cultural and literary appropriations of blackness as 'independent of any external reality'—in other words, as 'blackness without blacks.'"¹⁵⁴

While historians and cultural studies scholars such as Tina Campt and Fatima El-Tayeb have worked to recover the experiences of Afro-Germans, and work has been done by Namibian historians and institutions to collect oral histories and describe the experiences of those directly affected by German colonization, the visual archive remains thoroughly colonized. This also leaves open the question: At what point and to what extent did the Herero see images of their own murders, and what effect did these images have?¹⁵⁵

Certainly these images have been seen and are used as evidence by Herero making claims in the present moment. Many of the photographs that I look at here, to an extent, have unknown authorship (beyond German settlers and colonial troops) and unknown intent—however, by placing them in conversations with contemporaneous photographs and ideological projects, and within the violence of the German settler colonial project, the effects of the images as a discourse cohere. Looking at historical images through the lens of visual and critical media studies not only exposes the existence of violence, but also

¹⁵⁴ David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2011), 19; Sander Gilman, *On Blackness Without Blacks: Essays on the Image of the Black in Germany* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982).

¹⁵⁵ I hope to engage these questions to a greater extent in a future iteration of this project.

makes clear the foundational role of the visual in conceptualizing the human, and categorizing who is marked as not human.

The Photographer's Shadow: Gender & Race



Photo #56 captioned “[obscured word] Schönheit D.S.W.A.”
Prussian Secret State Archives, Berlin, 2015.

In one box of photographs at the State Archives in Berlin, I find first an image of a caged leopard and then an image of a Herero woman.¹⁵⁶ In both photographs, the leopard and the woman were marked by the shadow of a German photographer—perhaps but not certainly the same man (identifiable by the outline of the his military cap) cast over his subject. In thinking through the looped gaze as a way of considering authorship in the

gaze, the shadow of the white European male photographer cast over the Black African woman subject as he shoots a photograph of her appears almost as its representative opposite. The gaze of the photographer becomes the shadow cast over the subject. The

¹⁵⁶ Prussian Secret State Archives, IX. HA Bilder SPAE VII Nr. 2157, Photo 14, Photo 56.

proximity of this shadow gaze cast over leopard and woman evokes the approximation of blackness and animality, in the context of Africa as exotic.¹⁵⁷ Further, the Herero woman in the photograph is subject to the logic of the perpetrator's camera; whether or not she is in imminent danger, she is trapped within the historical narrative of German colonial genocide.¹⁵⁸

Photographs of Herero and other Indigenous women, and arguably also photographs of Herero youth regardless of gender, are framed through the gaze of colonial desire. In writing about photographs taken in the twentieth century by Malian photographer Seydou Keïta, Teju Cole writes, "The difference between the images taken by colonists or white adventurers and those made for the sitter's personal use is especially striking in photographs of women. In the former, women are being looked at against their will, captive to a controlling gaze. In the latter, they look at themselves as in a mirror, an activity that always involves seriousness, levity, and an element of wonder."¹⁵⁹ Many of the images of women in the colonial albums are with German officers— in one, a blonde bearded German man is surrounded by four smiling African women in long skirts,

¹⁵⁷ See Che Gossett, "Blackness, Animality, and the Unsovereign," *Verso Blog* (September 8, 2015).

¹⁵⁸ In my work on selfies, I attend to the disruption of the perpetrator gaze; in Holocaust photography, this is defined by photographs of *Einsatzgruppen* firing squads; in one photograph on display at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, "the barrel of the executioner's rifle protrudes into the shot...the gun and the camera occupy the same space in the landscape. As Marianne Hirsch points out in *The Generation of Postmemory*, the spectator unwittingly occupies the 'Nazi gaze,' in which 'the photographer, the perpetrator, and the spectator share the same space of looking at the victim' and the victims 'are shot before they are *shot*.'"

¹⁵⁹ Teju Cole, *Known and Strange Things* (New York: Random House, 2016), 129.



From the album GStA PK, IX. HA, SPAE, IV Nr. 41 Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Enthält u.a.: Otawi; Outjo; Tsu-meb-Mine; Rietfontein; Grootfontein; Namutoni; Waterberg, ca. 1904 – 1909. Prussian Secret State Archives, Berlin, 2015.

aprons, and head wraps. A small African child, mostly naked, looks up at the man. The man's hand is in his pocket. The women are close enough to him to touch, even overlap in the image. In another set of two photographs side by side, a German man in uniform and an African woman in a head wrap and long white dress stand near each other. They look like shy lovers in the empty landscape, both facing the camera and smiling, but with a cautious distance between them. Her arms wrap around her own waist, his hands are on his hips. The next photograph is only of the woman, she stands sideways but faces the camera, smiling but with one hand over her mouth, evoking shyness. Two small African girls, also in light colored dresses and head wraps, play in the dirt behind her. Camppt writes of ethnographic photos in a South African archive, "viewed in their historical and



“A German man and a local woman on his (?) bed in the troops’ quarters. (Basler Afrika Bibliographien, Photoarchiv, Album unbekannt, 1909-1915).” Published in Wolfram Hartmann, *Hues between black and white: historical photography from colonial Namibia 1860s to 1915* (Windhoek: Out of Africa Publishers, 2004)

institutional context, they witness a transliteration of beauty into racialized cultural categories.”¹⁶⁰ The contestations of these transliterations are on display in these images that simultaneously evoke intimacy and violence in the context of anxiety about miscegenation. One photograph, taken between 1909 and 1915—shows a German man and an African woman together on a bed in the troop’s quarters.¹⁶¹ He lies flat, she is

¹⁶⁰ Campt, *Listening to Images*, 50.

¹⁶¹ Wolfram Hartmann, *Hues between black and white: historical photography from colonial Namibia 1860s to 1915* (Windhoek: Out of Africa Publishers, 2004), 79.

raised up on an arm, they both look at the camera. The corrugated metal walls around the bed are home to two large illustrations of the faces of white European women.¹⁶² They smile from the walls, the absent presence of white femininity. The juxtaposition of the Black woman on the white German soldier's bed and the painted white woman on his wall presents multiple contestations around race, gender, and sexuality. Miscegenation was illegal under a colonial law passed in 1905 in German South West Africa (*Deutsch Südwestafrika* DSWA), and similar laws were introduced, though not passed until November 26, 1935, within Germany.¹⁶³ There were comparatively few German women in the colony,¹⁶⁴ although some missionaries came with their families, and a campaign was sponsored by the German Colonial Society to transport white German women to

¹⁶² Although I do not contend with colonial advertising in this project— as Ciarlo contends, “Neither the growth of German colonial sciences, such as anthropology, after the 1870s nor the beginning of direct German colonial rule in 1884 had much impact on commercial articulations within the German metropole. The construction of a racial—and ultimately racist—imaginary of colonialism in Germany...flowed not from the established ideologies of race science or colonialism but rather from the new connections of commerce.” Ciarlo tracks, for example, the appearance of the visual markers of minstrelsy, originating in a U.S. context. However, the postcard or advertising trade card as colonial fetish object appears in this project— the distribution of colonial images from Namibia as commodity items, the pinning of a German advertisement to the barracks wall in a photograph.

¹⁶³ Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz,” 438.

¹⁶⁴ See Hans Grimm's *Südafrikanische Novellen* and scholarship on his work, including —Sara Lennox, “Race, Gender, and Sexuality in German Southwest Africa: Hans Grimm's *Südafrikanische Novellen*,” *Germany's Colonial Pasts*. Eds. Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz and Lora Wildenthal (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2005), 63-75; Maureen O. Gallagher, “Fragile Whiteness: Women and Girls in German Colonial Fiction, 1900-1913,” *Women in German Yearbook* 32 (2016), 111-137; Gunther Packendorf, “Of colonizers and colonized: Hans Grimm on German South West Africa,” *Social Dynamics* 12:2 (1986). 39-47.

South West Africa in response to concerns about miscegenation.¹⁶⁵ The Society “allocated money for selected unmarried women’s free ship passage to German South West Africa, where they would work as domestic servants for colonist families until bachelor colonists married them. Women in Germany who were already engaged or married to German colonists were also to receive free passage...By 1907 it had given free passage to 111 unmarried German women.” Yet, Lorna Wildenthal quotes the colonialist economist Moritz J. Bonn as saying, “when discussing the high numbers of mixed-descent children born outside marriage, ‘the main cause of bastardization in Africa was not the absence of white women but the presence of black ones.’”¹⁶⁶ As suggested by the image of the German soldier and the African woman in the white dress, and photographs collected, for example, by Hartmann in *Hues Between Black and White*, transracial romantic intimacy and sexual exchange¹⁶⁷—via coercion, transaction, or desire—not only happened but was captured casually in photographs. The images presented by Hartmann show, for example, African women arm-in-arm with or on the laps of German men, and family portraits of married German men and African women with their children—before or in defiance of the 1905 ban. Most of the women pictured in the earlier colonial albums are African

¹⁶⁵ Richard V. Pierard, “The Transportation of White Women to German South West Africa, 1898-1914,” *Race & Class* 13 (1971).

¹⁶⁶ Lorna Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press. 2001), 91.

¹⁶⁷ Intimacy in terms of proximity, defined not as love but familiarity, was a given— see for example the close bonds between German soldiers and *Bambusen*.

(more images of white women begin to appear the later the date of the photograph).¹⁶⁸

The scarcity of white women in the colony makes the logic of white femininity more jarring in German propaganda, for example, an illustration which showed two Herero men, in the dress of farmworkers and brandishing a rifle and club, assaulting a German woman who cowers dramatically, one hand over her brow and the other raised towards the men in a gesture of pleading and ineffectual self-defense, as a shadowy mass of threatening Hereros approach in the distance.¹⁶⁹ In contrast, many Germans believed that Herero women in particular “often mutilated and ‘roasted’ flesh from the corpses of German soldiers”—in a letter to a German language newspaper, a man named Karl Brehmer wrote, ““one will hardly wonder that the soldiers cannot be constrained from killing such bestial creatures.””¹⁷⁰ This contrast will arise in the Cramer case documented in the *Blue Book Report On The Natives Of South West Africa And Their Treatment By Germany*, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Racial Ideology, Miscegenation and Sexual Violence

Anthropologist Eugen Fischer, chair of the anatomy department at Freiburg University beginning in 1918 and director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics in Berlin from 1927 to 1942, traveled to

¹⁶⁸ For more on the roles of white German women in the colonial context, see Daniel Joseph Walther, *Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002).

¹⁶⁹ Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, *Genocide in German South-West Africa: the Colonial War (1904-1908) in Namibia and its aftermath* (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2008), 186.

¹⁷⁰ Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, xxiv.

German South West Africa in 1908 and conducted a study published in 1913 as *Die Rehobother Bastards*. This study, which looked at the mixed race children of Germans and Africans—largely German men and Khoisan, and later Herero women, was seminal in the burgeoning field of eugenics—not only in Germany but in the United States and Britain. *Die Rehobother Bastards* drew on photography as a method of visual “evidence” of racial degeneration through miscegenation. The study, which included 164 “Bastard”¹⁷¹ men and women, included photographs of many of these individuals, taken by Fischer himself.

While consenting miscegenation was disciplined and policed in German South West Africa as well as in Germany, the *Blue Book* notes cases of sexual violence against Herero women. Endemic sexual violence is also heavily a part of the Herero oral history and collective memory of the genocide and the broader colonial period. In the *Blue Book*, eyewitness Johannes Kruger, a mixed race Khoisan and German man serving with the colonial forces, stated, “often, and especially at Waterberg, the young Herero women and girls were violated by the German soldiers before being killed.”¹⁷² The British authors of the *Blue Book* continue: “Evidence of violation of women and girls is overwhelming, but so full of filthy and atrocious details as to render publication undesirable.”¹⁷³ In the archive of visual evidence of the genocide, images of the Shark Island camp are rare.

¹⁷¹ Kössler writes, “The German term of ‘Bastard,’ as its English equivalent, carries a derogatory meaning that is absent from the ethnonym of *Baster* which is employed by the community themselves.” Reinhart Kössler, *Namibia and Germany: Negotiating the Past* (Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2015), 276.

¹⁷² Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, 117.

¹⁷³ Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, 121.

However, a German lieutenant named Düring brought a roll box camera to Shark Island in 1906 while stationed in South West Africa. Out of the images taken by Düring—the Sam Cohen Library of the Swakopmund Scientific Society in Swakopmund, Namibia holds several albums with photographs by Düring—“Only five of Düring’s photographs of Shark Island are known to have survived.”¹⁷⁴ In one of these photographs, a man identified as Dr. Gühne is posed, in an echo of the (superficially) more light-hearted album images, in military uniform and at the center of a group of Herero women.¹⁷⁵ The photograph echoes other photographs of German men in uniform taken with African women, however, in the Shark Island camp photograph, the women are visually readable as in physical and emotional distress. In all of the images of Herero women with German men, questions of consent and the gaze are at play, but particularly in this carceral image. Olusoga and Erichsen write, regarding Shark Island, “as in all the camps, rape was common on Shark Island, and the sexual exploitation of Herero women was not merely accepted—it was actively celebrated. Lieutenant Düring’s photograph was one of many pornographic and semi-pornographic images taken of African women by German soldiers during the war. Some were made into postcards and sent to Germany or otherwise distributed in colony. One officer, Georg Auer, took several pictures of naked African women which he later published along with his diary.”¹⁷⁶ Of the five photographs of Shark Island taken by Lieutenant Düring to survive, one pictures “a naked, adolescent

¹⁷⁴ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 212.

¹⁷⁵ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 213.

¹⁷⁶ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 213.

Herero girl standing in a tiny shack...Squeezed between the girl's thighs, in an unconscious effort to retain some semblance of dignity, are the torn remains of her dress that had been ripped from her body."¹⁷⁷ The logic of dignity and the unconscious is read into the photograph by Olusoga and Erichsen, but the nakedness of women in all of the surviving photographs from Shark Island are marked by a pornotropic logic of sexuality and desire within bare life, political domination, and genocidal violence.¹⁷⁸

In the publication "Inequality in Namibia," published by a development nonprofit in 2011, the authors note "One under-researched area is the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war during colonial conquest. There are, however, accounts of Herero women who were captured and removed from the families to become sex slaves to German soldiers. Some were moved from their family homes and settled in other areas, for example, amongst the Namas in the South. The descendants of these women are still alive and relate some of this undocumented history."¹⁷⁹ A 1998 *New York Times* article—written before Germany apologized for what at the time was described as a massacre—noted the role of sexual slavery not only as a historical violence but in defining the present-day population of Namibia. The article quotes one Herero leader who noted the similarities between the German case and the sexual enslavement of Korean women by the Japanese during World War II. "I thought, hey, that's my grandmother -- a comfort

¹⁷⁷ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 213.

¹⁷⁸ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

¹⁷⁹ Herbert Jauch, Lucy Edwards & Braam Cupido, "Inequality in Namibia," *Tearing Us Apart: Inequalities in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2011), 185.

woman," he said. "And I thought, if the Japanese could pay for that, the Germans could."''¹⁸⁰

Women had been photographed in the camps during the genocidal encampment of 1904-1907, but seemed to fade from sight in the aftermath, while the bodies of men became more legible within a system of policing that operated on and around the economics of forced hard labor.¹⁸¹ Lorena Rizzo, in her study of police photography in German South West Africa, examines an album created between 1911 and 1915 by the colonial administration as a document of policing in the tradition of Bertillon or Galton's criminal types.¹⁸² The criminalization of women appears, in Rizzo's examination, to be around "female transgressions of morality that became legally epitomized as prostitution."¹⁸³ The single mugshot of the woman in the album Rizzo examines could be read further through the 1905 colonial law, or the possibly contemporaneous publishing of Fischer's study on miscegenation. In the photo, she stands sideways and then forward, her hands placed on top of her apron, clearly visible in the nascent biometric stylistic of the time.¹⁸⁴ While Rizzo argues that the "colonial visual *tautology*...discursively

¹⁸⁰ Donald G. McNeil Jr. "Its Past on Its Sleeve, Tribe Seeks Bonn's Apology," *The New York Times* (1998). Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/31/world/its-past-on-its-sleeve-tribe-seeks-bonn-s-apology.html>-- an interesting response was written by Margaret D. Stetz who noted that Japan had not, as of 1998, apologized officially. <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/02/opinion/l-comfort-women-s-due-218014.html>

¹⁸¹ Rizzo, "Shades of Empire," 2013.

¹⁸² Alphonse Bertillon. *Signaletic Instructions Including the Theory and Practice of Anthropometrical Identification* (New York: The Werner Company, 1885).

¹⁸³ Rizzo, "Shades of Empire," 344.

¹⁸⁴ See Camp's work on hands in police photography in *Listening to Images*, 2017.

prioritized race against gender,” reading this album with others acts as a reminder that gender and race are inextricable in reading—in this analysis, the single photograph of the woman in the police album takes on greater significance.

The Hanged Man and Lynching Photography

In the second to last album I looked at in the State Archives, there is a photo of a Black man being hanged by white German men in uniform. The album begins in 1905, and was purchased from Kodak in Berlin.¹⁸⁵ This was the first photograph of a hanging that I came across while conducting my own archival research, that I “discovered,” that I was, in a way, unprepared for. In attending to the historical context and the possibility of close reading this photograph, I had to contend with the nagging presence of myself as an embodied spectator as well as a researcher. Viscerality, in this context, operates as a methodology of witnessing; not only experiencing the wave of feeling associated with this evidence of colonial and racialized murder but also the relationship between “embodiment and documentation”¹⁸⁶ and the “fleshiness, or experiential dimension, of the text.”¹⁸⁷ What is the desire that led to this documentation and preservation in the archive? Is the perpetrator’s photograph driven by a perverse or pornographic desire? What shapes my viewing of this image, and through the image as conduit, the interaction between my embodied self and the lively and dead bodies in the photograph?

¹⁸⁵ Prussian Secret State Archive, GStA PK, IX. HA, SPAE, IV Nr. 36.

¹⁸⁶ Tortorici, “Visceral Archives,” 408.

¹⁸⁷ Musser, *Sensational Flesh*, 23.

The original caption, written in white ink, indicates that the scene is of an execution for the murder of farmers (*Strafgericht an einem Farmermörder*).¹⁸⁸ The use of *Strafgericht*, which translates to punishment but is often used to describe criminal courts, suggests legitimacy of the killing, against the unequivocal *mörder*—murder. The gallows, a large, sturdy structure, appear a permanent or semi-permanent fixture in the landscape. The photograph is taken from some distance away, the desolate and rocky ground rises up in the foreground and the wooden gallows fills the image, although the camera is angled to show two German men observing. One, heavily mustached and wearing a suit, bowtie and hat, stands with his hands folded behind his back. The other, in a heavy coat and slacks and wearing a cap, holds a mug and appears to be mid-conversation or laugh. Two more white men in pants and shirtsleeves, one almost entirely obscured behind the construction of the gallows, appear to be working. A dog saunters through the frame. A German officer in uniform, his tall leather boots reflecting the light, stands below the body of the hanged man, one hand on his feet and the other on his torso, as if to steady the body for the photograph, as if being directed by the photographer. He does not look at the camera—his face is turned slightly away, his head inclined towards the hanged man's leg, his cap almost touching the body. I read this figure as concentrating on the task of holding the body still—I am reminded of the 1910 lynching photograph taken by Mississippian O.N. Pruitt, in which a white man in a hat kneels before the bodies of two hanged men to hold them steady, his face turned away from the camera.¹⁸⁹ This macabre

¹⁸⁸ Thank you to Nil Uzun for helping me decipher 20th century cursive handwriting.

¹⁸⁹ Raiford, "Lynching, Visuality, and the Un/Making of Blackness," 29.

labor places the German officer in the photograph but not of the photograph, he is both a perpetrator caught in the act by another perpetrator and a prop, so that the body will not blur in the image, but will be reproduced faithfully. When I first encountered this image and in subsequent readings, my eye has always been drawn elsewhere; I have been



The witnesses who look away. From Album 37 (1906). Prussian Secret State Archives, Berlin, 2015.

unable to focus my gaze at the center of the composition, to look closely at the body of the lynched Black man. I have looked at hundreds of these photographs, from the archive of lynchings in the United States. The

horrors accumulate and in the

need to look away, the lynching

victims risks becoming a universal and universally Black victim, against the individuality and specificity of each death. Who was this hanged man, lynched for the murder of German farmers? Did he do it? Does it matter?

The distance of the photographer and the contrast in the image obscures the victim's features so that his face appears in silhouette almost flattened to a paper cut-out portrait. I read the figure as young, he is a young Black man in the worn European-style shirt and slacks of a laborer. His hands are tied behind his back and his feet are bare. Perhaps they are also bound. His body is covered but the hands of the German officer, steadying his corpse for the benefit of the German photographer's camera, touch his bare foot, his bound and exposed hands. He hangs from the gallows by what looks too thin to

be twisted rope—the use of wire would be consistent with the practices documented in the *Blue Book*.

Ida B. Wells in the 1900 essay “Lynch Law in America,” wrote that “the sentiment of the country has been appealed to, in describing the isolated condition of white families in thickly populated negro districts; and the charge is made that these homes are in as great danger as if they were surrounded by wild beasts.” Wells’ words had transnational circulation, as did the notoriety of lynching in America. Wells’ connections between the logic of protecting white womanhood and the white settler family, and the association of Black populations with wild beasts, are indicative of an anti-black settler colonial logic that proliferated across sites of Western colonial expansion. The epidemic of lynching in the United States resulted in the murders of “at least 3,220 African American men, women, and children between 1882 and 1930, and nearly 5,000 of all races and ethnicities until 1968, primarily in the South [where] photography emerged as integral to the lynching spectacle.”¹⁹⁰ Photography was fundamental to lynching as publicized mass death that was meant to function as a mode of necro and biopolitical control.¹⁹¹ Insomuch as mass killing operated to subjugate, in addition to decimate, dysgenic populations, the spectacle of the lynching—both in the United States and South West Africa, was for the satisfaction of the perpetrator but also and perhaps more so for the education of the survivors. In the 1905 photograph of the hanged man, there is no indication that the image was reproduced, but it was nevertheless public.

¹⁹⁰ Raiford, “Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory,” 115.

¹⁹¹ Achille Mbembe, Libby Meintjes trans. “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15,1 (2003). 11-40.

A European transport driver during the Herero genocide in South West Africa testified in the *Blue Book* that “the hanging of natives was a common occurrence...No trial or court was necessary. Many were hanged merely on suspicion...The Germans did not worry about rope. They used ordinary fencing wire, and the unfortunate native was hoisted up by the neck and allowed to die of slow strangulation. This was all done in public, and the bodies were always allowed to hang for a day or so as an example to the other natives.”¹⁹² The hanged black body, in public space and circulated in reproduced image, operated as a warning and a conditioning, which tore apart communities and family structures, noting here Spillers’ *ungendering* as a mode which destroys generations, the claim of the blood.¹⁹³ In South West Africa, as demonstrated by the photographs of *Bambusen*, which I look at more extensively later in this chapter, the Herero orphans of the gallows and the camps—those that survived—became servants to the murderers of their parents, in a colonial-patriarchal mode of relating. Unlike many lynching photographs from the United States, the frenzied or jubilant mob is not so much a feature of execution photographs from South West Africa, although there are often Germans in the photographs, in the margins or standing in rows or groups as audience. Wells continued, in her indictment: “in those old days the multitude that stood by was

¹⁹² Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, 120.

¹⁹³ Silvia Federici, in discussing the witch hunts of Europe as a mode of initiating patriarchal power and a new capitalist order, describes witch burnings as, “an important public event, which all the members of the community had to attend, including the children of the witches, especially their daughters who, in some cases, would be whipped in front of the stake on which they could see their mother burning alive” Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2003), 186.

permitted only to gloat or jeer. The nineteenth century lynching mob cuts off ears, toes, and fingers, strips off flesh, and distributes portions of the body as souvenirs among the crowd.” As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the interest in flesh trophies was not absent in German South West Africa, but rather became systematized, through the collection of body parts preserved in alcohol and skulls, for anthropological, racial, and medical research.

In addition to the macabre souvenirs described by Wells, photographs were taken and collected, sold as postcards and mailed through the U.S. post—a practice which was technically banned by the U.S. Postmaster General in 1908, via an addition to the Comstock laws. Steinmetz and Hell evoke American lynching photographs and postcards in their examination of visual culture in German colonization—similar lynching postcards were circulated not only in the colony but in Germany. One postcard depicts German soldiers “packing skulls into crates, for export to university collections and race scientists in Germany.”¹⁹⁴ The photographs taken of lynchings by professional and amateur photographers circulated commercially as part of a cottage souvenir industry in both cases. These images allowed white Americans and Germans in Germany to participate in an imagined community of racial domination,¹⁹⁵ cohering white identity through the images of violence against the black body.

In my initial observation of the 1905 *Strafgericht an einem Farmer-mörder* photograph while visiting the archive, I did not notice two more figures in the image—

¹⁹⁴ Steinmetz and Hell, “The Visual Archive of Colonialism,” 2006.

¹⁹⁵ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

appearing at first as more of the barrels and bricks that surround them. I zoom in on a digital scan of the photograph after returning to the United States and noticed that two African women sit with their backs to the gallows, facing the wide open expanse of desert and shrub that fades into the sky. They are barely silhouettes, a swatch of light fabric next to dark, an obscured but dark-skinned face, one looking down, the other looking at her companion. Who are these women? What is their relationship to the hanged man, the executioners? In the colonial album, the photograph of the hanged man, the lynching party, and the women witnesses are on the same page and facing photographs of: a swimming hole, an African woman and child in traditional dress, cattle, and mining (it looks like the subjects are panning for gold). How does one read the other tropes in the album; the romance, the naked swim party, the casual day-to-day enjoyment captured on camera, all in relationship to the man in chains, the man who hangs, the women with their backs to the scene? I want to pay attention to these witnesses, those that watch within the scene or refuse to look, these survivors who barely appear.¹⁹⁶

The Scourged Back (The Trophy and The Appeal)

In the United States, the same lynching photographs that circulated as postcards were often amended with different text, in an NAACP poster or anti-lynching pamphlet,

¹⁹⁶ There is, as Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman make clear in their groundbreaking work *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1991), an incommensurability of experience of the witness; each tells their truth, but they can only see from their position within the scene, and can only speak from that place. Laub and Felman suggest testimony as a literary genre, rather than a complete account of events, a conclusive statement. Witnessing and history are in relationship, but they are not the same; this is all to say, while many testimonies can help build a history alongside archival materials, an individual testimony bears witness to individual trauma.

to become humanitarian propaganda. Images travel, through a visceral witnessing that can be, in turn, grotesquely pornographic—in the words of Claudia Rankine, “the dead body as an object that satisfies an illicit desire”¹⁹⁷ or vestibular—a crack through which to slip towards something new.¹⁹⁸ The resignification of images, however didactic and captioned, depends on the eye and the gut of the viewer. In considering these different functional iterations in the life of sometimes the very same photo—the trophy and the appeal, I close read images from the 1918 *Blue Book* of Maria and Auma (meaning Old Mother)—two women killed by their employer Ludwig Cramer.¹⁹⁹ The two images of Maria and Auma were published in the chapter titled “The position of a native when complainant” and were taken originally by a doctor at the hospital where the two women were treated.²⁰⁰ While the original intent of the photographer is lost, the images circulated first in the court case against the women’s assailant (murderer) and then in the *Blue Book*, in condemnation not only of their original treatment but the colonial court’s handling of the prosecution of their killer. In the *Blue Book*, two plates show the backs of Maria and Auma, taken on February 15th 1912, of the horrific whipping received by the two women. The images were taken fourteen days after the beatings; Auma died at this time and Maria

¹⁹⁷ Claudia Rankine, “The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning,” *The New York Times*. (June 22, 2015). Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html?_r=0

¹⁹⁸ Via Weheliye’s reading of Spillers and Winter in *Habeas Viscus*, 2014.

¹⁹⁹ Noting the slippages here in employment and ownership, in the coercive labor system of German South West Africa.

²⁰⁰ It is difficult, in the mode of storyteller, assembling these cases in and out of chronological order, not to make impossible connections—that the two women in the photograph of the hanged man, for example, might in fact be Maria and Auma.

died six months after.²⁰¹ The images of Maria and Auma's backs in black and white, if not captioned and accompanied by a full written narrative of the case, look topological or perhaps like bark, rather than like skin or wounds at all. Their faces are not photographed. There are no images of the women's faces or figures before or after the attacks—only these surveys of their injuries. The photographs are accompanied by intensely specific written descriptions of the wounds of the victims. As Spillers writes, describing William Goodell's study of North American slave codes, "the anatomical specifications of rupture, of altered human tissue, take on the objective description of laboratory prose."²⁰² The medical report of Maria's injuries note the size in centimeters and location of each missing expanse of skin. The *Blue Book* further describes in lurid detail the manner by which these injuries were received—the binding of Maria's hands, the way her clothes were cut from her body by Cramer and his daughter Hildegard before she was beaten.

Aesthetically and as atrocity photographs, these images might be compared to the earlier American photograph "The Scourged Back," an image credited to McPherson & Oliver in Baton Rouge, which was taken in the early 1860s and features scarring on the back of a man named Gordon, who escaped slavery in Mississippi to join the Union Army. In contrast to the photographs of Auma and Maria, "The Scourged Back" depicts the raised ridges of healed scars from a past brutality. The image was circulated by Northern abolitionists to display the horrors of slavery. The photograph, commonly understood as one of the first photographs to be used as propaganda, was taken in a

²⁰¹ Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, 282-283.

²⁰² Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

Union army encampment precisely for the purpose it was used for, and seems visually to work to demonstrate Gordon's humanity while showing the inhumane treatment he faced. His back is to the camera and he is shirtless to show his scars, but he is turned slightly, his face in profile not to demonstrate physiognomy but so that he can, to the best of his ability, turn towards the camera. The photograph disrupts the rubric of laboratory prose by acting as both evidence and a portrait; the appeal of the photograph is one being made by Gordon himself. In the image, one arm is outstretched and bent towards his back, he seems to be reaching with his hand to feel his own ridged scars. It is a photograph with intent, and to an extent, represents a conversation between the photographer and the subject.

Notably and importantly, there are many historians who work to recover the agency of Black women and other silenced voices in the archive—the German court account and the British analysis can both be read in the mode of reclamation of the negotiations made by each of the women and men in the pursuit of survival and harm reduction in the face of German colonial violence.²⁰³ My focus on the images here necessarily disrupts the possibility of the project of reading agency. Instead, I center the skin made topographical, the body made flesh, the human made dead, the corpse made specimen. While this forecloses the possibility of recovering voices in the archive, it allows a reading of the image in the flesh, through Spillers conception of the pornotropic. Spillers, in "Mama's Baby," coins the term *pornotroping* to describe the external

²⁰³ Considering in particular the methodologies introduced by Marisa Fuentes in *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

imposition of meaning on the black body, particularly the bodies of Black women.

Weheliye builds on this heuristic in *Habeas Viscus*, defining pornotroping via Spillers as “the becoming-flesh of the (black) body [which] forms a primary component in the processes by which human beings are converted into bare life.” Weheliye focuses on pornotroping as the element of bare life which is literally naked, the deep sexualization which is paired with subjugation. In popular images of enslaved Black people in the United States:

“The subject’s clothes were often shown torn, partially removed, or missing altogether; the body itself was often shown being whipped, beaten, hung, pierced, bitten, branded, or otherwise subjugated to a white oppressor. Moreover, many of the exposed and attacked bodies were shown in explicitly erotic poses, raising the question of how these largely proslavery images functioned as a type of pornography.”²⁰⁴

The images of Maria and Auma are not pornographic in this sense, or in the sense of the photographs taken by Düring at Shark Island, which more closely conform to this model. The images of Maria and Auma are taken so close to the body as to be barely distinguishable in form, ungendered and not clearly, at first glance, human. The closeness of the camera to the body is in contrast to the several photographs of hanged male victims of the colonial regime included in the *Blue Book*, images which are taken in panorama, to include the scene. The photographs of Maria and Auma are intimate, invasive, the lens goes where the whip had gone before in opening up the body as flesh.

²⁰⁴ Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science,” 54.

Cramer's Trial

The *Blue Book* spends significant time on the case of the perpetrator of Maria and Auma's murders. Cramer was charged by the colonial courts with assault for these and assaults on six other Herero and San; Grunas, Konturu, Alwina, Amalia, and Magdalena—all women—and July, Maria's husband. He ended up paying a small fine and spending four months in prison (the court found "mitigating circumstances" in almost every case).²⁰⁵ The *Blue Book* elaborates consistent abuse of Africans by German settlers, and the reluctance of colonial authorities to prosecute or punish settlers. While these abuses are presented as aberrations against, presumably, the benign paternalism of British colonial rule, both the events and the British accounts of those events are revealing of the violences of colonial relations more broadly.

Konturu and Grunas—both beaten with a sjambok (a type of whip) ostensibly for the death of a sheep—both lost children they were carrying as a result of the attacks. As the *Blue Book* notes, the German Criminal Code at this time carried heavy penalties for assault and murder, including the death penalty or life imprisonment, and had particular specifications applying to cases that resulted in the loss of an unborn child. However, in his defense in regards to the case of Grunas, Cramer argued that he was within his rights, specifically the "paternal right of correction."²⁰⁶ The court denied this defense in regards to the brutality of the attack, but did not question, as far as is documented, the premise of the defense—that the German farmer had a paternal relationship to his adult African

²⁰⁵ Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, 288.

²⁰⁶ Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, 272.

servants. Keeping in mind that at this time labor was coerced, although not considered slavery under colonial law—flogging was regularly referred to as “paternal chastisement.”²⁰⁷ In the sentencing of Cramer, the court critiqued him for not familiarizing himself “on any other farm when he first came into the country with the handling of natives and how difficult it is, as is generally done, but he started farming and handling natives at once by himself.”²⁰⁸ The critique here is not of Cramer’s violence per se, but rather of his failure to be a good manager of Indigenous people as natural resources. All of the assaulted victims were servants of Cramer—the beatings were based around accusations of killing or theft of livestock, and in particular the poisoning of livestock and the poisoning of Cramer and his wife.²⁰⁹ Here the logic of poisoning in relation to witchcraft takes on a particularly racialized aspect; the association of poison as a woman’s weapon is mixed with the fear of Indigenous knowledges as witchcraft carried by enslaved African and Caribbean women, and the general fear of slave uprising. The idea that Herero servants might poison water sources in order to kill livestock is ironically reflected through the earlier practice by the German army, during the Herero genocide, of systematically poisoning desert wells to prevent fleeing Herero from accessing water. Further, the beatings of the Herero women and the treatment of the loss of their children must be read in light of the eyewitness accounts of wholesale slaughter

²⁰⁷ Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, 94.

²⁰⁸ Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, 287.

²⁰⁹ There is a massive body of work on the fear of slaveowners in the United States of being poisoned by their slaves, particularly the women that served in houses on plantations.

and the logic of targeting non-combatant women and children less than a decade earlier.²¹⁰

In the court documents from Cramer's trial, the particular detail is included that, while being interrogated about the alleged poisonings, Konturu (again, pregnant at the time), was not only stripped of her clothing and whipped while naked, but also that Cramer "sought from the poison in her private parts with his finger."²¹¹ This is presented not as a mode of sexual violence but evidence of Cramer's fear of poisoning; in the same way that images of violence against black bodies is presented as scientific but contain pornographic signifiers. Interestingly, the British report in the *Blue Book* critiques Cramer's wife (who is not named in the report) for failing to "exercise the proper wifely pacifying influence over him."²¹² While the *Blue Book* does not comment on the gendering or sexualization of torture Konturu was subjected to, Cramer's wife is deeply gendered through the lens of proper white womanhood. Cramer's wife, as the primary representative of femininity, against the ungended African victim, is criticized through the lens of her husband's behavior, as a reflection of her inadequacy as a colonial woman. Returning to the project of bringing white women to the German colonies, Cramer's

²¹⁰ The logic here is not that it is ethically worse to target women but specifically that women were not direct participants in anti-colonial uprisings as fighters, so the methods of killing were quite different, and further that women, when targeted, were subject to particular gendered violences. Further, reading these images in the genealogy of Spillers necessitates an attention to the violent sexualization of Black women via pornotrope as well as the ungending of Black women through the destruction of the family and population-level violence.

²¹¹ Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, 280.

²¹² Silvester, *Words Cannot be Found*, 291.

wife's inadequacies might represent a critique, from one colonial force to another, of the failure of German women to properly pacify not only their husbands but the colonies themselves.

Reading this case in the *Blue Book* in concert with Lorena Rizzo's study of the criminal album elaborates the visual grammar, the hieroglyphics, of ongoing genocidal violence against Africans that exceeds the period of official mass killing. The criminal identification photograph or mugshot operates as a site of the "crime made flesh"²¹³—while Cramer's consistent violence is read as a management failure, in contrast the "'native subject' [accused or suspected of crime] is confined to an embodiment of crime, or potential violence."²¹⁴ In the long aftermath of necropolitical colonial genocide, Black native bodies continue to be biopolitically managed of with the always present reality of forced labor and the threat of death. In the photographs Rizzo includes with her article, like in the appendix of images in the *Blue Book*, native prisoners wear elaborate chains—on their necks and often also on their ankles. The corresponding album of white prisoners from DSWA, is, as Rizzo points out, lost in or to the archive.²¹⁵ In the one photograph of white prisoners that she pulls for comparison—two murderers—neither of the men are

²¹³ Rizzo, "Shades of Empire," 343, citing Steven Pierce and Anupama Rao, *Discipline and the Other Body: Correction, Corporeality, Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

²¹⁴ Rizzo, "Shades of Empire," 344.

²¹⁵ Rizzo's research is conducted in the Namibian State Archives.

wearing chains at all, much less the neck chains that appear in all of the images of African prisoners who are men, regardless of their alleged crimes.²¹⁶

The case presented in the *Blue Book* also reveals the proliferation of post-mortem examinations and dissections by German doctors in 1911 and 1912— a continuation of the frequent practice, for example, of performing post-mortems on victims at the Shark Island camp during the genocide. The violence of the colonial project became an opportunistic site for study and experimentation on the body beyond the demarcated genocide. The medical treatment of Cramer’s victims at the Gobabis hospital and the documentation of Maria and Auma’s wounds by the attending Dr. Hollander must be read through this lens— the pairing of a paternalizing attitude towards Indigenous Africans and a desire to instrumentalize their bodies for the development of scientific and medical knowledge. Extending this reading of the body, this instrumentalization of the black Indigenous body operates within a broader sense of ownership, that extends through life and into death—a material relation that I discuss further in Chapter 2.

Bambusen and Ungendering/ Un-generating

Many of the images of groups of young African children in the Prussian Secret State Archives are captioned with the term *Bambusen*; according to George Steinmetz, the *Bambusen* were “young Indigenous helpers and mascots, mainly Ovaherero, who were attached to individual Germans” in military and civilian life. Steinmetz writes that “many of the thousands of Ovaherero children orphaned by the 1904 war became Bambusen”—

²¹⁶ The one woman in the album, who is Black, is not in chains. I discuss this photograph earlier in this chapter.



Bambusen with German soldiers and dogs. Prussian Secret State Archives, Berlin, 2015.

this is to say, their parents were murdered by German settlers and then they were taken into a servitude that resembled a pet-like status—and that this was a central colonial policy in German South West Africa. Steinmetz discusses the “partial similarity” of these children to the German soldiers—a mimetic training in which they were given German names, parts of German uniforms to wear, and were indoctrinated into military sociality while remaining servants to those who killed their families and communities.²¹⁷ In one photograph, from an album circa 1905 – 1907 (IV Nr. 32), eight Germans in military uniform stand, one holding two dogs on a leash. Five Herero youth squat in front of them,

²¹⁷ George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 212. The legacy of the *Bambusen*, particularly sartorially, takes on new valences in Herero postmemorial practice, in which Herero *Otruppe* ceremonially wear parts of or complete German uniforms (claimed to have been taken off killed German soldiers in battle), or costumes made to resemble these uniforms, as documented in the portraits photographed by Jim Naughten and collected in the 2013 book *Conflict and Costume: The Herero Tribe of Namibia* (New York: Merrell, 2013).



Album 39, pages 6 and 7—a photo captioned “Kettengefangne,” in which a white soldier stands next to three Black men in loinclothes with shackles on. This photo faces one of a group of Black school children and and Black teacher. Prussian Secret State Archives, Berlin, 2015.

three in military caps. The names of the Germans, but not of the boys, are labelled under the image. The same album contains an image of a group of emaciated and skeletal Herero men and women—the photograph, and others taken by O. Ziegler and titled “The first surrendering Herero” (but not captioned in the archive where I first saw it), were “sold widely and have found their way into numerous collections of colonial photography.”²¹⁸ In album 39, ca. 1904 – 1914, which is carefully assembled and has what appear to be original captions printed in purple ink, there is a photograph captioned

²¹⁸ Joachim Zeller, “Images of the South West African war: Reflections of the 1904-1907 Colonial War in Contemporary Photo Reportage and Book Illustration” Wolfram Hartmann (ed.) *Hues between Black and White. Historical Photography from Colonial Namibia 1860 to 1915*. (Windhoek: Out of Africa, 2004), 319.

Kettengefangne [roughly, “chain gang”], of three Herero youth, two in bar handcuffs and all three in ankle irons, guarded by a German man who holds a whip and has a pistol tucked into his waistband. This image directly faces on the opposite page one captioned *Schul Kinder* [“school children”], a group portrait of African children and an African schoolteacher, reading books. Returning to Lemkin’s definition of genocide—the accompaniment of mass killing with conversion, the forced abandonment of Indigenous knowledges or ways of being with a focus on children, are part and parcel of a genocidal project. I place particular emphasis on the proximity between photographs of clear genocidal violence and photographs of children to frame this aspect of genocide as ongoing—like residential schools and transracial adoption programs in the settler colonial context of the United States and Australia. The destruction of generations, of lineage, is a colonial violence that, as Spillers argues, then becomes fictioned as the absence of a past or future. The *Bambusen* are held in place, without lineage or family ties, in a present in which they have no name but that which they are given by the conquerer, and no identity or culture beyond the German uniform they have been dressed up in.

The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute—Tracing Ideological Frameworks into the Nazi Era²¹⁹

Eugen Fischer, who had traveled to German South West Africa in 1908 for his study on miscegenation, returned to Germany and continued to promote his work in the service

²¹⁹ I acknowledge that in this project, I do not trace the historical period between the end of German rule in South West Africa and Nazi rule. The effects of German rule in SWA certainly continued, both in terms of the aftermath of the genocide and in the continuing presence of German settlers. SWA continued to be under British colonial rule and then South African apartheid rule until Namibia became independent in 1990.

of racial ideology, which extended from a focus on Africans as dysgenic to also encompass Jews and Roma-Sinti during the Nazi era.²²⁰ Fischer began a comprehensive ethnological survey of Germany in 1928, towards preserving a distinct German race.²²¹ Nazi racial ideology against Jews both played on existing European anti-Semitism and built on German anti-blackness as produced by colonial racial science and continued via racist propaganda against primarily French troops of African origin (West African, Algerian, Tunisian, Moroccan, Malagasie, and Somali) during WWI and during the proceeding occupation.²²² Anti-Black propaganda proliferated as the Nazis gained power

²²⁰ “In 1933, the anatomist Eugen Fischer, who had just been elected rector of Berlin University and in this role had signed the dismissal of his “non-Aryan” colleagues, praised the “biological population politics” of the new NS regime, which used selection and Ausmerzung (a term that can mean elimination as well as destruction) to create a genetically and racially desirable population (Müller-Hill, 1984; p 13/14). Again in 1943, Fischer recapitulated the preceding 10 years by pointing out the great good fortune of his theoretical science having prospered in an atmosphere of general acceptance fostered by NS ideology. He lauded the practical application of racial hygiene’s “scientific results” in governmental procedures (Hofer and Leven, 2003; p 27)” (Hildebrandt 900). Sabine Hildebrandt, “Anatomy in the Third Reich: An Outline, Part 2. Bodies for Anatomy and Related Medical Disciplines,” *Clinical Anatomy* 22, 8 (2009). 894–905.

²²¹ Additionally, in 1933, the *New York Times* ran an article about Eugen Fischer that praises his work as a boon to science and its aid to anthropological research—“Despite its connection with the ‘national resurgence,’ it is a truly scientific study”—while reassuring readers that the Reich was not about racial superiority, only purity. The article mentions Fischer’s research on “crossings between whites and Hottentots in German South West Africa” which it praises as a classic. The article further positively compares Fischer’s argument about race and national identity “to that advanced in the United States for preserving national parks free from outside plants, for keeping them in their natural state.” This aligned with existing isolationist and eugenicist views in the United States.

²²² For more on existing European anti-semitism, see Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1951) .

—a propaganda slide from circa 1933 depicts two well-dressed women in makeup with their arms around each other— one is Black, one is white. The text reads: "The result: Racial pride fades" (*Das Ergebnis! Der Rassestolz Schwindet*).²²³ A publication circa 1936 in the USHMM archive shows Black women in Africa, in African dress and Germany, in European—purporting to show a failed sartorial or Lamarckian attempt at becoming European—with the title "From Black will never come White." Further, multiple racial propaganda slides in the USHMM archives focus on the Jew as a "Bastard race" (*Der Jude ist ein Bastard*) between Oriental, Negro, Hamite, and Ancient Asian races.²²⁴ This is read interestingly within the larger discourse of racial purity and the specific fear of miscegenation in German society, pre-dating the 1935 Nuremberg Laws criminalizing intercourse or marriage between Jews and non-Jewish Germans, stemming from Fischer's work and the promotion of the Rehoboth Bastards as threat. The language of Bastard here, and the visual association through images and charts of European Jews with blackness, demarcates Jews as Other by tying them to blackness. While anti-Semitism, in Germany and elsewhere, is a complex phenomenon that cannot wholly be conflated with forms of scopophilic racism, the visual language here works to un-hitch Jews

²²³ USHMM Collections 1996.A.260 Photograph #17608. This photograph is also featured on the cover of Tina Campt's book *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

²²⁴ One of these images, Photograph #49813 in the USHMM Collections, is "from a slide lecture produced by 'Der Reichsfuehrer SS, der Chef des Rasse-und Siedlungshauptamtes' [the Leader of the SS, the Chief of the Race and Settlement Main Office]. The slide lecture, entitled 'Das Judentum, seine blutsgebundene Wesensart in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart' [Jewry, Its Blood-based Essence in Past and Future], is Part I of the thematic series, 'Judentum, Freimaurerei, Bolschewismus' [Jewry, Freemasonry, Bolshevism].

from the privileged eugenic category of the white German precisely by linking them to dysgenic categories.

As Nazis were building this racial propaganda machine, an ideological and rhetorical line was drawn from the Rehoboth Bastards to the Rhineland Bastards, the children primarily of German women and Black African troops stationed in Germany during World War I—an extremely small population, who the Nazis focused on immediately upon coming to power. In April of 1933, “Hermann Göring ordered that the local authorities collect information on their numbers and whereabouts” and in 1937 “the Nazi regime consulted Eugen Fischer...Special Commission No. 3 was formed by the Gestapo” with Fischer and Wolfgang Abel from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute on the board. “The commission’s task was to identify and sterilize the Rhineland children...by 1937 almost four hundred, all in their teens, had been forcibly sterilized.”²²⁵ The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute was at the center of Nazi racial politics and was directly involved in the Nazi genocide of Jews and Roma-Sinti; racial hygienist and hereditary pathologist Otmar von Verschuer employed Josef Mengele, who had been one of his students, as an assistant at the Institute while Mengele was the camp doctor at Auschwitz.²²⁶

In an official and clearly staged photograph, taken in 1938 and captioned in the archive as “Dr. Eugen Fischer examines racial portraits in his office at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics and Eugenics,” Fischer evokes the

²²⁵ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 307.

²²⁶ Sheila Faith Weiss, “The Loyal Genetic Doctor, Otmar Freiherr von Verschuer, and the Institut für Erbbiologie und Rassenhygiene: Origins, Controversy, and Racial Political Practice,” *Central European History* 45,4 (2012). 631-668.

archetype of the kindly, elderly doctor in white coat and suit. A slight smile plays on his lips, his body and the image that he looks at are both slightly turned towards the camera. This photograph is regularly reproduced in studies of Nazi racial science. It is perhaps the most recognizable photograph of Fischer. His desk is cluttered with a pile of images, he holds a pen in one hand as though about to take serious notes on the object of his study. The image he holds towards the camera is of a young Black girl, her hair in braided pigtails. Another portrait, of an older woman in 3/4 profile, with short hair and wearing what appears to be a high collar calico dress, sits framed on the desk. This same portrait also appears in the USHMM archive in a set of slides used by Dr. Johannes Schottky in 1934 to demonstrate the effects of miscegenation—in the presentation, this portrait is captioned “Bastarde zwischen Hottentotten und Weisen.” These slides are from Fischer’s research in German South West Africa. Another image in the USHMM collection, of a slide used for a lecture in 1936 by Dr. B.K. Schultz in Dresden, features a portrait of another of the woman on Schottky’s slide—in profile, and juxtaposed with an image of a blonde, light-skinned woman who is also mixed race (but is not featured on Schottky’s slide). The caption on the slide reads “Baßtardfrauen aus Südweßrafrika; die eine ähnelt dem europäißen, die andere dem hottentottißen Erßcheinungsbild”—“Bastard women from South West Africa; One resembles the European, the other the Hottentott.” The juxtaposed images, taken by Fischer, and the caption on the slide express a deep racial anxiety around passing.

In other photographs from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, archived at the U.S. Holocaust Museum, “a German racial scientist and his Japanese colleague at the Kaiser

Wilhelm Institute carry out examinations of the skulls of ‘foreign peoples’” and “a staff member of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, Section for Heredity Pathology and Constitution Research, takes a skull measurement as part of a racial study.” Like the portrait of Fischer, these photographs are also staged publicity shots, the scientists re-enact examinations for the camera. Unlike photographs that only surfaced much later of Nazi atrocities or scenes that were only captured by Allied troops liberating concentration camps, these photographs are acceptable scenes of research, meant for consumption, to showcase sophisticated and transnational research projects that are similar in character to those being carried out by racial scientists in the United States. The origin of the skulls is either not inquired about, or is presumed to be within the rights of researchers, in the name of science.

Artifice and the Looped Gaze in Kaiser Wilhelm Institute Publicity Photos

One set of images that particularly stood out to me in the USHMM collection were those documenting the use of photography by the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, these kind of *meta*-photographs. For example, an image from 1930 of a formal photo studio in which a technician, under a sheet, is photographing a set of white, presumably German twins against a dark backdrop. One twin waits outside the frame of the technician’s camera, but is captured by the wider angle of the secondary lens, while the other sits in profile, in a chair formally altered to include biometric information in the photograph. All of the apparatus of the imaging is visible—the bulky institutional camera, sets of lights and their controls, the full backdrop, even a mirror and sink where one imagines voluntary subjects might check their images before being captured. The image is well-lit by a large

window that is also in the frame. Both girls wear all white, the technician's long white coat is visible below the black sheet.

Another image, taken in 1940, shows three Black men, identified by the USHMM as “probably French colonial POWs,” being photographed by Institute anthropologist Wolfgang Abel outdoors, in front of a white building with a row of windows. Abel—Fischer’s protege and a board member of Special Commission No. 3, wrote his doctoral dissertation “by comparing Bushman, mixed Hottentot and Bantu skeletons which [Austrian anthropologist Rudolf] Poech had brought to Vienna.”²²⁷ One of the POWs wears an undershirt and stands in partial profile, facing Abel and the camera that is pictured in the scene. Next to and partially obscured by him, a man in a military jacket also faces Abel. The third subject, in full uniform including a military cap, stands slightly apart and faces the viewer of the image in the vantage point of the second photographer, the unseen camera capturing the broader scene. The orientation of this third man disrupts the fiction of the scene, by exposing clearly the presence of a second camera (which is nevertheless “obvious” due to the existence of the image). Abel, partially out of the frame, holds a handheld box camera which faces the three men, but his gaze is turned neither towards the men or the second photographer. He squints off into the distance, at an unknown distraction. An image that predates the Institute shows Fischer taking a photograph of an African woman and child in South West Africa—they sit on a chair

²²⁷ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 38.



On the left: Eugen Fischer in South West Africa. Photograph from the Archiv der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, Berlin-Dahlem. On the right: Eugen Fischer at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute. Photograph from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

while he stands, operating the camera on a tripod.²²⁸ The photograph-within-the-photograph here functions similarly and differently than the ominous shadow of the photographer cast over the subject, the barrel of the gun which enters the frame and exposes the Nazi gaze (*they are shot before they are shot*). While the existence of the photograph always already denotes the presence of the apparatus of the camera in the scene, the artifice of a second camera—the photographer being photographed in the act of photographing—makes plain the broad artifice of the indexical project of photography. These photographs were likely taken to showcase the work of Fischer and the Institute, but reading them through a lens of countervisuality exposes the artifice, the apparatus of ideological production represented in these assembled images.²²⁹

²²⁸ “Eugen Fischer photographing a woman and child in German South-West Africa.” Archiv der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, Berlin-Dahlem. Retrieved from <http://manufacturingrace.org/en/3-researchers>

²²⁹ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

To Look at Images of Violence

In this chapter, I trace a visual lineage that crosses time and space, with the aim of tying the visibility of colonial violence in German South West Africa to broader studies of colonial photography, images of racial violence in the United States, and the ways in which these images and their discursive descendants circulated in Nazi Germany. With this associative map of images, I work to displace the idea that any one of these events or spaces is ruptural or discrete, to re-link anti-black violence in the United States to genocidal settler colonial projects, to re-link the settler colonial project in DSWA to a broader discourse that is shaped as much by visibility as by materialism, to re-link the violence in 1904 to that in 1941. Overarchingly, I use these case studies to begin to interrogate the broader project of understanding what shapes present ways of looking, in the lineage of these violent histories.

Ezekiel in the Valley of Dry Bones: Returning the Body, the Bones and the Meat

“The bill before us today is not about the validity of museums or the value of scientific inquiry. Rather it is about human rights.” —Senator Daniel Inouye

“Where is the head of my forefather? Who will give us the answer? ...I want the head back of my grandfather to be reunited with his body in death.” —Kaptein Dawid Frederick



“Thousands flocked to Namibia's Hosea Kutako International Airport Tuesday, praying, singing, and chanting as the 20 skulls were returned to the country.” *CNN*, 2011.

When the plane landed at the Hosea Kutako International Airport outside of Windhoek, Namibia, thousands came to the airport to greet it. The plane carried 20 skulls identified to have originated in what is now Namibia, which were being returned by Germany. In a photograph taken by CNN, Herero women at the airport hold up a large banner which obscures most of their bodies—only their faces and horn-shaped hats are visible between the expanse of their sign and the wing of the airplane that looms over them.²³⁰ On the banner, two photographs of skulls and a Namibian flag float like clip art

²³⁰ The hats, which incorporate pre and post colonial stylings, combine the symbolic gesture towards the importance of cattle in Herero community and appropriate aspects of 19th century German aesthetics.

between the all-caps words “WELCOME HOME” at the top and, in a different font, but also all-caps: “REPARATIONS NOW!!!!” at the bottom. This chapter follows the journey of those skulls, from South West Africa to Germany to Namibia, connects their story to that of the thousands of skulls that have not been repatriated as well as repatriation struggles in the United States, and highlights juxtaposition of the two statements on the Herero women’s banner—the welcoming home of a stolen ancestor paired with the urgent demand for amends.

The museum collections and archives of the West are full of bones, the literal human remains of thousands, acquired primarily in the late 19th and early 20th century during the height of the cadaver trade.²³¹ Skeletons, especially skulls, were at the center of projects to categorize humans, to think about human origins but also to prove biological racial difference and the superiority of the white race. Ideological frameworks motivated the collection of human specimens in the name of anatomy, physical anthropology, and racial science in the 19th and 20th centuries. Colonial and racial violence against those categorized as less than human provided ample opportunities for the collection of such

²³¹ This encompasses histories that cross anthropology, racial science, pathology and medicine. See for example Helen MacDonald. *Human Remains: Dissection and Its Histories*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

human specimens.²³² Many years later, these bones are neither forgotten nor laid to rest—they lay at the center of contestations over indigenous personhood under ongoing settler colonialism.

The constellation of policies and narratives around present-day skull repatriation as the afterlife of scientific racism reveal calcified truths that seem particularly prescient to address today, as movements like Black Lives Matter and Stand With Standing Rock call for the United States as a nation to reckon with the lasting legacies of chattel slavery and settler colonialism. In Germany, the European refugee crisis and reparations demands from Namibia, as well as decolonial and anti-racist movements within Germany, call for the German people and government to extend their historical reckoning beyond the Holocaust. The unburied bones of historical violences represent a present and animated haunting, that demands redress.

Legislation was passed in 1990 in the U.S. to facilitate the return of indigenous remains by federally funded museums—however, as of 2011, the Smithsonian had only returned about a third of its holdings of human remains collection (about 5,000

²³² Laura Briggs, in “The Race of Hysteria,” charts a transnational history of colonial collection and what she describes as the “natural history collectors' sensibility”: “The body parts of African American, U.S. indigenous and colonized women throughout the globe were exchanged by researchers and mounted in museums. The skeletons of two black girls were to be found in the U.S. Army Medical Museum, another African American was in the dissecting room of London's King's College, and the genitalia and skeleton of the “Hottentot Venus” were preserved after death at the Musée de L'Homme in Paris. The detached pelvises of women from Java, the Canary Islands, and Africa, and black women from the United States, were sent back and forth between the United States and Europe” (261).

catalogued objects consisting of human body parts, according to the New York Times).²³³ The continued holding of human remains is a transnational concern, and efforts outside of the United States are even more recent. In the 2000s, remains were returned to Aboriginal communities in Australia, from the Science Museum in London, the Smithsonian and Charité Berlin Museum of Medical History.²³⁴ Germany only began developing standards for skull repatriation around 2011, when Namibia made inquiries about skulls of Herero and Nama genocide victims shipped to German institutions at the beginning of the 20th century. In addition to these archived dead, there is widespread speculation around human remains in private possession, in the United States and Germany.²³⁵ Perhaps the most spectacular recent example in the United States was the resurfacing of the skull of Nat Turner, reclaimed by the slave revolt leader's descendants in 2016, which I begin to contend with later in this chapter.

In this chapter, I focus on the aftermath of colonial genocide and the making and unmaking of humans, by looking at the collection of bodies and skulls of Indigenous and enslaved peoples in German South West Africa and the United States.²³⁶ These remains

²³³ Doreen Carvajal, "Museums Confront the Skeletons in Their Closets," *The New York Times* (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/25/arts/design/museums-move-to-return-human-remains-to-indigenous-peoples.html>. It is notable that this article on remains repatriation was featured in the Art & Design section of the paper.

²³⁴ Carvajal, "Museums Confront," 2013.

²³⁵ Daina Ramey Berry, "Nat Turner's Skull and My Student's Purse of Skin," *The New York Times* (2016). Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/18/opinion/nat-turners-skull-and-my-students-purse-of-skin.html?_r=0

²³⁶ I am thinking here through the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a mode of dispossessing the indigeneity of those enslaved Africans as well as native people on the American continent.

became evidence in the story of human history, archaeological things and intellectual property.²³⁷ I track repatriation claims in Germany and in the United States around Indigenous crania that hinge on the logic of national sovereignty and lines of descendants, and counterpose this with crania that are suspended out of time through the dispossession of sovereignty or Indigenous status. The unnamed skulls, labelled with ethnic or racial designations but largely dispossessed of their individual histories, are haunted objects, in the sense that they index and carry with them stories of dispossession both of land and the body, questions of personhood, collective memory and official history. These skulls come to represent contestations over the temporality of trauma and embodiment in the afterlife of chattel slavery and the ongoing project of settler colonialism.

Placing the United States and Namibia in conversation further intervenes into the erasure of Black indigeneity, re-framing histories of chattel slavery as a project of displacing Indigenous ties to land and identity for Africans who entered and survived the trans-Atlantic slave trade.²³⁸ Contending with the Herero and Nama genocide as a settler colonial genocide, framing African Black indigeneity in conversation with U.S. Indigenous and Black identity, that complicates binaries which render Black indigeneity as illegible or unthought. Like the photographs I contend with in the previous chapter, the story of the bones is one of capture, ownership and sovereignty; of the relationship

²³⁷ Referring to archaeological things, I begin to gesture here to Césaire's concept of "thingification." Césaire, *Discourse On Colonialism*, 42.

²³⁸ Iyko Day, "Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, Anti-Blackness, and Settler Colonial Critique," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, 2 (2015), 102-121.

between the body made flesh and its trace. Using a visual studies analytic approach, I document the historical contexts in which these bones were collected and address the contemporary concerns that surround their repatriation. The skulls of Black and Indigenous people are approached historically as visual evidence, and the negotiations of their return is steeped in optics as politic.

The bones, without the flesh, are made to seem a thing apart from the body, a postmemory of the body, an aftermath. Like a photograph, they are a kind of trace, a proof that a person was once here, that they existed. They operate as a kind of evidence, of a human unmade, made corpse. The bones are interred, dug up, articulated, studied, repatriated. They sit in archives, are subject to morphometric and stable isotope analysis, lie in deserts and the bottom of the sea and in heroes graves. They are inscribed with meaning, affixed with labels, yellowed palimpsests under a UV light. I was struck by the distinct characteristics of each skull I examined, despite that they bore the same affixed paper label, reminded that “slavery is not an indefinable mass of flesh. It is a particular, specific enslaved woman, whose mind is active as your own, whose range of feeling is as vast as your own...”²³⁹

Cranioscopy—the visual study of skulls—is in some ways at the historical root of the categorization of races, a scopic regime of raciality that is skin deep and yet seeps into the bone. German comparative anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach came up with the idea that skulls contained evidence of racial difference in the 18th century. He “established Europe’s first significant scientific collection of human crania, with some

²³⁹ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015). 69.

250 specimens from around the world” and favored among them “the skull of a young Georgian woman” who he claimed was widely recognized as “his most beautiful specimen...he named her the representative of humanity’s original form, an ancestor of the group he named with a new word, the ‘Caucasian’ race.”²⁴⁰ The biologization of race can be traced in this genealogy not only to the visual project of categorizing living bodies by skin color and physiognomy, but also to the visual project of looking at and measuring bones, again through a strangely gendered and sexualized process of exposing women’s bodies, in this case to the bone.

Though I note my incursion into the claims and methods of physical anthropology as a field, my investments here are not those of a physical anthropologist, and are in many ways counter to the aims of that field. I do not, in a blanket sense, oppose the study of human origins or diversity, but rather question the structures that enable and are enabled by that study.²⁴¹ While I acknowledge shifts in the field of physical anthropology as well as shifts in museum and curatorial norms, removing something from the public eye, changing the language in an exhibit or shifting the language around research is not the same as repair. I am not calling for shifts in language or representation but rather thinking through that which is in the attic and the basement of American, German, as well as Namibian present-day racial politics. I question the limits of cultural sensitivity or

²⁴⁰ Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America’s Unburied Dead* (University of Chicago Press, 2010). 34.

²⁴¹ At the same time, I acknowledge the complex and nuanced approaches to physical anthropology taken by those navigating these questions, such as Dr. Janet Monge at the Penn Museum, and am grateful for her time and generosity in talking through the concerns of my project.

progressive epistemological framing within a system at its foundation based on the ownership of living and dead black and indigenous bodies.

Discourses around provenance and repatriation often seem at an impasse. Roughly sketched, the historical pursuit of knowledge, in a Western context, has been shaped through and for colonial and racial aims, enabled by and enabling violence against non-Western and non-white peoples. In the present moment, researchers who have inherited the spoils of this history have their own investments in research, which may come into conflict with present-day demands to return Indigenous artifacts and remains. These demands may come from Indigenous communities, or may be shaped by emergent political movements. While researchers that work with human remains of unknown or troubled provenance increasingly are called upon to deal with the ethical and political implications of this research, both published work and private conversations with the author reveal a deep anxiety among researchers, but also a broader hegemonic anxiety, around calls for repatriation. With a professional investment in retaining one's archive, the projection of emptied museums and gutted collections is dismaying. In good faith, researchers that I have spoken to hope to contribute to future shared human knowledge by doing physical anthropological research; noting that while disposing of murdered or stolen human remains does not undo their origin, potential information on human populations might be lost if remains are made inaccessible.²⁴² Technology, after all, is

²⁴² Using the language of provenance echoes the investments of anthropologists, divorcing the bones as artifact from the human body and life through the language of museum collection.

constantly shifting the possibilities of knowledge extraction.²⁴³ Others have fairly pointed out that repatriation does not constitute reparations, that burying the bones may only bury the problem.

In the biblical story of Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones, the prophet has a vision of a desert valley, full of human skeletons. Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy to the bones, “I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life.”²⁴⁴ The bones in this story represent the enslaved people Israel, whose “bones are dried up and [whose] hope is gone.” In response, God, through the prophet Ezekiel, promises to raise the bones of the people from their graves, in the dry valley, so that they will live again and be taken to the promised land. This passage has deep resonances for this project, and deep historical resonances for the African American community and theology.²⁴⁵ As the bones represented the enslaved people Israel, who would be resurrected into freedom, enslaved Africans in the U.S. became the people Israel. The development of this narrative in relation to the literal existence of dry bones begs the question, what does resurrection look like in the present? What do the bones

²⁴³ Isotope analysis, which is a useful climactic indicator, i.e. can reveal where remains originated and information about the diet of the individual and thus the plant and animal life in that area as well as other health and environmental indicators, was first pioneered in the 1970s and has become increasingly advanced. One of the major arguments for the retention of human remains has been around future access when more advanced technologies become available.

²⁴⁴ “The Valley of Dry Bones,” (Ezekiel 37:1-14, New International Version)

²⁴⁵ Luke A. Powery, *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).

demand, as a haunting, material presence? I titled this chapter after the biblical story to index the animated, laden quality of the bones, as attached to a past understanding of freedom and the yearning for a future utopian liberation.

The Racialized Body and the Bones

"No Indian ever went to his or her grave with a sign on his or her forehead reading 'here lies the archaeologists' only hard evidence.'" —Clayton W. Dumont Jr.

In a project that is in many ways a haunted one, contending with the body after life and the afterlife of the body, I am concerned with the question of how our understanding of the body as a delineated and sovereign actor shifts between a lively body and a dead one, a body become corpse. This perhaps echoes the question of capture; how the body is made flesh through racial violence, how the body is made image when it is shot by the camera. The body, never as bounded or singular as we suppose, coheres via an outside —²⁴⁶I am not you therefore I am myself—and through loss—the self is what vacates the body in death, the body is the remainder.²⁴⁷ The delineations of the body from the world, or the living body from the dead, the body from the flesh, the sacred corpse from the thing, is differentiated, in all stages of the process of living and death, along lines of race and gender.

²⁴⁶ Judith Butler writes, "The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all of these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension" (26). As embodied beings we exist in vulnerable proximity to each other, in affective networks, "outside ourselves and for one another...periodically undone and open to becoming unbounded" (27-28). Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006).

²⁴⁷ Despite the materialist turn away from a Cartesian dualism, philosophy continues to be concerned with the idea of a "self," that is what vacates the body when death occurs.

Reading the body beyond the subject of liberal personhood opens up questions of conative networks of affecting bodies, of bodies that are undone by each other and exist in relations of vulnerability and desire.²⁴⁸ Here, in the mode of visceral witnessing, this might open up the question of how the lively body interacts with the dead, the enfleshed body with the bones. This is complicated by the necropolitical, the lively body and its interactions with the body marked for death—and then, life within the necropolitical, in which bodies marked for death live together.²⁴⁹ In addition to moral and religious concerns about the state of the body after death, the corpse coheres ethical and political questions regarding the status of human and the quality of grievability, in particular in the face of the incomprehensible violence of genocide and other crimes against humanity. How we treat the body after death is codified socially but diverges wildly between the sacred and profane.²⁵⁰

Lacqueur, in *The Work of the Dead*, evokes the strange truth that the human sense of the body after death continues to be “a protean magic that we believe despite

²⁴⁸ The idea of conative bodies, originally from Spinoza’s *Ethics*, is developed in Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁴⁹ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 2014.

²⁵⁰ For more on “grievability” see Butler, *Precarious Life*, 2006. In an Anglo-American context, the British Murder Act of 1751 mandated that the bodies of murderers be given to anatomists; the desecration of the remains by public dissection extended capital punishment into humiliation after death; “in no case whatsoever the body of any murderer shall be suffered to be buried; unless after such body shall have been dissected and anatomized as aforesaid.” Stuart Banner, *Death Penalty: An American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

ourselves.²⁵¹” The body is invested with power through ritual; the body without burial, the body without name, takes on the character of aberration or horror within this system of meaning making, the protean magic that is the work of the dead.²⁵² There are of course other rituals, in particular the ritual of capital, by which the body after death becomes commodity through the exchange of capital. The body which is bought and sold becomes a product, a fetish—living or dead.

In the sections that follow I contend primarily with the non-consensual use of bodies after death—in particular bones and especially skulls—for display, entertainment, or research; however, this certainly extends to the body left unburied through willful neglect or put on public display after mob violence or summary execution, the body mutilated and dumped. The unmarked cemetery, the mass grave, is the corollary to the unburied bodies on display.

Ricardo Roque, in his work on human crania as disruptive presences, describes the “circulation of human remains as scientific things” as part of a persistent “racial regim[e] of mobility”—the remnants of the racialized body are displaced from their site of original

²⁵¹ Thomas W. Lacqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). 27.

²⁵² “Variants on the theme of the degraded corpse are stories, echoing one another over centuries, about getting the right dead body in the right place and excluding the wrong body from where it is not wanted...there seems to be a universally shared feeling not only that there is something deeply wrong about not caring for the dead body in some fashion, but also that the uncared-for body, no matter the cultural norms, is unbearable. The corpse demands the attention of the living, however that attention is paid.” Lacqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 7-8.

significance and become a part of the colonial project, subject to imperial travels.²⁵³

Roque proposes the skulls as possessing a “dangerous” liminality, which has the potential to introduce a transgressive agency into the space of the colonial expedition or even the collection— as a kind of cursed class of objects,²⁵⁴ despite the materialist distancing of enlightenment science. Roque ascribes a powerful afterlife to the skulls, in the mode of “new counter-circuits of racial mobility,” decolonial claims that are elicited precisely by the presence of the skulls in Western museums.²⁵⁵ In the unruly contestations of the archive, the debate over colonial haunting would, ironically, not arise (at least in this iteration) without the unburied bones.

“Disorderly Forgetting”:²⁵⁶ Herero Skulls Unburied, Repatriated

“From a legal perspective, human remains held in museums/collections in Germany are as a general rule regarded as things, in respect of which ownership may be acquired or transferred.” —Deutscher Museumsbund

The Herero and Nama genocide has not been buried. The evidence lies in the open; in the disproportionate land ownership by German speaking Namibians, the genetic and physiognomical evidence of German ancestry in Black Namibians, oral histories passed

²⁵³ Ricardo Roque, “Human Skulls, Dangerous Wanderers” in *Crawling Doubles: Colonial collecting and affect*, Ed. Mathieu Kleye Abonnenc. (Paris: Editions B42, 2016).

²⁵⁴ Noting but not delving into long Orientalist histories of curses tombs and mummies curses especially in Egypt; I further note the specificity of “cursed” here as Roque’s usage, rather than my own framing.

²⁵⁵ Roque, “Human Skulls,” 270.

²⁵⁶ Heiko Wegmann, “Die Frieburger Alexander-Ecker-Sammlung, Kolonielles Schädel sammeln und der aktuelle Rückgabeprozess nach Namibia.” *Sammeln, Erforschen, Zurückgeben? Menschliche Gebeine aus der Kolonialzeit in akademischen und musealen Sammlungen* Ed. Andreas Winkelmann, Thomas Schnalke, Holger Stoecker (Berlin: Arnold Bergstraesser Institut, 2013). 401.

down in Herero families.²⁵⁷ Even so, white Namibians and many Germans continue to contest the genocide. Swampkomund City Councilman Wilfried Groenewald was quoted as saying in a 2017 *New York Times* article about a contested German war memorial in the city, ““The conflict, of course, was there...But who started the war? Was it Hereros who killed the German settlers? There was a past from all sides. Everybody had a bad side.”²⁵⁸ The Herero and Nama genocide is an open wound, and an open grave. The literal bones of the genocide are unburied:

“...beneath the waters of Lüderitz Bay, divers have reported Shark Island to be surrounded by a ring of human bones and rusted steel manacles...There is a mass grave under the sidings of the railway station in the Namibian capital, Windhoek, and another on the outskirts of the seaside holiday town of Swakopmund. The national museum itself is housed in a German fort which was built on the site of another concentration camp.”²⁵⁹

David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, authors of *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, took photographs in 2006, included in their book, of the sunbleached bones of concentration camp victims, only partially buried in the sand of the Namib desert. In memory practice in Namibia, while the bones of Herero and Nama victims of genocide remain in mass graves, scattered in the desert sand, or sit dusty in the basements or archives of German

²⁵⁷ See, for example, the oral history project Casper W. Erichsen and Larissa Förster, *What the Elders Used To Say: Namibian Perspectives on the the Last Decade of German Colonial Rule* (Windhoek: Namibia Institute for Democracy, 2008).

²⁵⁸ Norimitsu Onishi, “A Colonial-Era Wound Opens in Namibia” *The New York Times* (Jan. 21, 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/world/africa/namibia-germany-colonial.html>. This quote and others throughout the article also represent the tendency in journalism to give voice without critique to genocide deniers and white supremacists as though these are legitimate positions in the service of fair and balanced reporting. I discuss these contested monuments further in Chapter 4.

²⁵⁹ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 11.

universities or museums, the bones of the German dead in Namibia are venerated in marked and maintained cemeteries and with large memorials that continue to stand.²⁶⁰

The origins of Indigenous African bones in German institutions is multiple, and certainly not limited to the remains of Herero and Nama people or to South West Africa.²⁶¹ However, the practices and ideologies seen in German South West Africa are indicative of a larger set of practices enabled by scientific racism and the “collectors sensibility.” On Eugen Fischer’s first trip to Namibia, when he produced his study of the “Rehoboth Bastards,” Fischer also collected human remains by digging up grave sites. Fischer acknowledged in his writings that this might be upsetting to the descendants or communities of the buried, but justified his claim by calling the graves ““deserted and forgotten.””²⁶² This putative forgetting is a familiar extension of the always already past, always already empty land ideologies of settler colonialism— the inhabitants must be vanished, those who live there are not the original inhabitants and therefore have no claim, the dead are doubly so, without kin or heirs that would return to their graves or be invested in the sanctity of their burial sites. Fischer’s logic is belied by the secrecy of grave robbing, the admission of desecration that coincides with excuse.

While individual members of the *Schutztruppe* at first independently participated in the scientific market for body parts, “the traffic in skulls...was later sanctioned by the

²⁶⁰ Kössler documents recent efforts in Namibia to commemorate Herero dead especially by Herero communities. I contend with the presence of these memorials and how public interaction with them circulates on social media in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

²⁶¹ German scientists, soldiers, and explorers stole or purchased human remains throughout German colonial holdings and on other expeditions.

²⁶² Kössler, “The Saga of the Skulls,” 276.

colonial administration that oversaw the shipment of crates full of skulls from concentration camp prisoners to Germany. In fact a postcard was produced depicting soldiers posing in front of the drying skulls.”²⁶³ Madley notes that “...a 1907 war chronicle recorded that, ‘A chest of Herero skulls was recently sent by troops from German South West Africa to the pathological institute in Berlin, where they will be subjected to scientific measurements,’ before noting that, ‘Herero women have removed the flesh [from the skulls] with the aid of glass shards.’”²⁶⁴ This practice is sparsely documented and unimaginable even within the broader landscape of atrocities.²⁶⁵ In the third chapter, I return to this moment to think through the violence done to Black maternal social life, and the intimacies of racial violence within and outside the space of the camp.²⁶⁶

Erichson writes further that “among the German rank were a large number of medical officers who facilitated the shipment of preserved body parts like brains, penises and noses to Germany. By 1906 research on cadavers was endemic. According to German medical statistics a total of 778 autopsies were conducted in the concentration camps.”²⁶⁷ Kössler notes that in 1913, Eugen Fischer suggested that African prisoners sentenced to

²⁶³ Erichson. *Modern Genocide*, 1055. I also mention this postcard in the previous chapter.

²⁶⁴ Erichson, *Modern Genocide*, 437. This is also discussed by Kössler, 276, Krüger, 98, Zeller, 77.

²⁶⁵ I have struggled to think through this information, as laden as it is, because it presents itself to me as unthinkable.

²⁶⁶ In this analysis, I turn back to Spillers’ work on the flesh, as well as Agamben’s work on the camp and Sarah Haley’s insights on Black maternal social life in a U.S. context.

²⁶⁷ Erichson, *Modern Genocide*, 1055.

death be sent to Germany alive, to better preserve the soft parts of the body for scientific study.²⁶⁸ Studies were also conducted on living Herero prisoners, as Kössler notes from the research of German zoologist Leonhard Shultze in 1908.²⁶⁹ When war disrupted his ability to gather animal specimens, Shultze turned to human ones.²⁷⁰ The problem of offended sensibility was solved by the war and encampment of Herero “prisoners of war.” In a response to a request by anthropologist Felix von Luschan, a German lieutenant named Zürn wrote, ““in the concentration camps taking and preserving the skulls of Ovaherero prisoners of war will be more readily possible than in the country, where there is always a danger of offending the ritual feelings of the natives.”²⁷¹ Again, even within the contest of the horror of mass murder, Zürn distances the desire for burial

²⁶⁸ Kössler, “The Saga of the Skulls,” 277. There are several key considerations in relation to bodies under Nazi rule—the craze of human specimen collection and post mortem dissection in the name of medicine at concentration camps in Southwest Africa is explained in part by the sense by German anatomists that there was broadly a lack of bodies with which to study anatomy. “The traditional sources before 1933 in Germany and other countries were unclaimed bodies from prisons and general and psychiatric hospitals, as well as bodies of the executed,” however capital punishment rates in Germany were relatively low before 1933 (Hildebrant, 895). After 1933, according to a study by Hildebrant, this dearth was largely replaced by a steady supply of corpses, primarily of executed political prisoners and forced laborers, although bodies were also obtained from the Nazi camps. “Bodies from concentration camps were considered less desirable by some anatomists, as they tended to be emaciated and potentially carried infectious agents. Indeed, Gustav von Hirschheydt, dissector at the anatomical institute of Posen, died from typhus after being bitten by a louse from the body of a Jewish prisoner. In collaboration with Hermann Voss, he had produced and sold plaster casts of the faces of dead Jews from a nearby concentration camp to the anthropological museum in Vienna (Aly, 1994, 2003)” (Hildebrant, 898).

²⁶⁹ Kössler, “The Saga of the Skulls,” 277.

²⁷⁰ H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl, Eds. *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003). 175.

²⁷¹ Kössler, “The Saga of the Skulls,” 277.

and ritual of the Herero from German Christian burial ritual, delegitimated as a “feeling.” The *Blue Book* states, “burial rituals were particularly important in Herero tradition and the failure to bury the bodies was seen as particularly offensive.”²⁷² While the repetition of “particularly” here seems misplaced—it’s unclear what the British authors of the report are contrasting this desire to, given the broad human desire for sacred treatment of the dead—it does serve as emphasis, noting that the egregious nature of the prevention of burial was understood by everyone involved as a continued injury in excess of killing.

The remains of genocide victims and other stolen bones that were sent to Germany as part of the booming cadaver trade in the 19th and early 20th centuries began to be reclaimed over a century later. These are primarily skulls rather than complete skeletons,²⁷³ many from the Ecker Collection at the University of Freiburg, which is comprised of approximately 1370 skulls of varying origin.²⁷⁴ The Berlin Museum of Medical History at the Charité Hospital has thousands of skulls in storage.²⁷⁵ By 2001 “it became evident that the collection might contain skulls of problematic provenance. In 2004, the University of Freiburg’s rectorate thus decided to consider repatriation after assessing legitimate repatriation claims. A first opportunity to put this into practice was a reply to an enquiry made by the Namibian Embassy, addressed to Germany in 2010,

²⁷² Silvester, *Words Cannot Be Found*, 117.

²⁷³ Both because much racial research was focused on craniology but also because it was easier to ship crates of skulls or pickled heads than whole bodies overseas.

²⁷⁴ Wittwer-Backofen, “Ambiguous provenance?” 66.

²⁷⁵ Carvajal, “Museums Confront the Skeletons in Their Closets,” 2013.

concerning the existence of remains of Namibian ancestry.”²⁷⁶ This procedure, described by project leaders from the University of Freiburg and the Charité Berlin Museum of Medical History, is worth unpacking. First, the appearance of revelation, that a skull collection which was assembled in a period that included Germany’s foray into colonial expansion under the Second Reich, and all of the Third Reich including the Holocaust, might contain problematic skulls seems in bad faith. Second, the logic of the process of repatriation is already predicated on ownership over the skulls and authority over the designation of truth and facts.

The colonizing institution, however historically removed, retains control over adjudicating the legitimacy of claims to the bones of the colonized. These questions are attached to categories of nationhood, ethnicity, and race which are already framed through a colonizer’s logic, and are further complicated by the idea of repatriation as attached to nation states which may not have existed at the time of the theft and may not represent the interest of the dead and their descendants. Even the root “patria” posthumously presumes nationalism.²⁷⁷ Further, repatriation is attached to conceptions of lineage or descent which are disrupted by these same violent logics. Additionally, careful attention must be paid not only to the process of repatriation but also to the aims of repatriation as a form of repair. To what extent can the only ever partial return—the skull without the skeleton, the bones without the body, the body without name—repair the theft, especially when the theft is perhaps not the critical wound that needs repair? To

²⁷⁶ Wittwer-Backofen, “Ambiguous provenance?” 66.

²⁷⁷ Thank you to Savannah Shange, who pointed this out to me during the “Black Bodies” seminar at the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis in 2017.

what extent might the act of repatriation be attached to other kinds of reparations for the harm of colonial rule and indigenous genocide?

In a 2013 *New York Times* article, the director of the Charité Museum of Medical History, Thomas Schnalke, who helped develop the German standards for remains repatriation, a “process that emphasizes evaluating each claim individually within a moral framework”—said “he knows that returns stir uneasiness among museums, which worry that such repatriation could intensify demands for looted art objects too. ‘There is anxiety that it might open the gates,’ he said.” This echoed in a way Polenz’s concern over a cascading call for reparations, that “compensating descendants in Namibia would subject Germany and other nations to an endless stream of new claims.”²⁷⁸ In the case of the museums, Schnalke told the *New York Times* that “the ‘avalanche effect’ has not happened, and the reparations have aided a ‘healing process.’”²⁷⁹ This admission reveals the conflicting investments at play: on the one hand, decolonial activism emphasizes bringing to the surface histories of violence, respect for the dead and the return of ancestors. They seek to put the bones in the ground without putting the issue to rest. On the other hand, museums seek to preserve their collections so that researchers can have access to remains. In this view, the skulls become props or trophies, a part of the tableau

²⁷⁸ Onishi, “Germany Grapples With Its African Genocide,” 2016. Also cited in the introduction to this project.

²⁷⁹ I am reminded of Sylvia Wynter’s treatment of Zygmunt Bauman’s “New Poor”—“as a category defined at the global level by refugee/economic migrants stranded outside the gates of the rich countries” and the implied exclusivity of “gates,” through which Third World, Black, and Indigenous people cannot pass, into modernity and access. Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity, Intellectuals* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

of Western history, part of a dominant narrative that ironically erases even the possibility of liveliness for the people that became the bones.

The published “Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains” by the Deutscher Museumsbund operates not as a binding document but a set of guidelines for German institutions regarding human remains, both “specimens in anthropological collections and anatomical and pathological preparation” as well as ritual objects which might incorporate human remains and therefore cross the categories of cultural artifact and biological material. Recalling earlier discussions of the “moral framework” of German actors, the document, in the translated English text, continues to use the German *‘menschliche berreste’* rather than the English “human remains” because of the greater emotional resonance in the German phrase for the document’s authors. The German for them more clearly recognizes the connection to “deceased human beings” that the distancing quality of the word *remains*.²⁸⁰ However, the document uses the framework of cultural relativity to question a universal understanding of injustice in relation to the provenance of the skulls: “It is difficult to give a standard and conclusive definition of what constitutes a context of injustice, since very different values applied and apply in different cultures and at different times. The museum or collection in question must rather establish whether in a particular case a context of injustice can be assumed in relation to

²⁸⁰ Deutscher Museumsbund, “Recommendations,” 7. “...all non-processed, processed or preserved forms of human bodies and parts thereof. This covers particular bones, mummies, bog bodies, soft tissues, organs, tissue sections, embryos, foetuses, skin, hair, fingernails and toenails (the last four even if they originate from living people) and cremated remains; all (ritual) objects into which human remains as defined above have been knowingly incorporated.”

the origin or acquisition of the item in question.”²⁸¹ This invites the question, to what extent is this onus on the museum in fact reiterating a position of epistemic authority over Indigenous claims to injustice?

Institutions retain ownership over or access to the skulls and other human remains in the face of repatriation inquiries. There is a kind of institutional slow-down, via the questioning of claims to the skulls on the basis of ethnic belonging (the skulls must be proven to be Herero in order to be returned to the Herero, for example) and whether claimants can prove victim status in the context of histories of violence. Further, these recommendations also cite the need to access knowledge “of the history of mankind.” Regardless of the careful ethical framing, repatriations are framed via the logic of retention, and as a negotiation between two parties who both have valid stances that should be mediated to find a compromise. Further, repatriation claims are ultimately at the discretion of the institution to grant, based on its own expert opinion. At one point, the authors note the possibility of alternatives to repatriation, which might include “permanent loan, joint ownership, joint research projects, exchange for objects of similar value.”²⁸² In the case of claims that do not have clear legal status, the institution may decide whether the ethical impetus to return the remains exceeds the value to the institution or consists of a legitimate ethical demand. Further, the Deutscher Museumbund notes, “not every colonial context can automatically form the grounds for

²⁸¹ Deutscher Museumbund, “Recommendations,” 10.

²⁸² Deutscher Museumbund, “Recommendations,” 62.

return.”²⁸³ At stake here is a broad ethical orientation to decolonization as a principle and process—what possibilities are foreclosed by operating within the knowledge and power configurations of an inherently colonial society?²⁸⁴

In this landscape, the corpse in situ, stolen, or imaged in photographs, operates as a locus of truth, a talisman that both drives and seems to offer relief to the need to know. For example, a 2010 article in the *Namibian Sun* newspaper claimed that repatriated remains included not only Herero and Nama victims of the genocide but also the skulls and other bones of Damara, Owambo, and San people²⁸⁵. The article expressed concerns that the presence of other remains challenged Herero and Nama claims to victimhood and might operate as a way of denying culpability by Germany—even though it is known that figures like Eugen Fischer participated in grave robbery before and during the genocide as another way to access indigenous remains, and that these skulls might have been obtained in that way in addition to direct genocidal violence.

The political question of ownership of the skulls is a strategic one. In 2011, when Germany repatriated the first skulls, all language of genocide and war was absent; a press release referred to the skulls of “deceased” Herero and Nama “brought” to Germany, with

²⁸³ Deutscher Museumbund, “Recommendations,” 66.

²⁸⁴ Kössler extensively discusses the political repercussions of the ongoing repatriation of skulls in a Namibian and German context, and the implications for postcolonial nation building—while I follow and gesture to these debates and concerns in the context of postmemory, my concern here is primarily situating this case study in a broader topography of witnessing in which the bones operate as a kind of material evidence that is laden with meaning, and affectively, desire to recover ancestry and ancestors, the desire of reproducing generations.

²⁸⁵ *Namibian Sun*, “Owambo, Damara and San skulls found in Germany,” (March 10, 2014).

no mention of the method of acquisition.²⁸⁶ Further, the identification of Damara, Owanbo, and San skulls as reported by the *Namibian Sun* has been used by the contemporary Namibian government to claim a centralized anti-colonial struggle that de-centers Herero and Nama claims, towards constructing a shared national identity. This conflict reveals some of the complications of Namibia as a postcolonial nation state.²⁸⁷ The concerns around finding proof in the skulls, that all of them should be identifiably sourced through the period of episodic genocidal mass murder, is also based in a model of genocide that depends upon proving mass death. This mode of scarcity doesn't allow for the broader recognition of colonialism as a genocidal project in and of itself, returning to Raphael Lemkin's original development of the category. Attached to the desire for proof, as the concerns about the presence of Damara, Owambo, and San skulls gestures towards, is the anxiety of the hoax, the falsehood, the lie. Physical evidence, like the photograph, is supposed to render truth, to be incontrovertible.

One can imagine the laden quality of the skulls, in light of the historical knowledge that one's ancestor is certainly dead, and has been killed in genocidal violence. Their body is lost to you, there is no grave to visit, only a desert full of bones, and thousands of skeletons of uncertain provenance in European institutions and private collections. A photograph of skulls—as many as 40 at one time, some displayed in clear acrylic boxes—appears in the news.²⁸⁸ These skulls on display have been identified as the skulls of

²⁸⁶ Kössler, “The Saga of the Skulls,” 292.

²⁸⁷ Kössler, “The Saga of the Skulls,” 311.

²⁸⁸ I note here the epistemological danger of this imagining but am nevertheless pulled by this act of sympathetic identification.

your people, they are being repatriated to the government that now putatively represents you.²⁸⁹ There is no way to identify, in almost any case, who those skulls were in life.

They have become symbols rather than people, a collective body that stands in for all bodies. And yet, can one help but scrutinize the bones, the cracked teeth and the shape of the eye sockets, the way in which the jaw has been bolted to the cranial bones, the way in which the cranium has been sawed open, the identifying numbers and the word “Herero” inked on the bone? Who were you, in life? Who were you to me?

The Herero and Nama communities in Namibia have largely been excluded from these repatriation processes, presenting the perception that, to the Germans, one African is as good as another to quickly resolve a historical embarrassment, to excise from Germany this body of evidence. One leader of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Council for the Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide, Uerikua Tjikuua, said, “It’s not just the return of the

²⁸⁹ There are strong concerns among the Herero and Nama that the drive for repatriation as well as that for reparations represents a case of “about us without us,” in which the Namibian government claims the historical genocide without centering the affected communities. Herero, Ovambanderu and Nama traditional leaders released a statement in 2014 that stated “The remains of our people have been spoiled by our own government and we cannot advise otherwise than to tell all our followers not to participate in ceremonies that do not respect our deceased” (Kössler 310). Further, I acknowledge that I do not, in this project, address the complicated decolonial struggle and the history of SWAPO in Namibia. On this subject, see for example SWAPO, *To be born a nation: The liberation struggle for Namibia* (1981); Denis Herbstein, *The Devils Are Among Us: The War for Namibia* (London: Zed Books, 1989); David Soggot, *Namibia: The Violent Heritage* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986); Colin Leys and John S. Saul, *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1995).



A Namibian delegate takes a photograph of one of the 20 skulls repatriated from Germany in 2011.
Associated Press.

bones, you bring the bones, but Where is the meat?”²⁹⁰ In a process obsessed with descent and lineage, the German government has “ruled out compensation for descendants [of genocide victims], preferring to address its responsibility through bilateral cooperation on the national/state level.”²⁹¹ Tjikuua’s question—where is the meat?—sardonically mirrors the lack of substance in German as well as Namibian responses to the historical and material demands of genocide remembrance and reparations with the loss of the flesh, the

²⁹⁰ Kössler, “The Saga of the Skulls,” 288. An article in *Modern Ghana* represents some of the frustrations associated with the repatriation process—that Germany does not seem to take seriously the need for high profile government presence or to put resources into the identification and return of skulls, much less offer reparations. Kwame Opoku, “Will Namibian Bones Haunt Germans Forever?” *Modern Ghana* (2013). Retrieved from <https://www.modernghana.com/news/511087/will-namibian-bones-haunt-germans-forever.html>

²⁹¹ Wittwer-Backofen, “Ambiguous provenance?” 69.

biological substrate, the blood and fat and muscle and black skin that was scraped from the skulls of Herero and Nama victims before their skulls were sent to Germany.

For the 2011 handover of the skulls from the Charité Hospital collection, a delegation from Namibia travelled to Berlin for a ceremony hosted by the institution. Protestors outside held signs that read “*Enschuldigung sofort/ Reparations Now.*” The skulls sat in archival boxes on a long white table surrounded by white flowers, labelled with numbers and the ethnic group membership of the person. Two of the skulls were displayed in acrylic boxes, as if to prove that the rest of the boxes indeed contained bones, or as though more than two would be too much, visually and spiritually, to take in. Like most of the crania in these colonial collections, the skulls are split by the surgical saw, annotated with pen on bone. In the photographs that illustrate the articles about the 2011 repatriation, members of the delegation lean in to examine the skulls. One man in a Namibian military dress uniform takes a photograph of the skull on his phone. Another image zooms out to show the German press photographers with their long lenses, taking close up portraits of the crania. The angle and subject matter of the photograph by the Namibian official with the flip phone and the press photographer with the digital single-lens reflex camera are the same, there is no material need for the cell phone photograph against these high resolution portraits. The urge to document, remains. When the skulls arrived in Namibia, in caskets draped with Namibian flags, they were greeted by crowds of Namibians, many Herero in the contemporary iterations of ceremonial dress, who held

signs that said “Welcome Home” and “Reparations Now!”²⁹² In Germany and Namibia alike, the presence of the skulls, rather than operating as archaeological or osteological evidence, operated as evidence of historical violence; the repatriation represented evidence of the need for reparations. With the bones, the meat.

Postmemory, Repatriation, and Temporality

In the United States, the repatriation of Indigenous remains²⁹³ was precipitated legally through the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), although the Smithsonian Institution had begun repatriating American

²⁹² *CNN* “Germany Returns African Skulls,” (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/04/africa/gallery/namibian-skulls/>

²⁹³ Kyla Schuller notes that “Beginning in 1868, U.S. soldiers were ordered to gather any native skulls they encountered...Native bodies were removed from the earth and transformed into a prehistoric object, ‘a souvenir, a curiosity, a specimen.’ Over 4,000 heads amassed in Eastern laboratories.” Schuller, “The Fossil and the Photograph,” 237. Fabian describes a letter from Agassiz to U.S. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton in 1865, in which he asks for promised bodies to be sent to him at Harvard; “Now that the temperature is low enough, permit me to recall to your memory your promise to let me have the bodies of some Indians; if any should die at this time...I should like one or two handsome fellows entire and the heads of two or three more.” This fervor for gathering predates the end of the Civil War, however. For example, a letter in the archives at the National Museum of Medical History in Silver Spring, Maryland recounts a conversation between George A. Otis, curator of the Army Medical Museum, and Spencer Fullerton Baird, curator of the Smithsonian. Baird writes to Otis regarding correspondence from a Private Charles Ruby in Laramie, Wyoming; he writes, “while out between Hat Creek and Red Cloud Agency [Ruby] passed the spot where the Cheyenne Indians two years ago made their last stand and nearly all were killed. He remarks that their skulls and bones lie scattered in all directions and will soon be lost. The thought occurred to him whether it would not be of interest to have some of these skulls collected.”

Indian remains in the 1980s.²⁹⁴ The U.S. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act was passed in 1990 and was “built on a long history of state and federal legislation and followed a separate agreement with the Smithsonian Institution, protected graves on tribal and federal land, prohibited traffic in Native American ancestral remains, and required museums and other institutions that received federal funds to publish inventories of the native remains and grave goods in their collections and arrange for their repatriation.”²⁹⁵ However, as Claire Urbanski incisively notes, “NAGPRA law upholds and facilitates settler colonial ideologies by prioritizing the pursuit of scientific knowledge for the purposes of settler accumulation and through its affirmation of the settler colonial project and knowledge orientations.” The standards for repatriation signal the triumph of the genocidal project of settler colonialism—to render native peoples archeological, to produce the reality that there is no one left to claim the bones (whether or not this is materially true). Legislation proposed by Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii, chairman of the Select Committee on Indian Affairs in 1987 would “create a national memorial where bones ‘which are not useful for scientific inquiry’ would be buried.”²⁹⁶ However, the Secretary of the Smithsonian, “in a Nov. 10 letter to Mr. Inouye...expressed some concerns about the proposal. ‘Compulsory interment,’ he wrote,

²⁹⁴ However, “Before returning the remains, casts will be made, a process that could take a year, Ms. Jacobs said. But she also said replacing all bone displays with casts presented a problem of authenticity and would not be done.” Associated Press, “Indians Seek Burial of Smithsonian Skeletons,” *The New York Times* (December 8, 1987). Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/12/08/science/indians-seek-burial-of-smithsonian-skeletons.html>

²⁹⁵ Fabian, *The Skull Collectors*, 218.

²⁹⁶ Associated Press, “Indians Seek Burial of Smithsonian Skeletons,” 1987.

‘could result in an irretrievable loss of material of significant scientific and educational value.’” In response, Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians Suzan Shown Harjo noted that “‘Nowhere in the Constitution does it guarantee the scientific right of anthropologists to study Indian remains.’”²⁹⁷ When the Smithsonian agreed to return remains in 1989, a compromise was made in which, rather than a blanket return, only those remains whose tribal origin could be recognized would be returned. Adams expressed the reluctance of the institution in a 1989 *New York Times* article, “Smithsonian to Give Up Indian Remains.” Adams stated, “It is wonderful and inevitable... We do so with some regret, but everyone would acknowledge that when you face a collision between human rights and scientific study, then scientific values have to take second place. To do otherwise would suppress the record of violence against Indians in the westward movement.”

This reluctance has continued on the part of museums and scientists to give up the bones, with a marked persistence. As Clayton W. Dumont Jr. notes, NAGPRA only mandates remains that can be identified as belonging to a tribe; the final rule on “culturally unidentifiable remains” was not established until 2010. The hold on bones that are “unidentifiable” both place those who might have claims to the bones at the mercy of “experts” who have the right to designate that identifiability both through a Western tradition of empirical science and through the vector of federal tribal recognition. It also signals the triumph of the genocidal project of settler colonialism—to render native

²⁹⁷ Associated Press, “Indians Seek Burial of Smithsonian Skeletons,” 1987.

peoples archeological, to assert the reality that there is no one left to claim the bones (whether or not this is materially true).

Transnational Repatriation Discourse

This is a narrative about knowledge and power, about what is possible and what is unthought within the present truth regime. As Clayton W. Dumont Jr. argues, “the ongoing struggle between native peoples and many in the scientific community over the right to determine the significance of native dead is an example of why the power to narrate truth is critical to the pursuit of native sovereignty.”²⁹⁸ Senator Daniel Inouye, speaking in support of NAGPRA in 1990, said on the Senate floor, “The bill before us today is not about the validity of museums or the value of scientific inquiry. Rather it is about human rights.” However, the value(s) of scientific inquiry and the curatorial practices of museums as repositories of Western epistemic power are factors in preventing indigenous people from being recognized as belonging to the human as a category that has rights. In a 1987 *New York Times* article about indigenous remains in the Smithsonian, titled “Indians Seek Burial of Smithsonian Skeletons,” Suzan Shown Harjo stated “It means something to the rest of the world to have us next to the elephants and the dinosaurs, things past and things not quite human.” Harjo reiterated in a 1989 article, “These museums thought that these collections were theirs forever and that they would not have to deal with living people, assuming that we all would be dead. It comes down to whether Indians are human. That debate remains today. The fact that the Smithsonian has 19,000 of our people is one of the last vestiges of colonialism,

²⁹⁸ Clayton W. Dumont, “The Politics of Scientific Objections to Repatriation,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 18, 1 (2003). 109.

dehumanization and racism against our people.” Repatriation of remains is framed through what the Deutscher Museumbund calls a “bipolar assessment”— in their 2013 “Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains,” the authors (for the relevant section, Claus Deimel and Markus Schindlbeck) write:

“The human remains contained in European collections can be viewed on two different levels: firstly from the perspective of the individuals and groups from whom the items originate, and secondly from that of those explorers and collectors who compiled, researched, published and systematised the related collections. Research in the future will therefore have the special task of ensuring that appropriate justice is done to both parties.”²⁹⁹

Despite significant space being given in the report to the question of ethics and histories of violence, the recommendations, like the broader landscape of repatriation discourse on the side of the institutions that hold the bones, always already operates on the assumption that the position and perspective of the institutions is equal to that of the people whose bodies were taken and their descendants. Claire Urbanski thinks through these institutional logics through the framework of carceral strategies, describing the hoarding of ancestral remains as a kind of “indefinite detention”³⁰⁰ that extends the cradle-to-grave carceral politics that curtail the possible lives of people of color in the United States in particular. Urbanski describes the estimated 8,000 bodies of Ohlone people held in the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley; the Ohlone have no legal recourse to repatriation under NAGPRA because they are not federally recognized. Urbanski’s work brilliantly charts the space of

²⁹⁹ Deutscher Museumbund, “Recommendations,” 29.

³⁰⁰ Claire Urbanski, “Ancestral Detention: Settler Desire and the Carceral Logics of Grave Theft and Museum Containment,” Conference Presentation, Spatializing Sovereignty Conference, Mills College (2016). 3.

settler colonial carceral projects beyond the reservation and the residential school, from the unrecognized and desecrated grave to the bones rendered specimen and made toxic through preservation,³⁰¹ through the ongoing project of settler colonialism on the land that has been made empty. In many ways, the language of collection and indefinite detention has become gentler, following neoliberal trends, but materially, the investment in ownership is largely unchanged.³⁰² In the face of this, the investment in collection as a mode of colonial hoarding itself must be called into question. As a researcher with archive fever, invested in access to the archive, I nevertheless keep arriving at the uncomfortable question: why do we keep the things we keep? And then, as a historian invested in tracking change over time, what really distinguishes our faith in science as an arbiter of truth from 19th century science, in this case racial science and craniology, and present-day research? Certainly there have been massive shifts, both in terms of the ethics of research post-World War II and the sophistication of science; needless to say, for example, genetics are not eugenics. And yet science continues to be shaped by ideology, by the questions asked by researchers and our own capacity or desire for understanding, data continues to be interpreted by people within a regime of truth that constrains the possibilities for structuring that data into knowledge. Research continues to be enabled by the insistence on keeping the bodies of somebody's grandparents in rows of wooden drawers, wrapped in newspaper under a university pool, in acid-free archival boxes. I

³⁰¹ "Often when museums do return bodies and sacred objects, they are severely poisonous due to preservation chemicals. Remains are returned permeated with colonial possession; physically contaminating connections to the past and making the present toxic." Urbanski, "Ancestral Detention," 7.

³⁰² Using Urbanski's term "indefinite detention" here.

note this as I move between the violences of the past and the present day. I am not attempting to draw a direct or chronological line, for instance, from craniology to stable isotope analysis and 3D imaging,³⁰³ rather, I point out the continuing colonial investments of contemporary research, following Dumont's argument that one must attend to the political, rather than giving in to the myth of scientific objectivity. As Dumont documents, scientific understanding is represented, falsely, as neutral. The "right to know" is represented as sacred and unquestionable. Before NAGPRA was passed, "Mr. [Robert McCormick] Adams, Secretary of the Smithsonian, has said that the museum has no problem returning those bones that were stolen from graves or can be traced to living descendants, but that it would like to keep other bones for scientific study." He also claimed, against the idea that the bones were stolen, that most of them came from "archaeological excavations or were found on construction or roadbuilding sites." This claim, echoing Eugen Fischer's much earlier claim about the forgotten or deserted burial site, implies a kind of "finders keepers" mentality. It belies the sense that rather than various kinds of "modern" development imposing on indigenous burial sites, any bones found can be claimed by the modern by right, because they were in the path of this rightful excavation. To be found on a construction site is to be, in Adams' reasoning, unwanted, to be found in an archaeological excavation means to be prehistorical. In a colonial society, in colonial time, the idea that one might have ancestors so old is

³⁰³ A minimally invasive method of reconstructing nutritional conditions, origin and migration of persons by extracting a small sample from the bone, often a molar, and testing it essentially for components present in regional soils that would reach humans through the food chain.

unimaginable. Scientists and researchers opposed to NAGPRA further critiqued what they described as religious claims, or argued that without the record of the bones, Americans would be subject to the mythological histories of native invention, rather than hard facts;³⁰⁴ “when native objections are referred to, they are described as “present-day political needs,” “religious beliefs”... “local political considerations.””³⁰⁵ The idea that indigenous people are re-writing history or attempting to control the narrative against the “truth” arises in Namibian public discourse as well— German Namibian writer Andreas Vogt was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, “the ideological mainstream is antiwhite...It is very easy to say that it was the white people who stole our land, and it is the white people who have all the wealth, and it is the white people whose kids go to better schools, and it is the white people who have everything while we have nothing... This is a very simple statement, and I understand it fully, because the people of Africa, the majority, are of simple mind.”³⁰⁶

In the Deutscher Museumbund recommendations, driven in part by the repatriation requests from Namibia, the authors state that in cases of repatriation, the “aim [is] striking a balance between the conflicting values and world views expressed in that debate and thus providing assistance in connection with the handling of specific claims for return. The first stage towards achieving that aim is, however, always to establish the

³⁰⁴ Dumont, “The Politics of Scientific Objections,” 111.

³⁰⁵ Dumont, “The Politics of Scientific Objections,” 113.

³⁰⁶ Onishi, “A Colonial-Era Wound,” 2017.

origin and status of the human remains concerned.”³⁰⁷ Again, the assumption is made that the claims of the museums and those of the communities making repatriation claims are at least equally valid. The bones are presented by anthropologists and other researchers as “hard evidence,”³⁰⁸ critical for the proliferation of human knowledge that exceeds the localized desire for justice. Even in the cases of bones that have already been extensively studied, researchers cite both access to new methods and the need to retain the bones as proof, without which their findings can’t be reiterated. The *Deutscher Museumbund* writes, “their scientific value is therefore indisputable,”³⁰⁹ dismissing precisely the terms of the dispute; not whether the bones have scientific value but rather whether science has value, to whom and in service of what. Later in the report, when discussing the considerations around the histories of collections which include human remains, the authors note that collections must be considered in light of “the history of Enlightenment, system of world knowledge which, although developed from a European perspective, is

³⁰⁷ Deutscher Museumbund, “Recommendations,” 18.

³⁰⁸ Dumont, “The Politics of Scientific Objections,” 112.

³⁰⁹ Deutscher Museumbund, “Recommendations,” 24.

nevertheless universally valid.”³¹⁰ This claim of universal validity, set against the naming of “conflicting...world views,” establishes those world views as not empirical, anti-scientific, not modern, fundamentalist; rather than as legitimate claims that exceed an interest in human biological history towards an interest in access to the human as a historical category made exclusionary through the biologization of race.

Temporality/ The Time of Violence

This is in many ways ultimately an argument about time—whose bones remain their own within colonial temporality and what claims can be made over the centuries to care for the body. The U.S. Archaeological Resources Protection Act, which became law in 1979, defined graves and human skeletal remains that were at least 100 years old as “archeological resources” and therefore subject to possible excavation. These remains were categorized, whether on “public lands and Indian lands” as “an accessible and irreplaceable part of the Nation’s heritage.”³¹¹ Under German Basic Law,³¹² the long-

³¹⁰ Deutscher Museumbund, “Recommendations,” 29. Later, the document reads: “Cultural claims of dominance are incompatible with the universal application of the concept of human dignity. The European ‘enlightened’ interest in knowledge and science is not automatically entitled to take precedence over the historically or culturally foreign. That interest must itself rather be placed in context as a possible cultural practice (see Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen zu Frazers Golden Bough*). In cases of conflict, that practice or the ideas about the care of the dead of those from whose culture the dead person or human remains originate must be followed. The choice made will essentially depend upon whether and to what extent those beliefs survive in the people of origin, i.e. whether they may (still) be said to be a culturally significant practice. This is because, in such a case, the interest in knowledge and science is satisfied at the expense of those who feel obligated to care for their dead, and, possibly, feel existentially so obligated” (45).

³¹¹ Archaeological Resources Protection Act, Public Law 96-95; 16 U.S.C. 470aa-mm

³¹² First enacted in 1949 under western Allied occupation, the German Basic Law was amended and adopted as the constitution of a united Germany in 1990.

dead, who have been determined to have timed out of post-mortem rights by no longer being commemorated, may legally become “things” and therefore ownable by law.³¹³ The report cites distant chronology, especially in relationship to mummified remains. The Deutscher Museumsbund report states, “In view of the very distant chronological link between archaeological human remains and people alive today, there has been hardly any ethical and moral debate to date about the handling of such remains and their presentation...Mummies and bodies used for anatomical purposes are today regarded under German law as ‘tradeable items’ which may be owned, exchanged or given away.”³¹⁴ Temporality here is directly related to personhood—the time during which “a human corpse is still being commemorated as a deceased person and is not therefore capable of being property” is dependent upon a backwards look that grants the status of the human to those who were legally property, who experienced “thingification” via Cesaire’s claim, even before death.³¹⁵ In the German study of skulls to potentially be repatriated to Namibia, the author writes,

“an important question is addressed by defining the age of human remains relevant in potential repatriation claims. Considering cultural, spiritual, or religious beliefs concerning ancestors, ethnologists suggest a time span of around 5 generations,

³¹³ Deutscher Museumsbund, “Recommendations,” 34-35.

³¹⁴ Deutscher Museumsbund, “Recommendations,” 17.

³¹⁵ Deutscher Museumsbund, “Recommendations,” 38.

respectively 125 years, as a limit for repatriation claims as this is considered as the time span to respect [the] personality of the deceased and their direct offspring.”³¹⁶

Here, the empirical aging of the bones operates within a generational logic of familial kinship that, first of all, is interrupted by colonial violence and in particular the reproductive violence of chattel slavery through the law of *partus sequitur ventrum*.³¹⁷ Under this logic, for example, Nat Turner’s family would not have claim to his bones; I use this example not to claim that Turner’s remains would be withheld but to note that the arbitrary idea of five generations is disrupted in the wake of colonialism and slavery, violences which erase and exceed normal inheritance.³¹⁸ Christina Sharpe draws on the term “residence time,” which describes the “amount of time it takes for a substance to enter the ocean and then leave the ocean,” to describe the temporality of the wake, that is, the afterlife of slavery. She writes, “Human blood is salty, and sodium...has a residence

³¹⁶ Wittwer-Backofen, “Ambiguous provenance?” 68. The Deutscher Museumsbund recommendations have the extended context: “From an ethnological perspective, memories of a deceased person fade after approximately “four to five generations. This equates to approx. 125 years, thus providing a period of time which can also serve as a guide from a physical anthropological perspective. In the case of people who were killed or whose body was handled in an unlawful manner more than 125 years ago, genealogical mapping to people alive today is usually no longer possible. Consequently, it is no longer possible to identify direct descendants in whose eyes the injustice which occurred could continue to have an effect. It must, however, be borne in mind that memories of injustices perpetrated, in particular in the case of the persecution of certain groups and genocides within a people or State of origin, are likely to remain vivid in people’s minds for longer than 125 years. That period of time can therefore be used as a guideline in this context only in the case of individual cases of injustice. In cases of doubt, dialogue should be sought on this point.”

³¹⁷ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 79.

³¹⁸ Using the language of Christina Sharpe here.

time of 260 million years.”³¹⁹ This residence time in the wake is “trans*Atlantic time...an oceanic time that does not pass, a time in which the past and present verge.”³²⁰ Spillers turns to histories of slavery, the disruption of African social structures and personhood by the property relations of slavery; “genetic reproduction becomes, then, not an elaboration of the life-principle in its cultural overlap, but an extension of the boundaries of proliferating properties.”³²¹ Spillers notes this relation of ownership over the Black body to critique the ascription of pathology to the Black family. She notes that the obsession with a perceived absence of Black fathers, as exemplified by the content of the 1965 Moynihan Report, bypasses a historical lack of the law of the mother, because of the interruption of any familial ties by the ownership of Black slaves as property, and the ways in which this haunts the de jure and de facto history of Black people in the U.S./ Western social structure. While the Deutscher Museumbund acknowledges that 125 years may not be adequate to histories of violence, in which “the persecution of certain groups and genocides within a people or State of origin, are likely to remain vivid in people’s minds for longer than 125 years,” it remains within the power of the institution to cite or shift these temporal guidelines. The perception of temporality as attached to “direct descendants” was also used to argue against key proposals of the NAGPRA legislation; anthropologist Keith Kintigh argued against the “presumption of affiliation between a group and human remains or objects from their aboriginal lands” based on the idea that

³¹⁹ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 41.

³²⁰ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 128.

³²¹ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 75.

“the development of modern tribal groups has taken place over such a long time that it is not possible to make reasonable or unique assignments of modern tribal groups to atemporal aboriginal lands.”³²² I extend Spillers’ critique of perverse reproduction, which does not generate descendants but proliferates products, to claims over the remains and therefore the memories of ones ancestors, and indeed, the continuing identification of communities. Colonial institutions continue as the arbiters of claims to history, to ancestry.

The American Golgotha

Samuel G. Morton, the Philadelphia physician and anthropologist, amassed a particularly massive collection of skulls beginning around 1830, now housed at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.³²³ Agassiz, the zoologist who made daguerreotypes of slaves in South Carolina, “wrote to his mother [upon encountering the collection]... ‘Imagine a series of 600 skulls, most of Indians from all tribes who inhabit or once inhabited North America.’”³²⁴ The opportunity to see the Morton collection, known as the American Golgotha, was what brought Agassiz to the United States originally, in 1846. Morton’s hugely influential research on cranial capacity and racially differentiated brain size helped cement the idea of biological racial difference and the attachment of skull size to presumed intelligence—as Stephen Jay Gould thoroughly contends with and critiques in the 1981 study *The Mismeasure of Man*. While

³²² Dumont, “Contesting Scientists’ Narrations,” 25.

³²³ University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Morton Collection.

³²⁴ Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science,” 42.

scholars including the Morton Collection's curator, Janet Monge, have argued that, contrary to Gould's conclusions, Morton did not manipulate his data to support his ideological beliefs, the fact remains that his conclusions based on that data were faulty and were used in the service of racial ideology.³²⁵ Morton asserted in *Crania Americana* that the "Ethiopian race" as a whole "In disposition...is joyous, flexible, and indolent; while the many nations which compose this race present a singular diversity of intellectual character, of which the far extreme is the lowest grade of humanity."³²⁶ Morton also described "African Hottentots" as "the 'nearest approximation to the lower animals.'"³²⁷ When Morton died in 1851, a memorial piece published in the Charleston Medical Journal stated, "We can only say that we of the South should consider him as our benefactor, for aiding most materially in giving to the negro his true position as an inferior race."³²⁸

Morton's collection also included "84 of what Morton termed 'Native African' crania."³²⁹ Most of the skulls of African origin were obtained by Morton "in 1840 from a

³²⁵ Jason E. Lewis, David DeGusta, Marc R. Meyer, Janet M. Monge, Alan E. Mann, Ralph L. Holloway, "Correction: The Mismeasure of Science: Stephen Jay Gould versus Samuel George Morton on Skulls and Bias," *PLoS Biology* 9, 7 (2011). The accuracy of cranial measurement seems, to me, to be rather beside the point—in the same way that defenses of J. Marion Sims by scholars such as L. Lewis Wall may accurately reflect historical knowledge on anesthesia and fistulas, but nevertheless fail to think through the broader context of chattel slavery.

³²⁶ Morton, *Crania Americana*, 7.

³²⁷ Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science," 49.

³²⁸ Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: The Origins and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), 14 cited in Renschler, 35.

³²⁹ Emily S. Renschler and Janet M. Monge, "The Crania of African Origin in the Samuel G. Morton Cranial Collection," *Goodwin Series* 11 (2013). 35.

physician in Havana, Cuba. An enclosed letter described these particular individuals as Africans from various tribes who died shortly after arriving in Havana as part of the slave trade.”³³⁰ Many also came from American physicians working in Liberia, and some from South Africa among other locations— all were sent by American or European doctors or officers. As Renschler and Monge note, the Morton collection is still used as a bioarcheological research collection and is considered a valuable archive;³³¹ this raises ethical questions along the lines of the HeLa cells or the obstetric surgeries developed by J Marion Sims, regarding how to relate to scientific discovery and practical knowledges that are deeply imbricated with the dehumanization of Black people in the United States.³³²

Imagine Africa

In my first visit to the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in May 2017, I encountered the community engagement project by the museum in service of the re-conceptualization of their “Africa” exhibit. The project, with the hope to “present a new interpretation of [the Museum’s] Africa collection within the next five years,” is titled “Imagine Africa” and is framed by the over-arching question, posed to the public, “How do you imagine Africa?” It is difficult not to approach this

³³⁰ Renschler and Monge, “The Crania of African Origin,” 36.

³³¹ The current catalogue of the Morton collection, provided to me by Penn anthropologist Dr. Janet Monge, includes 1682 entries.

³³² See Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2010); Laura Briggs, “The Race of Hysteria: ‘Overcivilization’ and the ‘Savage’ Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology,” *American Quarterly* 52,2 (2000). 246-273.



“Imagine Strength” at the Penn Museum. Photograph by the author, 2017.

question sardonically, noting the precise failure of the West to allow Africa to imag(in)e itself. Nevertheless, the Penn Museum holds one of the largest collections of African objects in the U.S.; 20,000 catalogued objects primarily from between 1600 and 1900 C.E. with 525 objects from what is now Namibia and 710 objects from what is now South Africa. The temporary exhibit was organized into eight approaches to the question “How do you

imagine Africa,” with each approach labelled “Imagine...” I was of course drawn to the physical anthropology exhibit, titled “Imagine...Strength.” One placard reads:

“What can we tell you? Our new exhibition could provide insight into the history of race and slavery in America. The Penn Museum’s Physical Anthropology Collection is unique, containing the skeletal remains of over 72 enslaved people, all from Africa. Since the acquisition of the Morton Collection of slave skulls (acquired from Philadelphia’s Academy of Natural Sciences in the 1960s), the remains have been heavily analyzed, researched, and the findings published. By interpreting this research and displaying objects from this collection, we could provide a scientific and anthropological interpretation of the enslaved people of Africa.”³³³

The text of the exhibit reads, “As part of the slave trade, many African people were forced to leave their material possessions behind, bringing with them three immeasurable

³³³ Documented by the author.

strengths: skills, beliefs, and biology.” It goes on to extoll the “contributions” of enslaved African people to “the economic success of our young nation, yet, the history of these people is not well known.” Applying the trappings of immigrant verve to enslaved people allows the extension of the mythology of the immigrant dream to the ancestors of enslaved people, denying both the continuing afterlife of slavery and the acute, crucial difference between the trans-Atlantic slave trade and other ways people came to the United States. This logic also, in a progressive mode, allows the application of the “settler colonial” label to be extended to Black people in a move that denies the stolen indigeneity of Black people and flattens the complexity of contemporary dispossession.

The exhibit continues, “By studying the materials and bones left behind by these people, we can understand the many things they carried with them as they were brought across the Atlantic to the United States.” Below this sign, in one acrylic box, sits two radii—human arm bones. Under the bones, captioning a picture of slaves picking cotton in a field, is text that reads, “enslaved Africans worked long, arduous hours on agricultural tasks, like picking cotton. The physical demands of these jobs would have ensured the development of strong muscles and bones.” The text continues to describe the effects of labor on human bones. “Bones react to the pull of muscles, which attach to roughened bone projections. Many agricultural activities rely on powerful muscles in the elbow, wrist, and fingers.” Visitors are encouraged to compare their arms to casts of the arm bones on the basis of strength. What is the logic of presenting this information on the basic systems of human biology in the context of the bones of enslaved Africans? The physiology of the laboring body is eclipsed, in historical context, by the sedimentation of



Two radii, from the “Imagine Strength” exhibit at Penn Museum. Photograph by the author. 2017.

stereotypes about Black physiology. As Lundy Braun writes in *Breathing Race into the Machine*, the bodies of Black people were represented as inherently dysfunctional —“black bodies were fit for the field and little else... Forced labor was seen as a way to

‘vitalize the blood’ of flawed black physiology. By this logic, slavery is what kept black bodies alive.”³³⁴ In fact, there is no mention of Black people in the exhibit, with its honed focus on “African” biology as a cipher for blackness.

In another acrylic box (identical to those in the photographs of the Charité Hospital skulls) rests a human crania, the jaw and teeth missing. A paper label is affixed to the forehead. It reads “NEGRO, BORN IN AFRICA.” and is not commented on in the placard that captions it. Rather, the placard focuses entirely on evidence of sickle-cell anemia in the bone, how to spot the “affects [sic] of some diseases left behind in human bones” and the connection between the sickle cell gene and malaria. This is further enforced by a cast of the top of the crania, which visitors are encouraged to examine with a magnifying glass. “What can this skull tell us?... The frontal bone here has a cast from

³³⁴ Lundy Braun and Hamza Shaban, “How Racism Creeps Into Medicine,” *The Atlantic* (2014) Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/08/how-racism-creeps-into-medicine/378618/>. Cited by Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 111.

one of the eye sockets of the skull above. This person had sickle-cell anemia. Use the magnifying glass to inspect the eye sockets.” The history of “Negro, Born in Africa” is transformed incompletely into an osteological specimen. Museum visitors are invited to look closely, but in a limited and vivisected mode, through the empirical tool of diagnosis.³³⁵

Daina Ramey Berry, in *The Price for their Pound of Flesh*, her study of the economic valuing of Black human bodies under chattel slavery—in particular enslaved men and women’s understanding of their own valuation—turns at the end to the continued monetization of the flesh after death. Berry describes this as *ghost value*—“the price tag affixed to deceased enslaved bodies in post-mortem legal contestations or as they circulated through the domestic cadaver trade,” building on the language of the domestic slave trade.³³⁶ Berry’s use of “ghost” here is interesting in the context of the cadaver trade, in relationship to the genealogy of ghost-ness as present absence, rather than a continued material presence as a body vacated of that which might be referred to as the ghost. Berry’s work focuses not on anthropological collections but medical ones, which are the more common repositories for black bodies. In 1989, “construction workers found the cadavers of close to four hundred people in the basement of the Old Medical College” believed to have been procured primarily by Grandison Harris, an enslaved Gullah man purchased by the medical faculty at the Medical College of Georgia in 1852

³³⁵ See Keith Walloo on sickle cell anemia and race—*Dying in the City of the Blues: Sickle Cell Anemia and the Politics of Race and Health* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

³³⁶ Berry, *The Price for their Pound of Flesh*, 7.

and given the job of procuring subjects for dissection for the school.³³⁷ ”Some of the bones ‘had specimen numbers written on them,’ and workers found vats full of whiskey that held the remains of ‘body parts.’”³³⁸ Work by anthropologists that looks critically at anatomical teaching collections in the United States often focuses on socioeconomic class, the ways in which the bodies of the impoverished were more likely to end up in anatomy labs. The bodies of the poor, the indigent, and also notably the mentally ill, were more likely to end up in pauper’s graves, unclaimed by family or friends, were more likely to be donated to medicine to spare taxpayer’s expense. Because the claiming of bodies consisted of an economic exchange, unclaimed—and thus subject to dissection—



African skulls from the Morton Collection. Penn Museum. Photograph by the author. 2017.

³³⁷ Berry, *The Price for their Pound of Flesh*, 170.

³³⁸ Berry, *The Price for their Pound of Flesh*, 172.

was not the same as unwanted by loved ones.³³⁹ In the book chapter “Dissection and Documented Skeletal Collections: Embodiments of Legalized Inequality,” the authors focus on large and frequently used curated osteological collections in the U.S.—the George S. Huntington Anatomical Collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (3070 individual skeletons; collected 1893-1921), the Robert J. Terry Anatomical Collection also at the Smithsonian (1728 skeletons; this collection includes a large number of photographs of cadavers as well; collected 1910-1967), the Hamann-Todd Osteological Collection of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History (3100 skeletons; collected 1893-1938), and the W. Montague Cobb Human Skeletal Collection at Howard University (680 skeletons; collected 1932-1969).³⁴⁰ It is important to note that the histories of these collections post-dates the ability to purchase the bodies of enslaved Americans. The article offers a fascinating history of these collections and their methods of procurement, and the connections between the men who started each of these collections. The authors emphasize the effects of structural violence on shaping these collections with a strong focus on class; certainly a greater attention to the carceral politics at play is warranted, in a system where the poor and indigent, with a disproportionate representation of people of color, ended up not only with a shorter life span and unable to pay for burial, but also in poorhouses, penitentiaries, and asylums.

While there were large numbers of white cadavers that found their way into anatomy labs

³³⁹ Jennifer L. Muller, Kristen E. Pearlstein, and Carlina de la Cova, “Dissection and Documented Skeletal Collections: Embodiments of Legalized Inequality,” *The Bioarchaeology of Dissection and Autopsy in the United States* Ed. Kenneth C. Nystrom. (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2017). 185.

³⁴⁰ Muller et al., “Dissection and Documented Skeletal Collections,” 185.

and large numbers of bones of white people that will never be returned to distant descendants or communities of origin, the bodies of Black people are disproportionately represented in these collections (the W. Montague Cobb collection represents an interesting counterpoint as a collection at a HBCU, which nevertheless was subject to the inequities of the afterlives of racialized bodies), and are marked differently by histories of violence.³⁴¹

The authors note the anti-racist beliefs of white scholar T. Wingate Todd and note that he trained W. Montague Cobb, the first African American to earn a Ph.D in anthropology. An intersectional critique is useful here in parsing how a researcher can be anti-racist in stated belief but might still benefit from a system that disproportionately impoverishes and thus makes available the bones of Black people for research. Cobb as anatomist worked within the logic of racial science but not in service to it; Cobb argued that “few Negroes and no Negro institutions have been prepared or equipped to make studies of racial anatomy themselves...contribution and not defense is the motive of Howard’s interest in racial anatomy.”³⁴² The authors note that “the collectors discussed...are distinct from their predecessors, as craniologists and phrenologists of years past sought specifically to support conclusions regarding the superiority of the ‘white’ race”³⁴³ however, “many individuals in the Terry, Hamann-

³⁴¹ While the numbers of remains of indigenous Americans and Asian Pacific Islanders are quite large in anthropological collections, in medical collections, they are virtually unrepresented. See Muller et al., “Dissection and Documented Skeletal Collections,” 196.

³⁴² Muller et al., “Dissection and Documented Skeletal Collections,” 194. Citing Cobb (1936), 10.

³⁴³ Muller et al., “Dissection and Documented Skeletal Collections,” 198.

Todd, and Cobb Collections are likely in-migrants associated with the Great Migration.”³⁴⁴ It is telling that, in regards to the Terry collection, curators noted the particular difficulty in obtaining the remains of white women.³⁴⁵ Further, while these collections certainly post-date the heyday of American craniology, they historically overlap with this vein of racial science and the rise of eugenics. To claim equivalency along racial lines between or within these collections is contemptuous in the face of stubborn biological racism and massive health disparities along racial lines, as well as long histories of exploitation and research as violence. One can use historical bioethics violations to shape future bioethical guidelines, but the ghosts of these pasts are still an open question; what does knowledge of structural violence require of researchers, particularly when the collections in question still exist and are still actively open for research?³⁴⁶ Are they valuable precisely for the stories they tell about inequality, or does their continuing existence and the insistence on their continued use represent an ongoing investment in the disparities that produced them?

Nat Turner’s skull

There is, however, this difference: in those old days the multitude that stood by was permitted only to gey or jeer. The nineteenth century lynching mob cuts off ears, toes, and fingers, strips off flesh, and distributes portions of the body as souvenirs among the crowd.” —Ida B. Wells

Nat Turner was a preacher, who led an uprising of slaves in 1831, who marched on Jerusalem, Virginia long before Harriet Tubman became the Moses of her people. In the

³⁴⁴ Muller et al., “Dissection and Documented Skeletal Collections,” 197.

³⁴⁵ Muller et al., “Dissection and Documented Skeletal Collections,” 191.

³⁴⁶ Muller et al. call for “critical reflection,” while I wonder if this is sufficient. See et. al., “Dissection and Documented Skeletal Collections,” 186.



Kerry James Marshall, "Portrait of Nat Turner With the Head of His Master" (2011)

aftermath, Turner hid in the marshes for two months before being captured. He was tried and hanged—Alfred L Brophy's article "The Nat Turner Trials" circumvents surprise that Turner would have been afforded a trial. Rather, the trial would have operated as a public spectacle; "trials were part of the whole system of slavery, held together by norms of white supremacy

promulgated in the press, the pulpit, and on plantations."³⁴⁷ After Turner's execution, he was not buried. Rather, his body was mutilated and portioned out as trophies.

Kerry James Marshall's 2011 painting "Portrait of Nat Turner With the Head of His Master" described by Holland Cotter in the *New York Times* as "the ax-wielding rebel is a kind of biblical hero, a black David turning his back on a dead Goliath whose severed head is one of the show's very few images of a white person." It's interesting that Cotter bypasses the biblical and art historical referent of Judith beheading Holofernes. There are

³⁴⁷ Alfred L. Brophy, "The Nat Turner Trials," *North Carolina Law Review* 91 (2013). 1817-80.

white starbursts painted on Turner's forehead, perhaps a reference to Turner's statement, in his Confession, that his parents knew he was a prophet because of "certain marks on [his] head and breast," although perhaps a coincidence (similar starbursts appear in other paintings, a highlight, the shine of light on the face). The painting takes on a new valence when read as a defiant reversal—it is not the head of Turner but that of his enslaver that is separated from the body, which seems nowhere in site. Turner is not in imminent danger in the painting but is a figure of strength and stillness, holding the bloody axe but not in action, having beheaded his oppressor but not engaging with it. The painting is out of time—there are no historical markers in the painting, it might portray a moment in 2017 or 2002 as well as 1831. Turner's skull as relic, Turner as saint.

An obituary of one of the white men in Southhampton County who suppressed the uprising, William "Buck" Mallory, ran first in the Petersburg Express on July 17th 1860 and was reprinted in the *New York Times* on July 21st of the same year, in the "Obituaries" section. "He was the identical 'Buck Mallory' who skinned Nat Turner, the leader of the rebellion, and the hide having been tanned, portions of it are now extant in the 'curiosity shops' of many residents in and about Southhampton. While in the store of Mr. John R. Davis, in this city, a week or two since, he remarked that 'he had skinned Nat Turner, and he would have skinned old John Brown if he could only have had the opportunity.'"³⁴⁸

Daina Ramey Berry wrote a *New York Times* opinion piece focused on the macabre souvenirs that must continue to sit in private homes across the United States, handed

³⁴⁸ "Obituary," *The New York Times* (July 21, 1860). 5. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1860/07/21/news/obituary.html>

down through generations—including the recently recovered skull of Nat Turner. Berry argues to readers, “will you not come forward and admit to collecting ghostly relics of the past? I recognize that, at one point, these “‘trophies” served as evidence that justice had been served, but now it’s time to bring justice to those who were desecrated. Returning these body parts to descendants, or at least granting them a respectful burial, will help our nation heal from the sin of slavery and its ugly afterlife.”³⁴⁹ Richard Hatcher, the first Black mayor of Gary Indiana, came into the possession of Nat Turner’s skull in 2002, when it was given to him by local civil rights activists for the collection of a proposed civil rights museum in Gary.³⁵⁰ He turned the skull over to Turner’s descendants, represented by Washington D.C. residents Shanna Batten Aguirre and Shelly Lucas Wood, in 2016 in a recorded ceremony. A short film put together by *National Geographic* documents the moment when Aguirre opens the white box containing the skull. Pictures accompany the articles— a weathered and aged object that is missing all its teeth and the complete lower jaw. A slanted surgical cut separates the top of the cranium from the rest of the skull. Aguirre lifts the lid off the box, flinching, almost gasping before she turns

³⁴⁹ Daina Ramey Berry, “Nat Turner’s Skull and My Student’s Purse of Skin,” *The New York Times* (Oct. 18, 2016). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/18/opinion/nat-turners-skull-and-my-students-purse-of-skin.html> Interestingly, in the *Post-Tribune* article, Amrita Myers, Associate Professor of History at Indiana University, claims that “there isn’t historical precedent of African-American body parts being passed down during slavery”—she tells the author, Javonte Anderson, that while this was common in the post-emancipation lynching epidemic, she had “never heard of black men and women body parts under slavery being used for sale or for relics.”

³⁵⁰ Javonte Anderson, “Skull thought to be Nat Turner’s, now in possession of former Gary mayor, to be returned to descendants,” *Chicago Tribune* (October 6, 2016). Retrieved from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/news/ct-ptb-alleged-nat-turner-skull-gary-st-1007-20161006-story.html>

away, the cover falling over the bone. The skull had taken a strange path before that moment—much more convoluted in a way than the specimens in Morton’s American Golgotha or the collections of University of Freiburg, and more in line with the journey of the lynching photographs collected by James Allen in “Without Sanctuary” (one of which includes hair taken from the victim). Taken as trophies by the perpetrators, the visual or material evidence disappeared from view into private collections, and reappeared at flea markets, on eBay, pulled out of attics and basements by descendants. The activists who had given the skull to Hatcher had received it, according to a *Chicago Post-Tribune* article, from Robert Franklin, a former Elkhart school administrator. Franklin’s family had passed the skull down for generations, after a great-grandfather who was a doctor received it from a patient, who said it had been given to her by her father. The patient “claimed that her father was a doctor who treated Turner after his death.”³⁵¹ Franklin, according to National Geographic, tried to donate the skull to the Smithsonian, but it was declined by the institution.³⁵² In the article, Rick Francis, the Southhampton county clerk, is quoted as saying, “I’ve got some DNA from a gentleman I am confident is a descendant of Nat Turner and we have some artifacts, particularly the rope that will serve for further study if DNA can be taken off of that.”³⁵³ There is no clarification in the article, but one might assume that the rope in question was that used to

³⁵¹ Anderson, “Skull thought to be Nat Turner’s,” 2016.

³⁵² Justin Fornal, “Exclusive: Inside the Quest to Return Nat Turner’s Skull to His Family,” *National Geographic* (2016). Retrieved from <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/10/nat-turner-skull-slave-rebellion-uprising/>

³⁵³ Anderson, “Skull thought to be Nat Turner’s,” 2016. I emailed the author of the article for clarification, but received no response.

hang Nat Turner, kept as another form of trophy and now imbued with macabre historical import.

The case of Nat Turner's skull was unique in many ways—the skull was not in a collection, it had a name and a history attached to it and descendants to claim it, and its return was a transaction between individuals, not institutions. Even within this reclamation, there was a tone of suspicion—a need for DNA testing, proof of the veracity of the claim. All of the articles on the return of Turner's remains contain a variation on the line contained in Berry's *New York Times* piece on the skull—"If DNA tests confirm that the skull is genuine, then Turner's family will have the opportunity to lay their famous relative to rest."³⁵⁴ What does it mean if this skull is not Turner's skull? What happens then? If the skull turned out not to be Nat Turner's, what would happen to it? As of May 2017, the department of anthropology at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History was still "in the process of examining the cranium."³⁵⁵ In correspondence with anthropologist Karin Bruwelheide regarding the cranium of Nat Turner, I inquired about "remains in national institutions that don't fall under NAGPRA but have troubled provenance, particular in the shadow of histories of racial science and chattel slavery."

Bruwelheide responded (reproduced in full):

Upon completion of our studies [of the Nat Turner crania] we will release a full report that includes methodology. Our approach in studying any human remains, be they from forensic cases, historic contexts or prehistoric contexts, is to speak for the individual we are learning about. We use the same techniques to answer the questions that need answering. Some of these people were denied a voice in life,

³⁵⁴ Berry, "Nat Turner's Skull," 2016.

³⁵⁵ Personal Correspondence with Karin Bruwelheide at the National Museum of Natural History. May 16, 2017.

but our studies treat all human stories equally. As analytical approaches improve and develop, we are better able to interpret the clues in bone and tell these stories. For the disenfranchised of the past whose lives were never recorded in history books, the bones provide one of the few ways to learn about these individuals' lives and deaths. Without physical anthropology, a more complete view of history would never be told. We have written chapters recently in two books that you might be interested in reading, entitled *Studies in Forensic Biohistory* and *The Bioarchaeology of Dissection and Autopsy in the United States*.³⁵⁶

In no way is this a personal critique of Bruwelheide as an individual. Rather, I reproduce this statement to point to common shared assumptions in the field of physical anthropology and in particular among researchers working with human remains of questionable or determinably problematic origin. Bruwelheide rejects the premise of my question, flattening the project of physical anthropology into a kind of “all bones matter” narrative; “our studies treat all human stories equally.” The epistemological claim is a bold one. The idea that the bones are needed to tell a history which includes “these people [who] were denied a voice in life” and that it is the special task of physical anthropology to tell those stories, is predicated on a set of assumptions that both values some ways of knowing over others, and continues to deny the right of those groups to tell their own histories. While certainly many history books leave out the stories of indigenous and

³⁵⁶ Although these collections are both very interesting, Bruwelheide's contribution in *Studies*

in *Forensic Biohistory* is on the unearthing and study of the body of a white naturalist and collector for the Smithsonian, her contributions in *The Bioarchaeology of Dissection and Autopsy* are on medical history in an early British colony, and she also contributed to a study on medical training in 19th century Richmond. While this article does reference African and African-American crania, it only argues that this provides a “potential biological means of evaluating nineteenth-century Richmond population diversity, and more specifically the diversity of the population subject to use in medical teaching and training” (151).

enslaved people, books are not the only way of recording history. Further, the idea that the lives and deaths of those who were stolen or bought, in body or bone, belong to U.S. national institutions to tell, reiterates a relationship of ownership and denies the continuing existence of those peoples. Bruwelheide, echoing the broad claims of the field, presents a heroic narrative of the scientist as preserving a history that would be lost without them—but lost to whom? Her reference to improved analytical approaches echoes a comment made by Adams in opposition to NAGPRA; “Just as no thoughtful researcher would think of discarding a library reference book after one examination, as if it had served its purpose, so, too, archeological reference materials . . . are reexamined time and time again as research orientation, techniques of investigation, and specific scientific questions change.”³⁵⁷ Ironically, at least for the time being, the return of Nat Turner’s skull to his descendants has placed another body in the custody of an institution of the government who enabled Turner’s enslavement. Turner’s skull becomes a specimen, another library book.

The story of Nat Turner’s skull turns out to be a useful touchstone in tracing an absence or difference in the methodology of skull repatriation. The skulls of Indigenous Americans may be returned to their tribes of origin. Skulls of international origin may be returned to the present-day equivalent of their countries of origin— the Herero and Nama skulls returned to Namibia by Germany, aboriginal skulls returned to Australia by the Smithsonian. In these cases, there is a sovereign nation to represent (re)generation, a kind of incomplete dispossession in which there are survivors to claim their ancestors.

³⁵⁷ Dumont, “Contesting Scientists’ Narrations,” 13.

However, what happens to the skulls of Indigenous tribes completely destroyed by settler colonial genocide, or that are not recognized as tribes under a federal system where indigenous people are granted status through a colonial logic? Under NAGPRA, they cannot be claimed. Nat Turner's skull may be claimed, if its identity is proven, by his descendants, through the claim of blood relationship.

In national collections, the remains of African and African American people represent are a small percentage, especially compared to those of indigenous Americans— 5.1% of objects in the Smithsonian's physical anthropology collection are classified as Black —³⁵⁸and compared to medical and osteological collections, which have much higher distributions of black bodies.³⁵⁹ Regardless, the question remains an open one. Does the value of these bones for research—in osteology as well as anthropology—outweigh considerations of their mixed origins? In a system that willfully destroyed family structures for enslaved people, and destroyed attachment to sovereign indigeneity for Black people, what are the limits of a system of return based on genetic descendancy or genealogical lineage, and national identity? How does this underscore or relate to calls for reparations, or the broader need for repair? Do reparations in this case look like burial of the dead? What is the decolonial action to be taken, recognizing the impossibility of a pre-colonial return, what does return of the body entail? What structures would need to be

³⁵⁸ Smithsonian Secretary Robert McCormick Adams, Joint Hearing before the Select Committee on Indian Affairs and Committee on Rules and Administration, United States Senate, National American Indian Act (Part I) (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987). 73.

³⁵⁹ While there was a long colonial anthropological motive to collect the remains of Indians, the bodies of enslaved as well as free impoverished and disenfranchised Blacks proved to be an easier source of bodies for anatomical study.

reinvented or built to lay the dead to rest? How do we move forward when the bones are held in time?

Using the skull of Nat Turner as a contrasting case study, what happens to the unnamed skulls of Black Americans whose remains may have been stolen, or who were stolen in life and whose bodies were sold by their owners, in cases of what Daina Ramey Berry calls “ghost value” within the slave trade? There is a simple, practical question—What should be done with the skulls of Black Americans whose bones were sold to museums by their enslavers, or were otherwise accumulated without the knowledge of their families or their consent?—under which lies a complicated problem. These bones, these unsettled dead, represent a limit case for liberal claims to progress and confound the idea that the projects of chattel slavery and settler colonial genocide are in the past. As writer Max Fox communicated in an email about my project, “the same ontological bind for Black and Indigenous people obtains: white supremacy holds even their kinship structures as property.”³⁶⁰

Conclusion: The Bones and the Meat

“1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains. 2. States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.” —Article 12, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Senator Daniel Inouye, arguing for NAGPRA on the Senate floor, stated, “When human remains are displayed in museums . . . it is never the bones of white soldiers or the first European settlers . . . that are lying in glass cases. . . . By any definition, this is

³⁶⁰ Max Fox, Personal correspondence with the author (June 2017).

racism.”³⁶¹ I reiterate my question: What is the relationship between reparations and repatriation, the potential value of data versus the social cost? Throughout my research on the subject of bones and repatriation, what has emerged time and time again are calls by Indigenous people, in these cases in the United States and Germany and Namibia, for the return of remains so that they might be buried and mourned. This is in contrast to the claims of non-indigenous, colonial institutions that insist that the value of the knowledge imparted by the bones outweighs the ethical implications of keeping the bones, and further, that the bones are the only way to access the stories of these dead. However, these knowledges can only ever be produced within a colonial epistemology that by design erases original knowledges—to own the bones is to be able to produce knowledge about the bones, within and reproducing the power structure by which Western institutions gained access to the bones in the first place. To echo Uerikua Tjikuua, I underscore the indigenous demand for the return of the bones and additionally the “meat,” denoting here a call for meaningful reparations. W.E.B. Du Bois in 1920, pondering on the desirability of whiteness, observed sardonically, “whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!” If whiteness is defined as a property relations that we wish to do away with forever, a case of hoarding the whole earth, then what must we loose hold of? The trace of the body owned, the bones and the image, are not the intellectual property of all humankind as defined through the exclusionary onto-epistemological reign of Man, after all.

³⁶¹ Dumont, “Contesting Scientists’ Narrations,” 31.

Coda: Photographs of Bones

The so-called “father of eugenics” Francis Galton developed the method of composite photography in the 1880s to determine types, both along racial lines and lines of social pathology. In this technical method, portraits of multiple subjects are combined through the use of repeated short exposures to produce a single image. Each individual subject’s face is merged to create, in Galton’s reasoning, an average “type.” On April 22, 1885, J.S. Billings and Washington Matthews presented a set of brief papers, titled, “On composite photography as applied to craniology” and “On measuring the cubic capacity of skulls” at the National Academy of Sciences. They documented a year-long experiment carried out at the Army Medical Museum— to perfect a method of applying composite photography to skulls. The sets of images—photographs reproduced as lithographs—were presented with the papers represented composite skulls of “six male Sandwich Islanders’ skulls, and one set including six male Arapahoe Indian skulls.”³⁶² In the papers, Billings and Matthews are not overly focused on defending the purpose of this process, favoring a detailed description of the methods by which the skulls could be precisely captured as composites. They do however note that:

“well known to ethnologists...the distinctions of race are much more marked in the physiognomy of the living subject than in the differences shown by dried crania; and that the bones of the face with the relations which they bear to those of the calvarium, give more valuable race indications than do the calvaria alone. While something has to be done in the study of the internal configuration of the cranial cavity, and more especially of the

³⁶² J.S. Billings and Washington Matthews, “On composite photography as applied to craniology; on measuring the cubic capacity of skulls,” *Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences* 3, 13 (1885), Julius Rien & Co. 106.

various fossae and projections at its base, with reference to their differences in various races, this field of inquiry is as yet comparatively unworked. It seems very desirable to follow out this special line of investigation in connection with the large and valuable collection of crania of American races which now exists in the Army Medical Museum and in the National Museum.”³⁶³

This desire—which would require the skulls to be taken apart, made especially urgent for Billings the puzzle of how to accurately measure skull capacity, in order to document this fact before sectioning the skulls. Matthews’ paper argues against granular methods of measuring and recommends, with instructions, a method developed at the Army Medical Museum involving coating the inside of the skulls with shellac varnish and gum and filling them with water.

On November 12, 1885, Billings and Matthews presented a paper titled “On a new craniophore for use in making composite photographs of skulls.” The paper details the building of an apparatus for holding skulls in place in order to produce the composite images. Made of brass and wood, the craniophore looks like an elaborate cage with a punishing clamp for holding the skull in place and wires for determining the precise location of each skull. The images of the skulls themselves, taken against a black velvet backdrop with the aid of the craniophore, are ghostly and strange in the way that multiple exposure images tend to be. The skulls overlap but do not align perfectly—they are not uniform and hazy edges pull off from the main image. The skulls are identified by numbers etched into their foreheads; in the case of “Six Adult Male Arapahoe Indian Skulls,” Nos. 12, 667, 774, 892, 1760, and 1832—the number of the skull exposed last effaces the rest. In the 1886 issue of the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, a very

³⁶³ Billings, “On composite photography as applied to craniology,” 106-107.

pleased Francis Galton described displaying composite photographs of skulls by J.S. Billings, a U.S. doctor in the War Department. He writes that the twenty photographs formed four series, “Ancient Californians, Arapahoe Indians, and Whistitaw Indians. Six skulls of adult males of each of these races had been taken, and a composite had been made of each set...”³⁶⁴ These photographed skulls were not, in most cases, the long dead, but the victims of ongoing colonization, dead through massacre and epidemic. Billings delivered his work on composite skull photography to Francis Galton in 1884— Galton wrote to Billings, “I was most agreeably surprised by receiving your beautiful skull composites yesterday morning, and laid them that very evening before the Anthropological Institute. The negro seems extremely good and testifies to the great similarity of its constituents, just as the European skull does to their diversity. You must have found it difficult, as I did, to arrange so that they should be superimposed with the utmost probable justice.”³⁶⁵

In the Samuel George Morton Cranial Collection at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, all of the skulls have been CT scanned, an archive that is open for research (though one may also access the actual skulls at the museum, with an appointment).³⁶⁶ Imaging processes that exceed photography, including

³⁶⁴ Francis Galton, “Exhibition of composite photographs of skulls by Francis Galton,” *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 15 (1886), 390.

³⁶⁵ Galton, “Exhibition of composite photographs,” 390.

³⁶⁶ CT scanning, or computed tomography scanning, uses computer-processed aggregates of multiple X-ray measurements taken from different angles to construct virtual “slices” of an scanned object, without actually slicing. This allows the viewer to see inside the object without disassembling or otherwise damaging the object.

magnetic resonance imaging and computed tomography, are considered non-invasive and more precise methods of obtaining data from human remains. This includes 3D scanning, which allows for the “contact-free, precise and colourfast manufacture of replicas of fragile remains, such as skulls.”³⁶⁷ In studying the skulls of “ambiguous provenance” in the Ecker collection, the skull represents a kind of palimpsest in a postmemorial cranioscopic looking. The scientists who collected the skulls, like Morton with his explanatory labels, inscribed data about the skull onto the bone. The scientists examining the skulls in the present day, to determine their provenance, applied “UV light...to decipher faint signatures and reveal those that are invisible in daylight” before photo-documenting the findings.³⁶⁸ “All skulls were digitally photographed following an international anthropological standard and delivering the standard frontal, lateral, occipital, vertical and basal views and adjusted to the Frankfurt plane. All skulls underwent computed tomography imaging for later 3D shape analysis.”³⁶⁹ These imaging processes also allow scientists to convert the bones into data for permanent collection—a database which exists outside claims to repatriation for research.

³⁶⁷ Deutscher Museumsbund, “Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections,” (2013). 21.

³⁶⁸ Wittwer-Backofen, “Ambiguous provenance?” 74.

³⁶⁹ Wittwer-Backofen, “Ambiguous provenance?” 77.

Black Death Spectacle: “Open Casket” and the (Un)Making of the Human

“However, it must be ensured that the human remains are exhibited in a respectful context, meaning for instance that any humorous touches must be avoided absolutely. It would probably be problematic if, for example, a contemporary artist were to use body parts in his or her art.” —Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections p. 32

“...there is a long history of black characters created by white authors...I don't understand needing permission to do it.” —Joe Scanlan³⁷⁰

“There were many reasons why I could not, should not, make this painting.” —Dana Schutz³⁷¹

“To the curators and staff of the Whitney biennial: I am writing to ask you to remove Dana Schutz's painting ‘Open Casket’ and with the urgent recommendation that the painting be destroyed and not entered into any market or museum.” —Hannah Black, Open Letter to the Curators of the Whitney Biennial

The controversy around white artist Dana Schutz's painting of Emmett Till, “Open Casket,” included in the 2017 Whitney Biennial, meant that photographs of the painting circulated to a broader audience than visitors to the museum—particularly through social media but also newspapers, blogs, and other print and digital media.³⁷² The painting measures thirty-nine by fifty-three inches. In it, viewers may note the deep abstraction of the face, the muted but violently applied tones of brown and black and gray in what one might understand to be the subject's face, the expanse of white that is the shirt, the yellow that is perhaps the fabric of the casket but also resembles a halo. Thin red strokes evoke blood, one cutting through the white of the shirt and one, messier, seeming to derive from the face. It is not, aesthetically, a beautiful painting; it is

³⁷⁰ Carolina A. Miranda, “Art and race at the Whitney: Rethinking the Donelle Woolford debate,” *The Los Angeles Times* (June 17, 2014). Retrieved from <http://beta.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-donelle-woolford-controversy-whitney-biennial-20140609-column.html>

³⁷¹ Oliver Basciano, “Whitney Biennial: Emmett Till casket painting by white artist sparks anger,” *The Guardian* (March 21, 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/mar/21/whitney-biennial-emmett-till-painting-dana-schutz>

³⁷² I identify the race of the artist both because it comes into play in the controversy that this chapter contends with, and to combat the unmarkedness of race, by which any other quality— woman, artist, mother— is defaulted to whiteness unless otherwise noted.



Dana Schutz, "Open Casket" (2016)

compelling in the way that abstraction can be, because it is uncanny and discomfiting. Standing in front of the actual painting, at the Whitney Museum, the construction of the deeply textured surface is made visible, the gash in the painting that appears to have been built up with cardboard as well as oil paint, for a wound with depth.

Dana Schutz's painting was first exhibited in Berlin, in 2016, in a show titled "Waiting for the Barbarians."³⁷³ It did not seem to garner critique in Berlin, perhaps because the image—Emmett Till in his open casket—has such a particularly American genealogy. Arguably, as the controversy around "Open Casket" unfurled, the painting itself became beside the point—an index for broader debates over intimacy with and

³⁷³ Dana Schutz, "Waiting for the Barbarians," *CFA Mitte* (2016) Retrieved from http://www.cfa-berlin.de/exhibitions/waiting_for_the_barbarians/catalog/waiting_for_the_barbarians#

representation of racist violence. In a placard updated to reflect an acknowledgement of the controversy, the Biennial's curators write:

“Since the opening of the Biennial, this painting has been at the center of heated debate around questions of cultural appropriation, the ethics of representation, the political efficacy of painting, and the possibilities or limitations of empathy. The painting's inclusion in the Biennial reflects on the ongoing fact of racialized violence in the United States, and stems from the curators' belief that the Whitney, as a museum of American art, must engage this enduring history, and that art is critical to this conversation.”

The stance of the curators that Schutz's painting belonged in the Biennial because of ongoing racialized violence in the United States unfolds into a set of beliefs, assumptions, and good faith efforts. These complications proliferate on the part of neoliberal institutions and those that work within them in the present moment, where white supremacist violence is made visible especially to white people, who previously did not have to look. The painting certainly reflects racialized violence, as the curators suggest; the question is (in part) whether the painting is simply a mirror image, reproducing racialized violence, or if it is a reflection with a difference.³⁷⁴ The curators also do not engage, at least publicly, the question of whether the Whitney has done the reparative work needed for the institution to participate in conversations about justice.

³⁷⁴ Although I use the language of “racialized violence” at times to reflect the texts or language I am engaging, the term “racialize” implies the imposition of racial identity, as though outside forces are claiming violence to have been about race, or that this violence is devoid of a specific perpetrator and a specific target, rather than the perpetrators of violence acting out of anti-black and other forms of racism, or white supremacy as a system being racist violence.

The Whitney Museum is steeped in violence—the Biennial itself has a controversial history of excluding and exploiting people of color.³⁷⁵ Schutz is also not the first white artist to have created representational controversy during the Whitney Biennial—during the 2014 Biennial for example, a white male artist named Joe Scanlan was included in the show, but as his alter-ego, a Black woman artist named Donelle Woolford.³⁷⁶ Visiting the Biennial, I am hyper aware that while many of the images on display contend with Black life and Black death, and the majority of the employees of the Whitney watching over the pieces during my visit are Black men, the vast majority of visitors to the exhibit are, like myself, white. This uncomfortable observation is backed by research—a 2010 report from the Center for the Future of Museums (an initiative of the American Association of Museums) notes the failure of museums to keep up with demographic change. In 2010, the U.S. had a minority population of 34%, while 91% of museum visitors were white. The report argued both for the importance of museums writ large, as well as the importance attending to the growing “majority minority” in order for museums to remain relevant.³⁷⁷ A 2015 report by the Andrew W. Mellon foundation notes

³⁷⁵ See protests at the Whitney by Black women artists in the 1960s and 1970s; more recently, at the 2014 Whitney Biennial, the YAM art collective withdrew from the Biennial, citing a list of injustices.

³⁷⁶ Miranda, “Art and race at the Whitney,” 2014.

³⁷⁷ The 2017 “Trendswatch” report, published by the American Alliance of Museums, named emerging trends for museums to attend to as “Empathy, criminal justice reform, artificial intelligence, migration and refugees, and agile design.” American Alliance of Museums, *Trendswatch 2017* (Arlington: Center for the Future of Museums, 2017). Report retrieved from: <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/center-for-the-future-of-museums/projects-and-reports/trendswatch>

also that leadership positions in museums are overwhelmingly filled by white people.³⁷⁸ A 2017 *New York Times* article, titled “It’s a Diverse City, but Most Big Museum Boards Are Strikingly White,” journalist Robin Pogrebin reports that “while 67 percent of New York City residents identify as people of color, only 38 percent of employees at cultural organizations describe themselves that way.” Additionally, a survey taken by the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs found that most museum curators were white, while museum jobs in maintenance and security had the fewest white workers.³⁷⁹ These disparities are being confronted by artists, curators and activists including Kimberly Drew, the Social Media Manager at The Met, as well as actioned represented by online hashtag campaigns like #MuseumsSoWhite and #MuseumsAreNotNeutral.

While the 2017 Whitney Biennial included a collective work by Occupy Museums on looming artist debt, Schutz’s paintings have been sold for up to \$482,500 at

³⁷⁸ Claire Voon, “The Diversity Problem at American Museums Gets a Report” *Hyperallergic* (August 3, 2015). Retrieved from <https://hyperallergic.com/226959/the-diversity-problem-at-american-museums-gets-a-report/>

³⁷⁹ Robin Pogrebin, “It’s a Diverse City, but Most Big Museum Boards Are Strikingly White,” *The New York Times* (August 22, 2017) https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/arts/design/new-york-museums-diversity-staff-boards.html?_r=0

auction.³⁸⁰ The connection between the Whitney Museum and Eli Whitney, inventor of the cotton gin, is tenuous but real, by blood and money. The founder of the Whitney, Getrude Vanderbilt Whitney, was a distant descendant of Eli Whitney's by marriage, but the name evokes the gin and the gin evokes both the machine that made cotton (and thus slavery) the linchpin of the Southern economy before the Civil War; and also the metal fan that ventilated the cotton gin in 1955, to which Emmett Till's murdered body was lashed before he was sunk in the Tallahatchie River.

Coco Fusco, a Black Cuban-American artist, describes Schutz's painting as "an iconic photo [refracted] through the language of abstraction." Refraction is a physics term—for an image to be refracted through a visual language is a trick of semiotics, the signs and visual codes by which we create meaning. When a wave of light hits a change in the medium through which it travels, it changes direction. I take up this idea of refraction, and a related concept—that of parallax, the difference in the perceived position of an object viewed along different lines of sight—in order to consider what happens when we

³⁸⁰ Noting that the art industry does not necessarily benefit artists personally but nevertheless pointing out the inflated value assigned to Schutz's work. This dissonance is deepened along lines of race—a painting by Basquiat sold at Sotheby's auction in 2017 for 110.5 million dollars. The work was sold by real estate heiress Lise Spiegel Wilks; Basquiat died at the age of 27 of a heroin overdose. Alex Greenberger, "For its Whitney Biennial Project, Occupy Museums is Calling on Artists in Debt to Share Their Experiences," *ArtNews* (December 6, 2016) Retrieved from <http://www.artnews.com/2016/12/06/for-its-whitney-biennial-project-occupy-museums-is-calling-on-artists-in-debt-to-share-their-experiences/>; Basciano, "Whitney Biennial," Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/mar/21/whitney-biennial-emmett-till-painting-dana-schutz>; Nate Freeman, "Record-Breaking \$110.5 M. Basquiat Shocks Attendees at Sotheby's \$319.2 M. Postwar and Contemporary Evening Sale," *ArtNews* (May 18, 2017) Retrieved from <http://www.artnews.com/2017/05/18/record-breaking-110-5-m-basquiat-shocks-attendees-at-sothebys-319-2-m-postwar-and-contemporary-evening-sale/>

look at things from different places. Further, I think through the desire and possibility of looking differently, by looking at this contemporary painting of an iconic historical photograph and the debates that surrounded it, responses to it and defenses of it. I further engage other images and texts that, when placed in conversation with this narrative, reveals the strange ways that visual ideologies travel, and how making images might engage and reshape historical violences for present-day consumption. Image making, in the mode of aesthetics, represents a kind of intentional looking—and how much more so when the aim is to recreate, or to refract, an existing and already iconic image.

In the context of my broader project, “Open Casket” acts as a case study for understanding the questions of looking that I am engaging, in part because of the public nature of debate over the piece in the age of social media. Further, while this painting and the murder of Emmett Till have an essential connection or “home” in the United States, this case resonates in oft unexpected ways with broader histories of violence. I return here to a faith, as a researcher, in coincidence—from the travels of “Open Casket” to Berlin to the performance by Fusco, who wrote an ardent defense of the painting, of a piece about the Herero genocide the same spring as the Biennial’s opening.

Refraction: The Dana Schutz Controversy

When the Biennial opened in March 2017, Black artist Parker Bright conducted a series of protests where he physically blocked the painting by standing in front of it, wearing a t-shirt that read “Black Death Spectacle” on the back, from which I take the title of this chapter. A spectacle is an image that grips—An event or scene regarded in terms of its visual impact, from the Latin *spectaculum*, “public show,” from *specere* “to



“Black Death Spectacle” protest by Parker Bright. Photo by Scott W. H. Young, via Twitter.

look.” It is definitionally impactful and striking.

David Marriott describes spectacle as “the starting point for a conflict over image as self-identity, a conflict that occurs over who endures being

looked-at and who is

nothing but this property

of being-looked-at by eyes that are never his, or her, *own*, a conflict that reveals how a politics of representation haunts our experiences as desiring subjects.”³⁸¹ The question, as Marriott imparts, is about desire, and whether the gaze shapes the scene or simply takes in the actors within in. As I will discuss in relation to images of Emmett Till’s body, there is a distinction between being made a spectacle and making a spectacle of oneself. Bright plays with these distinctions—in his intervention, the words “Black Death Spectacle” are written across the back of a living Black person, who is making a spectacle of himself while drawing attention to the ways in which Schutz has made a spectacle of Black death. This question of the spectacle is at the center of the project of making-visible Black death. For example, whether the proliferation of captured images of police murders is

³⁸¹ Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 29.

spectacular in the sense of bursting through feigned or real ignorance, or if this violence constitutes a banal spectacle, which is seen over and over again but not felt.³⁸²

A letter from Black artist Hannah Black, co-signed by a number of artists and writers, including Bright and Christina Sharpe, asked the curators of the Biennial to remove the painting and moreover recommended that the “painting be destroyed.”³⁸³ This demand, at the top of the letter, hit a nerve. Many responded with outcry over censorship, Schutz was given venue after venue to defend and further showcase her work. I read this demand as performative—in part because of the controversy surrounding the image, Schutz’s representation of Emmett Till will not easily disappear—but ultimately and transparently agree with Black’s view.³⁸⁴ I think that I understand Schutz’s impulse to paint this image, and interrogating that understanding, find it to be laden with suspect qualities. There are key points in Black’s letter as well as the responses to it that resonate with the concerns of this dissertation, around questions of dispossession and ownership, and the white gaze as one of ownership.³⁸⁵ Further, by interrogating the terms of the debate, it becomes evident that there are key understandings of how we look at images,

³⁸² Dawn L. Rothe and Victoria E. Collins, “Consent and Consumption of Spectacle Power and Violence,” *Critical Sociology* 44, 1 (2018). 15-28.

³⁸³ Hannah Black “Open Letter to the Curators and Staff of the Whitney Biennial,” (2017) Retrieved from <http://blackcontemporaryart.tumblr.com/post/158661755087/submission-please-read-share-hannah-blacks>

³⁸⁴ Around the same time, artist Pastiche Lumumba wrote a Facebook post in which he argued that “Schutz should pay black artists to remove and/or decide what happens to it.” *Facebook* (March 22, 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10154523889816089&set=a.112413731088.92681.505711088&type=3&theater>

³⁸⁵ Black writes on this subject, “white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights.”

and who we are when we look at images, that have not shifted. I tread careful lines in thinking through identity and authorship as a white academic, when the precise critique of the work of Dana Schutz and others is their whiteness—not as skin color but as mode of ownership, the ability to claim the experience of blackness with impunity. What, here, does it mean to look differently as a white person, against the white look in a way that honors the work, the labor of Black countervisuality—that is, that counters the authoritative visuality whose first domain, according to Mirzoeff, is the slave plantation?³⁸⁶ I want to name this practice of looking differently, by whoever is doing it, as work, and acknowledge the multivalences of this. First, the work of mourning, to go off the language of Claudia Rankine, and the work of theory; but also the “white look” as something that one works through, that is an effect of the looped gaze, of looking back at oneself. It is not enough to see, if we do not identify where we are looking from. I draw on a lineage of scholarship that works to define the relationship between the image and feeling, and what can be done with the gaze. I struggle here with the desire to write in a liberatory mode, to follow my own gut desire when I look at images and to be captured by the common political and ethical feeling that I find in the scholarship that I cite throughout this project. At the same time, I recognize the failure of this project is precisely that which I have named throughout this writing—the look is shaped by ideology, and the desire for another way of looking is constrained by this regime of truth.

³⁸⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

I don't know if learning to see differently is enough, in fact I'm sure it isn't. But it's something.

After Black's open letter was released, defenses of Schutz's work proliferated in and outside of the art world. While it did not go viral, someone started a hashtag: #FreeDanaSchutz. Coco Fusco responded quickly, within about a week, with an article in *Hyperallergic*, titled, "Censorship, Not the Painting, Must Go," which tries to unpack Black's letter towards eviscerating it.³⁸⁷ I was particularly interested in Fusco's response for a few reasons—she is a Black artist and scholar who frequently makes work about race, colonization, and representation, who wrote a munificent defense of Schutz's work. Additionally, in a coincidence that I will discuss more later in this chapter, a couple of weeks before writing this piece, on March 11th, Fusco had performed a piece about the Herero and Nama genocide in Berlin. I am interested in these overlapping moments, in which histories of violence become tied together through transnational arts and memory practices.

Fusco argues in her defense of the painting, "there is a deeply puritanical and anti-intellectual strain in American culture that expresses itself by putting moral judgement before aesthetic understanding. To take note of that is not equitable with defending whiteness...it's a defense of civil liberties and an appeal for civility."³⁸⁸ She continues, "I

³⁸⁷ Coco Fusco, "Censorship, Not the Painting, Must Go: On Dana Schutz's Image of Emmett Till," *Hyperallergic* (March 27, 2017). Retrieved from <https://hyperallergic.com/368290/censorship-not-the-painting-must-go-on-dana-schutzs-image-of-emmett-till/>

³⁸⁸ "Civility" has taken on a conflicted aspect since the 2014 firing of Professor Steven Salaita. See for example Evyn Lê Espiritu and Jasbir K. Puar, "Civility, Academic Freedom, and the Project of Decolonization: A Conversation with Steven Salaita," *Qui Parle* 24, 1 (2015). 63-88.

suspect that many of those endorsing the call [to destroy the painting] have either forgotten or are unfamiliar with the ways Republicans, Christian Evangelicals, and black conservatives exploit the argument that audience offense justifies censorship in order to terminate public funding for art altogether and to perpetuate heterosexist values in black communities.”³⁸⁹ In addition to puritanism and anti-intellectualism, Fusco blames Black’s failure to get the painting on “Eurocentric art education,” an over-emphasis on formalism, elitism, and a failure to understand art history. Fusco further critiques the letter by arguing that artists like Black “lack formal opportunities to engage with critical race discourses and histories of anti-racist cultural production.”³⁹⁰ Here, I put Schutz’s work and Black and Fusco’s letters precisely in the context of critical race discourses and histories of anti-racist as well as white supremacist cultural production, towards an understanding of what work the circulation of the painting, as well as the circulation of the letter, might do in this landscape.

Dana Schutz is not the first artist to depict Emmett Till’s body. A rendering of his portrait—his living face, not his corpse—is a frequent subject of civil rights murals. A 2012 painting that does engage Till’s body after his murder was titled “How She Sent Him and How She Got Him Back.” The painting, by Lisa Whittington, who is a Black woman, was presented as a contrasting study to Schutz’s piece by writers including Jared Sexton, who describes the theme of the painting as “careful, responsible remembrance” (although Sexton seems ambivalent about the success of this painting as

³⁸⁹ This claim frankly seems unfair, and unlikely.

³⁹⁰ Fusco, “Censorship, Not the Painting, Must Go,” 2017.

well). In Whittington's piece, Till is presented as a kind of two-faced horror, on the left, half of a child-like rendering of a big-eyed boy in a yellow shirt, against a bright blue background. On the right, the painting becomes visceral and terrible, the background dark, the boy grotesque and naked and brutalized. In Whittington's painting at least, there is a "before," Till is not always already a body made flesh. As a viewer of art, I find this painting to be aesthetically distasteful. I don't like it. It is hard to look at. For

Whittington, writing about her own work after the Schutz controversy, "How She Sent Him and How She Got Him Back" is purposefully difficult. She critiques the over-aestheticism of Schutz's painting, calling it too peaceful and without horror.³⁹¹ She does not ascribe this over-aestheticism inherently to the abstraction of the painting; the possibility that a painting might be abstract and also capture horror is left open. Sexton describes the "curious loop" represented by the spectacle of these paintings—both paintings—by which, to attempt to protect the lives of Black children, "we are drawn into an imagination of atrocities committed against them, compelled to watch them being brutalized."³⁹² This begs the question, which arises also in regards to body cams and cell phone footage of police murders: Is the spectacle of Black death in fact necessary in order to protect Black life?

³⁹¹ Lisa Whittington, "#MuseumsSoWhite: Black Pain and Why Painting Emmett Till Matters," *NBC Think* (March 26, 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/news/museumssowhite-representation-black-pain-why-emmett-till-painting-matters-ncna737931>

³⁹² Jared Sexton, "The Rage: Some Closing Comments on 'Open Casket'," *Contemporary* (May 21, 2017). Retrieved from <http://contemporary.org/the-rage-sexton/>

In Fusco's response to Black, she makes the point that white artists have long made anti-racist art, and further, that "black artists have also accrued social capital and commercial gain from their treatment of black suffering." As Fusco points out, the Biennial includes a painting of Philando Castile dying in his car after being shot by police, painted by Henry Taylor, who is a Black man. Taylor's painting did not garner protest despite also portraying a somewhat abstracted scene of Black death, perhaps because his other paintings in the exhibit read as celebrations of Black life, and perhaps as Fusco critiques, because Taylor is Black. While in many ways Black's letter, as well as Fusco's response to it, center around what might be described as identity politics, in my reading, the differing central claims of both are around the nature of white supremacy and the white look, and what rights whiteness may claim. The "also" in Fusco's critique belies a false equivalency between the social capital and commercial gain accessible to Black artists versus white artists, much less as a result of work made about Black death.³⁹³ Taylor's painting, titled "THE TIMES THAY AINT A CHANGING, FAST ENOUGH!" has a different kind of intimacy than Schutz's "Open Casket." On the one hand, there is a temporal intimacy—the video taken by Diamond Reynolds of the 2016 murder of her boyfriend, Philando Castile by police officer Jeronimo Yanez, was watched millions of times and circulated virally online.³⁹⁴ The likelihood of viewers of Taylor's painting having watched the footage is high; the alternative is that the viewer of the

³⁹³ I would like to at some point investigate the proliferation of "Black Lives Matter" swag made available through businesses that appear to have no connection to the movement and were often not Black owned.

³⁹⁴ Streamed on Facebook Live, see forthcoming work by Katy Gray on this subject.

painting has actively avoided watching the footage. The painting then acts as an index to the footage, implicating or commiserating with the audience in their viewership of this Black death spectacle in its original circulation. And yet, his painting is temporally suspended, seemingly in the impossible moment of possibility in which Castile might be saved—there is no blood, the pink hand holding the gun and the brown body exist together on the canvas in stasis.³⁹⁵ Schutz, while seeking to evoke present-day anti-Black violence, chose to present a temporally distant death, and long after the moment of possibility—Emmett Till will not be saved, although in the painting, the casket will never be closed, the matter will never be buried. To witness death in the present and to then present death in the past on the one hand might cite a historical continuity, and on the other hand, might dispel a sense of urgency. And then there is the question of positionality, the intimacy that defenders of Schutz seek to deny or mitigate: that Taylor is a Black man depicting the circumstances of death of a Black man by a non-Black police officer, while Schutz is a white woman depicting the aftermath of the death of a Black boy because of the actions of a white woman.

In her open letter, Black writes, “those non-black artists who sincerely wish to highlight the shameful nature of white violence should first of all stop treating Black pain as raw material.” The language of raw material evokes both the idea of biological substrate and of natural resource—returning to Spillers’s conception of the flesh as that which precedes the body. The hieroglyphics which mark the Black body through the

³⁹⁵ See Teju Cole. “Death in the Browser Tab,” *The New York Times* (May 24, 2015). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/24/magazine/death-in-the-browser-tab.html>.

history of chattel slavery is then still, in an ongoing sense, most profitable for the perpetrator, within racial capitalism. Fusco responds, “the argument that any attempt by a white cultural producer to engage with racism via the expression of black pain is inherently unacceptable forecloses the effort to achieve interracial cooperation, mutual understanding, or universal anti-racist consciousness.” There is a deep difference between treating Black pain as raw material and engaging with racism. Far from inherently unacceptable, it is crucial that white cultural producers engage with racism. However, if that work is done via the *expression of black pain*, that is, the conveyance of the feeling of pain of Black people by white cultural producers as surrogates, Hannah Black and the signers of the open letter have every reason to be suspicious. Further, the goals that Fusco names, returning to the argument around equivocation, are, ones that flatten the experience of racism to something that would require equal output from all parties. Mutual understanding implies that an understanding of the position of whiteness is appropriate, much less that whiteness is salvageable as a positionality.

Black writes, “if Black people are telling her [Schutz] that the painting has caused unnecessary hurt, she and you [the curators] must accept the truth of this.” As in the previous chapter, in which the standpoints of indigenous people whose ancestors’ remains were stolen and the institutions that stole them were at best equivocated, much of the writing on “Open Casket” at best presents the views of Schutz and the museum as equivalent to those of Black people upset by the painting. Often in both cases—even when supporting the injured party of color—the institutional or white view is seen as the reasonable or empirical one, and the view of people of color as merely emotional. The

institutional response within the Biennial was to change the text of the exhibit, as though the protest could be rendered another aspect of the display rather than a genuine political intervention. Just as Indigenous claims to their ancestors remains are described as merely or even dangerously religious and anti-science, the claims against Schutz are described as “puritanical and anti-intellectual.”³⁹⁶ Fusco writes, “It is difficult to reason with the enraged.” The language of rage contributes to the sense, in response to the letter and other critiques of Schutz’s work, that the white woman artist needs protection from *Black* rage in particular, re-employing precisely the gendered racial markers that underpin violence against Black people.

The Black Body Naked and Dead

“and wherever I looked that summer/ I learned to be at home with children's blood/ with savored violence/ with pictures of black broken flesh/ used, crumpled, and discarded” —“Afterimages” by Audre Lorde

In 2005, Schutz made a painting titled “The Autopsy of Michael Jackson.” The painting features a ghoulish, yellow corpse on a morgue table, surrounded by colors that evoke viscera. The Y-cut in the figure’s chest is legible, the genitals are a deeply abstracted set of shapes that do not suggest a penis or any other discernible sex organ. The painting is significant in relation to Schutz’s later decision to paint “Open Casket”—Jackson did not die until 2009 (Art critic Hrag Vartanian referred to the painting in 2009 as “prescient”³⁹⁷) and in the painting, the artist’s brush prefigures the coroner’s scalpel. Schutz’s painting of Jackson suggests a fascination with the black body in death. In an

³⁹⁶ Dumont, “The Politics of Scientific Objections,” 122; Fusco, ““Censorship, Not the Painting,” 2017.

³⁹⁷ Hrag Vartanian, “Dana Schutz’ Prescient “Autopsy of Michael Jackson” (2005)” (June 27, 2009) Retrieved from <https://hragvartanian.com/2009/06/27/dana-schutz-mj/>



Dana Schutz, "The Autopsy of Michael Jackson" (2005)

interview with *Bomb Magazine*, she said, "I was thinking of the painting as a photograph that hasn't been taken yet....How does he die? How old is he? What shape is he in? What does he look like naked?"³⁹⁸ While Schutz stated an interest in Jackson as an icon,³⁹⁹ her choice of Jackson specifically, and Jackson dead, specifically, cannot be separated from ways in which death and nakedness, in the white gaze, have historically figured in violent ways for Black men and women. Race figured in violent ways for Jackson, and contributed to his early death. The question—*What does the Black body look like, naked and dead?*—has long been a subject of fascination, spectacle, illicit desire, in the white gaze. Claudia Rankine writes:

³⁹⁸ Mei Chin, "Interview with Dana Schutz," *Bomb Magazine* (April 1, 2006) Retrieved from <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/dana-schutz/>

³⁹⁹ Margaret Schwartz writes about Jackson's body as iconic in *Dead Matter: The Meaning of Iconic Corpses*, in which she also writes about the body of Emmett Till. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

We live in a country where Americans assimilate corpses in their daily comings and goings. Dead blacks are a part of normal life here. Dying in ship hulls, tossed into the Atlantic, hanging from trees, beaten, shot in churches, gunned down by the police or warehoused in prisons: Historically, there is no quotidian without the enslaved, chained or dead black body to gaze upon or to hear about or to position a self against.⁴⁰⁰

Rankine to an extent here juxtaposes “American” to the “black body” in a way that demarcates citizenship and indeed personhood as white—following Wynter's and Spillers’ historicization of precisely this relationship. The privileged ordinariness of life for white people, for *Americans*, the very production of the white body, as Rankine points out, is produced through the juxtaposition of the Black flesh. This is the pre-condition of the gaze, in the afterlife of slavery—in *the wake*, to again draw on Sharpe’s naming of the temporality of chattel slavery and anti-blackness. Rankine takes as a primary object of her observations—not precisely the image of Emmett Till in his open coffin, but rather the choice by his mother Mamie Till to present her son’s body to the public. Rankine writes, “by placing both herself and her son’s corpse in positions of refusal relative to the etiquette of grief, she ‘disidentified’ with the tradition of the lynched figure left out in public view as a warning to the black community, thereby using the lynching tradition against itself.”⁴⁰¹ Mamie Till insisted on a spectacle, a forcing of the gaze—“Let the people see what I see,” she said. Rankine also uses the language of spectacle—language that is echoed by Parker Bright’s protest at the 2017 Whitney Biennial but in a different register, and one that shifts over time.

⁴⁰⁰ Claudia Rankine, “The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning,” *The New York Times* (June 22, 2015) Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html>

⁴⁰¹ Rankine, “The Condition of Black Life,” 2015.

To what extent does Black death, in this moment, constitute a spectacle? And to what extent is Black death normalized to the point of being mundane? Sharpe names the unnatural deaths of Black people as so normative as to be “the ground we walk on.”⁴⁰² Perhaps this normalization, after the initial spectacle, frames each death for those removed from the immediate experience of loss, as an iteration that slides off the eye. In my previous chapters, I have described how the same images may circulate as both trophy and appeal; in this chapter, I look at the parallaxic gaze by which an image can circulate as both at once, and by which the image is re-cycled and iterative. Parallaxis, which I discuss in greater depth later in this chapter, is a way of understanding the participation of the spectator in making meaning in visual texts, when looking from different positions. Critical visual studies scholars—from Ariella Azoulay to Christina Sharpe, ask iterations of the same question—what is the demand in the gaze? What do I do with the look? This question is extended to ask, in the language cited by Campt, “Who is gazing,” or, who is looking? What histories structure your gaze? What will you do with your look?⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 7.

⁴⁰³ I ask these questions throughout my work—the language of the last two questions is from my review of Tina Campt’s *Listening to Images* in *The New Inquiry*—JB Brager, “See Hear: A Review of Tina Campt’s *Listening to Images*,” *The New Inquiry* (June 2, 2017). Retrieved from <https://thenewinquiry.com/see-hear/>

Schutz, in an interview with *Art Net News*, describes the image of Emmett Till as “analogous” to the images being produced in 2016 when she made the painting.⁴⁰⁴ Her language is a repetition of her official statement, posted next to her painting in the Biennial exhibit: “Till’s photograph, like a still-open wound, felt analogous to the horrific events of the summer. What had been hidden was now in plain view.”⁴⁰⁵ The language of analogy sticks—it presents an understanding of these violences as ruptures, as wounds, rather than all aspects of the same damn wound. In the documentary *13th*, activist Cory Greene, speaking about photos of police violence, says, “we don’t need to see pictures to understand what’s going on, it’s really to...speak to the majority of masses who have been ignoring this...But I also think there’s trouble of just showing black bodies as dead bodies too.”⁴⁰⁶ This comment, read with Schutz’s statement, reveals two snags— first, the idea that anything had been *hidden*, versus, as Greene points out, ignored. In 2016, the year that Schutz painted “Open Casket,” police killed 1,169 people in the United States—the year before, 1,220.⁴⁰⁷ And second, the statement that “what was hidden was now revealed” presents a passive revelation—does Schutz mean that the photograph of Till’s

⁴⁰⁴ Brian Boucher, “Dana Schutz Responds to the Uproar Over Her Emmett Till Painting at the Whitney Biennial,” *Art Net News* (March 23, 2017). Retrieved from <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/dana-schutz-responds-to-the-uproar-over-her-emmett-till-painting-900674>

⁴⁰⁵ Boucher, “Dana Schutz Responds to the Uproar,” 2017.

⁴⁰⁶ Ava DuVernay (Producer & Director), Howard Barish and Spencer Averick (Producers), *13th* (United States: Kandoo Films, 2016).

⁴⁰⁷ Numbers from the “Killed by Police” project. Retrieved from <http://www.killedbypolice.net>.

body and the camera phone footage of police murders are equally revealing?⁴⁰⁸ Is she, even implicitly, taking credit for revelation, through her presentation of Till's corpse via "Open Casket"? Here, we return to the trouble with just showing black bodies as dead bodies. The horrific footage director Ava Duvernay includes in *13th*, of Black people being murdered by the police captured primarily on smartphone cameras, is all included explicitly with the permission of the families of the victims. The permission of the families is logistically beside the point—for better or worse, each of these scenes has gone viral, they are available widely on the Internet and would conceivably fall under fair use. At times, it is difficult to avoid them when scrolling through news feeds, even if you don't want to see them, if you are exhausted by the reiteration of these traumatizing scenes, if the scene is of your loved one and the moment of their death is shown, over and over. In a piece about the shooting of Walter Scott, whose murder by police officer Michael Slager was caught on camera by witness Feidin Santana, Teju Cole writes, "The videographic afterimage of a real event is always peculiar. When the event is a homicide, it can cross over into the uncanny: the sudden, unjust and irrevocable end of the long story of what one person was, whom he loved, all she hoped, all he achieved, all she didn't, becomes available for viewing and reviewing."⁴⁰⁹ Cole describes the difficulty of looking away, and the impossible desire to stop the video, close the browser, in the

⁴⁰⁸ The wording from the *Art World* interview, which differs slightly from the exhibit text.

⁴⁰⁹ Teju Cole, "Death in the Browser Tab," *The New York Times Magazine* (May 21, 2015). Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/24/magazine/death-in-the-browser-tab.html?_r=0. ; The video of Scott's death was subsequently posted on the digital front page of the *New York Times*.

seconds before Scott falls, when there is, in the time of the video, “still time,” a desire that I also read in Henry Taylor’s painting of Philando Castile.⁴¹⁰

Parallactic Witnessing and Racial Refraction

While Dana Schutz, as a white artist, can make a painting of Emmett Till that is read as fine art and an exercise in universal empathy, the work of Black artists making work about violence against Black people may be dismissed as didactic or too particular. At best, work by Black artists about the violence against Black people is simply digested through the same art world lens—as fine art, an exercise in universal empathy—a double bind which flattens the political urgency of death that is happening right now. The question of what is accomplished by the act of painting Emmett Till, in the thought process of Dana Schutz, is not the same of the effect of the finished painting on display or in circulation. Schutz’s process, according to her, was aural as well as visual. She explains, “More than the photograph of Emmett Till, I relied on listening to Mamie Till-Bradley’s verbal account of seeing her son, which oscillates between memory and observation. I thought of this as a social painting, this happened in America, and it’s still happening.”⁴¹¹ Schutz immediately re-claims the image of Till as one that belongs to America (and thus, as a white supremacist nation state, to white people). This rhetorical move attempts to shield Schutz from the critique that her painting undermines the divide

⁴¹⁰ Cole, “Death in the Browser Tab,” 2015.

⁴¹¹ One can listen to Schutz talk about her piece at the Whitney Biennial 2017 Audio Guide Playlist, retrieved from <https://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/AudioGuides/40?stop=23>

between Mamie Till's performative act—⁴¹² her purposeful creation of a spectacle and her faith in the power of the photograph; and that which belonged only to Mamie Till—her memories, her subjective experience of seeing the body of her murdered son. Mamie Till made a set of choices that turned the image of her son's body into an appeal, into a body of evidence—it was not chance or provenance but her determination for Emmett's death to have political force of meaning that made the body *spectacle*. Mamie Till, writing in her memoir, describes the moment Emmett's body arrived in Chicago, before even the opening of the casket—"And I kept screaming, as the cameras kept flashing, in one long explosive moment that would be captured for the morning editions."⁴¹³ The photograph circulated in ways which might, in a pre-digital sense, still be described as viral, but the photographs were published originally in *Jet* in 1955, the "weekly Negro news magazine." Photojournalist Ernest Withers's⁴¹⁴ "close-up of Emmett's face, published in *Jet* on September 15...was passed around at barbershops, beauty parlors, college campuses, and black churches, reaching millions of people. Perhaps no photograph in history can lay claim to a comparable impact in black America."⁴¹⁵ Fusco takes issue with

⁴¹² Mamie Till is referred to by the last names Till, Bradley, and Mobley by various authors, based on different last names she had throughout her life.

⁴¹³ Mamie Till-Mobley, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America* (New York: Random House, 2003). 132. Quoted in Timothy Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 68.

⁴¹⁴ A revered Civil Rights Movement photographer who was revealed in 2010 to also be an FBI informant—see Robbie Brown, "Civil Rights Photographer Unmasked as Informer," *The New York Times* (Sept. 13, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/14/us/14photographer.html>

⁴¹⁵ Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till*, 75.

Hannah Black's assertion that "Till was made available to Black people as an inspiration and warning," turning to the idea that, in statements by Mamie Till, all the world was meant to see Emmett's body. Fusco is not incorrect in the assertion that Black people were not the only audience, of course. Although Christina Sharpe rightly points out that the original publication in *Jet* would have reached precisely a Black audience, the photographs likely traveled in ways that exceeded their original circulation. Sexton intervenes, naming the truth that "nothing is ever made available *only* to black people, no matter how hard we may try to cultivate the esoteric or mimic the proprietary. We have no sanctuary for such contemplation."⁴¹⁶ Because relations of ownership are foundationally tied to race in the United States, the conception that anything would be for only Black people is anathema to the broader culture, which of course relies primarily on the production of or appropriations of Black cultural labor. This understanding highlights the risk taken by Mamie Till and indeed any Black mother who makes the work of mourning visible—to make one's loss a spectacle risks providing a trophy for those whose gaze is shaped by white supremacist desire, rather than an appeal or a demand.

In another statement, quoted in the *New York Times*, Schutz said, "I don't know what it is like to be black in America but I do know what it is like to be a mother. Emmett was Mamie Till's only son. The thought of anything happening to your child is beyond comprehension. Their pain is your pain. My engagement with this image was through empathy with his mother...I don't believe that people can ever really know what it is like to be someone else (I will never know the fear that black parents may have) but neither

⁴¹⁶ Sexton, "The Rage," 2017.

are we all completely unknowable.” In an article titled “The Case Against Dana Schutz” in *The New Republic*, Josephine Livingstone and Lovia Gyarkye write, “Schutz’s defense is that her project is more about gender than race...[her narrative] flattens the layers of black motherhood—a position complicated by the contradictions of being both black and a woman in America...if Schutz identified so strongly with Mobley, why did she paint Emmett Till’s corpse and not a portrait of Mobley herself? When Schutz made that choice, she decided that her own feelings of empathy for Mobley as a mother mattered more than Mobley’s relationship with her dead son or the way she chose to represent him in death.”⁴¹⁷ While Schutz gives lip service to the incommensurability of experience, she seems to have not thought through her exercise in empathy, as Livingstone and Gyarkye remark. Schutz’s belief that she was engaging in empathy with a grieving mother by painting the body of her dead son seems misplaced—did Schutz think she could feel what Mamie Till felt? What was she trying to know? And then, Carolyn Bryant was also a mother— at the time of her husband’s murder trial, her sons were three and two years old.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁷ Josephine Livingstone and Lovia Gyarkye, “The Case Against Dana Schutz,” *The New Republic* (March 22, 2017) Retrieved from <https://newrepublic.com/article/141506/case-dana-schutz>

⁴¹⁸ In the 2017 poem “To the child of the white artist, whose mother said her painting of Emmett Till was about a conversation with his mother,” poet Rachel Eliza Griffiths writes, “*Forgive me*. Is that what your mother meant?/Was it shame or a sensation: *this could be mine*. My own/child dragged up from ole Dixie's depths? Was it a fear?” The poem continues later, “A black boy's face is free speech/ somewhere. Is that what your mother meant?/Or did she slip into another woman's grief with her/ brushes & white canvas? Chile, did she tell/ you what it meant?” Retrieved from https://www.buzzfeed.com/poetrachelelizagriffiths/to-the-white-artist-who-said-her-painting-of-emmett-till?utm_term=.ryXBzwRKq#.nyQ0eojXG

The word *parallax* is defined as “The effect whereby the position or direction of an object appears to differ when viewed from different positions”⁴¹⁹—I look to parallax here as a way of thinking about positionality in witnessing, to conceptualize less physical space than social space. For Schutz, “Open Casket” is an imagined image, Emmett Till’s corpse rendered through the mind and brush of a white woman. Dana Schutz says “the painting is very different from the photograph. I could never render the photograph ethically or emotionally.”⁴²⁰ Sexton describes another kind of parallax; “Schutz, some sixty years later, would like *not* to be like Bryant, implicated in the state-sanctioned racial violence against black people, and perhaps especially that violence which polices interracial sexual encounter.”⁴²¹ Schutz as white woman who paints a dead black child resists identification with Carolyn Bryant, whose words caused the murder of a Black child, motivated by the anxiety surrounding interracial sex and particularly the fear of violation of white womanhood. As Sexton points out, Schutz’s attempt at empathy, her identification with Emmett Till’s mother, is disrupted by a difference in location. Sexton writes, Schutz cannot “simultaneously track her pathos and her positioning” in her painting of Emmett Till—echoing Whittington’s urging that rather than only express her empathy for Mamie Till, Schutz explore her relationship to Carolyn Bryant. She would like, as Sexton writes, *not to be like Bryant*, but perhaps must consider and sit with the likeness precisely in order to escape it.

Writing about the forensic

⁴¹⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁴²⁰ Boucher, “Dana Schutz Responds to the Uproar,” 2017.

⁴²¹ Sexton, “The Rage,” 2017.

spectacle of the murdered Black African body, David Marriott describes the consumption of the body “as spectacle, as commodity” as revealing “[a connection] between a gaze that destroys and petrifies and a gaze that carries the wish to have what is seen enter into me as visceral capital...the spectral life of the commodity endures and maintains itself in the magical eye of the camera.”⁴²² Marriott writes, “It is as if whites and blacks were watching different screens and the spectator’s eye were geared to a differing set of frames and patterns.”⁴²³ Sharpe, in an interview with *Hyperallergic*, frames this difference through the language of intimacy—what is the position of the viewer in relationship to the “Black brutalized body”? Schutz paints us all looking down into Emmett Till’s open casket, but who are we to him? When we look, do we see a son? Another body on the nightly news? Sharpe writes that we are all in the wake, we are all doing wake work, but that there is “an intimacy that you have as the perpetrator of violence, and an intimacy that you have as people who have suffered violence.”⁴²⁴ The work that each of these intimate relationships demands is different. Whittington poses the questions that she would ask Schutz, after seeing her work: “Where is the artwork that interprets the lies that got Emmett Till killed? Where are the portraits of the men who lynched Emmett? What was in their eyes during the act of murder? What color is remorse?”⁴²⁵ Whittington

⁴²² Marriott, *Haunted Life*, xix.

⁴²³ Marriott, *Haunted Life*, xxi.

⁴²⁴ Siddhartha Mitter, “‘What Does It Mean to Be Black and Look at This?’ A Scholar Reflects on the Dana Schutz Controversy,” *Hyperallergic* (March 24, 2017). Retrieved from <https://hyperallergic.com/368012/what-does-it-mean-to-be-black-and-look-at-this-a-scholar-reflects-on-the-dana-schutz-controversy/>

⁴²⁵ Whittington, “#MuseumsSoWhite,” 2017.

urges Schutz to continue the work of “Open Casket,” in a generative calling-in that acknowledges the need for white people to look at and face ongoing racial violence and white supremacy. And, as part of this work, to admit when the refractions of racial violence prevent seeing.

Sharpe asks, “if museums and memorials materialize a kind of reparation (repair) and enact their own pedagogies as they position visitors to have a particular experience or set of experiences about an event that is seen to be past, how does one memorialize chattel slavery and its afterlives, which are unfolding still?”⁴²⁶ The temporality of museums and monuments is static, representing fixed points in time. What small claims the Biennial had to being a didactic project were disrupted by the lack of pedagogical interventions—the lack of intervention, rather than positioning the museum as a neutral site of open interpretation, positions the museum as a site of unmarked whiteness. One of the curators of the Whitney Biennial exhibit, Christopher Y. Lew, was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, “For us it was so much about an issue that extends across race. Yes, it’s mostly black men who are being killed, but in a larger sense this is an American problem.” The other curator, Mia Locks, stated that the painting “was a means of ‘not letting Till’s death be forgotten, as Mamie, his mother so wanted.”⁴²⁷ What does it mean for this to be an American problem? It is difficult to unpack Lew’s statements without

⁴²⁶ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 20. A question that presciently evokes the investments of this chapter as well as the third chapter of this project.

⁴²⁷ Randy Kennedy, “White Artist’s Painting of Emmett Till at Whitney Biennial Draws Protests,” *The New York Times* (March 21, 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/21/arts/design/painting-of-emmett-till-at-whitney-biennial-draws-protests.html?mtrref=www.google.com>

pushing against them along the same lines of false equivalency and universality that appears in many defenses of Schutz. Of course racist violence is an issue that extends across race, but not flatly. In regards to Locks's statement, the question of memory is an interesting one. Emmett Till's murder and his mother's activism is a central narrative in United States civil rights histories. His image is already iconic—but also, his mother's purpose in making visible his murder was for the purpose of justice, not memory for memories sake. If one is going to paint a very different painting from the photograph, a social painting that renders the brutally murdered body of a young Black boy in his coffin, it seems important to know to what end that project is being undertaken.

Rankine gestures towards the trophy/appeal paradox in relationship to images of Michael Brown's body in Ferguson and the crime scene photographs from the Charleston church shooting; "once exposed to it, a person had to decide whether [Brown's] dead black body mattered enough to be mourned." She continues—"Another option, of course, is that it becomes a spectacle for white pornography: the dead body as an object that satisfies an illicit desire."⁴²⁸ These are not the only options of the parallaxic gaze (and there is arguably an overlapping position), but are perhaps the most salient. In the open letter, Black writes, "That even the disfigured corpse of a child was not sufficient to move the white gaze from its habitual cold calculation is evident daily and in a myriad of ways, not least the fact that this painting exists at all." Against this position, Fusco argues, "the fact that [Schutz] was stirred to resurrect the image of Emmett Till's open casket is a sign of the success of the Black Lives Matter movement in forging awareness of patterns of

⁴²⁸ Rankine, "The Condition of Black Life," 2015.

state violence by politicizing the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, and others.” Sexton wryly critiques, “Maybe [Schutz] tried to imagine that black lives matter and, given the convoluted outcome, a good many black people were left thinking, ‘with friends like this....’” Again, what might be accomplished for Dana Schutz in the process of the act of painting Emmett Till, is not the same of the effect of the finished painting on display or in circulation. The critique is not then of what Black Lives Matter may have stirred within Schutz, but what the white look, the white museum, then enabled for other’s to look at.

Christina Sharpe describes “a kind of blackened knowledge, an unscientific method, that comes from observing that where one stands is relative to the door of no return and that moment of historical and ongoing rupture. With this as the ground, I’ve been trying to articulate a method of encountering a past that is not past.”⁴²⁹ Sharpe urges her reader, “we must think about Black flesh, Black optics, and ways of producing enfleshed work...At stake is not recognizing antiblackness as total climate. At stake too, is not recognizing an insistent Black visualsonic resistance to that imposition of non/being.”⁴³⁰ Sharpe later cites an Arthur Jafa interview with artist Kara Walker— Walker describes her place of making work as “a kind of ‘retinal detachment’” in which she becomes a being without skin, without gender or race in the sense of being un-skinned.⁴³¹ “The skin is literally kind of pulled away...It’s not a safe space to be, but it’s one where

⁴²⁹ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 13.

⁴³⁰ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 21.

⁴³¹ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 97.

you can kind of look at the underside of race a little bit.”⁴³² To be without skin is not the same as retinal detachment; one implies an engagement with the flayed body in the sense of vulnerability as well as wounding. While race is written on the skin, the skin pulled away does not un-race the body. By contrast, retinal detachment as a true disorder, is characterized by “the appearance of a curtain over the field of vision,” a literal failure of sight as a sense.⁴³³ Sharpe critiques Walker’s work here, noting the relationship between retinal detachment and blindness—Sharpe notes the histories which Walker does not see or contend with, the limited range of her imaginings. One might extend Sharpe’s critique, which focuses on the framing of the Domino sugar factory installation *A Subtlety*, to Walker’s response to the controversy over Schutz’s inclusion in the Whitney Biennial. At the height of the controversy, Walker posted an image of Artemisia Gentileschi’s painting “Judith Slaying Holofernes” with text that, while it did not name Schutz or the painting, seemed to offer support for the artist.⁴³⁴ In her comment, she takes up Schutz’s own

⁴³² Kara Walker, cited in Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 98.

⁴³³ The National Eye Institute, “Facts About Retinal Detachment” (2009). Retrieved from <https://nei.nih.gov/health/retinaldetach/retinaldetach>

⁴³⁴ “The history of painting is full of graphic violence and narratives that don't necessarily belong to the artists own life, or perhaps, when we are feeling generous we can ascribe the artist some human feeling, some empathy toward her subject. Perhaps, as with Gentileschi we hastily associate her work with trauma she experienced in her own life. I tend to think this unfair, as she is more than just her trauma. As are we all. I am more than a woman, more than the descendant of Africa, more than my fathers daughter. More than black more than the sum of my experiences thus far. I experience painting too as a site of potentiality, of query, a space to join physical and emotional energy, political and allegorical forms. Painting - and a lot of art often lasts longer than the controversies that greet it. I say this as a shout to every artist and artwork that gives rise to vocal outrage. Perhaps it too gives rise to deeper inquiries and better art. It can only do this when it is seen.” Kara Walker, Instagram Post (March 23, 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BR-3iH5l0ZW/>

language of empathy, and says that it is unfair to associate an artists work only with their own trauma. She says—“I am more than a woman, more than the descendant of Africa, more than my fathers daughter. More than black more than the sum of my experiences thus far.” Walker may be the contemporary artist par excellence when thinking about work that engages a visceral witnessing of the visibility of racial violence. Her panoramic paper cuts, for example, extend physiognomy into violent caricature. She relies on the viewers’ internal knowledge of racist stereotypes to identify the race of figures presented only in silhouette—and subjects these discomfiting characters to every violence imaginable. While these tropes and even, to an extent, the forms of violence familiar to chattel slavery and its afterlives are subverted and maneuvered within Walker’s work, her work nevertheless forces the viewer to confront and to perhaps consider their own relationship to this violence. Walker’s claim to retinal detachment is puzzling because of this—against this space of detachment, Sharpe asks what is *on* one’s retina, via the work of poet Dionne Brand and evoking Spillers—the history of the trans Atlantic slave trade is “written *on* her flesh, as an optic that guides her way of seeing, understanding, and accounting for her place in the world.”⁴³⁵ While this gaze is shaped by trauma and ongoing violence, it is also laden with possibility: “With the optic of the door of no return on our retina, we might envision, imagine, something else—something like what Joy James (2013) calls ‘a liberated zone’ even though under siege.”⁴³⁶ To behold, Sharpe

⁴³⁵ Sharpe, *In The Wake*, 99.

⁴³⁶ Sharpe, *In The Wake*, 100. Citing Joy James, “‘Concerning Violence’: Frantz Fanon’s Rebel Intellectual in Search of a Black Cyborg,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, 1 (2013). 57-70.

reminds us, is both to see or observe, and to be beholden, to have an obligation. The *optic* of the door of no return, drawing on Weheliye's *habeas viscus*, is a vestibular way of seeing, of visioning both a way to live within the flesh but also a way through, to imagine a future with a difference.

Atrocity and Abstraction

Jared Sexton writes, "I do not see in [Hannah Black's] demand to de-commodify and de-aestheticize the image and likeness of Emmett Till a call for silence or asceticism among non-black artists."⁴³⁷ Black's demand is, as Sexton points out, a gathering of a "black counter-public" in which the performative demand for the destruction of Schutz's painting allows the articulation of a broader critique and desire. For non-Black artists, questions of aesthetics, politics, and ethics must nevertheless be addressed. In Fusco's response to the open letter, she mounts a defense of the aesthetics of abstraction. Fusco argues that the aesthetic dominance of the Black Arts Movement (1965-1975), associated with Black power, demanded "realist aesthetics and didacticism" in the treatment of racial politics and racial trauma, marginalizing black abstractionists. Fusco dismisses the demand, writing, "I would have liked to think that the days of Black Arts Movement militancy were long gone."⁴³⁸ Interesting, the abstract nature of Schutz's representation is not mentioned in the open letter, which focuses on appropriation and the violence of the white gaze. Further, Fusco's defense of abstract art seems separate from her defense of non-didactic art in the context of Schutz's painting, which by the artist's own description

⁴³⁷ Sexton, "The Rage," 2017.

⁴³⁸ Fusco, "Censorship, Not the Painting," 2017.

is meant to have a didactic function despite its abstract quality. The existence of art that is not realistic and has no overt educational purpose is not under attack. Nevertheless, while Fusco dismisses the realist, didactic demands of “Black Arts Movement militancy,” the function of art (particularly art depicting real violence, whether abstract or realist) around the ethics of representation and the bounds of self-expression is in fact an open debate. In her defense of abstraction, Fusco references Adorno’s assertion about the Holocaust, that “realist representations of atrocity offer simple voyeuristic pleasure over a more profound grasp of the horrors of history.” Certainly, while faithful renderings operated as crucial evidence—and even more so the heroic efforts to capture photographs of the camps,⁴³⁹ the visceral, emotional impact of abstract art about atrocity cannot be discounted. Adorno captures the anxiety over voyeuristic pleasure and desire that are characteristic of a perpetrator gaze. Again, however, abstraction seems besides the point—rather, the specificity of the impact of the works being made, how they are circulated, and the material relations that shape these questions, must be attended to.

When confronting images—abstracted or otherwise—of real violence, the question becomes one of power. Against Schutz’s claiming of Black visual memory for an unmarked white universal, there is a critical tradition of Black artists and activists reclaiming images produced within a white supremacist framework. Leigh Raiford introduces the concept of “critical black memory [as] a mode of historical interpretation and political critique.” Raiford looks at lynching photography as it is re-signified as anti-lynching photography in a practice of “black visual hermeneutics” as a method of “visual

⁴³⁹ Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 2012.

re-visitations and iconographic re-inscriptions” by Black activists and artists towards “an assertion of themselves as viewing subjects and not merely visual objects.”⁴⁴⁰ Sharpe, in naming the dual project of imaging as representation and imagining as forming an idea, asks how Black artists and subjects image and imagine otherwise, against “those portraits outside of our own imaging and imagining in which, to borrow from Huey Copeland (2013), we seem ‘bound to appear.’”⁴⁴¹ She names a method of “Black visual/textual annotation and redaction” which works “toward reading and seeing something in excess of what is caught in the frame; toward seeing something in excess of what is caught in the frame; toward seeing something beyond a visibility that is, as Nicholas Mirzoeff argues, subtended by the logics of the administered plantation.”⁴⁴² Brian Wallis writes, in discussing Carrie Mae Weems’ 1995 photo/text series *From Here I Saw What Happened And I Cried*, “if colonialism and ethnographic exploitation depend on appropriation, one must acknowledge that what is taken can always be taken back.”⁴⁴³ Weems assembles and reinscribes a set of images; the first four images are appropriated from Louis Agassiz’s daguerreotypes, washed in red. The text reads, printed all caps in white across the images: “You became a scientific profile/ A Negroid type/ An anthropological debate/

⁴⁴⁰ Raiford, “Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory,” 114.

⁴⁴¹ Sharpe asks, “how might we understand a variety of forms of contemporary Black public image-making in and as refusals to accede to the optics, the disciplines, and the deathly demands of the antiblack worlds in which we lives, work, and struggle to make visible (to ourselves, if not to others) all kinds of Black pasts, presents, and possible futures?” (115). Citing Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁴⁴² Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 117.

⁴⁴³ Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science,” 59.

& a photographic subject.” Describing Weems’s 1992 Sea Island Series, which also made use of the Agassiz daguerreotypes, and echoing Raiford’s black visual hermeneutics as a mode of the gaze, Wallis writes, “Weems viewed their lives empathetically from a black point of view. She saw these men and women not as representatives of some typology but as living, breathing ancestors. She made them portraits.” In Weems’s intervention, the appropriated images are framed by mirrored and facing portraits of an African woman—her face in profile nevertheless evocative of ethnographic portraits, printed with the title of the assemblage *From Here I Saw What Happened And I Cried*—the use of “I” here imagines an affinity between the historical images and Weems as artist. The ancestor matriarch looks from the past at the fate of her descendants, the artist looks from the present at a traumatic past.⁴⁴⁴ There is a historical lack, in the archive, of self-portraits of Black women in particular, on the basis of uneven access to the technology and the purposeful inaccessibility of photographic technologies,⁴⁴⁵ on the one hand, and then the disparity in what is preserved, lines of provenance, the ways in which public and collective memory is contested and uneven, often reproducing the dominant ideology it produces. In 1972, Alice Walker wrote of the “genius of a great-great-grandmother who died under some ignorant and depraved white overseers lash” instead of making the art that she might have made, or whose work hangs in a museum under the nom de plume

⁴⁴⁴ The idea of the ancestor matriarch draws on Amber Musser’s work.

⁴⁴⁵ Returning here to my conversation in the introduction about Shirley Cards and the ways in which tropes of lighting were racialized and decidedly aimed at representing white bodies. Contending with the photographic representation of Black bodies has meant also contending with medium conventions and the very logic of the technology itself (thank you to Katy Gray, who offered these thoughts in this context).

“anonymous.”⁴⁴⁶ Debates about who has the ability to represent themselves and who is always represented by others are a part of an old discourse, and such representational violence has material effects. In *Photography on the Color Line*, Shawn Michelle Smith engages W.E.B. Du Bois’s 1900 project “Types of American Negroes” and 1906 project “The Health and Physique of the Negro American.” Du Bois, in these photographic series, was in conversation with eugenics as a nascent ideology and the visual language of anthropology—the images, as Smith argues, “replicates Galton’s methodology... reproducing the authoritative forms of race scientists to contest the dominant conclusions about race at which eugenicists arrived.”⁴⁴⁷ Writing about Malian photographer Seydou Keta in “Portrait of a Lady,” Teju Cole observes, “Something happened when Africans began to take photographs of one another: you can see it in the way they look at the camera, in the poses, the attitude.”⁴⁴⁸

I do not attempt to present an exhaustive or even partial list of the artists who might be referenced to counter Schutz’s project, because too many spring to mind. I think again of the Kerry James Marshall painting “Portrait of Nat Turner With the Head of His Master” that I referenced in Chapter 2, that triumphant moment where Turner’s oppressor is dead but he is still alive, as a painting that evokes the pain of history without reiterating it. Other artists, such as Ken Gonzalez-Day in his series “Erased Lynchings,” have taken

⁴⁴⁶ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1972).

⁴⁴⁷ Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 55.

⁴⁴⁸ Cole, *Known and Strange Things*, 129.

up the fraught relationship between the image and who is looking. In this series, Gonzalez-Day presents historical photographs of lynchings that have been manipulated to remove the image of the victim. The photographs, then, are without violence, uncanny particularly because some of them are iconic, because the viewer recognizes the absence and knows that there is meant to be something going on. Significantly, many of these images include white participants and spectators at the lynchings, which are left in the image, which become, with the victim absented, the focal point of the image. The eye is not drawn to the black and brown bodies undone, but to the white bodies that are implicated. In more recent work, such as the 2014 show “RUN UP,” Gonzalez-Day surreally blends scenes from the contemporary movement for Black Lives and against police violence, with historical images of lynchings, both reenacted in tableau.

In artist Doreen Garner’s 2014 performance and video piece “The Observatory,” the artist “displays herself as specimen.” The piece in fact evokes Coco Fusco’s 1992 site-specific performance with Guillermo Gomez-Pena at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. The two artists presented themselves as a living exhibition, in a gilded cage, as “undiscovered aborigines.”⁴⁴⁹ In “The Observatory, Garner evokes and subverts histories of human zoos, of the colonial exhibition, the enslaved or captive African as test subject, museum display. Further, “The Observatory” as spectacle engages and implicates the contemporary audience in their own fetishistic gaze upon the black body, splayed open, maybe naked, maybe dead. The video documentation is visceral and discomfiting;

⁴⁴⁹ Pamela Sommers, “Performance.” *The Washington Post* (1992). Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1992/10/20/performance/64a5c70e-d3db-4cd6-ad7f-62596334d1b9/?utm_term=.d1f5a5aab7c3

Garner, and subsequently the glass of the vitrine she is interred in, is smeared with petroleum jelly, and glitter, which reads as a kind of light-catching grime. The box is filled with condoms stuffed with materials that make them resemble entrails, and hair—as though it is coming out of or composes Garner’s body. Much of the footage is shot from a vantage in which the audience faces directly both Garner’s spread legs and her face; from this angle, the viscera looks strangely and monstrously obstetric. Garner has the blonde finger waves of a vintage Hollywood starlet, red lips and mascara that drips and runs as Garner blinks, twitches, grimaces, presses her face and then the ball of her foot against the glass to an alarming EDM Trap music soundtrack. Her body is contorted disconcertingly, her small movements seem almost animatronic, although she hardly moves at all. In the 3:13 minute long documentation of the hour-long performance, Garner’s gaze is almost always on the camera, and thus the viewer is met with the demand of her gaze. A ghost image of Garner’s face is reflected in the glass; over two-thirds of the way through the video, Garner turns away from the viewer and meets her own mirror reflection; briefly, before the camera cuts to a long shot, Garner disrupts her own long look and, inscrutably, meets her own eye.

Visceral Witnessing: In the Body

Anti-black racism, is, in Claudia Rankine’s words, “in our bodies no matter our race.”⁴⁵⁰ This way of describing the sedimentation of generations of legal and cultural anti-blackness exceeds implicit bias or internalized racism in its popularly understood sense, to think about the effects on the body—not only the wearing of race as embodied

⁴⁵⁰ Rankine, “The Condition of Black Life,” 2015.

but the ways in which racism wears down the body. And also, the visceral quality of racism as an embodied hatred—as a feeling that resides in and effects the body.⁴⁵¹ Here I return to the concept of viscosity as a way of thinking the embodied experience of the archive and the image. I note again Tortorici’s definition of viscosity as the “experience of intense and highly mediated bodily feelings or affective responses that manifest themselves through conflicting corporeal and emotive reactions.”⁴⁵² A number of feminist scholars address this embodied experience as an analytic when reading texts—like the archival encounter or the consumption of art. Amber Musser asserts that “using sensation as an analytic tool...emphasizes the connections between reader and text/object/ assemblage...[it] introduces contingency and multiplicity but also invites us to examine the fleshiness, or experiential dimension, of the text.”⁴⁵³ Relatedly, Tina Campt describes what she calls the “fifth haptic temporality” as that of her “own archival contact with the images and the albums.”⁴⁵⁴ In each of these readings, the text becomes lively in its effect on the body. This opens up space not necessarily to view texts as agential in of themselves but to make room in analysis for the multiples of human reaction that made occur, not only on an intellectual but on a gut level. In Campt’s archival reading, the photograph becomes an actor in the encounter, one of multiple conative bodies in space

⁴⁵¹ Sara Ahmed writes, “‘The hate,’ as an emotion that seems detached from bodies, surrounding the scene with its violence. And yet, the word ‘hate’ works by working on the surfaces of bodies.” *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁴⁵² Zeb Tortorici, “Visceral Archives of the Body: Consuming the Dead, Digesting the Divine,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20, 4 (2014), 407.

⁴⁵³ Musser, *Sensational Flesh*, 23.

⁴⁵⁴ Campt, *Listening to Images*, 90.

that interact and touch each other. This requires an act of imagination perhaps, but so does building the world we want to see; so does actively creating a future in which Black people can thrive. When dominant structures of apperception in the afterlife of colonialism and chattel slavery reproduce anti-Blackness, transformations toward utopian desire require a broadening of one's tools—a turn to other senses, other ways of perceiving.⁴⁵⁵ In reaction to the fleshiness of the text, Musser proposes “empathetic reading,” which “relies on fostering a connection between the corporeality of the reader and the structures of sensation.”⁴⁵⁶ While this reading strategy is a useful extension of the analytic tools available to read texts, empathy remains suspect as a category. Defined as “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another,” empathy nevertheless implies a slippery undertaking of identification, which may or may not be an accurate projection. Further, as the case of Dana Schutz’s “Open Casket” makes plain, empathetic feeling must still then be translated into responsible action.⁴⁵⁷

How History Travels

*“The woman in that article looked just like my grandmother
and that doesn’t happen to me –
I don’t belong to a tribe
I don’t know where my ancestors were from
I don’t have a homeland where people look like me
I’m just American, African American and
people tell me I look like other women all the time”
—Drury*

⁴⁵⁵ Brager, “See Hear,” 2017.

⁴⁵⁶ Musser, *Sensational Flesh*, 24.

⁴⁵⁷ This opens up a conversation about ethics and what it means to be ethical that exceeds this dissertation but that I hope to foray into in future work.

In March of 2017, Coco Fusco presented a performance at the Sophiensaele Theater in Berlin, of testimonial material from the “Words Cannot Be Found” 1918 *Blue Book* publication *Report On the Natives of South West Africa And Their Treatment By Germany*.⁴⁵⁸ This was before the opening of the Biennial and before the writing and publication of her response to Hannah Black’s open letter, though not by much. The performance, titled “Words May Not Be Found” was part of a series hosted by the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, and consisted of an ensemble in a black box theater reading fragments of text from the report. In an article by Vanessa Gravenor in *Sleek Magazine*, published in April of 2017, Gravenor, without referring specifically to either Schutz’s painting or Fusco’s own response to it, praises the performance in contrast to Schutz’s work. She writes:

“‘Words May Not Be Found’ explicitly focuses on the violence and pain of the black body, yet does not succumb to overtly exoticized spectacles that would allow the contemporary audience to view the events as sensational. In weeks where there has been persistent backlash against the spectacle of black suffering and the subsequent insistence of the destruction of such images because they remain consumable commodities for a majorly white audience, the ephemeral nature of Fusco’s performance resists typical codings.”⁴⁵⁹

The performance, which consisted of over two hours of textual readings in a dark theater without explicit aesthetics or performance, is marked by the kind of endurance that Fusco incorporates into much of her work. Gravenor is correct that there is no spectacle, in the sense of a visual impact. Sensationalism is an interesting question—the

⁴⁵⁸ Performance documentation provided for research purposes by Coco Fusco.

⁴⁵⁹ Vanessa Gravenor, “Coco Fusco Retells the first German Genocide in Berlin Performance.” *Sleek Magazine* (April 2017). Retrieved from <http://www.sleek-mag.com/2017/04/20/coco-fusco/>



Still from Coco Fusco, “Words May Not Be Found” (2017)

Blue Book when produced was rather a sensationalist project, intended to provoke disgust at the German colonizers and support for the new British regime. Fusco describes the *Blue Book* as “a very unusual kind of historical document; usually the story of colonialism is told by the colonizer.”⁴⁶⁰ This seems not a precise reading of the document — while it contains documentation of Herero testimony, it is filtered through the view of the British colonial government and thus is also a story of colonialism told by the colonizer.⁴⁶¹ Many of the testimonies are by Africans who worked with or for the colonial forces. Fusco retains faith in the power of testimony despite the context of the containing

⁴⁶⁰ Lily Kelting, “Life In Berlin: Coco Fusco Re-Opens German Colonial Archives.” *NPR Berlin* (March 15, 2017). Retrieved from <http://www.nprberlin.de/post/life-berlin-coco-fusco-re-opens-german-colonial-archives#stream/0>

⁴⁶¹ See Reinhart Kössler, “Sjambok or Cane? Reading the *Blue Book*.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, 3 (Sept 2004), 703-708; Mads Bomholt Nielsen, “Selective Memory: British Perceptions of the Herero-Nama Genocide, 1904-1908 and 1918,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43, 2 (Apr 2017), 315-330.

document, “testimony is testimony is testimony.”⁴⁶² In an interview with Contemporary And (C&), Fusco stated, “Being an outsider means that I don’t have a sense of a particular kind of guilt that would prevent me from doing certain things.” However, Fusco’s project was not wholly conceived of as an outsider; according to Fusco, “Words May Not Be Found” was developed in part out of conversations with young Afro-Germans and members of refugee groups who wanted to work on issues of the colonial past in relation to contemporary German denial and racism. Fusco also noted that she kept seeing clippings about the skulls in German institutions; “I have this image in my mind of these 7,000 skulls... one day I’m going to do a project about those goddamn skulls.”⁴⁶³ In fact, Fusco inquired about the possibility of accessing the skulls for the KW Institute commissioned piece, before envisioning the tribunal with multiple voices, addressing those implicated by the history.⁴⁶⁴

In interviews, Fusco further analogizes the desire to expose the German public to the genocide, and the emotionality of sitting with those histories, to the American approach to slavery; “I don’t see anybody in America crying about slavery. In my experience, there’s more avoidance than grief. It’s hard stuff.”⁴⁶⁵ This quote is presented in the interview without much context—Fusco appears to be contrasting her own outsider demand that Germans contend with the emotional burden of their own past with the

⁴⁶² Author interview with Fusco, January 26, 2018.

⁴⁶³ Author interview with Fusco, January 26, 2018.

⁴⁶⁴ Fusco says, “Namibians know there was a genocide, they don’t need me to tell them.” Author interview, January 26, 2018.

⁴⁶⁵ Kelting, “Life In Berlin,” 2017.

failure of Americans to contend with histories of slavery. The extent to which this claim might be true, and for who, is illustrated by another performative intervention into German colonial history, by another American artist. There are few texts by American artists that engage the Herero and Nama genocide—Namibia, much less German South West Africa, does not loom especially large in the American imagination, compared even to neighboring South Africa.

Preceding Fusco's performance, Brooklyn playwright Jackie Sibblies Drury's 2012 play "We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South-West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915" contends with a fictional theater group developing a play (within the play) about the Herero genocide. "We Are Proud to Present" plays on precisely the lack of guilt that Fusco gestures towards, extending it beyond the ability to confront another country's violences and towards a sense of entitlement. The play engages precisely the distasteful "overtly exoticized spectacles" that Gravenor imagines and contrasts with Fusco's performance piece. The fictional play in Drury's project is sparked by a photograph, influenced by a visual identification—in which one actor reads a magazine story about the Herero and sees her grandmother's face in a picture of a Herero woman. The Black actor who instigates the project experiences recognition based on physiognomy across difference; Drury's play traces the investment in and failures of this project. And yet, the play within the play successfully traces the scaffolding, via (mis)recognition, of anti-blackness across contexts. The play (d)evolves from an attempt to present a piece of buried or lost history, into appropriations, stereotypes, and ultimately

a blurring of German and American racist pasts. The specificity and the binds of history seep in. All of the actors are American, their portrayals of Germans and Herero quickly take on the tones of American race relations and stereotypes—first of Africa (one actor, vexed by the stereotypical portrayals, says, “This isn’t that kind of Africa. Ok? We already Wikipediaed this.”), then of Black Americans. The actor who is leading the project, frustrated with the interruption of debate, tells the other actors, finally, that she is “gonna push you to do it so everyone is going to keep going/ And no one is stopping, no one is done nothing is over/ because/ we’re going to stay in it until I stay stop.” The actors return to 1905, in the thick of genocidal expulsion, encampment, the order to shoot on sight. While working to stay in this space, American southern “accents creep in” nevertheless. A conversation between a white actor, playing a German soldier, and a Black actor, playing a captive Herero, becomes peppered with *bessa* and *ain’t*—the stereotyped vernacular of Black people in the American South. The scene escalates as the white actor starts to use the word “nigger,” the white actors begin to tell violence racist jokes, the ensemble becomes frenzied, the Black actor says over and over, over the chanting of the ensemble, “I have been black all my life.” In the text of Drury’s play, the actors, who have been identified by “Actor” and distinguishing numbers, are now identified by race—White Man, Black Man, Another White Man, etc.

In the final frenzy of this escalating situation, White Man and Another White Man produce a noose and put it over the neck of the actor playing Black Man. In the text, Drury writes the stage direction: “Black Man breaks character,” and, in a panic, shouts “Help me” and “get this fucking thing off me.” The frenzy ends abruptly—the characters

return to “Actor 2” etc. The scene, and the play, end in confusion and near silence as the actors come out of the thrall. They have spent much of the play rationalizing and processing, trying in good faith to contend with a “forgotten” genocide and histories of violence, and they have sunken into the beaten track of the deepest racial violences ingrained into U.S. history. Actor 2, who has almost been lynched, leaves the stage, followed by the Actor directing the scene. Each actor reacts differently—Drury leaves room in the script for genuine reaction, but gives the white actors the particular and chilling task of inducing genuine laughter in themselves, a kind of mania, while Actor 4, the other Black man in the cast, who has not almost been lynched, cleans up the stage alone, and looks at the audience. “He tries to speak [to the audience], but he fails.” The play ends in silence and failure, it is devastating in text and performance.

It is almost halfway through the play, through many iterations of attempts to perform German and Herero in re-enactment, that Actor 6 tells the company about the photograph that influenced the presentation. She tells them, “An entire tribe of people nearly destroyed. People who looked like my family...and here [my grandmother] was, speaking to me through the picture of this Herero/ woman. That was my way in. It was like I was having a conversation with my/ grandmother.” Immediately, the problematic stereotypes of African (as) savages that all the actors have been falling into—“When I kill a tiegah I eat de heart of the animal while it beats.”—becomes just the white actors trying to do impressions of their immediate conception of Actor 6’s Black grandmother —“Ooooh, chil’...Whatchu think this is? Weez in it now. Can’t just tell a talk no mo.” These failures of identification and (stereo)typing operate through the enabling vector of

presumed recognition. The play brilliantly contains a conversation about race as a visual language and transhistorical identification based on racial identity, written in almost a kind of blank verse.⁴⁶⁶

In writing about Mamie Till, and specifically in the political labor that Mamie Till undertook around her son's corpse, in its laying out as evidence, as a martyred body, I am drawn back to the brief piece of information from a 1907 German war chronicle that ““Herero women have removed the flesh [from the skulls] with the aid of glass shards.””⁴⁶⁷ This is presented as gendered labor—there is a specificity to why *women* removed the flesh. It reads as perhaps a kind of perversely maternal labor, within a racial logic in which the “desire that endgenders future”⁴⁶⁸ is denied, and reproduction can only ever be that of *things*. Spillers presents kinship as impossible to imagine within the objectification of slavery in the United States, because “property relations would be undermined.”⁴⁶⁹ Within the ideologically similar structure of *thingification*, the body labors before and after death, in different modes of profitability. The nature of the body as commodity is to be used up, and then to be used again, and then thrown away. The divorcing of Black women from the emotional workings of kinship and care, in being

⁴⁶⁶ Towards the end of writing this project, I learned of the 2016 performance *Schädel X*, a Flinn Works Production in coproduction with Sophiensaele Berlin, which I would like to write about in future iterations of this project; see <http://flinnworks.de/en/project/schädel-x-skull-x>.

⁴⁶⁷ Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz,” 437.

⁴⁶⁸ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 73.

⁴⁶⁹ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 75.

forced to do this work, is reflected again through the characterization of Herero women as “bestial creatures” and themselves cannibals with an innate desire to mutilate flesh.⁴⁷⁰

New Ways of Looking— Insurgent Ground

“my eyes are always hungry/ and remembering/ however the image enters/ its force remains.”
—“Afterimages” by Audre Lorde

In a series of strange logistical events, the open casket that Emmett Till was displayed and photographed in is now on display at the Smithsonian, in the National Museum of African American History and Culture—according to Till’s cousin Simeon Wright, in an interview with the Smithsonian Magazine, “In 2005, we had to exhume Emmett’s body. The State of Mississippi would not reopen the case unless we could prove that the body buried at the cemetery was Emmett’s. State law prohibited us from placing that casket back into the grave, so we had to bury him in a new casket.”⁴⁷¹ While Till’s body was reinterred, the unburied and still open casket stands to represent the literal and figurative openness of the case, the lack of resolution both for Till and his family, and for racial justice more broadly.⁴⁷²

There is no going back—Jared Sexton, in his response to the controversy over Schutz’s painting and specifically to Black’s letter, asks how the painting should be destroyed, and whether it is possible to destroy something that has already entered the public consciousness (or something that was always already there):

⁴⁷⁰ Silvester, *Words Cannot Be Found*, xxiv.

⁴⁷¹ Abby Callard, “Emmett Till’s Casket Goes to the Smithsonian,” *Smithsonian Magazine* (November 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/emmett-tills-casket-goes-to-the-smithsonian-144696940/#yiAcO4DowAp5ttLR.99>

⁴⁷² I hope to write more about Till’s casket in future iterations of this project.

How is the image and likeness of Emmett Till, a black boy, to be destroyed by the artist, a white woman, in and as an expression of active solidarity in a larger struggle with black women (and those with whom they live and die)? Should she work alone or with accomplices, in the light of day or under cover of night? Should she burn it? Behead it? Or should she beat it mercilessly, shoot holes in it, cut off its edges, wrap it in barbed wire, weight it with heavy metal, drive it to the nearest bridge and throw it into the water? Should it sink to the bottom, swell up and begin to rot? Should it rise again, surface and wash up on the banks of the river, shocking the unsuspecting passerby with the sight of some uncanny thing? Who will that be? Not if, but when.

In this passage, Sexton evokes the horrific violence done to the black body—the flesh and blood body of Emmett Till and in a broader sense—in his evocation of the imagined destruction of Schutz’s painting, her rendering of Till. His conjuring seems parallel to the litany in Audre Lorde’s poem “Afterimages,” in which the poet unflinchingly describes the damage to Till’s body, and observes with a grim triumph the 1979 flooding of Jackson, Mississippi as a form of revenge. Lorde writes, “Emmett Till rides the crest of the Pearl, whistling.” The poem contains the assurance that the dead cannot stay dead, that they are animated and lively with injustice. In both Lorde’s poem and Sexton’s essay, Till as ghost or icon rises again, not as a living boy but as an “uncanny thing.” In Sexton’s essay, by doubling the corpse and the painting, Sexton describes the murder of Till through the destruction of the painting, leaving one to consider if there is a way out, and to conclude rather that there is only a way through. Sexton asks but does not dwell on the identity of the unsuspecting passerby who encounters Schutz’s painting, swelled up and begun to rot—but it is an interesting question to return to. When we encounter images of violence (not if, but when) who will we be?

Spillers ends the seminal essay that is at the heart of this dissertation with the assertion that, in the gendered paradox of the American delegitimization of the Black family, Black women stand in the flesh—“This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the insurgent ground as female social subject.”⁴⁷³ Throughout this project I am, following Spillers, less invested in restoring a population to the status quo than contributing to the explosion of the category, in gaining insurgent ground. What does not yet exist that must, that might be fostered in part by the project of seeing differently. As Campt evocatively writes of the “future real conditional or that which will have had to happen [...] the grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn’t happened but must.”⁴⁷⁴ To see differently is to imagine differently, with material implications. If the present moment is a continuation of a regime in which Blackness is antithetical to humanness, and the eye is the purveyor of that truth, then we must learn to look differently. In the mode of visceral witnessing and the looped gaze, I contend both with these renegotiations and also the complications of other gazes, the ways in which the transhistorical viewer is not a passive or innocent witness.

⁴⁷³ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 80.

⁴⁷⁴ Brager, “See Hear,” 2017.

Selfie Possessed: Representational Politics from the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and other sites of Holocaust Memory

“A memorial is an everyday occurrence, it is not sacred ground.” —Peter Eisenman, Memorial Architect

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin consists of 2,711 concrete stelae—upright rectangular columns resembling memorial stones—in a grid over a 4.7 acre site. It is central within the city, close to the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag. The site is surrounded by tourist shops, the U.S. embassy, the Tiergarten park across the street. Employees stand at the corners of the park and yell at people who climb on top of the stelae to take daring selfies or try to ride their bikes through the maze. During my first visit to the memorial in the summer of 2015, I paid something like a euro to have a one cent coin pressed into a souvenir at a tourist kiosk next to the memorial. Out of several choices of iconic Berlin landmarks, my flattened coin featured unmarked



Selfie, taken by the author at the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2015.

squares of different sizes representing the stelae, and the words “Holocaust Memorial Berlin Germany.” On one of my subsequent visits, I ate döner kebab with fries and watched the sun fade over the stelae at one of the restaurants next to the memorial. A 2006 article in the *Berliner Zeitung* referred to this block of tourist-serving businesses as

the “Holocaust beach.”⁴⁷⁵ The site is a sloping field, and the stelae vary in height, so that they look like a relatively flat field from above and from the borders of the monument. As one descends deeper into the field, the stelae begin to tower overhead. When one is walking alone through the maze, even the laughter echoing through can have a sense of the uncanny—the feeling of descent from the ordinary day into the disorientation of the memorial space.

An estimated four million people visit the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe every year, though considerably fewer—475,000 in 2015—visit the memorial’s museum exhibition.⁴⁷⁶ The Berlin Holocaust Memorial, as a site, is a locus not only of memory, reflection, and mourning; it is also a space of play, cruising, and selfie-taking. The experience of visiting the Memorial is shaped by multiple factors; for example, whether one realizes that they are visiting a Holocaust memorial, or whether one visits the museum exhibition located underground, below the memorial.⁴⁷⁷ This exhibit counters the unmarkedness or ambiguity of the stelae with extensive information

⁴⁷⁵ Thomas Rogalla, “Neben dem Mahnmal für die ermordeten Juden entsteht eine touristische Infrastruktur Am Holocaust-Strand,” *Berliner Zeitung* (2006). Retrieved from <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/15516840>

⁴⁷⁶ *Deutsche Welle*, “Berlin Holocaust Memorial: five million visitors,” (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.dw.com/en/berlin-holocaust-memorial-five-million-visitors/a-18998336>

⁴⁷⁷ Irit Dekel, *Mediation at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

on the Holocaust, within a particular narrative.⁴⁷⁸ The memorial is also itself an artwork; it operates as a visual intervention in space, and a place where one might intervene and interact with the installation as a visual and experiential piece. With the proliferation both of Holocaust tourism, social media culture, and networked tourism, visiting the memorial is, perhaps increasingly, a performative act, an experience that is purposefully crafted for sharing in networked communities online.

This chapter focuses on the interactions between bodies and sites of Holocaust memory, and the ways in which the evidence of these interactions circulate as images in social and other forms of media. I look especially at the phenomenon of selfies taken at the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, as a way to think through questions of (in)visibility and representation in the afterlife of genocides—the interplay between the Herero Genocide and the Holocaust—and in the contemporary landscape of racism and xenophobia. Tourist selfies at the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe allow one to think about ownership over public and political memory and the material effects of Holocaust memory as a scarce or protected resource. This has implications for the public space of Berlin in contemporary contestations over the place of refugees, migrants, and German people of color in German society, as well as contestations over spaces of colonial memory. Through an analysis of bodies in memorial space and the sharing of images from this site on social networking apps such as Instagram, I argue that

⁴⁷⁸ In a 2012 *New Yorker* article titled “The Inadequacy of Berlin’s ‘Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,’” Richard Brody describes the museum as “not marked prominently, it’s not easy to find, and it’s not integral to the display.” Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-inadequacy-of-berlins-memorial-to-the-murdered-jews-of-europe>

the circulation of selfies from sites of Holocaust memory is important to understanding contemporary ethno-racial configurations and racism in Germany, and more broadly, to thinking about the transnational circulation of whiteness as a visually privileged construct.

In the context of my broader dissertation project, a study of selfies at the Holocaust Memorial resonates in several ways. First, the question of whether the selfie as practice shifts our ways of looking, or if the selfie as a genre offers any new dimensions to the act of witnessing. The idea of parallaxes, introduced in Chapter 3, applies here on several levels; the differential experience of the same space, the differential experience of viewing the image. Further, some of the same discursive markers of shame, bad taste, or tone deafness arise here, which mark conversations about Dana Schutz's "Open Casket." Markers of identity and intimacy shift in this case—while claims to public space, ownership and access continue to be shaped by whiteness, here the appropriate status of victimhood has also been claimed for whiteness towards the criminalization of people of color. Additionally, in this final chapter, I return to the site of the Berlin as the metropole to the colony of German South West Africa, and as the primary site of my archival research on colonial photographs from the region. On the same research trip spent in the Prussian Secret State Archives looking at German colonial images, I was confronted by the quotidian absence of colonial memory in Berlin. This was paired with visual reminders of contestations over the status of refugees, most visibly the presence of "Refugees Are Welcome Here" signs across the city (less visible were attacks on

refugees, and protests where white Germans carried signs that read “Rapefugees Not Welcome Here”).

Memory Landscapes

The historiography of the Holocaust is often presented as so complete that there is neither room for a prologue or an epilogue; this has translated into visual and memorial practice. In the physical space of Berlin, while Holocaust memorialization and history is in the forefront, a longer colonial and racist history is shrouded in street names and artifacts presented without critique. This Holocaust memorialization is owned by whiteness. As I will show, the claims of Ashkenazi Jewish and white gay communities are made visible against the concealment of other victim groups from the Holocaust and violences that precede and post-date that event. This concealment and inattention is increasingly being countered by Afro-Germans and allies in Berlin; evidenced for example by community involvement in Coco Fusco’s performance of material from the *Blue Book* and protests of Herero skulls at the Charité Museum, the push to change street names, and an ongoing grassroots “peoples history” movement that gives postcolonial tours of Berlin and of the German History Museum. The German History Museum ran its first exhibit dealing with the history of German colonialism, titled “German Colonialism: Fragments Past and Present” beginning in October 2016,⁴⁷⁹ making stark the previous absence while signaling a potential shift in the treatment of German colonialism in the

⁴⁷⁹ “German Colonialism – Fragments past and present,” *Contemporary And* (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.contemporaryand.com/exhibition/german-colonialism-fragments-past-and-present/>

metropole.⁴⁸⁰ In a perceived landscape of scarcity, anti-blackness and racism continue to play a key role in genocide memorialization. In relation to this, the terms of the (Holocaust) selfie debate have trended towards decline narratives regarding today's youth and narcissism—these narratives have ascribed ignorance and the presumption of bad behavior to brown and black actors, and have applied a differently anxious, disciplining eye to the behavior of white actors. This takes on further nuance and anxiety in the space of Berlin—when whiteness might presumptively be divided into white (German) perpetrators, white (Jewish) victims, and white (American and British) liberators. These relationships are visibilized in media panics over mostly white young people from the United States and Israel taking selfies at Auschwitz, the Berlin memorial and other sites of Holocaust memorialization. For example, Jewish Israeli artist Shahak Shapira's digital art project "Yolocaust" collected selfies taken at the Holocaust memorial in Berlin and replaced the stelae in the background with images of concentration camps, so that it appeared that the selfie takers were posing with the victims of the camps and other atrocities.

Placing these selfies in a transnational visual landscape, I argue that the scrutiny around these selfies both obscures and reveals a particular investment in appropriate ownership over Holocaust memory, which proscribes engagement with the Holocaust as part of a broader history of colonial and racial violence. Counter to this, I situate the Holocaust as part of an ongoing assemblage of violence that is constitutive of modernity.

⁴⁸⁰ The relationship is not clear between these cultural shifts and the increasing awareness campaign about the Herero and Nama Genocide, repatriation claims, and the civil case brought against the German government by the Ovaherero and Nama in U.S. courts.

I argue that this alters the landscape of memory in ways that open up new political possibilities both for remembering colonial violence and genocide and for contending with contemporary anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-blackness. I turn to photography both because of the historical role of this technology in establishing the demarcations of the human, and because the glut of images being produced in this moment offers a body of evidence that allows us to track the movement of discourses and emotions through shares and likes, hashtags and virality. The optics of violence and citizenship operate on multiple registers in the age of social media, of networks and algorithms; selfies at (Holocaust) memorials—against genres like protest selfies or refugee selfies—seem to show nothing at all, through the rubric of exceptionality and hegemonic norms.

On the “Selfie”

We are producing more images than ever before—the eye is pulled from image to image in the endless scroll of social media. Something like 95 million photos are uploaded daily onto the Instagram app alone.⁴⁸¹ The selfie—“a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website”⁴⁸²—as practice and artifact, continues to be the subject of popular media scrutiny after emerging as the *Oxford Dictionary* “Word of the Year” in 2013.⁴⁸³ The selfie emerges within the media feed as a mundane product in an overwhelmingly

⁴⁸¹ Salman Aslam, “Instagram by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts,” Omnicore Group (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.omnicoreagency.com/instagram-statistics/>

⁴⁸² *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁴⁸³ “Word of the Year 2013” *Oxford English Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2013>

saturated visual field. As a practice and a product, it is marked by concerns of virality and fame, but also surveillance and legibility within the always already exclusionary rubric of the human as a visual project. In this current moment, the selfie is a flashpoint in conversations about self-representation because it is, in its specific iteration, the product of a particular and new technological move; the smartphone, the front-facing camera, even the selfie stick.⁴⁸⁴ The question arises—in relation to refugees who send selfies to loved ones after a successful ocean crossing, activists in the streets, prisoners in solitary confinement who have not seen their own faces for decades, perpetrators of State and non-State committed terror—of who gets to have a smartphone, whose selfies are celebrated or mocked, venerated or maligned.⁴⁸⁵

The selfie operates within a *looped gaze*, which, as I have argued previously,⁴⁸⁶ places the photographer and the photographed subject in the same position. The spectator, looking at the looped image, is in the position of the camera that acts as mirror. Ostensibly, we are in the position of seeing how the subject of the image sees themselves. This project is interrupted by the ideological screen, which refracts the image, warping it through the ideas and affects that shape the individual look. The selfie as a representational politic marks a particular technological moment but also a longer struggle; we might frame conversations about selfies as part of a much older discourse,

⁴⁸⁴ While I do not address it in this project, the ecological and human devastation of the tech industry cannot be understated.

⁴⁸⁵ JB Brager, “On The Ethics of Looking,” *Selfie Citizenship*. ed. Adi Kuntsman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁴⁸⁶ Brager, “The Selfie and the Other,” 2014; Brager, “Unknown Woman,” 2015.

about who has the ability to represent themselves and who is always represented by others, and the material effects of this representational violence. When looking at the selfie—critically, ethically—one is forced to ask where we are looking from, as well as who we are looking at, within political frameworks of visibility, hyper-visibility, erasure and misrepresentation.

In the introduction to "Selfie Citizenship," Adi Kuntsman asks a series of questions that help to methodologically frame my own approach to selfies in this chapter: "What are the conditions in which a selfie can do political work? What are the regimes of in/visibility in which such work operates? Who are the selfies made for? By whom? How are they consumed? Who has the ability--and the safety--to star in a selfie, how and in what context, and when is such ability impossible?"⁴⁸⁷ I primarily focus on Instagram,⁴⁸⁸ which is a social media app launched in 2010 exclusively for sharing visual content-- the app recently added a feature called "Instagram stories," but the general focus is a feed that one scrolls through endlessly. Instagram is also an app with an international audience; 80% of Instagram users come from outside the United States.⁴⁸⁹ Originally chronological, the feed is now based on an algorithm which selects and recycles popular content or content that the algorithm determines a user will be interested in seeing; for

⁴⁸⁷ Kuntsman, "Selfie Citizenship," 14.

⁴⁸⁸ Instagram, like other tech and social media companies, is deeply implicated in the gentrification of Northern California, and operates within the same corporate and neoliberal logics as its counterparts and competition.

⁴⁸⁹ Josh Constine, "Instagram doubles monthly users to 500M in 2 years, sees 300M daily," *Tech Crunch* (June 21, 2016). Retrieved from <https://techcrunch.com/2016/06/21/instagram-500-million/>

example, the more one likes a user's posts, the more that user's posts appear in the feed.

The more promoted a user's account, the more likely it becomes a recommended account with an even wider reach. If new content does not receive a high level of engagement as soon as it is posted, it is less "promoted" in followers' accounts. The company said in 2016 that approximately 70% of Instagram posts are not seen in an average feed.⁴⁹⁰

Instagram is increasingly being used to build personal brands in a consumer model; because of this, the Internet is flooded with tips on how to hack the algorithm and to promote ones' posts (Instagram also offers paid post promotion). For example, posts that are geotagged with a location purportedly received 79% higher engagement, in one 2014 study.⁴⁹¹ Additionally, a 2014 study conducted by researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology and Yahoo Labs found that Instagram posts containing human faces were 38 percent more likely to receive likes than posts with no faces, and were 32 percent more likely to draw comments.⁴⁹² The study stated that the age and gender of the subject "do

⁴⁹⁰ Mike Isaac, "Instagram May Change Your Feed, Personalizing It With an Algorithm." *The New York Times* (2016). Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/16/technology/instagram-feed.html?_r=0

⁴⁹¹ This study focused on Instagram accounts attached to brands, however, the increasing trend towards personal branding makes this differentiation less stark. Because of frequent changes to the algorithm, it's unlikely that this figure is still correct, however, it gestures towards the considerations users make when posting. Simply Measured, Inc., "Instagram Study" (2014) Retrieved from <http://get.simplymeasured.com/rs/simplymeasured2/images/InstagramStudy2014Q3.pdf>

⁴⁹² "Face It: Instagram Pictures With Faces are More Popular." Georgia Tech News Center. (March 20, 2014). <http://www.news.gatech.edu/2014/03/20/face-it-instagram-pictures-faces-are-more-popular>; Saeideh Bakhshi, Eric Gilbert and David A. Shamma, "Faces Engage Us: Photos with Faces Attract More Likes and Comments on Instagram." CHI 2014, April 26—May 1, 2014, Toronto, Canada (2014).



“Joy Buolamwini found her computer system recognized the white mask, but not her face.” From the Algorithmic Justice League.

not impact engagement.”⁴⁹³ The authors claim that “to our knowledge, our study is one of the first to show, systematically and at scale, how photos with faces drive online social engagement.”⁴⁹⁴ The study does not address race in engagement,

claiming that the focus on age and gender was based on “previous research on disparities in internet usage and social network audience” which also did not address race.⁴⁹⁵ In addition to perpetuating this elision in the research criteria, the study used a leading facial recognition technology, Face++.⁴⁹⁶ Critiques of facial recognition software have included a failure to detect faces with darker skin due to bias in code writing and training sets; this

⁴⁹³ Bakhshi et al., “Faces Engage Us,” 966. The methodology of this study might be described as problematic, along the same lines as the “Selfie City” project. The study used face recognition software (which, following critiques of Shirley Cards, might have difficulty detecting darker skin tones) and Mechanical Turks (low paid online human workers) to determine factors such as gender in the images.

⁴⁹⁴ Bakhshi et al., “Faces Engage Us,” 966.

⁴⁹⁵ Bakhshi et al., “Faces Engage Us,” 967.

⁴⁹⁶ Face++, <https://www.faceplusplus.com>

begs the question of how many darker skinned faces were used for the Georgia Tech study, if any at all.⁴⁹⁷

There is no significant quantitative demographic research on the effects of race on Instagram *engagement*, though there is research on race and Instagram adoption and use. Jason Chan notes that “research on technology use has indicated that communities of Color participate on social media at higher levels than Whites,” citing Pew research studies from 2013 and 2014.⁴⁹⁸ A 2016 Pew trends report noted that 57% of new Instagram users were non-white. As of 2016, 32% of online adult Americans regardless of race used Instagram.⁴⁹⁹ Social media adoption has trended similarly across racial demographics in the United States, however, this only tracks who is using social media (and only in the U.S.), not how. Despite the lack of quantitative research, race does have

⁴⁹⁷ Tess Townsend, “Most engineers are white — and so are the faces they use to train software,” *Recode* (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.recode.net/2017/1/18/14304964/data-facial-recognition-trouble-recognizing-black-white-faces-diversity>; Zoe Kleinman, “Artificial intelligence: How to avoid racist algorithms,” *BBC News* (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-39533308>

⁴⁹⁸ Jason Chan, “Racial Identity in Online Spaces: Social Media’s Impact on Students of Color,” *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 54, 2 (2017), 163-174; Aaron Smith, “African Americans and technology use: A demographic portrait,” *Pew Research Center* (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/01/06/african-americans-and-technology-use/>; Mark Hugo Lopez, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera & Eileen Patten, “Closing the digital divide: Latinos and technology adoption,” *Pew Research Center* (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/03/07/closing-the-digital-divide-latinos-and-technology-adoption/>

⁴⁹⁹ Shannon Greenwood, Andrew Perrin and Maeve Duggan, “Social Media Update 2016,” *Pew Research Center* (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/11/11/social-media-update-2016/>; “Social Media Fact Sheet” (Jan 12, 2017) *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/>; Jeffrey Gottfried and Elisa Shearer, “Appendix A: 2013 and 2016 trends,” *Pew Research Center* (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/social-media-and-news-2016-appendix-a-2013-and-2016-trends/>

an identifiable effect on the circulation and engagement with photos of faces on Instagram, within a longer tradition of anti-blackness in portraiture.⁵⁰⁰ The selfie operates along lines of social capital and privilege that pre-date the selfie. Art critic Aria Dean cites the way in which the political potentials of the selfie were subsumed by white feminism; the “nascent selfie politic’s success in making itself visible made it vulnerable to subsumption within already dominant ideologies—which is to say, ideologies that center and favor whiteness.”⁵⁰¹ In no time at all, the “life- and difference- affirming politic [of the selfie]...whittled itself down to its most palatable iteration,” particularly around the reification of whiteness. For Dean, white selfie feminists reduce both feminism and the selfie to an undifferentiated question of control over unmarked white women’s self-representation, against the unmarked male gaze.⁵⁰² Against this, Dean ponders the possibility of self-representation gestured towards in Lorraine O’Grady’s seminal 1992 article, “Olympia’s Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity”—the power of the Black woman artist mirroring herself. Outside the realm of art, Dean’s commentary reveals both a social relation; that selfies are subsumed by whiteness, and a possibility; that the selfie holds a potentiality for power that exceeds itself. Artist Mandy Harris Williams takes on the politics of the Instagram algorithm, promoting the hashtag #brownupyourfeed and working to point how the algorithm, and therefore the feed,

⁵⁰⁰ Artists such as Carrie Mae Weems and E. Jane have engaged this in their self-portraiture work. E. Jane in particular has used Instagram as a platform for their conceptual work engaging race, gender, and selfies.

⁵⁰¹ Aria Dean, “Closing the Loop,” *The New Inquiry* (2016). Retrieved from <https://thenewinquiry.com/closing-the-loop/>

⁵⁰² Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, 3.1 (1975). 6–18.

reflects existing dominant ideologies around race and gender.⁵⁰³ However, the aesthetic *politic*, even when present, is subsumed and even sublimated into brand aesthetics. Even Williams' project is based in a desire to hack the algorithm towards inclusion, towards a desire for the politics of attention to be turned away from whiteness, that is fraught because of its functioning within the overarching violence of capitalism.

Selfies taken at and posted from Holocaust memorials are subject to the same market logics that shape the considerations around explicitly branded social media posting; geotagged images that use hashtags and include faces will receive more engagement. Even when users do not actively buy into the personal branding imperative, the app disciplines the user into these behaviors.⁵⁰⁴ These market logics operate within racial capitalism—whiteness circulates globally and is overvalued.⁵⁰⁵

Holocaust Photography, Holocaust Selfies

The selfie marks an intervention into the subject positions that are thinkable in relationship to the camera; this holds particular weight when placed in relation to Holocaust memorials because these Holocaust selfies become part of the postmemorial archive of Holocaust photography. Photography as a modern technology has been central

⁵⁰³ Williams is on Instagram as @idealblackfemale. See <https://www.instagram.com/idealblackfemale/>

⁵⁰⁴ Rutgers psychology professor Mauricio Delgado says, “Often, if you have the earliest predictor of a reward—a sign of a social media alert, like your phone buzzing—you get a rush of dopamine from that condition stimulus. That might trigger you to go check out the outcome, to see what it is. That type of reinforcement is something that you now seek out.” Molly Soat, “Social Media Triggers a Dopamine High,” *Marketing News* 49, 11 (2015). 29-30.

⁵⁰⁵ Walter Johnson and Robin D.G. Kelley, *Forum 1: Race, Capitalism, Justice*, The Boston Review (2017).

to understanding the Holocaust as a *modern* event—and the Holocaust has been central to the theorization of atrocity photography. Ariella Azoulay traces the belief that photography is about a sovereign relationship—the photographer captures or creates the photograph, as a sole author creating an intentional sole outcome, a final product. In this sovereign relationship, the subject does not figure—they are made object.⁵⁰⁶ Against this, Azoulay thinks about the encounter of the photograph, as an event—“the event of photography” versus “the photographed event.”⁵⁰⁷ When the photograph is taken, particularly when there is a power differential between the photographer and the photographed, as in photojournalism in disaster or war zones, it is unlikely that the photograph will be viewed by those in it. Azoulay writes, “The separation between the ontology of photography and the ontology of the photograph allows us to see the photograph as merely one possible outcome among others for the event of photography, just as we can hold the evidence of other participants in this event to constitute additional sources for its reconstruction.”⁵⁰⁸ The photograph then becomes the “platform upon which traces from the encounter...are inscribed,” rather than the product of a sovereign maker.⁵⁰⁹ Emphasizing the encounter de-ontologizes the roles in relationship to the photograph—who is spectator, who is acting in and upon the event of the photograph.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ Barthes describes this relationship in *Camera Lucida*, that in being photographed, one becomes “a subject who feels he is becoming an object” (14).

⁵⁰⁷ Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (New York: Verso, 2012). 21.

⁵⁰⁸ Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 24.

⁵⁰⁹ Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 24.

⁵¹⁰ Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 25.

Marianne Hirsch further argues that particularly in the context of atrocity photography, “the identity of the photographer—perpetrator, victim, bystander, or liberator—is indeed a determining element in the photograph’s production” that “engenders distinctive ways of seeing and, indeed, a distinctive textuality” in the object of the photograph.⁵¹¹ Selfies conflate those positions; in the space of the looped gaze, the photographer and the subject occupy the same position—in point of fact, are the same person. The encounter is a sovereign, singular encounter. Azoulay argues that, “The photographer—who is usually on the edge of another, different institution—turns the photographed individual into his or her object, shapes him or her without allowing the individual to have any direct control over the result.”⁵¹² If we view the selfie as a kind of pinnacle of photographic consent via the looped gaze (the photographer is the subject, the subject is the photographer), we can depart from this civil contract to interrogate different breakdowns of permission, of recognition—who doesn’t get to take a selfie, and what that reveals about the conditions that keep them from doing so.⁵¹³ Within the archive of existing photographs from or of the Holocaust, few images exist that were created by victims—the encounter that is being traced is an already violent one, and then, the gaze follows. Much of the visual archive of the Holocaust is comprised of photographs taken by perpetrators, or the images captured by Allied photographers at the end of the war. The gaze, within the event of taking the photograph and in looking at it, is crucial to understanding the effect of a photograph on

⁵¹¹ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 133.

⁵¹² Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*.

⁵¹³ JB Brager, “Selfie Control,” *The New Inquiry* (March 17, 2014). <https://thenewinquiry.com/selfie-control/>

those involved in its production as well as consumption, particularly in the context of atrocity photography. For example, Hirsch indexes firing squad photography by Einsatzgruppen members and spectators, in which the gun and the camera occupy the same space in the landscape of the massacre. As I have written about in previous chapters, she points out that the viewer of the photograph unwittingly occupies the “Nazi gaze,” in which “the photographer, the perpetrator, and the spectator share the same space of looking at the victim,” and the victims “are shot before they are shot.” In contrast to the archive of images that adhere to the “Nazi gaze,” and other modes of violent looking, the selfie conflates the subject positions of photographer and photographed. Within the constrained space of the photograph itself, I can identify the subject and the photographer, whatever that person’s subject position. The direction of the gaze, within the event of the taking of the photograph, is clear. The looped gaze therefore liberates the spectator from the positionality of the “lethal” Nazi gaze.⁵¹⁴

In the context of atrocity tourism (what is often problematically referred to as “dark tourism”),⁵¹⁵ this looped gaze is read instead, by Anja Dinhopf and Ulrike Gretzel, as the self-directed *tourist gaze*.⁵¹⁶ Susan Sontag critiqued the figure of the tourist with

⁵¹⁴ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 135.

⁵¹⁵ “John Lennon and Malcolm Foley define dark tourism as travel to places of mass destruction and death that have a strong cultural resonance because of our familiarity with them through the media (Lennon and Foley, 2000: 10, 16–21)” (Gross, 336).

⁵¹⁶ The tourist gaze as a concept was introduced by Urry and Larson in 2011.

camera in hand in her 1977 book *On Photography*, describing the photographer as a “supertourist.”⁵¹⁷ She writes:

“A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it—by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir. Travel becomes a strategy for accumulating photographs. The very activity of taking pictures is soothing, and assuages general feelings of disorientation that are likely to be exacerbated by travel. Most tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter. Unsure of other responses, they take a picture. This gives shape to experience: stop, take a photograph, and move on.”

The act of photographing, for Sontag, levels the experience; the goal is no longer to have the experience but to produce the object or trophy—the image of the experience. For Dinhopf and Gretzel, the practice of tourist photography has shifted with the rise of social media—now, added to the act of taking pictures is the “digital immediacy” of sharing those pictures in online networks.⁵¹⁸ The front-facing camera allows the tourist to narrate and prove experiences as they are happening, to produce a self in real time; “in the age of social media tourists are not the only ones gazing. Rather, they are gazing with their own eyes as well as the eyes of their imagined audience.”⁵¹⁹ The new selfie tourist gaze turns the objectifying gaze, so often turned towards a landmark or an other, towards the tourist themselves. This objectifying gaze operates towards the production of a selfie as a competitive product—one that is crafted through a precise performance of the self, in

⁵¹⁷ Sontag, *On Photography*, 33.

⁵¹⁸ Anja Dinhopf and Ulrike Gretzel “Selfie-taking as touristic looking,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 57 (2016). 127. Notably, as an article published in a tourism research journal, the authors ask how destination marketing, management, experience design, brands and attractions might contend with the shifting tourist gaze.

⁵¹⁹ Dinhopf and Gretzel, “Selfie-taking as touristic looking,” 129.

this case as tourist, in order to garner engagement. The selfie-friendly design of the Berlin memorial might be read as prescient in the time before the selfie, as museums, public sites, businesses, are increasingly mindful of creating selfie-friendly environments for marketing and public engagement purposes. Further, Dinhopf and Gretzel write, in tourist selfies, the attraction increasingly recedes from sight, replaced by other markers of place — a geotag, a caption, a hashtag. “As the tourist destination becomes the distant backdrop or prompt or completely disappears from the photo, the self becomes elevated as a touristic product—it is what tourists are there to consume.”⁵²⁰ This relationship of touristic looking raises particular questions in relation to sites of atrocity or Holocaust tourism—the backdrop of history recedes, leaving the constructed self in situ as the primary product of shared consumption. One must ask whether the process of taking the selfie and uploading it pulls the photographer/subject out of an “authentic” engagement with the site, or if it helps place the photographer/subject within the historical, affective, and political narratives of the site. If the selfie indeed constructs or cultivates a *self* for consumption, within the space and place of the Berlin memorial, or the Auschwitz museum, or the Dachau memorial site, then what work does that constructed self do, both for the selfie taker and for those who consume the image in networked communities online? Further, how does the specificity of the tourist gaze shape selfies produced at sites like the Berlin memorial or at former camps? How is the memory tourist’s selfie different than that of the first-generation German teenager taken on a field trip to the

⁵²⁰ Dinhopf and Gretzel, “Selfie-taking as touristic looking,” 134.

Berlin Memorial, or that of a North African asylum seeker being housed in the former Dachau camp?

Auschwitz Selfies



“Selfie in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp” by Breanna Mitchell, via Twitter.

In 2014, a selfie taken at Auschwitz by white teenager Breanna Mitchell from Alabama went viral, about a month after she tweeted a photo of herself with the caption “Selfie in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp” with a smiley face emoji. In the photo, Mitchell, standing outside on a path between two barracks buildings, smiles broadly in a pink sweatshirt and hoop earrings, her light

brown hair down around her shoulders and one Apple earbud tucked into her ear. The teen was heavily criticized, but was given a media platform to defend her selfie behavior; she told the news show *Take Part Live*, hosted by Meghan McCain and Jacob Soboroff that the selfie and the trip to Auschwitz itself was in memory of her father, who had died a year previous and who shared her love of WWII history. In the interview, Mitchell described the Holocaust and WWII as “the only thing that interested me in history” and her father’s “favorite part of history.”⁵²¹ While Mitchell continued to be critiqued, often along lines of being a silly narcissistic millennial girl, a parallel narrative emerged about her personal tragedy, and the need to protect Mitchell as a vulnerable young (white) girl

⁵²¹ “Auschwitz Selfie Girl Interview,” *Take Part Live* (July 21, 2014). Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/vRsDYyvZmlA>. Interestingly, Mitchell also points out that she had spoken to a Holocaust survivor during her ninth grade year via webcam.

from the intense scrutiny of social media cultures. Learning of Mitchell's personal loss, one might re-examine the selfie and identify emotions that exceed the smiley face emoji in Mitchell's own face; perhaps she has been crying, perhaps there are layers to the meaning in her smile, which seems less broad and carefree than one originally perceived. The hypervisible landscape of digitally captured memory tourism engenders an online shaming culture that exceeds the attention to Mitchell but is often focused precisely on inappropriate selfies. One such example, the "With My Besties in Auschwitz" Facebook page, featured Israeli teenagers' selfies taken while visiting the former camp—often on school or other group trips. The page got over 12,000 "likes" before it was pulled down over negative media attention and lawsuit threats.⁵²²

In previous work on selfies, I have looked primarily at selfies taken at Auschwitz. This represents a smaller percentage of the overall number of photographs taken at the site than at the Berlin memorial. Because Auschwitz represents not only a memorial site but a physical site of historical violence, the implications of engagement with the space receive more scrutiny. Unlike the Berlin memorial, which is not attached to any particular site of death, Auschwitz is considered sacred or haunted ground (a consideration that also comes into play at Dachau, as I will discuss later in this chapter).⁵²³ The prevalence of "selfies" at sites of atrocity and memorialization may warrant an initial sense of frustration and judgement, as a kind of "bad" behavior, a paucity of engagement, in this

⁵²² Ruth Margalit, "Should Auschwitz Be A Site For Selfies?" *The New Yorker* (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/should-auschwitz-be-a-site-for-selfies>

⁵²³ There is much to say on the manipulation of the space of Auschwitz itself.

case with the history of Auschwitz as camp. Often, critics simply imagine that use of smartphones and social media represents a lack of caring, or an affective insulation. At the same time, asking what the selfie does as a practice and a product, rather than asking whether such photographs are appropriate, opens up questions of how digital natives engage with traumatic spaces and material especially through the increasingly ubiquitous logic of the personal brand, how Instagram users construct a narrative through the use of hashtags and comments, and what kinds of selfies receive widespread attention.⁵²⁴ When Holocaust tourists post on Instagram, are they also performing as “active producers of collective memory, historical knowledge, and ethical reflection, who are able to distinguish between the authentic and inauthentic dimensions of their experiences”?⁵²⁵ If photography constitutes a mode of witnessing, what happens when that act of witnessing is self-directed— when the photographer/subject is not just documenting Auschwitz, but themselves in Auschwitz? If one accepts the critique that the uploaded selfie is part of branding culture, then one has to interrogate what personal brand is being projected when a selfie is posted from a site of Holocaust history or memory. This is to say, Holocaust remembrance becomes a part of a personal brand that reflects the metanarrative of the

⁵²⁴ On self-branding and social media, see Andrew Mendelson and Zizi Papacharissi, “Look at Us: Collective Narcissism in College Student Facebook Photo Galleries,” Presented at the International Communication Association annual meeting (2010); Zizi Papacharissi, “The presentation of self in virtual life: Characteristics of personal home pages,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 79,3 (2002). 643-660; H. Liu “Social-network profiles as taste performances,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13,1 (2007).

⁵²⁵ Daniel Reynolds, “Consumers or witnesses? Holocaust tourists and the problem of authenticity,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 16, 2 (2016) . 334–353.

Holocaust itself—that it is a horror to be *remembered*, which requires no ongoing present action beyond the act of public remembering.

Over a million and a half people visit Auschwitz every year, from all over the world. It is an active and marketed tourist site—an all-but compulsory day trip while in Krakow, somewhat crassly advertised and often mentioned in the same breath as the Wieliczka Salt Mine, as well as a frequent site for school trips, a destination for The March of the Living and other forms of memory tourism that literally follow the teleological narrative of Jewish statehood “out of the ashes” of the Shoah into the promised land of Israel. Unlike the Berlin memorial, visiting Auschwitz has a pilgrimage-like status—visitors travel to the area primarily to go to the former camp. In contrast, visits to the memorial in Berlin’s city center are more likely to be part of a larger tourist experience of Berlin.⁵²⁶ The Auschwitz museum itself has an active Instagram account, @auschwitzmemorial, which regularly posts images from the site, reposts user images, and engages tagged user posts. The majority of visitor Instagram posts reiterate iconic images of Auschwitz: barbed wire, the *Arbeit Macht Frei* sign, the train tracks, piles of shoes, glasses and suitcases, the “Halt!” skull and crossbones signs. Instagram users often post multiple pictures during their time at the camp, and many users, especially youth visitors, at some point post a self-portrait.

I began this project by looking at 50 Instagram photographs, selected somewhat randomly, that were self-portraits and were tagged #auschwitz or #auschwitzbirkenau.

⁵²⁶ This contributes to the perception, particularly by American and Israeli Jews, of Poland and particularly Oświęcim as being forever trapped temporally in the Holocaust, while Germany is able to move forward in time.

While there seems to be some gender parity (based on my perception) in terms of Auschwitz selfies, almost all of the posters are read (again by me) as being young people. The majority are white or white-passing, and often posting in English, Hebrew, and German. The same trends emerge when aggregating photos from the Berlin memorial, reflecting a “three-point memory culture with its anchors in the United States, Germany, and Israel.”⁵²⁷ Tropes quickly begin to emerge—the selfie taken with iconic image; the selfie that is taken at Auschwitz, but does not comment on its location; the flippant or self-aware Auschwitz selfie; the introspective or educational Auschwitz selfie; the performed sadness selfie; the nationalist or Zionist selfie.⁵²⁸ Each of these selfies might be understood as serving a different iteration of the personal brand through the vector of the intention driving the tourist pilgrimage (or required educational field trip) to the former camp.

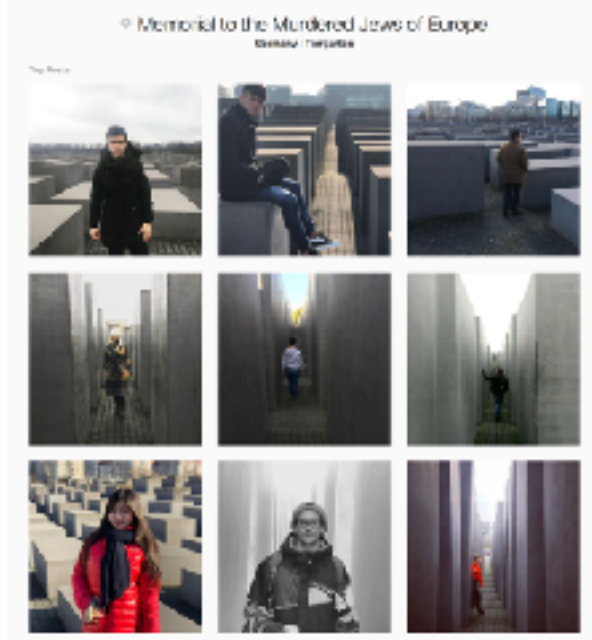
The Berlin Memorial: Stelae and Selfies

Unlike Auschwitz, the Berlin Memorial is more of a location than a destination; “visitors can walk through them again and again without being ‘there’, in a particular *place*; the experience is a function of moving through *space*.”⁵²⁹ Participants in the original design competition for the memorial were “asked to identify an appropriate aesthetic way ‘to invoke the sensations of mourning, shock, and respect jointly with the

⁵²⁷ Andrew S. Gross, “Holocaust Tourism in Berlin: Global Memory, Trauma and the ‘Negative Sublime,’” *Journeys* 7, 2 (2006). 8.

⁵²⁸ Adjacent to the genre of flippant selfies, but read as outliers, are intentionally hateful selfies, often posted with anti-Semitic or racist comments and hashtags.

⁵²⁹ Gross, “Holocaust Tourism,” 96. Emphasis original.



Screenshot of the Instagram geotag page for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

feeling of shame and guilt.’... The focus was thus on the emotions the monument would instill in the onlooker during his or her visit. The original purpose, honoring the victims, was in a sense subordinated to the instigation of a cathartic experience among the descendants of the perpetrators.”⁵³⁰

Against this original idea, one critique of the memorial claims that it allows an

identification with victimhood that does not push the consideration of being in the position of perpetrator; allowing Germans to slip into blamelessness.⁵³¹ This reveals a preoccupation with subject positions that reflect Marianne Hirsch’s subject positions in Holocaust photography— one may be a victim or a perpetrator in relation to history. The appropriate feeling is either one of intimate mourning or intimate guilt. Critiques of the Berlin Memorial’s lack of captioning often are invested in preserving a specificity of positionality; the idea that one must understand and privilege a precisely Jewish victimization in order to have an appropriate reaction to the memorial site. German journalist Lea Rosh, who is not Jewish, led the effort to build the Memorial to the

⁵³⁰ Katharina von Ankum, “German Memorial Culture: The Berlin Holocaust Monument Debate,” *Response, a Contemporary Jewish Review*, 68 (1997). 44-45.

⁵³¹ Alex Cocotas, “Blow up the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” *Tablet Magazine* (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/230085/memorials-yom-hashoah>

Murdered Jews, and insisted that the memorial be dedicated only to Jewish victims, rather than all victims of Nazi racial ideologies. Within this protective approach, a transhistorical identification or comparison is foreclosed to racialized actors who might experience an emotional connection to their own experiences of present-day persecution.

In contrast to the debates over who should feel what at the memorial, architect Peter Eisenman took a more *laissez faire* view, telling the German magazine *Der Spiegel* when the monument opened in 2005 “that he didn't expect visitors to be overly reverent. ‘People are going to picnic’ at the monument.”⁵³² The Berlin Memorial has been rife with controversy since its proposal—about the location, the design, the lack of participation from the Jewish community in Berlin, its usage by Berliners. One “scandal erupted in 2003 with the discovery that the company providing the material for coating the stones to protect them from graffiti had supplied the Zyklon B gas used by the Nazis in the death camps.”⁵³³ Some compare the memorial unfavorably to German artist Gunter Demnig’s site-specific project “*Stolpersteine*” or “stumbling stones,” in which a brass plaque is installed in the sidewalk in front of a Holocaust victim’s—Jewish or not Jewish—last known residence. The plaque includes the name, date and place of birth, and date and

⁵³² Esme Nicholson, “Satirist Takes Berlin Holocaust Memorial Selfie-Takers To Task,” *NPR* (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/01/24/511244932/satirist-takes-berlin-holocaust-memorial-selfie-takers-to-task>

⁵³³ Avner Shapira, “The Holocaust Memorial That Became a Refuge for Drunks and Sunbathers,” *Haaretz* (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.haaretz.com/life/books/what-not-to-do-at-the-holocaust-memorial-1.5246533>. As Jin Haritaworn points out in *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others*, the perceived need for an anti-graffiti coating anticipates vandalism, and the criminalization of youth of color within the context of urban policing.

place of deportation and/or death of the individual.⁵³⁴ They draw the eye and demand a pause (So, arguably, do the stelae, the latter are just more opaque in divulging information).

This opaqueness is a consistent critique of the Berlin memorial, which departs from the figural and informational quality of most Holocaust memorials around the world. Against the demands of realism, the Berlin memorial uses a modernist, even brutalist aesthetic, that does not direct the visitor how to interact with it, or demand any precise emotional reaction. In this sense, the Berlin memorial speaks to the question of abstraction in art about atrocity, that Coco Fusco brings up in relation to Dana Schutz's "Open Casket," which I discuss in Chapter 3. The deep abstraction of the monument prevents a voyeuristic pleasure in viewing violence, and does not give the viewer any clear emotional cues. It both allows and relies on the visitor to make their own meaning. Despite this abstraction, the Berlin memorial is not a neutral screen.

Broadly, memorials are not politically neutral—rather, they reflect the contestations within a society.⁵³⁵ The problem with static monuments is, arguably, that memory demands active practice, and is in fact a social practice. The monument operates

⁵³⁴ Cocotas, "Blow up the Memorial," 2017.

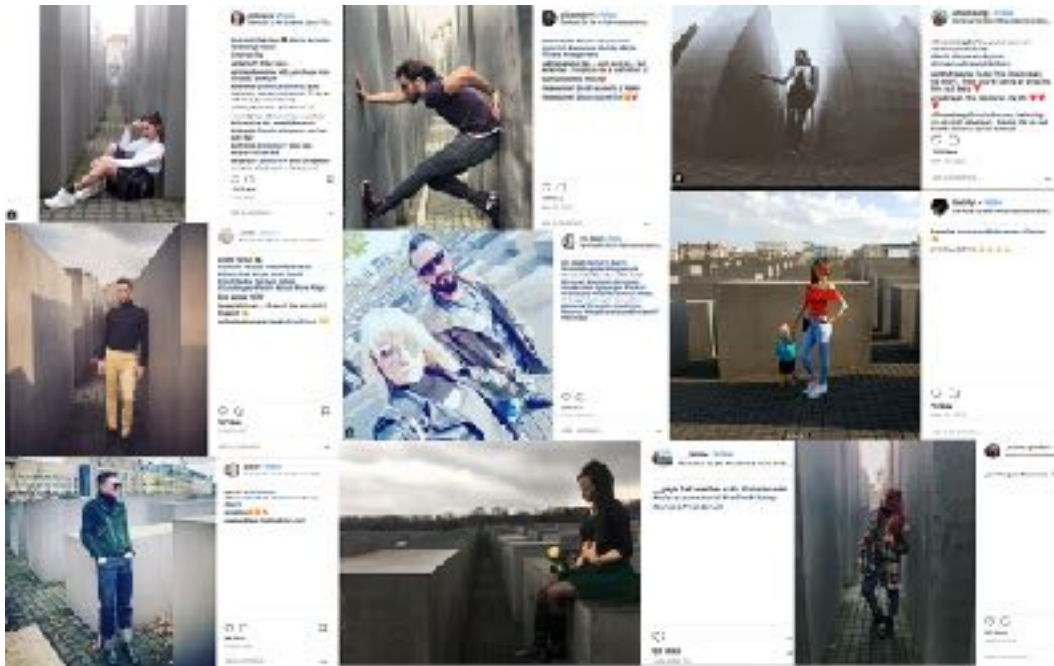
⁵³⁵ Elke Zuern writes, "Memorials are sites of personal, cultural and political remembrance, offering stylised presentations of the past, highlighting and glorifying certain actors and actions while purposely forgetting others. They represent the power and perspective of those who build them, through both their physical and symbolic prominence, and the attention they receive from locals and tourists. They are strategic sites for the definition and mobilisation of communities, and therefore also for contentious claims over history." Elke Zuern, "Memorial Politics: Challenging the Dominant Party's Narrative in Namibia," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 50, 3 (2012). 493.

on the view of memory as “a static and objective archive,” versus “an active process by which people recall, lay claim to, understand, and represent the past.”⁵³⁶ Eviatar Zerubavel describes *mnemonic socialization*, the process by which we “learn what we should remember and what we can forget” in a given environment.⁵³⁷ Critics of the Berlin memorial might consider the abstraction of the site to engender forgetting or a shallow engagement. Cocotas considers the Berlin monument a stand-in for actual deep engagement with Holocaust memory, and writes that the Berlin memorial promotes performative penance. The Berlin memorial, in his view, “allows its builders and visitors to wallow in self-regard,” to engage in “external shows of sorrow, tailored and edited for an intended audience. It is selfies instead of self-examination. The internalization of the Holocaust’s lessons, conversely, engenders no immediate political or social capital.”⁵³⁸ The flip side of this is that performative Holocaust memorialization is expected or rewarded with political or social capital; the mnemonic socialization in Germany, the United States, and Israel supports Holocaust memorialization in concert with the forgetting of colonial genocide. Of course, Holocaust remembrance as a political project, often in support of claims to a Jewish state in Palestine, largely precedes Holocaust or genocide education—that is, a clear understanding of what happened, to who, how, and why--information that can be synthesized into antifascist and anti-genocide strategies for the present and future. Further, the emphasis on anti-Semitism and Jewish victimhood

⁵³⁶ Raiford, “Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory,” 113; 119.

⁵³⁷ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). 87.

⁵³⁸ Cocotas, “Blow up the Memorial,” 2017.



Selfies from the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, assembled by the author.

during the Holocaust belies the larger “ideology of racial purity” that shaped Nazi violence and might offer a broader set of historical lessons.⁵³⁹ The “internalization of the Holocaust’s lessons,” which Cocotas contrasts to the bad behavior of memorial selfie-taking, begs the question of what lessons from the Holocaust visitors are expected to internalize, within this broader memory landscape, and whether one is expected or allowed to think these lessons in relation to other historical and ongoing violences.

The Endless Scroll

Contending with the vast collection of selfies taken at the Berlin memorial presents a methodological challenge, without using Mechanical Turks and other strategies

⁵³⁹ Tina Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004). 5.

that allow for the collection of large data sets.⁵⁴⁰ Because of this, I collected data manually, using Instagram and other apps that allow users to search Instagram by geotag.⁵⁴¹ Concerns have rightly been raised regarding both the surveilling possibilities of geotagging in social media, as well as questions of consumer citizenship in the use of Instagram photos and other social media posts, such as public tweets, in ad campaigns and other corporate projects. While these are broader concerns facing new media consumers, they are reflected in the practice of Holocaust memorial selfies. The subject matter and location of the images brings all of the concerns of social media photography into stark conversation, because of the emotional content and the uneven culture of judgement around these images and their circulation.

Unlike awareness campaigns that use selfies, often paired with a hashtag, to circulate an idea or demand, Holocaust Memorial selfies are not a coordinated effort or a collective action.⁵⁴² Their ubiquity exceeds conscious participation in a movement, and enters the realm of psychological and social performance. There is observably a shift in the syntax of selfie images made at the Holocaust memorial, over time, that seems attached to the vitriol around them—negative feedback within social media networks has educated users towards a shift in visual codes but not away from the creation of images

⁵⁴⁰ Mechanical Turks are an example of invisibilized low paid labor within a digital gig economy, as well as a hidden site of human bias in quantitative research.

⁵⁴¹ Depending on the progression of this research, I am interested in writing a code to scrape the relevant images; however, a secondary concern of this project involves both online privacy and labor. For example, I have previously used the “Selfie City” project as a model, which employed Mechanical Turks (online contract labor) to identify and classify selfies for the project.

⁵⁴² See Brager, “The Selfie and the Other,” 2015.

within the genre. In the same way that social media users get better at using hashtags to drive engagement, or learn to post images at times with higher traffic, users are disciplined by social media networks into conforming to posting behaviors and content that garner positive feedback. I observe that, since I began looking at Holocaust selfies in 2012, there are, as of 2018, fewer images that are obvious selfies, that is to say, where the subject is clearly holding the phone that takes the image (the apparatus of taking the image protrudes into the frame), or perhaps there are only more selfies masquerading as portraits. After a brief period of extreme popularity, there appear to be fewer selfie sticks. With the addition of video posting capabilities and the introduction of Instagram stories in 2016, visitors to the memorial site increasingly post videos of themselves walking through the maze of stelae. And yet, despite the policing of the genre, Holocaust selfies persist; the social market logic of the selfie trumps the social morays of memory and mourning. The politics of attention exceeds the politics of shame; all publicity is good publicity. It's possible too that within the alienated present, we long to see ourselves in



Selfie by sophalvt at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, January 26, 2018.

space, that an experience cannot cohere unless it is uploaded. As the tourist increasingly becomes the subject of the tourist photograph, the anchoring condition of being in place is governed by the adage “pics or it didn’t happen.”

There is a visual difference based on whether the photographer-subject is outside of, on top of, or inside the memorial. Alex Cocotas writes, critiquing the memorial and the selfie-takers:

“Visitors arrive, take photos, take a little stroll, take some more photos and leave. Popular poses include: wedged body in between stelae; stacked bodies wedged in between stelae; solitary subject sitting on a stele, back to the camera, looking out on the monument—*all those murdered Jews, so sad*—in stilted reflection; the album cover, for groups of four to six, one on each stele, arms and expressions spread wide, intimating a moment of spontaneous excitement, photographed seven times.”⁵⁴³

The images *feel* endless—when scrolling through the geotag feed, it appears that the vast majority of Instagram photos posted at the Berlin Memorial contain faces. If one limits the construction of the archive to images that are selfies in their truest form, in which the subject holds the phone and presses the button and is stylistically, obviously, the photographer, the variations on the image are limited by the form. Returning to Dinhopf and Gretzel, the self is placed in the forefront, one only glimpses an almost symbolic indication of the memorial context.⁵⁴⁴ Using front-facing smartphone cameras, much of the square frame of the picture is taken up by the face of the photographer-subject, sometimes intentionally edged out of the frame or awkwardly angled to include a view of the memorial as well. In some, the photographer-subject holds the phone high

⁵⁴³ Cocotas, “Blow up the Memorial,” 2017.

⁵⁴⁴ Anja Dinhopf and Ulrike Gretzel, “Selfie-taking as touristic looking,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 57 (2016). 134.

above them, to capture not only themselves and the stelae, but also the group they are visiting the memorial with. When using the front-facing camera, the selfie-taker is directly confronted with their own action and their own visage. When visiting the memorial, I took a number of selfies—in addition to trying to find the best angle through which to represent the presence of the stelae, I found it impossible not to hone in on the features of my own face, to undergo the familiar process of self-examination of looking in a mirror.

Further, the expressions of the photographer-subject help shape the consumption of the image. Understanding the selfie as a performance as well as a product, the facial expression of the photographer-subject, ranging from somber to an on-demand smile, articulate the intended reception. The consumption of the image is further crafted by the amendment of attached hashtags, which enter the image both into networked community and algorithmic economies—the likelihood of engagement rises with the attachment of hashtags, which garner more likes and follows and thus increases the value of the Instagram account and the social capital of the selfie taker. To the extent that hashtags directly reference the memorial or the Holocaust, it is unclear whether they are doing so to enter a conversation about the event or rather to potentially hit upon new followers who are exploring that hashtag. Or, if hashtagging has become a habituated activity, a part of the process of posting on social media that exceeds its use value. There is no singular agreed-upon hashtag for the Berlin memorial—they range from #jewishmemorial to #memorialtothemurderedjews to #berlinholocaustmemorial to #denkmalfürdieermordetenjudeneuropas and so on. In 2013, *Vice* documented the use of



Selfie by andreaaguirre93 at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, January 28, 2018.

hashtags that meshed popular engagement tags with more site-specific designations, forming hashtag portmanteaus like #instacaust.⁵⁴⁵

Many users geotag the memorial without using a hashtag that refers to the memorial or to the Holocaust at all. Some users add emojis, such as a German flag or a sad face. The hashtags range wildly—like at Auschwitz, they often pair popular follower-gaining tags with ones more specific to the site. For example, user andreaaguirre93 posts an image at the memorial on January 28th, of herself doing an assisted handstand against

⁵⁴⁵ Hektor Brehl, “Hashtags, die du für dein Holocaust-Gedenkstätten-Selfie nicht verwenden solltest,” *Vice* (2013). Retrieved from <https://www.vice.com/de/article/qbm4mv/25-hashtags-die-du-an-holocaust-gedenkstattten-nicht-verwenden-solltest>

one of the stelae, with the caption “NEVER GIVE  .

 In this case, she uses the

hashtags:

#berlin #enjoy #travel #picoftheday #bodybuilding #goals #workoutmotivation #workout
#squats #weightlifting #personaltrainer #girlswholift #bootygainz #girlswhosquat
#gymshark #gym #fitness #fitnesswoman #fitnessgirl #fitnessmotivation
#girlwithmuscle #fitnessmodel #instafit #friends #holocaust

The incongruity of the hashtag “holocaust” tacked onto a number of heavily networked hashtags (#picoftheday shows 371,839,229 posts on Instagram, #holocaust shows a far fewer 507,686 posts and is to be parsed through at one’s own risk) indicates one way in which Holocaust memory becomes a part of the social media user’s personal brand, through the practice of hashtagging. The primary consideration for users, arguably, is less whether one does the thing than how best to do it, in order to gain the social capital of awareness without the social stigma of insensitivity.

Filters are applied which alter the image-- in one, with no hashtags appended, the photographer-subject primarily fills the image with part of her face, mostly an eye and hair, with the slightest glimpse of the stelae behind her. Although no hashtags or even a caption is used, a black and white filter is applied, and the image is geotagged at the memorial.⁵⁴⁶ Black and white filters seem particularly popular— perhaps a nod to the somber nature of the site, or a draw to the “artistic” look; many of these images use the hashtag *#blackandwhite* in a self-conscious mode of aesthetic networking. Many of the filters are more subtle, shifting the saturation of the colors, bleaching skin imperfections from the subjects’ faces, deepening or lightening shadows.

⁵⁴⁶ Instagram user veeravaari, accessed Nov 7 2017. The photo appears to have later been removed.

The more nebulous category of portraits, that read as selfies but may not be, have a larger set of interactions with the stelae—people peek around them, leap across them, balance between them. The stelae become a playground, they seem to draw fashion bloggers and other photoshoots, planned and unplanned. In this category of not-selfies, the memorial becomes a backdrop in portraits that emphasize the full length of the subject’s body in mimetic fashion poses, to emphasize a complete look or sometimes draw attention to a particular accessory. Some posts use hashtags naming brands

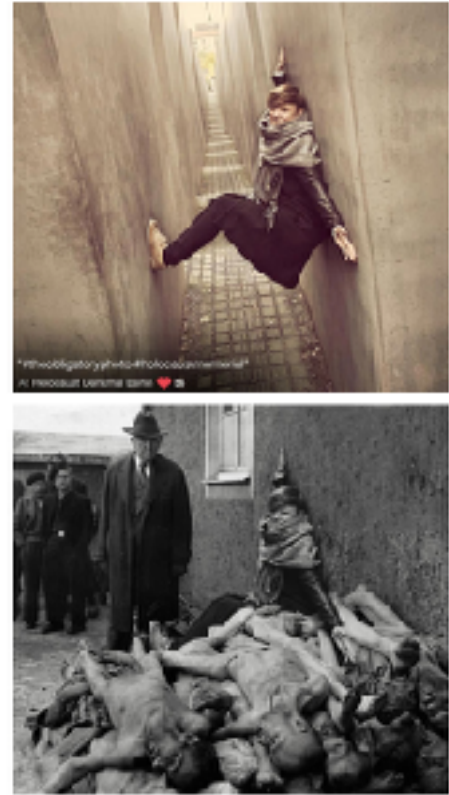


Image from the “Yolocaust” project.

featured in the image, as well as #ootd (outfitoftheday) or #styleblogger. However, many more of these do not mention the intent in the image’s creation, rather emphasizing a message related to the site. Perhaps this lack of recognition is designed to forestall negative criticism; it is also possible that a deeply internalized knowledge of self-presentation is simply being paired with an earnest attempt to engage the memorial’s meaning. For example, on January 25th, 2018, user tavoechevarria posts a full body portrait in fitted jeans, boots, an open jacket and a baseball cap. He stands between two rows of stelae, his thumbs are looped into his pockets and he gazes off into the distance, one knee slightly bent. The caption reads “You can’t hide what here happened.” The post both relies on audience recognition of the memorial site, or at least of the geotag, but

otherwise focuses on the image of the user. The audience then associates the user with the act of Holocaust remembrance, marking him as not only stylish and attractive, but also ethically appropriate.

Yolocaust and Grindr Remembers the Holocaust

The selfie shaming digital art project “Yolocaust” consisted of twelve selfies taken at the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe—when a visitor to the Yolocaust site scrolls over each selfie, the memorial in the background dissipates and is replaced by images of the bodies of Holocaust victims. Shapira states on the project website, “The selfies were found on Facebook, Instagram, Tinder and Grindr. Comments, hashtags and “Likes” that were posted with the selfies are also included.”⁵⁴⁷ In Shapira’s project, the doctored selfies would be taken down when each individual selfie-taker got in touch with him at “undouche.me@yolocaust.de”, ostensibly to apologize to Shapira personally for their bad behavior. In about a week, the project “ended,” when all twelve selfie-takers eventually got in touch with Shapira.

The “Yolocaust” project post-dates another online project of selfie-shaming, a blog titled “Totem and Taboo: Grindr remembers the holocaust,” last active in 2014; as well as artist Marc Adelman’s piece *Stelen (Columns), 2007-2011*, exhibited in 2011 at the Jewish Museum of New York.⁵⁴⁸ Both projects appropriate profile pictures from dating sites like Grindr, which feature the profile owner posing at the Berlin memorial.

⁵⁴⁷ Shahak Shapira, “Yolocaust,” <http://yolocaust.de/>. Accessed Feb 5, 2018.

⁵⁴⁸ Ariel Efraim Ashbel and Romm Lewkowicz, “Grindr Remembers the Holocaust,” <http://grindr-remembers.blogspot.co.uk> Accessed Feb 5, 2018; Marc Adelman, “Stelen (Columns) 2007 - 2011,” <http://www.marcadelman.com/installation/>. Accessed Feb 5, 2018.



Installation image from *Stelen (Columns)*, 2007-2011, Marc Adelman (2011)

Adelman posited his project as a comment on the effect of the AIDS epidemic on the present, and removed the dating profile information, presenting only the images themselves.⁵⁴⁹ In the “Grindr remembers the holocaust” posts, the bloggers who run the site leave the dating profile intact—often including both the racial identification of the poster (overwhelmingly white) and at times, racial preferences for potential partners. In Krause’s reading, cruising is another aspect of use of the memorial that takes on shifting, secular meanings in the course of everyday use—the tying of cruising to the monument, whether online or at the site, emphasizes “the ephemeral presence of queer desire in the Field of Stelae.”⁵⁵⁰ Across the street in the Tiergarten,⁵⁵¹ the “Memorial to Homosexuals

⁵⁴⁹ Valentina Rozas Krause, “Cruising Eisenman’s Holocaust Memorial.” *Anos 90, Porto Alegre* 22, 42 (2015). 66. Adelman ties the loss of the Holocaust to the loss of the AIDS crisis; Krause points out that the artists’ explanation bypasses identification with queer victims of the Holocaust.

⁵⁵⁰ Krause, “Cruising Eisenman’s Holocaust Memorial,” 69.

⁵⁵¹ The Tiergarten is a well-known cruising spot.

Persecuted Under National Socialism,” designed by artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, invites viewers to gaze at a video of two white, gay men kissing inside a concrete structure that evokes the stelae, but stands alone and apart.⁵⁵² Jin Haritaworn, in *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places* notes the ways in which this memorial invokes white acceptable queerness in its appeal to audiences. They argue that the memorial bypasses the historical record of gay life in Germany to make a claim to “gays as the ‘only forgotten victims’ who are disadvantaged in relation to Jews as the ‘privileged victims,’” towards a discourse that centers the Holocaust and the concentration camp in contemporary LGBT identity politics.⁵⁵³ I read this logic in Adelman’s *Stelen (Columns), 2007-2011*, in which the Berlin memorial placed in relation to the bodies of white gay cisgender men connects the memory of the Holocaust to the AIDS crisis, and therefore contemporary gay claims to blameless victimhood. Of course, the Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted Under National Socialism does not stand alone in its claims to the scarce resource of memory or in the Tiergarten—the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism is also nearby. This memorial,

⁵⁵² After German lesbians protested, an agreement was made to change the video every two years to include footage of (white?) lesbians kissing. Krause writes, “This was a controversial issue, since historians criticized (WILKE, 2012) the State’s attempt to equal homosexual and lesbian persecution because only men were explicitly targeted through the Nazi amendment of Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code (1935), which criminalized “lewdness” and punished it with imprisonment (STIFTUNG DENKMAL FÜR DIE ERMORDETEN JUDEN EUROPAS). By restating the importance of including lesbians, the HomoMonument disobeys historical accuracy in order to frame Nazi homophobia into the present queer rights movements” (75).

⁵⁵³ Jin Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). 146, 150.



Screenshot of the Instagram geotag for the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism.

designed by Israeli artist Dani Karavan and dedicated in 2012,⁵⁵⁴ commemorates the murder of 220,000 and 500,000 Sinti and Roma people during what is known in Romani as the *Porajmos*. The proximity of this memorial to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews seems to be making a particular claim to

history and victimhood in a similar

way to the Memorial to the Homosexuals. However, these memorial narratives are complicated by the ongoing violent racism, forced evictions, pogroms and structural abuses being faced by Sinti and Roma people in Germany and across Europe.⁵⁵⁵ This monument, unlike the stelae rising up from the ground, appears to be a flat and open space. Like the Memorial to the Murdered Jews, however, there is a sunken quality to the landscape, which in the field of stelae is represented by the descent of the uneven ground,

⁵⁵⁴ Israeli artist Dani Karavan, who is Jewish, describes his parents as “pioneers” in his artist’s statement. See <http://www.danikaravan.com/biography/>

⁵⁵⁵ See for example the European Roma Rights Centre, <http://www.errc.org/en-search-results.php?mtheme=4>; Barbora Černušáková, “A drop of hope in the sea of fear: Tackling hate crimes against Roma in Hungary,” *Amnesty International* (January 25, 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/01/a-drop-of-hope-in-the-sea-of-fear-tackling-hate-crimes-against-roma-in-hungary/>; Jonathan Lee, “Liberté, Egalité, Expulsions Forcées,” *The Norwich Radical* (February 8, 2018). Retrieved from <https://thenorwichradical.com/2018/02/08/liberte-egalite-expulsions-forcees/>

and at the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims is represented by the circular pool of water, at the center of which a triangle sits on the pool's surface, home to a single rose that is replaced daily. On Instagram, the geotag *Denkmal für die im Nationalsozialismus ermordeten Sinti und Roma Europas* is often incorrectly affixed to images of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews. Selfies at the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims are rare, perhaps because of the flatness of the site. The common tropes on Instagram focus on the details of the memorial—the stones naming concentration camps that surround the pool, the triangle with its single rose—or zoom out to capture the entire memorial, often in contrast to or presented as the landscape in which the Reichstag looms majestically in the background.

Selfies are more common at the Memorial to the Homosexuals, a perusal of the geotag shows a number of selfies with the memorial, often of gay couples kissing in imitation of the video playing inside the concrete stelae. Many selfies use the glass window of the monument as a mirror—reflecting both the selfie-taker and the apparatus



Screenshot of a mirror selfie Instagram post by prepare4landing, taken at the Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted Under National Socialism, December 4, 2017.

of selfie-taking, while also capturing stills from the looped video playing inside the monument, of the lovers kissing. This reflective surface both invites viewer participation into the scene, a kind of erotic longing that is tinged with nostalgia, which often operates in



Screenshot of a mirror selfie Instagram post by lesjs1031, taken at the Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted Under National Socialism, October 11, 2017.

the service of whiteness.⁵⁵⁶ The Holocaust selfies, whiteness and queerness become tied together in the long shadow of the Holocaust Memorial's stelae in a strange way; the particular attention to the Grindr profile and cruising aspects of selfie culture at the memorial gestures towards the deeper scandal and the overtness of queer sexuality, the



Screenshot of a selfie Instagram post by samucogno, taken at the Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted Under National Socialism, November 27, 2017.

strange potential of sex and desire at a site memorializing mass death. And yet, scholars such as Haritaworn emphasize the displacement of queerness-- as a vilified or deviant sexuality, onto brown and Black people and communities in Berlin,

⁵⁵⁶ My thoughts on temporality and reflective screens are informed by Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

while white gay and lesbian identity is normalized. In a performance titled "Inject/ed: Self(ie) Determination" documented in the book *Selfie Citizenship*, the self-identified transgender queer of color artist Raju Rage attends an exhibition titled the "Homosexualität_en" at the Schwules Museum in Berlin. In the performance, Rage draws attention to the absent presence of brown and black bodies in this exhibition of queerness in art, which was not limited to German artists but was presented as a celebration of German queerness. Rage's intention was to take up space in the gallery by taking selfies. They document the disappointing experience of being ignored, of failing to have interrupted the scene with their body in this moment of intention, while their body is considered and is disciplined as a disruption while trying to move through their everyday life in Berlin. I was drawn to the documentation of this performance in part because I attended this exhibition while in Berlin for research, though not while Rage was there. Rage writes, "I was surrounded mostly by a white audience looking at the artworks, who totally ignored my taking selfies with the work."⁵⁵⁷ This anecdote mirrors the data and experience that I discuss in the third chapter of this project, in relation to attending to the Whitney Biennial, around the whiteness of museums and art institutions. Further, Rage's performance illustrates the double bind of legibility for queer, racialized bodies—disappeared by the algorithm and ignored within queer "community," but made hypervisible and disciplined in public space.

⁵⁵⁷ Raju Rage, "Inject/ed: Self(ie) Determination," *Selfie Citizenship* Ed. Adi Kuntsman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). 4.

Haritaworn writes, “certain queer bodies become a lovely sight in the shadow of racialized Others.”⁵⁵⁸ They argue that the specter of “‘Muslim homophobia’ has joined an older chain of criminalizing and pathologizing signifiers that must be understood within a longer history of racism and colonialism,” and which has shaped the ascendancy of white queer privilege in gentrifying Berlin. Writing about the campaign to build the Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted Under National Socialism, Haritaworn argues that the memorialization of past violences works to uphold present day violence against racialized communities. The Holocaust is privileged and made exceptional as the ultimate site of racialized violence; “in order to be recognized as victim subjects...homosexual suffering needs to first resemble...Jewish suffering.”⁵⁵⁹ The proximity of the colloquially known “Homo Memorial” to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews “weds together the new discourse on ‘Muslim homophobia’ with the universally deplorable evils of National Socialism” and ties together liberal LGBT rights claims to the specter of genocide in ways that work to criminalize people of color in the present.⁵⁶⁰

Dachau Refugee Camp

The 2016 film “Austerlitz” by Ukrainian documentary filmmaker Sergei Loznitsa documents the quotidian movement of tourists at former concentration camps, including Dachau and Sachsenhausen. The 94 minute black and white film is shot in long takes using hidden cameras. The film hones in on the persistent use of phone cameras and

⁵⁵⁸ Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers*, 3.

⁵⁵⁹ Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers*, 150.

⁵⁶⁰ Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers*, 152.

selfie-taking; “Selfies in front of the ovens in the crematorium seem to be particularly popular.”⁵⁶¹ The filmmaker, who does not intervene or narrate the movements onscreen, seems to want to make a comment on the absurdity of this behavior, without being able to answer for it. He is flummoxed, despite his own desire to capture. The filmmaker asks, “What am I doing here? What are all these people doing here, moving in groups from one object to another? The reason that induces thousands of people to spend their summer weekends in the former concentration camp is one of the mysteries of these memorial sites.”⁵⁶² Certainly, this question has engendered quite a bit of research, ranging from “dark tourism” to family history and memorial tourism.⁵⁶³

However, in the context of the ongoing refugee crisis, some of the people induced to spend time at the former camps are there out of a different kind of necessity—the use of the camps, even while active tourist sites, as makeshift refugee camps. For example, in 2015, “21 male asylum seekers” from African countries were housed in buildings, which had plumbing and cooking facilities, and that post-dated the Holocaust on the site of the

⁵⁶¹ Heike Mund, “Selfies at Dachau: New film reveals embarrassing reality of remembrance” *Deutsche Welle* (2017). Retrieved from <http://p.dw.com/p/2WUFP>

⁵⁶² “Catch the UK premiere of this critically acclaimed film observing the phenomenon of ‘dark tourism’” *Tate Modern Film* (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/film/sergei-loznitsa-austerlitz>

⁵⁶³ Carol A. Kidron, “Being There Together: Dark Family Tourism and the Emotive Experience of Co-Presence in the Holocaust Past,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 41 (2013). 175-194; Daniel Reynolds, “Consumers or witnesses? Holocaust tourists and the problem of authenticity.” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 16, 2 (2016). 334-353.

former Buchenwald camp.⁵⁶⁴ German plans to house asylum seekers and other people experiencing homelessness at the sites of former concentration camps, including Buchenwald and Dachau, gained quite a bit of media attention. Setting aside the quality of the conditions or the policy failures that would require the establishment of such emergency housing, headlines about refugees being housed at camps certainly represented an optics problem; “Regional integration secretary Guntram Schneider had previously criticized the plan [at Dachau], saying that the city's intentions would be misunderstood abroad.”⁵⁶⁵ The conditions at refugee camps across Europe have in fact been compared to Nazi concentration camps. For example, the Greek interior minister, Panagiotis Kouroubilis called the Idomeni camp “a modern-day Dachau” in 2016.⁵⁶⁶ In 2017, Pope Francis referred to Europe’s refugee camps as concentration camps, on the logic that they are camps with terrible, life-threatening conditions from which people are

⁵⁶⁴ Lydia Willgress, “Refugees who fled to Europe for a better life are living in former Nazi barracks,” *The Daily Mail UK* (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3230670/Housed-Refugees-fled-Europe-better-life-living-former-Nazi-barracks.html>

⁵⁶⁵ Rick Noak, “Germany is housing refugees within Holocaust-era concentration camps,” *The Washington Post* (2015). Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/01/30/germany-is-housing-refugees-within-holocaust-era-concentration-camps/?utm_term=.e4639c9c1659

⁵⁶⁶ Will Worley and Lizzie Dearden, “Greek refugee camp is ‘as bad as a Nazi concentration camp,’ says minister,” *The Independent UK* (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/idomeni-refugee-dachau-nazi-concentration-camp-greek-minister-a6938826.html>

not allowed to leave.⁵⁶⁷ After the Pope made his comments—which did not compare the camps to the Holocaust, but rather to concentration camps (which have, of course, existed outside of the Nazi conception of them)—the American Jewish Committee decried the comparison. AJC Chief Executive David Harris wrote in a statement, “The conditions in which migrants are currently living in some European countries may well be difficult... but concentration camps they certainly are not,” and continued by referencing the Holocaust and stating, “There is no comparison to the magnitude of that tragedy.”⁵⁶⁸ This is further evidence of the ways in which memory of violence is still often treated as a contest, rather than as relational and part of a larger and connected structure—both because of the tendency to view history as episodic and because of the vested political interest in emphasizing certain violences over others. When the news circulated that refugees would be housed at Dachau, questions focused as much on appropriateness and preserving the sanctity of the camp as memorial space, as the rights or well-being of those housed at the camp. The sacralization of the Holocaust as event is tied to the sacralization of space— in which a building or site must be preserved or at least not built upon because of its association with historical violence. This both gestures towards a cultural belief in haunting and represents the flip side of the total erasure of colonial violence, in which sites necessarily must be built over and forgotten.

⁵⁶⁷ Cleve R. Wootson Jr., “Pope Francis called refugee centers concentration camps. A Jewish group says there’s no comparison.” *The Washington Post* (2017). Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/04/23/pope-francis-called-refugee-centers-concentration-camps-a-jewish-group-says-theres-no-comparison/?utm_term=.2ec6e0d7a875

⁵⁶⁸ Wootson, “Pope Francis called refugee centers concentration camps,” 2017.

In the space of urban Berlin as well as the space of Dachau as memory site, the refugee is produced as exceptional while the tourist—the citizen on vacation—is produced as norm. Something like 800,000 tourists visit Dachau every year—the interplay between Dachau as emergency housing and as a memorial site belies the desire for sites of Holocaust memory to remain exceptional and outside of the normalized impasse of ongoing crisis. The presence of refugees at Dachau resists the primary Holocaust memorial logic of “never again” with a human reminder that population level violence does happen again, and again, and it still happening. Even so, there has been little attention paid to the phenomenon of asylum seekers living at Dachau beyond the fascinating headline and attention to the perceived moment of crisis—they fade into the broader discourse about the place of refugees and migrants in German society.⁵⁶⁹

Racialized Others and Public Space

Race and ethnicity circulate in public space as contested—both in terms of bodies in space and the layout of places. A number of scholars have written particularly about the history of Black and African Germans, including continuing isolation, racism, and the perception that Afro-Germans are *not German*—despite Germany’s colonial relationship to Africa, as well as the documented presence of Black people in Germany since before the 16th century.⁵⁷⁰ These longstanding struggles have been compounded by more

⁵⁶⁹ With a failure to recognize that crisis has pooled and eddied—to borrow Lauren Berlant’s language in *Cruel Optimism*—that we are in an impasse of crisis, that crisis is the new normal.

⁵⁷⁰ See Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay, Ed. *The African-German Experience: Critical Essays* (Westport: Praeger, 1996); Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Campt, *Other Germans*, 2004.

recently shifting demographics, and the ways in which certain communities are vilified along racial lines. For example, in the 2015 article “Is it time for the Jews to leave Europe?” in *The Atlantic*, writer Jeffrey Goldberg calls “the Continent’s large and disenfranchised Muslim immigrant communities” the “chief propagators of contemporary European anti-Semitism.”⁵⁷¹ Muslim and Arab refugees and migrants are also cast as the particular and natural site of homophobia and sexual violence— as demonstrated in the media coverage of the New Year’s Eve “Sex Attacks” in Cologne, Germany in 2016. The assaults were, in the English language press, never framed in a larger understanding of sexual assault in Germany, or the vulnerability of women of color, particularly refugee



2016 Cologne police tweet “Hundred of Nafiris screened at main railway station.”

women, to sexual violence. Reports focused on the threat of mobs of Arab and North African *looking* men, attacking primarily white German women. Liberal German responses focused on cultural difference—the mayor of Cologne, Henriette Reker, commented to *The New York Times*, “We will explain our Carnival much better to people who come

from other cultures...so there won’t be any confusion about what constitutes celebratory

⁵⁷¹ Jeffrey Goldberg, “Is It Time for the Jews to Leave Europe?” *The Atlantic* (2015). 65.

behavior in Cologne, which has nothing to do with a sexual frankness.”⁵⁷² In 2017, police in Cologne detained hundreds of North African men, allegedly to prevent a repetition of the previous year’s sexual assaults—tweeting in multiple languages that they were screening “Nafris.”⁵⁷³ This term, which has entered popular use, refers to *NordAFRikanischer Intensivtäter* or “North African intensive offenders.” In addition to claims that Muslim refugees want to impose Sharia law on Germany, anti-refugee memes and other media describe refugees as “rapefugees,” often accompanied by portrayals of brown men attacking white women, or white women being forced to apologize for being racist after being raped by brown men. Ahmed argues that “...narratives of crisis are used within politics to justify a ‘return’ to values and traditions that are perceived to be under threat.”⁵⁷⁴ Even if unstated, the visual coding and rhetoric of “rapefugees” justifies a return to white supremacist values that rely on the figure of the sexually threatened white woman.⁵⁷⁵ In contrast, bias and hate crimes against communities of color and immigrant

⁵⁷² Melissa Eddy, “Reports of Attacks on Women in Germany Heighten Tension Over Migrants,” *The New York Times* (January 5, 2016). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/world/europe/coordinated-attacks-on-women-in-cologne-were-unprecedented-germany-says.html>

⁵⁷³ Eddy “Reports of Attacks,” 2016; Rory Mulholland, “Cologne police detain hundreds of ‘North African’ men over New Year,” *The Telegraph* (January 1, 2017). Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/01/cologne-police-detain-hundreds-north-african-men-new-year/>

⁵⁷⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁵⁷⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Sherene Razack, “How Is White Supremacy Embodied? Sexualized Racial Violence at Abu Ghraib,” *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 17, 2 (2005).

communities are not addressed.⁵⁷⁶ These white supremacist values are iterative and circulate transnationally within colonial origins—returning to the illustration of two Herero men, in the dress of farmworkers and brandishing a rifle and club, assaulting a German woman;⁵⁷⁷ the whistle which served to justify the murder of Emmett Till.

In Wedding, in northern Berlin—less than a half hour train ride from the Berlin Holocaust memorial, is a part of the city called the “African Quarter.” Germany’s colonial past is tangible here not only through street names honoring colonial figures, which are contested and in the process of being changed, but also in the space itself. While the street names can be changed, the layout of the “African Quarter” was planned with the aim of making the quarter a space to exhibit “the spoils of German colonialism, including exotic animals and humans.”⁵⁷⁸ This gestures to larger international debates about monuments and naming, including the continuing presence of confederate monuments in the United States. In all of these debates, the desire to change the memory landscape must be considered in the context of broader social and political change. A surface change, such as removing the visual and nominal markers of violent history, may only act as a pacifying force. If the socioeconomic after-effects of an event are not

⁵⁷⁶ “Germany Failing to Tackle Rise in Hate Crime,” *Amnesty International* (June 9, 2016). Retrieved from <http://www.amnesty.eu/en/news/press-releases/region/eu/germany-failing-to-tackle-rise-in-hate-crime-0984/#.WpMTXyOZPyI>

⁵⁷⁷ Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, *Genocide in German South-West Africa: The Colonial War of 1904-1908 and Its Aftermath* (London: Merlin Press, 2007).

⁵⁷⁸ Werner van Bebber, “Where the streets have bad names,” *Handelsblatt Global* (November 26, 2017). Retrieved from <https://global.handelsblatt.com/politics/where-the-streets-have-bad-names-851040>

addressed, or if the event is in fact ongoing, changing a name may only effectively mask that history, rather than addressing it.

Overlapping contestations arise in Germany's former colonies—for example, a bronze statue of a *Schutztruppe* soldier on horseback, called the *Reiterdenkmal*, was removed from public viewing near the *Alte Feste* (Old Fortress) in Windhoek and placed in storage in 2013. The monument, erected in 1912, commemorated the German soldiers and civilians who died during the 1904-1907 struggle.⁵⁷⁹ Another memorial to the German fallen, *Marine Denkmal* was erected in 1908 in the city of Swakopmund, and still stands.⁵⁸⁰ Because of the massive demographic shifts wrought by genocide and the many eras of colonial rule, the political and memorial culture in Namibia is more complex than German v. Namibian, pre- and post-independence.⁵⁸¹ Elke Zuern, in her work on Namibian memorial culture, argues that the dominance of a Swapo-based narrative de-emphasizes the specificity of experiences under German colonial rule. While

⁵⁷⁹ The text on the plaque of the monument read: “Remembering and honouring the brave German warriors that died for emperor and empire to save and protect this land during the Herero and Hottentot uprisings between 1903 and 1907, and during the Kalahari Expedition in 1908. Also remembering and honouring German citizens that died from the hands of the indigenous. Fallen, missing, died from accident, succumbed to their injuries or sickness: Of the Protection Force: 100 officers, 254 non-commissioned officers, 1180 soldiers, of the marine: 7 officers, 13 non-commissioned officers, 27 seamen. Killed during the uprising: 119 men, 4 women, 1 child.”

⁵⁸⁰ Onishi, “A Colonial-Era Wound,” 2017; Elke Zuern, “Namibia’s Monuments to Genocide,” *Dissent Magazine* (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/namibia-genocide-monuments-reparations-germany>

⁵⁸¹ Elke Zuern lucidly describes the struggles I gesture towards in Chapter 3 of this project, for representation of Ovaherero and Nama peoples in an Ovambo-dominated Swapo Party-led government, and for the specificity of remembrance for these ethnic groups against the desire for a coherent Namibian national narrative.

the Swapo-led post-independence government has built new memorials promoting a unified Namibian identity, German memorials largely remain in place. Comparable to confederate memorials in the United States, the continuing presence of colonial memorials in Namibia might be approached from multiple stances; as Zuern notes, “maintaining the memorial is a way to preserve memories of colonial era crimes.”⁵⁸²

While for part of the white German Namibian population, this might be a locus of racial pride, for many Namibians the memorials might serve as touchstones when making claims for reparations and other demands, complicating the desire for removal with the anxiety of erasure.

Post-Genocidal Germanness and Racialized Youth

Damani Partridge, writing about the Berlin Holocaust memorial, examines Holocaust memorialization as exclusionary, and looks at the ways in which the undertaking of Holocaust memorialization ostracizes “contemporary racialized subjects in Germany.”⁵⁸³ This creates a disjuncture “between racist memory and contemporary racism.” Partridge focuses on immigrant youth largely of Arab descent, and the specter especially of anti-Semitism and the policing of youth of color around “appropriate behavior” that Partridge observes amongst white teachers, social workers, and other agents of the state in Germany as well as the United States. Partridge observes a group of students who were part of a youth group in Berlin, involved in a program that introduced

⁵⁸² Elke Zuern, “Memorial Politics: Challenging the Dominant Party’s Narrative in Namibia,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 50, 3 (2012). 510.

⁵⁸³ Damani Partridge, “Holocaust Mahnmal (Memorial): Monumental Memory amidst Contemporary Race,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, 4 (2010). 820-850.

them primarily to German Jewish history in relation to the Holocaust—influenced in part by the perception of immigrant youth anti-Semitism.⁵⁸⁴ He documents a visit to the Berlin Holocaust memorial, chaperoned by white German social workers. “When asked to interpret the stelae, many [of the youth] said they saw them as mere abstract concrete blocks, a place to play hide and seek. The guide gave his own interpretation of why people were tempted to play at the Memorial, that they were overwhelmed by the horror, and that play put things back into a manageable order, but this reading sparked no epiphanies among the youth.”⁵⁸⁵ In fact, a *UPI News* story published soon after the memorial opened in 2005 noted that “many of the younger visitors [to the memorial] treated it as a playground. Among the first day's intake were school groups from across the country who seemed, in part at least, to relate better to the monument as a kind of maze-like playground than as a testimony to the darkest chapter in Germany's history.”⁵⁸⁶ The architect Eisenman, responding to the “Yolocaust” project, told the *BBC* “People have been jumping around on those pillars forever. They've been sunbathing, they've been having lunch there and I think that's fine...A memorial is an everyday occurrence, it is

⁵⁸⁴ The consistent perception that contemporary German anti-Semitism is a *foreign contaminant* rather than driven by “native” German forces—that Nazism and its underpinning ideologies are not only resurgent among white Germans but is in fact a consistent presence rather than having ended with the end of World War II. See also Esra Özyürek, “Export-Import Theory and the Racialization of Anti-Semitism: Turkish- and Arab-Only Prevention Programs in Germany.” *Contemporary Studies in Society and History* 58,1 (2016). 40-65.

⁵⁸⁵ Partridge, “Holocaust Mahnmal,” 825.

⁵⁸⁶ “Holocaust memorial playground for some,” *UPI NewsTrack* (May 13, 2005). Retrieved from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/11D60B3B77797638?p=AWNB>

not sacred ground.”⁵⁸⁷ The reading by the memorial’s architect is in contradistinction to popular perception of memorial sites as precisely sacred ground.

Connecting Partridge’s critique to Haritaworn’s and Krause’s observations about the displacement of queerness from white gay and lesbian bodies onto black and brown bodies, these immigrant youth become both the appropriate site of homophobia in German society *and* the subjects of anti-queer policing.⁵⁸⁸ The disciplining of immigrant youth at the Berlin memorial, towards “educating” these supposedly anti-Semitic and potentially homophobic Others into an assimilated tolerance can be read in relation to broader German anti-blackness, racism and Islamophobia. Haritaworn extends Partridge’s critique, arguing that Holocaust memorials and memorialization exists in Germany to “consolidate a post/genocidal Germanness”—*post/genocidal* for Haritaworn names the isolation of “genocide firmly in the past, while rendering death-making processes in the present unspectacular, self-inflicted, and mentionable only at great risk.”⁵⁸⁹ Through “the display of ‘correct’ memories, affects—including guilt and *Betroffenheit* [affectedness]... and conducts,” an always already white German identity can be “performed as innocent.”⁵⁹⁰ In this narrative, the violence of the past is in the past and Germany has atoned, through its Holocaust memorialization, not only for the Holocaust, but for all

⁵⁸⁷ Joel Gunter, “Yolocaust’: How should you behave at a Holocaust memorial?” *BBC News* (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38675835>

⁵⁸⁸ See also Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ* 3, 4 (1997). 437-465.

⁵⁸⁹ Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers*, 148.

⁵⁹⁰ Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers*, 147.

wrongdoing past, present and future. Germanness takes on the timeless quality of blamelessness, while blame for present-day problems are displaced onto a threatening Other. Haritaworn cites Esra Özyürek's work on the targeting of Muslim and Arab youth in Germany as the particular site of antisemitism; "According to Özyürek, the spectre guiding these programmes is racialised youth who identify too much—rather than too little—with the persecuted Jews. Such identification threatens the post-genocidal view of the nation by drawing connections between past and present forms of racism."⁵⁹¹ This identification does not circulate in selfie memorial culture—it is not a recognizable performance or an imaginable positionality in relation to the space of the monument or the politics of attention within social media networks.

Circulating Whiteness

Partridge asks, "How does the nation-state ultimately protect itself from contemporary accusation by building the monument as an historical artifact that primarily serves the contemporary function of memory?"⁵⁹² The violence of the state is displaced onto disenfranchised populations, while the memory of past violence forecloses attention to present-day violences against those disenfranchised populations. Holocaust memorialization, tied to liberal whiteness, is filtered through social media and brand culture through the proliferation of selfies taken at the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and other sites of Holocaust memory. However, both the selfies as texts and the media shaming culture around these selfies fail to disrupt, and in fact bolster, the

⁵⁹¹ Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers*, 148.

⁵⁹² Partridge, "Holocaust Mahnmal," 836.

mobilization of the Holocaust towards a consolidated, blameless whiteness in the aftermath of exceptionalized violence.

Conclusion: A Truer Word and Other Marvels

“In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness.” —Hortense Spillers

On January 24th, 2018, *The New Yorker* published an article titled “The Troubling Origins of the Skeletons in a New York Museum,” publicizing the news that eight skulls of Namibian origin, likely from victims of genocide, were being housed in the American Museum of Natural History’s most utilized research collection.⁵⁹³ The skulls had come as part of a larger collection sold to the museum by Austrian anthropologist Felix von Luschan in 1924. The article, by Daniel A. Gross, also notes that Eugen Fischer’s writings “have recently resurfaced on white-supremacist Web sites.”⁵⁹⁴ This dissertation was written from the inside of ongoing events and inside the impasse of crisis— long-standing, sedimented violences that take on the sheen of urgency through elections and movements. History, experienced as a palimpsest, is rather a living thing, shaping the present and being shaped by the present. The ideology that drove the Herero and Nama genocide has not faded away; Africa as a continent continues to be relegated as a site of pre-modernity, naturalized poverty, and natural resources for the taking, while Germany’s admissions regarding its violent history in Southern Africa come slowly and without material reparation.

This project is still unfolding; as I move out of the dissertation phase and into the book phase of the project, I envision publishing the fourth and fifth chapters, in part, as

⁵⁹³ Daniel A. Gross, “The Troubling Origins of the Skeletons in a New York Museum.” *The New Yorker* (January 24, 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-troubling-origins-of-the-skeletons-in-a-new-york-museum>

⁵⁹⁴ Gross, “The Troubling Origins,” 2018.

separate journal articles, and focusing in on the transnational exchange of images, ideologies and bodies between the United States, Germany, and Namibia during and in the long afterlife of settler colonial violence. I hope in particular to extend my research by traveling to Namibia and accessing the archives in Windhoek and Swakopmund in person. On this trip and a return trip to Berlin, I will build connections with artists and communities working to make demands for repatriation and redress, and using this to reshape the fourth chapter with more original research. I find myself particularly captured by the story of the skulls, in the United States and Berlin, and will extend this part of the project into multiple chapters. Further, as I continue to find contemporary art and theater responding to the Herero genocide and related violences, I see that part of Chapter 4 that contends with Coco Fusco and Jackie Sibblies Drury's theater projects expanding into its own chapter, that contends with *Schädel X* and other theater and performance art work in this vein.

In this project, I have worked to answer the question of how the visual circulation and containment of colonial violences continue to shape ways of looking and remembering. Are there different ways to approach positionality in relation to visual and material evidence that indexes histories of violence? In *Bodies of Evidence*, I argue for the importance of looking differently as part of crucial anti-racist struggle. I am particularly concerned with the location of witnessing, and the ways in which things look differently from different positions—what I refer to through the concept of parallax—and the effects of this on the consumption of images, as trophy or appeal. Further, I work to elaborate the relationship between the body and the image, thinking images in the flesh

through the heuristic of Hortense Spillers' seminal essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: an American Grammar Book," and thinking through this relationship via the concept of visceral witnessing.

In moving from the historical to the contemporary moment of image and ideological production together, I argue that sedimented constructs shaped through racist and settler colonial violence continue to shape the production and consumption of the visual, memory practice and scopic politics. These retinal sedimentations must be looked at plainly and addressed openly, to name the ways in which history and identity shape the function of the eye. I view this project as being part of a body of scholarship on the gaze or ways of looking that includes work by Tina Campt, Leigh Raiford, Christina Sharpe, Marianne Hirsch, Teju Cole, among others. I am particularly beholden to the work of Hortense Spillers; I work to think through and extend her theorization of the flesh to both the backwards look at visual historical archives and the ways that we look in the present.

I view my observations about visibility less as groundbreaking and more as an offering of ways of looking as applied to archives of living and dead bodies, in analog photographs, in museums, on social media. These archives provide insight into the ideological travels that have sedimented the human as a protected and exclusive constructed category along racial lines. Further, I contribute to these conversations by applying this line of critique to the Herero and Nama genocide in relation to history as an assemblage. As part of this project, I argue against a possessive or protective approach to memory, which for example prevents consideration of the Holocaust as part of a broader history of colonial and racial violence. Counter to this, I situate the Holocaust as part of

an ongoing assemblage of violence that is constitutive of modernity. Understanding history through the lens of these assembled horrors allows for a new perspective on the way events fit together, against a view of historical atrocity as a series of unconnected breaches into normal life. Rather, these exceptional periods cohere and reveal the deeper foundational violence that leads scholars and artists and activists to call for and imagine and struggle towards a new world, a new language.

At the beginning of Hortense Spiller's "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe," she describes the need to strip down through reductive meaning, and in this vestibular place of possibility to "await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness."⁵⁹⁵ I am captured by this future possibility, the idea that there is a new grammar to be seen, to be spoken. As Campt evocatively writes of the "future real conditional or that which will have had to happen [...] the grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn't happened but must."⁵⁹⁶ Looking to the future that is still a site of possibility, I end by returning to the flesh as vestibule, as an antechamber, as a place where one moves from what is into what may be.

⁵⁹⁵ Spillers, "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe," 65.

⁵⁹⁶ Campt, *Listening to Images*, 17.

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