

The Catholic schoolgirl & the wet nurse: On the ecology of oppression, trauma and crisis

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Abstract

This paper explores the idea of facing oppression by exploring how two photographs, one of a Catholic schoolgirl and one of a wet nurse, were received as they made their way through social media. In addition, the paper looks at a blog post that was made about photographs from a similar time period as the photos. By exploring how the photos were received through Fanon, visual studies, and psychoanalytic theory, the paper proposes a new way to view these photographs outside of the narratives of Oppression and Trauma. Instead, by understanding the re-inscription of the dominant narratives as an ongoing crisis, we allow for a reparative reading of this type of imagery that complicates our relationship with the past.

Keywords: *media studies; digital media; social media; photography; history*

The Catholic schoolgirl



FIGURE 1

“She can’t be Catholic! She’s naked!” said a woman in the audience during the question and answer session of a conference presentation. I was taken aback. During my presentation I had shared some of the stories and reactions of finding old archival photography that had been digitized, and how I had shared them online. I ended the presentation by asking permission to share a photograph I discovered online in the French National archives a week before (FIG. 1). There was a question that was nagging at me that I hoped the audience could help me work through: “is/was sharing this photograph the right thing to do? And why?” I introduced the girl in the photograph as Héliani, a catholic schoolgirl

who modeled for the photograph, information I knew from the brief bit of biographical information¹ included with the photograph in the digital archive where I found her. She had been modeling for a book titled, *Eve Noire/Black Eve*, a book I ordered after seeing the photograph. Knowing this history, I was taken aback by the comment from the woman in audience. Of course Héliani was a Catholic schoolgirl. But there was something different about this photograph; the ecology that she is visualized in is very different than how she might appear while actively being a student of the Catholic mission. This is a Catholic schoolgirl “spotted” at a party who became (devint) a model for the “Eve Noire” series. I am stuck on the ‘becoming’ part. It makes me wonder about how this photograph came to be.

The reaction of the woman in the audience to Héliani was not the first experience where I found myself taken aback by a reaction or question to my exploration of the photographic archive of women of the black diaspora. I was walking on campus with a professor when I first started this work. While explaining what I was doing, I used the terms “black women” and “colonial photography”. I watched her body recoil, something I took as a sign of the importance of this project. *Seeing* these women in a more fluid context, a broader and more universal ecology is needed to help shift the monolithic narrative that exists around them. I felt, and continue to feel, sadness and shame because women who look like me, women who were photographed for various reasons that were often highly problematic, were reduced and confined,

¹ “Jeune fille du village de Poto-Poto avec une coiffure de perles. Elève de la mission catholique, répondant au nom "d'Héliani", elle fut repéré par Ellebé lors d'un tam-tam (fête) à Poto-Poto et devint un de ses modèles pour une série de photographies intitulée "Eve noire".

left to be defined by those projects. When they are reduced to a monolithic narrative, they cease to exist in any larger ecologies of knowledge or meaning.

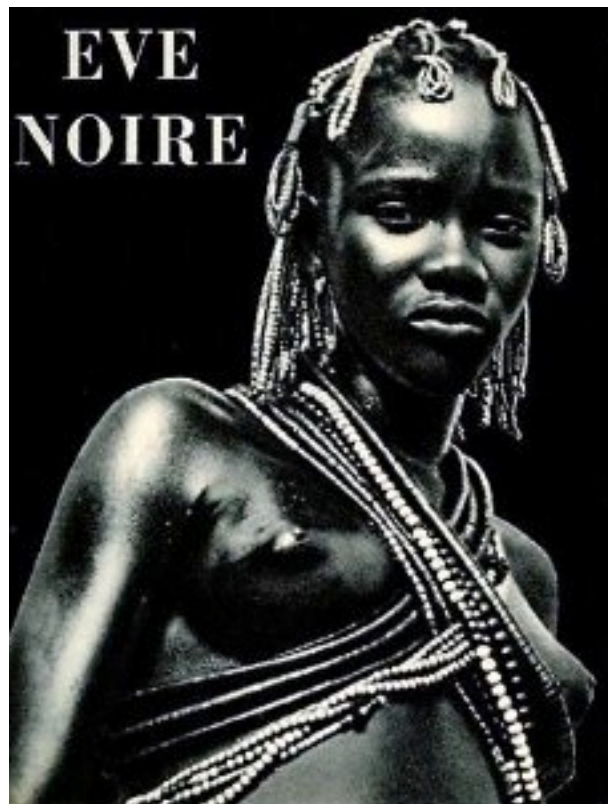


FIGURE 2

Finding the photo of Héliani changed how I think through my work and its imagined audience. This fraction of a second in Héliani's life is the collective image that society often imagines when we think of the dynamic of the historical black woman/white man, but that we rarely see captured by the camera. If my conversation with the professor caused her to recoil, Héliani's photograph – her body in focus front and center, a melancholic look on her face, a group of white men out of focus in traditional explorer gear looking at her in the background – represents what I feared the professor was seeing as she imagined what I was describing. Once *Eve Noire*, the book, arrived in my mailbox, I eagerly opened it not sure what I would find, but I instantly recognized the cover model. It was Héliani (FIG. 2). She stands in what appears to be a pose identical to the digitized photo from the French archives, but taken from a different angle. Rather than the person holding the camera being to her side, he is now in front of her, probably kneeling; she looks down directly into the lens. Her face has the same affective resonance. But there is something more. The background of the photograph has been blacked out. She stands alone, as Black Eve, without the distraction of the men surrounding her. The look on her face is powerful. Her melancholy becomes an unapologetic presence that says simply, "I am here. And I see you." It is the only image in the book that appears without a background. Other photos in the book focus on the women, but the backgrounds are blurry and many lack human spectators.

When spectators do sneak into the frame, none of them are white men. In a majority of the photographs, the girls and women are nude, but smiling.²

The original photograph of Héliani is painful to see. It makes visible what is typically invisible in colonial photography. While we might be able to imagine older white men in safari gear looking with scrutinizing, unfriendly gazes - surrounding their photographic subject - to see it actually happening, frozen in time and space though a photograph, is painful. When we view this image we see colonization come to life. The gaze of the white men is predatory. Their intentions, narrated by the looks on their faces and on hers, are animalistic. The gaze of the viewer is drawn to their blurred faces in an attempt to put them into focus, to face the boogeyman that will not allow the effacement of the colonial context that consumes Héliani. When we follow the gaze of the men, we see that they are staring – consuming her. Their gaze frames ours. Even contextualized, Héliani, Catholic schoolgirl dancing at a party, the photo still disturbs the viewer. Héliani is framed by the white male colonial and sexual gaze, breast exposed, alone, and surrounded. The blurred faces of white men erase the blurred black faces behind them that are also watching Héliani dance. When I posted it to Tumblr, the first person who reblogged the image drew attention to this erasure: “There’s just something about “Héliani’s” expression, and the intense gaze of the white men in the background on her nude body, that embodies this fetish.”³ The shadow archive, as described by Alan Sekula (1986) in “The Body and the Archive”, encompasses the entire social terrain within which Héliani can be imagined in (p. 10).

Yet Héliani remains. A young girl from the village of Poto-Poto with a hairstyle of pearls, a student of the catholic mission who responds to the name Héliani. Héliani, who becomes the personification of Black Eve. Héliani, who with a slight glance down, captured the horrors of colonization experienced by black women. Surrounded by white men, she embodies, for an instant, all the sexual horrors we place on black women in the context of colonization and enslavement. More than what we see in the photograph, our fear is what could happen to her immediately after.

The wet nurse

While the photo of Héliani is difficult because of the colonial history it makes present and visible, another photo, Type de « négresse » d’ADANA, (Turkey, Ottoman Empire, c1910), is disturbing for similar reasons. This is not a photo that I found and posted. Instead, I watched her

² The book in and of itself is an interesting place to look, created by Bertrand Lembezat, and administrator for la France d’outre-mer, the book lists him as “administrator of the colonies”, as well as the author and photographer for the book. Many photographs taken by him are available in the French National Archives that do not appear in the book, though there is some overlap between the photos online and in the book. The book was printed not by the French government, but instead by a private press in Switzerland.

³ <http://dynamicafrica.tumblr.com/post/22731164593/vintageblackbeauty-danseuse-de-la-region-de>

make her way through Tumblr, where the photo was re-blogged more than 3000⁴ times. The background of the image is a painted curtained terrace, indicating that it is studio print, a type of photo often used for postcards. However, the photo is cropped (FIG. 3). All that is left on the screen is the image of a black woman, mouth in a slight smirk, fatigued hooded eyes looking directly at the camera, her breasts large and exposed, below the left nipple a dot of what is likely milk. Her left hand rests on her left knee and her right knee appears to be slightly propped, sitting on an ornate bench. A skirt is draped between her legs, creating a seat. A fair skinned child nurses at her right breast, awake, looking up at the woman, clutching the nourishing breast (the nourishing woman) in his or her hands, nestled in the seat of her skirt, lying against her left forearm and hand. Instead of seeing a woman who might or might not be the child's mother, which was a possibility for, while the image caption placed the photograph geographically, as well as noting her race - a "black woman" (négresse) from Adana Turkey (something I discovered when I found the original, uncropped postcard) - nothing was said of the child, nor



FIGURE 3

was the woman marked as a nurse or nursemaid (nourrice), a practice that was common on French postcards (FIG. 4)⁵.

As the photograph circulated digitally, primarily by American users of Tumblr, instead of seeing the woman in the photo for who she was, the image contains the history of slavery and of the black Mammy in the United States. The ecology of knowledge of black nurses that people had to work with blinded them to the broader history that she was a part of. This image was seen as another instance of Mammy come to life, except that it was real: an actual photograph of Mammy in action. Seeing the image of Héliani creates a silence based on being stunned because it

is an image we are not used to seeing. The « négresse » d'ADANA creates a different type of silence, one we are used to encountering because her body is culturally hyper visible. We are inundated with her image, primarily in the United States, from the grocery store as Aunt Jemima, to films such as *Pinky* and *The Help*, to the restaurant Manos Morenas in Peru, the Jynx Pokemon from Japan, female golliwog dolls of New Zealand and Australia, collectible Mammy servant bells, salt and pepper shakers, and other items found around the world. The archives are full of her image as well. It is this overwhelming citationality of the Mammy that renders us unable to see the complexities of the relationship the photo presents us with.

⁴ <http://vintageblackbeauty.tumblr.com/post/26255822411/type-de-negresse-dadana-turkey-c1910>

⁵ The back of the postcard is said to have the following additional information, but I've been unable to locate this image in a traditional library or information about the publisher, "Type de « négresse » d'Adana Nourrice noire allaitante éditions G. Mizrahi, Adana, carte postale, 9 x 14, vers 1910"

The figure of the nurse is erased as she is subsumed (and consumed) by the figure of the mother (Coles, 2011, pp. 63-64). The shadow archive encompasses the entire social terrain in which she can be imagined (Sekula, 1986, p. 10). In our imagined psyche, her role and the role of the mother blend and merge, until “nurse as mother” fades away, leaving her mother role invisible, and the “nurse as object” or “nurse as thing” for us to contemplate. Similar to Héliani,



FIGURE 4

it is the life outside of the photo that creates the space of fear and discomfort for the viewers. We erase the complex relationship of nourishment and fill the gap we have created with our fears of her powerless, forgotten position. She becomes nothing more than a resource, detached from her humanity. Instead of the fear we have of the colonial male gaze, as with Héliani, we are left, in the back of our minds, with the image of the evil white mistress/mother. The unspoken statement that can be seen in many of the reactions to this photo as it circulated out of context is, “where is this celebrated white mother figure?” Mammy takes her place, casting the birth mother as detached from her own child. If the mother had been present, she would have been “saving” two generations of suffering, the suffering of the enslaved wet nurse as well as the child.

The pain we see continues to be amplified when we enter the lived narrative of blackness in relation to whiteness in the United States; specifically, in the relationship between white men and black women. While we cannot be sure of the

sex/gender of the child, there are no western markers of femininity visible on the child’s body. This is placed in contrast with the oversized breasts of the « négresse » d’Adana. Seeing the child as male, we “imagine his heartache and conflict...that his society forbade him to recognize his erotic feelings for black women that were linked to his deep love and gratitude to his ‘black Mammy’, who not only saved his life, but might have...given him a reason for living” (Coles, 2011, p. 67). This reading of the image is also colored by American slavery and segregation. Despite the varying context in which the photograph was taken (Turkey⁶), the « négresse »

⁶ The Ottoman Empire is historically underrepresented in discourse on slavery and its legacy. The U.S. and the Ottoman empire both enslaved black Africans; however, slavery was a much more complex social system in the Ottoman empire, where it was not limited to the chattel and plantation model that dominates the US narrative and, thus, the narrative within which the image of the wet-nurse was bounded (though there were Ottoman sugar plantations in Egypt that more closely resembled the US model). Further, slavery in the Ottoman Empire was not limited to the slavery of Black Africans. White Europeans, Caucasians (from the Caucasus region), and people of

d'Adana becomes an embodiment of “what slavery looked like” in the United States, as she moves through space and time as a digital artifact, cropped, decontextualized and detached from history.

Returning to Coles (2011), in her chapter on Nurses:

“The nurse or nanny’s metaphorical portrait needs to be brought out and dusted down, so that she can be hung in the gallery along-side the parents, grandparents, siblings, and other ancestors... It is time she was remembered for the impossible role she has been placed in, rather than considered as no more than a “servant” who can be fired and hired at the whim of the mistress. It needs to be recognized that a blind eye has been turned to the fact that the nurse often has been given the vital task of caring for a child at its most vulnerable and impressionable age. (p. 69)

We must remember that the ecologies of social relationships are complex and problematic; and they often live in excess of the narratives in which they are placed. By allowing ourselves to be blinded by the history we’ve been given by colonial narratives, we are not able to challenge history in a way that allows the history this woman represents to be more complicated. In continuing to see her as only another iteration of “mammy” we do not for her to be and individual human that had a life outside of the image. Additionally we blind ourselves of the ability to imagine what the diaspora actually looked and looks like and, in so doing, we limit our ability to *feel*.

The body scripts: Facing/fixing oppression

We must not ignore...the impact of our ancestral history, especially if our ancestors have suffered, for their anguish can return and haunt us. It is the anguished return of traumatic experience that repeats itself across generations and affects the way the next generation is perceived. (Coles, 2011, p. xiv)

In attempting to understand the origins of racism, it is important to avoid removing it to a historical past or displacing its sources onto the oppressed. Any investigation or representations of [otherness], then, must take a critical look at Euro-American whiteness to understand the construction of race as a category. As critic Coco Fusco has insisted, ‘To ignore white ethnicity is to reduce its hegemony by naturalizing it.’ (Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerrotypes”, p. 179)

other ethnicities were also enslaved. More often than not, slaves were incorporated into families as domestic workers with means of legal protection and multiple ways to end their slave contracts. Additionally, much like the ‘Mammy’ figure constructed by US slavery, which this image represents, the figure of the mixed race ottoman slave girl, or *the harem girl*, is an equally potent and culturally visible referent that is a carryover from Ottoman slavery. The role of black women as important figures can be seen in the contexts of both American and Ottoman slavery. For further reading, see Erdam, 1996; Toledano, 1982; Zilfi, 2010.

On October 15, 2012, the Society Pages, a sociologically focused collection of blogs made a post to one of their sub-blogs “Sociological Images”. The post highlighted Human Zoos at the turn of the 20th century⁷ and incorporated three images that showed people who had been taken to Europe and not only put on display, but also photographed and their image placed on postcards while in “captivity”. The leading text was the following (emphasis in original):

****TRIGGER WARNING for racism and enslavement****

The positioning of the photographs of these people with this detached ‘trigger warning’ forces the reader to place the people seen into ecologies of oppression. They can only exist and move within the realm of victimhood, within discourses of “racism and enslavement”. The placement of the trigger warning limits the ability for a different reality to be imagined, even though we know that these people existed in a different temporal-spatial reality from our lives and from the



FIGURE 5

fraction of a second of their lives captured photographically. It limits the ability for those of us who might have been touched by this history; those of us who could easily take the place of those in these postcards and photographs, to be proud to acknowledge that those we are seeing are kin, family, or familiar. The thing that I found most disturbing about this post, in addition to the positioning of the “victims”, is that the original article from which these images had been taken included a photograph of the man responsible for bringing people to Germany and putting them on display (FIG. 5). The Sociological Images post ended with a quote paired with the photograph of this man that stated: “In his memoirs, Carl Hagenbeck praised himself, writing, ‘it was my privilege to be the first in the civilized world to present these shows of different races.’” Despite this, his face, the face that *should* be associated with the ecology of oppression, racism and enslavement (as much as, if not more so than his

“victims”), remains invisible and, therefore, outside the system we use to understand the complex power arrangement of colonial history.

The blogger chose to reinforce racism and enslavement with photographs of people of color. This reinforcement limits the ability of someone who recognizes kin in these photographs to see the person *seen/scened* and the person *seeing* (me) as a whole person. Instead of being able

⁷ <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2012/10/15/human-zoos-at-the-turn-of-the-20th-century/>

to self-actualize, the person reflexively scripts herself and everyone like her as though racism, enslavement, marginalization, and oppression as the only ecology in which their presence is allowed or expected. Even as we are confronted in our day-to-day lives with alternate expressions of humanness, the dominant narrative re-produced in this post still marks the body as central to this narrative, a point reinforced with historical photographs.

This post brings to light a problematic aspect of encounters with historical photographs of black women across the diaspora. The discourses of slavery and colonization have rendered the creators of these archives invisible. The aesthetics of these photographs place the women as specimens or Types. This leaves the contemporary viewer of these photographs with two options: either to focus on the structures that brought these photographs into existence, and which have rendered the women in the photographs invisible, inasmuch as they become hyper-visualizations of racism and oppression and stop being individuals; or, to allow the photographs to become neutral, simply images of ‘women that existed’, photographic subjects like any other. Our collective inclination seems to be to do the former. As Bourdieu has noted, it is imperative that we are aware of this tendency so that we may find space for another way of seeing and analyzing: “Finally, and more subtly, surrendering to habits of thought, even those that can exert a powerful effect of rupture under other circumstances, can also lead to unexpected forms of naïveté... We must also break with the instruments of rupture which negate the very experience against which they have been constructed” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 251).

Within the colonial project there were variances in the practice of photography and ‘bringing the “Other” to Europe’. Prince Roland Bonaparte commissioned thousands of photographs of people from around the globe (Marien, 2006) and many of the collections are now available digitally on the French National Library website. The first book Bonaparte (1884) wrote, a book cataloging Surinam for the World’s Fair in the Netherlands in 1883, is also available digitally. It is clear in reading Bonaparte’s book that he did not look down on or see the people he photographed and brought to Europe as less than human in the way Hagenback did. Rather, he was respectful, complimentary, and mindful of their social and cultural position; and, at times, critical of the role of the white population of Surinam. The term primitive is used only to describe the Indigenous Indian population’s lack of written history, and even that is positioned next to the plight they have been given with regards to decimation of population due to disease and a situation that led many of them, both men and women, to drunkenness (p. 47). With this in mind, and knowing that outside of this book he did not write on other expeditions he financed or was a part of, I cannot help but wonder how his writing was received at the time, and if he saw the beauty in the photographs that I see today.

Although we have examples, like Bonaparte, who suggest other ways Europeans were thinking about these encounters, we focus on the bodies present, the bodies seen as representations of horror. We script the bodies into the historical context that Héliani and the « *négresse* » d’Adana bring to life/light for us. Just as their bodies are capable of representing all those (his)stories (rather than the perpetrators being the visual representation that is seen/scened), the body of a *black woman* becomes *the body of black women*, assuming and absorbing all the

historical narratives society has imagined for her across time and space. Instead of being touched by history, she is grabbed, shoved, pushed, and contained:

As a result, the body schema attacked in several places, collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema. In the train, it was a question of being aware of my body, no longer in the third person, but in triple. In the train, instead of one seat, they let me two or three. (Fanon, 1967, p. 92)

The idea of the body moving from the third person to the body in triple is a moment where the body becomes both in the realm of the social and the realm of experience. Language is structured such that, as we think of ourselves, we think of ourselves in first person. We have a set of words, first-person pro-nouns such as, “I”, “me”, and “my”, so that we can speak to, and of, our personal, embodied experiences. The movement through space causes a third person existence to be placed upon the body. While we experience “I, my, me”, the bodies around us experience “you” and “her/him”. In the social realm, the body of a person is matter that takes up space and has a narrative around it constructed by the I/eyes that perceive its existence. It is through that narrative that the body becomes human. The perception of the body as “you” or “her/him” is determined by the histories the body invokes and the feelings it conjures in other people. To face the body as a person, to see it, is to face (put a face on) all of those things that lie on the surface of history and our current social structure. For a black woman, her body scripts a story we do not want to confront or script ourselves into, in the first person. So we move away. We see her as not a “you”, but a “her” or a “she”. The third person of her body becomes space in triple. Distance. Empty space. Void of bodies. It is that moment on the train when, though there is a seat to the immediate left or right of her body, a person chooses to stand to avoid the suffocating proximity to all she represents. Her body is heavy (mentally). Her body is big (historically). Her body engulfs (now). Her body seems to suck up the air around it, though it is really just fear making others forget to breathe, unsure how to approach her as a “you”. The actual presence of the body makes people more aware of what they say and how they say it. It is a body that makes others self-censor and self-asphyxiate. Her body halts conversations and heightens others depending on its proximity. It is a body that, when present in only a representational sense, is safe to be consumed, to speak of, and about.

All bodies that could be associated with her body, even when they are different, are consumed by the sign-images of her body. The epidermal schema, as defined by Fanon, means that even as a black woman from the French Antilles or the United States has long since lost any ties to a site of African colonization, her body continues to be consumed, marked, and seen as though she is part of the narrative of colonization. And so she is. If we think further back than the colonization of the 1800s, we find repetition. The body of the black woman was objectified and consumed in the ‘New World’ under slavery. The body of the black woman in the ‘New World’ was enslaved and sexualized.

The body of the black woman was both creator and annihilation, all at once. We return to the Fanonian idea of the body in triple. Roles haunt the body of the black woman. She is the

woman who nourishes taboo hunger and sexual desire – a hunger that is fed by the images of Héliani and the « *négresse* » d’Adana. The confrontation with perceived horror was, in the case of Héliani, completely scripted (though this does not take away the trauma); and with the « *négresse* » d’Adana the photo is not what it seems. The script needed to read these images was already in the collective consciousness of those who viewed them. As is the case with the Society Pages post on Human Zoos, the ways we write the script binds bodies to a narrative of trauma, and forces those that recognize themselves in these images into a state of crisis.

Aesthetic literacy and decolonial cultural analytics

Contemporary cultural analytics asks that we turn large amounts of images into analytics: data sets that can be analyzed outside of their cultural context for underlying patterns (Manovich, 2009). The aesthetic focus of New Media studies, when brought into conversations with decolonizing projects, invites us to look at data in a different direction. There is a risk in turning images such as those I have analyzed in this paper into mere *data points*, rather than allowing them to rupture the limited cultural histories and experiences dictated by what we are seeing. While patterns may be evident when we analyze these images at scale, we can also see these patterns in our day-to-day interactions and conversations – those that call colonial aesthetics into being in our everyday lives. When we think of the colonial or enslaved body, data has already been culturally synthesized into a series of archetypal and social roles. Looking at these images does not inherently challenge cultural understandings of these bodies. The ability of the viewers of photographs to be able, automatically, to place Héliani and the « *négresse* » d’Adana into a cultural context, even if the contexts are only partially correct, completely false, or imagined (as well as the need for a “trigger warning” on a more or less neutral photographs) illustrates that, for these bodies, the work of cultural analytics has already been done. These images are seen to represent a whole archive of images that are already and immediately placed into very specific global cultural contexts. To examine these photographs as part of a decolonial project, we must take cultural analytics and ‘go the other way’ to reframe and renegotiate the boundaries of established narratives. We become able to negotiate the aesthetic resonances of these photos based on larger social contexts and digital movements.

The digital encounter is already inherently intercultural. We bring our own cultural perspectives and filters to help us understand what we are experiencing. The risk of turning images, like those analyzed in this paper into datasets (by focusing outward instead of inward), is that we risk losing the nuances that have been illuminated in their digitization. By not trying to improve our understanding of what is happening within the frame, we are liable to reinscribe and rebind these images within the social imaginary of colonization. The assumption that images and photographs are neutral, which is required in current methods of cultural analytics, is naïve and idealistic. An image, especially a photographic one, must be understood within larger cultural contexts that are inflected by time, place, and history. We cannot simply ignore these contexts because we are able to recontextualize images using software and algorithms. Bodies that are

marked and bound by colonial contexts do not have the liberty of losing themselves in the algorithm. Instead of the digital being a space where the aesthetics of anonymity and hive mind can take over, the digital becomes a space where names and stories that were invisible, can be made visible, creating new lines of flight that complicate dominant narratives.

To transform these images into a decolonial aesthetics project is to acknowledge that people who were subjects of, and subjected to, colonial power were also human. A decolonial aesthetics project requires, for me, investigating moments of humanness that we find captured in, but not bound by, colonial records. The colonial project attempted to stabilize global positions. One of the ways this was done was by keeping detailed historical photographic records. But foundations shift and, as much as we would like for the past and history to remain the same, as society changes, our understanding of the gifts of the past change as well. What was once a positive gift becomes a negative, and what was once a negative gift can shift to being positive.

Re/bound/ed: Mapping trauma and crisis

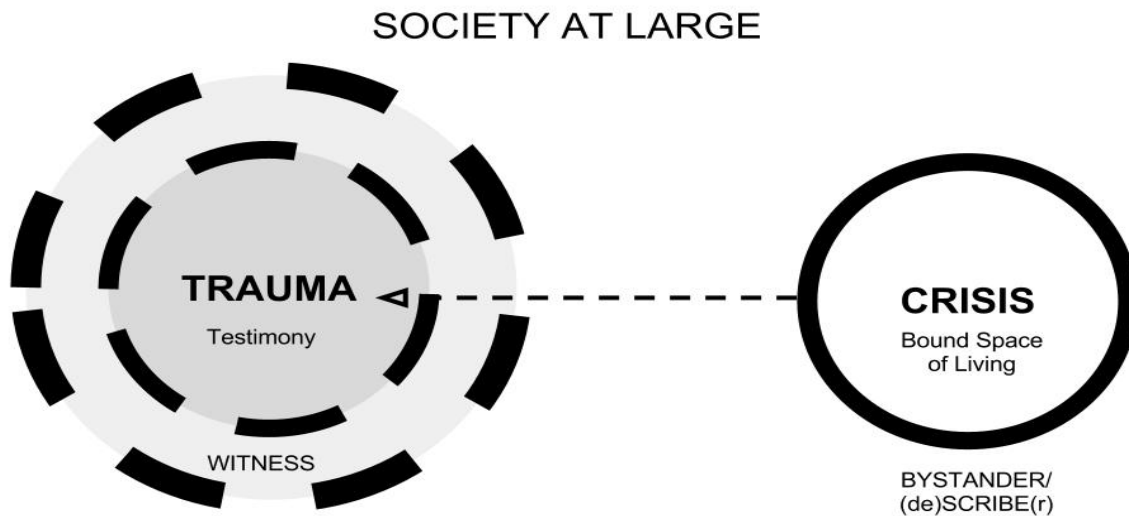


FIGURE 6

Soul murder, multi-generational soul murder, as described by Coles (2011, pp. 6-7), is the opposite of self-actualization. If soul murder is defined by “killing the joy of life” and “interfering with the sense of identity of another human being”, the practice of facing and fixing the oppressed with re-presentations of the oppressed body *as* the oppressed body across time and space, especially through photographic representations of the real, is a form of soul murder. The

scale in both time and space of the soul murder caused by the conflation of the oppressed body with oppression is so large that it can be seen as soul genocide. The “soul murder” is the beginning of how we socially rescript certain bodily representations (people) of trauma as crisis.

If we think of lives, or history, as existing along narrative lines, trauma is a moment where a narrative breaks and then comes back together. We know it has broken because it can never be known in the moment it exists. It is always the space of a memory. As such, trauma can exist only in the post-tense. It is always assumed to be located in narrative and accessible through testimony and witnessing. Because it is contained in this way, as a clear narrative break in the person or collective past that returns as a recurrence at some future point, there is a belief that by witnessing the testimony, the forced recurrence that is at time forced by the trauma itself or, at other times by an outside person (i.e. friend, family member, researcher, interviewer, etc), we are somehow able to bear witness to the trauma. In FIGURE 6, we see a visual representation of what this looks like. If trauma were to exist in a circle, we see the circle as one with open borders that has spaces where people can go in and come out of the trauma at different places during the process of recurrence, often through testimony. By consuming this testimony, we take on the role of witness. The space of witness becomes a circle that is able to consume the original trauma, expanding the circle of the event. Though the circle of witness is able to expand, it is still confined within a dashed circle that allows entry and exit from the event or recurrence. The ability to enter and exit means that trauma is allowed to exist and is acknowledged as part of society at large. These events of trauma often become history. While we want to see trauma as existing outside of the realm of binaries and negation, crisis represents the ordinary binariness of trauma. It is, at times, and for some, its core, an ordinary space and time of living.

When histories of trauma become institutionalized without a careful examination of the complexities and specificity of their contexts, they become crises. Crises are histories that exist in closed circles. The irony of the closed circle is that, rather than closing off the history in a way that allows for a natural evolution away from “the event in post” (trauma), people instead become trapped in history, unable to exist external from it. People who live in crisis do not experience a narrative break as an event but, rather, they exist in a narrative of breakage due to the constant backlash of a history, that, due to the institutionalization of it is no longer their history. Because of the way their histories and experiences have been institutionalized, those who come from a place of crisis often do not see how to get out of this circle. When an attempt is made to escape the circle of crisis, the pain of the backlash (not accepting of your history, denial of the past, loss of family, friends and home-spaces) brings them back. The circle of crisis becomes a space of living. There are no testimonies and there are no witnesses. Society at large is a bystander to the crisis, often oblivious to the barrier that exists. As bystanders, society also fails to see that by living, crisis is normalized. When it is normalized, and there is such a great pain attached to leaving, those living in that circle stop seeing it as anything other than life. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, the social structures that create the situation in the first place often lead bystanders to play a role of judgment, that is often very negative or hyper-critical. This judgment serves as another method of keeping the crisis contained and

institutionalized. It does not allow for growth. If attempting to leave the circle of crisis causes a rebound back to the center, the space of living, the role of the bystander bounds the circle in an attempt to ensure there are no dashes where the crisis can ooze out. Every crisis is a direct result of our socio-historical heritage. Every crisis becomes something we use to organize society around, but not in. This separation means that those who exist in crisis experience a constant onslaught of mini-traumas, traumas so small they are invisible to society at large. Those in crisis are defined by their locked-in-ness to their specific socio-historical heritage. Often, this heritage puts them in an awkward relationship with society at large when it comes to issues of commodification of their “story” or their movement. More importantly, as society at large is incapable of seeing those in crisis and their socio-historical heritage as a universal heritage, those who exist in communities of crisis become faceless, anonymous and interchangeable. In *History and Trauma*, Davoine and Gaudilliere (2004) suggest that, as a society, we tend to think of crisis as something internal to and ongoing for the individual, “whereas what is ongoing is this temporality out of time that abruptly opened out for their ancestors and endures, for them, in the very suspension of time” (p. 167). They go on to say, “Such a temporality without future or past eliminates all pertinence from a causal chain. This is because causality implies the orientation of the arrow of time from the past toward the future” (p. 167). If crisis is defined by a *persistent timelessness*, then crisis is the negation of the ability to create history from those ancestors that endured the original event that took their narrative of the causal chain of history. People in crisis become bounded, out of place and out of time, faces of concepts (racism, oppression, enslavement, suffering, etc.) both now and in the past, marked by the past, without it and without a future.

The photographs of Héliani and the « négresse » from Adana allow us to face representations of this bounding. To say that these two photographs are neutral is to deny the supremacy of the visual and the legacy of history. To imagine that these women are more than just the moment in which they appear in front of us, and to allow them to be outside of the frame, causes a physical pain. While I did not have as strong of a reaction to the « négresse » from Adana as I did to the photograph of Héliani, due to my own personal history, the overwhelming feeling of helplessness in the photo of Héliani broke my ability to unbind it from history. She became stuck in the moment, without a past or a future. The reality of the erasure of the black nurse across time and space, especially in the United States, as a central member of the families she nourished, as though she was a disposable resource, can create a similar pain. It makes us go back to her moment of suffering as though that moment is all there is and all that matters; again, no past, no future. Despite this, even in that moment, the two women were simply living. One was at a party, and the other was making a living. Similarly, the photographs presented in the Human Zoos article on *Sociological Images* shows the bounding effect placed on people stuck in crisis. When given the choice to frame the oppression properly, by including the face of the actual oppressor, the more salient and affective choice was instead to face Human Zoos with the oppressed, the individual in crisis, as though that was their ongoing state of being; no past, no future. This is a bystander position. We look at a history we cannot change and, instead, we

socially reproduce it, looking on and thinking “isn’t this so sad?”. The black body, and the black female body that is often absent, even from histories of blackness, is bound by the historical past, a heavy and painful past that has no opening to be another way. While the thought of the black body in captivity, as introduced by Harvey Young (2010), makes me very uncomfortable, the actual space of bounding (place of captivity) is productive. It is the space of history that we are too scared to move away from, for fear of erasing past pain and suffering, as though that is a possibility:

There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge. In most cases, the black man cannot take advantage of this descent into a veritable hell. (Fanon, 1967, p. xxi)

The line of crisis is solid. Unlike trauma, the holes of escape are invisible. Likewise, being constituted in these spaces means that attempts at existing outside of them are futile. There is possibility of coevalness. Even as the boundaries stretch, they never completely give way. The effect is a violent rebound. Society forces those bound by crisis to see themselves as both accomplice and victim, re-inscribing the limitations that are out of their control in their daily interactions with the world outside. The internal reflections on their own community and their place in the world leads those members of socio-historical crisis to question their daily interactions with those outside of their community and place their specific narrative over extraordinarily ordinary events. The spaces and members of socio-historical crisis populations are allowed to exist within and are transformed into non-places. These spaces are virtually non-existent, invisible to those outside of the crises they represent (think of prisons, working as domestic labor forces, support staff, non-elite transportation professionals, etc. across time). No matter how far away one gets from the center of the circle of crisis, nor how close one gets to the border, events occur that lock individuals back into bound space. The ordinariness of these events makes them invisible, like the decision to face oppression with the images of the oppressed. As we look back at those who we imagine as historically touched by this lived experience, especially this lived experience of blackness, we imagine them stuck, fixed by these moments. It is this *imagined fixity* of the crisis of black women that seems to be the root cause of the affective power of the photographs of Héliani and the « négresse » d’Adana. Just as photographs themselves ‘fix’ the split second of a referent, they also have the power to fix our imaginations.

While in the past the experience of these images might have limited them to being seen only in relation to that which can be viewed - limited in the social context they were presented in - the ability to link materials across time and space offered by the digital allows for paths of flight that were not previously available. While there is always a risk that presenting these types of images will simply re-articulate dominant narratives of the colonial experience, accessible resources allow a deeper practice of cultural analytics where, instead of reaching out into the current social practice, we can step into what is framed by the image and look at the larger

context at of its creation and original collection. Héliani was at a festival, surrounded by a community. The nursemaid lived in a place where articulations of race, gender, motherhood and slavery were complex and in flux. Acknowledging the larger cultural context can begin to shift a narrative that otherwise attempts to re-bound a singular story and instead compel those who see themselves reflected in these historical images to start imag(in)ing a possible alternate existence outside of the bounds of colonization. Because these images are what they are, we do not risk forgetting the real suffering, pain, and trauma that are the dominant collective cultural memory we use to bound colonization.

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