# Market Transactions Cannot Abolish Decades of Plunder

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It is hard to believe that one can truly be surprised today by the notion that millions of objects—never destined for museum display—have been looted from different parts of the world. However, the naturalization of these objects into European museums, displayed as though they were a part of European and American cultural heritage, has been instrumental in making such an assertion surprising, even implausible. The sheer quantity of looted objects is so enormous that assessing each object's discrete status is senseless as a way of grasping the meaning of the looting and its ongoing ramifications. Not all the objects that originated from looted countries were consciously or deliberately looted, of course. But even for those that were not, their acquisition was also part of the wholesale draining of entire communities of their objects and of the spiritual and material infrastructures under which their production was possible. Before their looting, such objects and structures made sense in ways that were irreducible both to imperial categories of art and to their status as props or "ethnic attributes."

The presence of these objects in foreign collections cannot be understood solely from the intentions of the individuals or institutions that acquired them, or from the distinct transactions through which they were purchased, exchanged, or endowed. To study them as discrete objects—separated from the communities, politics, and cosmologies of which they were part—is already to be caught in violently imposed imperial taxonomies, as well as to exercise imperial rights against those who opposed them and who refused (as much as they could) to interiorize and recognize them as legitimate. Moreover, this refusal should not be reconstructed as limited to objects, as though contained within that particular sphere, but should be sought after in broader modalities of objection to different imperialist measures. Such measures, as I'll discuss in the context of imperial invasions and interventions in South Africa, threaten to destroy

FIG. 5.1 George Washington Wilson (British, 1823–1893), "A Zulu Girl (Ingodusi), S. Africa," ca. 1905. Postcard published by Hallis & Co., Port Elizabeth.

FIG. 5.2 George Washington Wilson (British, 1823–1893), "Zulu Girl (Intombi), S. Africa," ca. 1905. Collotype printed on card.

from the outside the foundation of the internal organization of local societies through taxes, the census, and a market-based secularization of objects—denying them the status, function, and meanings they had in their communities.

By force, all objects become tradable and accessible, with no respect for the indigenous systems of order, hierarchies, and prohibitions on their uses that were once essential to the protection of members of their communities and to securing their place within these communities. Thus, for example, during the multiple rebellions that followed what is known as the defeat of the Zululand, Dinuzulu, the successor of King Cetshwayo, issued the order that "all girls and boys were to take off their bead works."[1] I deliberately avoid pretending to know the secret meaning of the beadworks, besides foregrounding that they were part of a complex system of social organization and communication, predicated on their unequal distribution among different members of the community. Prior to the British invasion, the production of their meaning was deliberately not left open to foreigners and their interpretations.

"Potential history" is a rejection of the violence of imperial history that relegates local oppositions and campaigns of refusal to the past, such that the outcome of imperial violence appears irreversible, as if the objection to their actions that didn't succeed in countering them is no longer a possibility in the present.[2] This means viewing images, such as these two variant photographs of a "Zulu Girl," not only from *outside* of the imperial chessboard but also as if such a board still today is open for interventions; put another way, it means viewing images not as *faits accomplis* (figs. 5.1 & 5.2). Let me say it bluntly: this photograph of the "Zulu Girl" adorned with beadwork, (wrongly) interpreted by the photographer as indicating her status, could not have been taken outside of the context of imperial violence, which, against local resistance, decided to "open up" Zululand and wage a war against the Zulu kingdom, destroying its different cultural, social, and political fabrics.[3] Such war was deemed both justified and unavoidable for, to quote the historian Ian Knight, the British saw Zululand as "an anachronism, a symbol of an alien and incomprehensible way of life which must inevitably give way in the face of European-driven concepts of progress."[4]

This war, in which the Zulu king Cetshwayo was defeated and treasures were plundered, was neither the first nor the last attempt to force the Zulu—like many other African kingdoms, societies, and tribes—to surrender and to cease being an "obstacle" to the relentless expansion of the European enterprise of the extraction of their resources, including lands, minerals, knowledge, and labor.[5] In other photographs, such as these two, Zulu shields and spears, many of which were already plundered and stored in the British Museum, were forced to appear as props rather than as barriers in the way of imperial power (figs. 5.3 & 5.4). In viewing these photographs as historical documents—as they are usually seen under the auspices of the archive—scholars are often misled into believing that these indigenous objects were props supplied by a photographer attempting to freeze the photographed persons in time, even though these people were "modern" (as if being modern is a blessing and the critical scholars' mission is to "prove" the Zulus' modernity). The use of the trope of modernity in the discussion of photographs catalogued as "tribal" often implies that being modern is what is denied to the photographed person, rather than recognizing that the command of being modern is part of the destructive arsenal of imperial rule.

Out of ignorance, denial, and complicity with the destructive power of the category of "modern," photography continues to be discussed as a modern technology and a marker of being modern. Many revisionist histories have been written to show how different colonized peoples were actually modern early on (i.e., by being actively engaged with photography), thus being "rescued" from their tribal representations deemed anachronistic and often a product of photographers' fantasies. That such photographs could be taken—in other words, that they were taken in a context in which the culture of one of the most powerful and independent African groups south of the Zambezi River could become props for depicting "Zulu warriors"—is a reflection not of the individual choice of an individual photographer or of a single photographed person, but of a general condition imposed globally, under which different places, such as Zululand, had to become penetrable for further white settlements, market forces, and commercial exploitation, and to be subjugated to their military governmentality.

Photography operates within this logic of racial capitalism and its expanding markets, independently of the specific decisions taken within the indoor spaces of photographers' studios. It is only by dissociating photography from the imperial enterprise that national histories of photography—such as South African photography—make sense. They are crafted along axes of the progress and propagation of technologies, the proliferation of cameras, and the speeding up of their operations, as if imperial processes of expansion, growth, and improvement were not part of the destructive and harmful military campaigns against the self-

FIG. 5.3 Unidentified photographer (South African), [Zulu conscripts], late 19th century. Albumen print.

FIG. 5.4 Unidentified photographer (South African), [Zulu warriors], late 19th century. Albumen print.

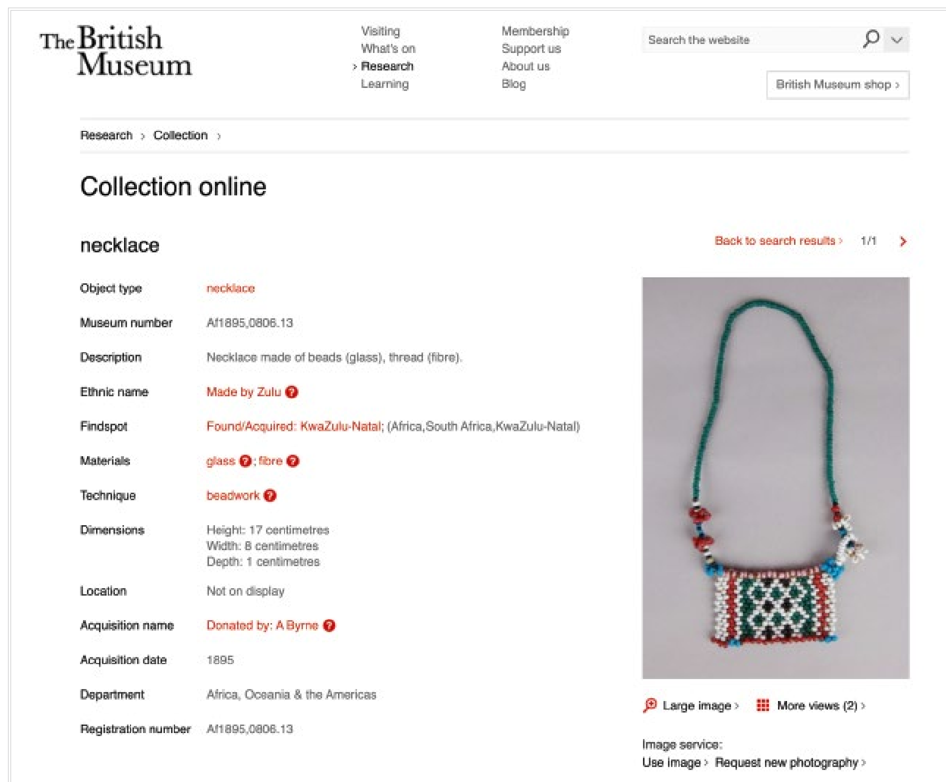


FIG. 5.5 Unidentified photographer (British), [Zulu necklace in the collection of the British Museum, 1895]. Web-page screenshot of online database.

sustainability of different people for the enrichment of European tycoons.

There is, of course, a difference in scale between these modes of enrichment, and a photographer such as George Washington Wilson is different from an entrepreneur such as Cecil Rhodes. However, photographic firms such as that established by the Scottish-born Wilson (whose son later took those photographs in South Africa for him) could not thrive without the wide galleries of people from all over the world whose portraits they were invited and authorized to take and commodify. Simply put: writing sui generis histories of photography means siding with imperial powers and recognizing their victories as *faits accomplis*.[6] A potential history of photography rejects this unavoidable historical movement and seeks to restage what was made into history as, instead, an open struggle between different regimes of power during which imperial rights—exercised, for example, by European tycoons to extract visual wealth from South Africa—were naturalized through and with photography and imposed as natural and neutral. This form of accumulation could not have flourished without this regime of imperial rights that enabled Europeans of all sorts to force indigenous people to be part of the raw material they extracted—often involving their free or cheap labor as photographed persons—for the support of the flourishing global industry of postcards and other visual printed matter, from which they alone profited.[7]

While many of the plundered objects, including photographs, are treated as precious collectible artworks—carefully handled, preserved, and displayed in Western museums and collections—millions of people in the countries of their origin (across Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East) have been expropriated from much of their material world, including resources, tools, the protective environment, and all sorts of artifacts, and forced to move out of the places where they self-sustained for centuries. It is no secret that, to this day, these uprooted, forced migrants continue to seek a place where they can again be at home and rebuild a sustainable world.

Contrary to the way they are usually presented and discussed, these two movements of forced migration—of people and artifacts—are not unrelated. In their parallel and related formation and coexistence, they have been constitutive of the imperial world since its inception in 1492. Against the tendency of historians to study these movements separately, while at the same time also in their specific geocultural (objects) and geopolitical (people) contexts, I propose to see the principles upon which the imperial regime is predicated in their connection and recurrence in different places in different times. It is necessary to recognize the historical coproduction of these two movements today in order to stop relating to photographs as either neutral records or precious objects that belong to yet another separate realm of photography or art. It is necessary, then, to question the rights of major professional actors—from collectors to curators and scholars—who continue to relate to photographs as distinct objects of knowledge, available for those whom the same imperial enterprise endowed with the adequate expertise to handle them.

Photographs were not only plundered like other types of objects; they were also defined as the private property of those who authorized themselves to extract them, thus denying the photographed persons' rights to the outcome of the photographic encounter, as well as to the place and position from which they could continue to participate and intervene in the outcome of their encounter with others.[8] Imperial extraction of natural sources and labor creates enduring patterns. Similarly to other forms of extraction, the photographic extraction exceeds discrete events and is reproduced through

FIG. 5.6 Unidentified photographer (British), [Walking stick of Zulu King Cetshwayo in the collection of the British Museum, 1895]. Digital photograph.

the distribution of rights, the circulation of these photographs as objects, and the reproduction of the positions we inhabit when we engage with them. As such, my concern here is not to simply read these photographs as given objects, but to unlearn the imperial rights embedded within the position from which such reading is shaped—as an obvious form of engagement with objects extracted from others, and which continue to be preserved separately and away from them.

Unlearning consists of a series of avoidances of the terms and categories that were made available by the major imperial actors who had a clear interest in shaping photography as a practice of extraction and in situating it in the realm of knowledge; promoting its products as artistic and modern renderings of the world; and having their own "internal merits" accessible to and recognized by circles of experts. To return to the example of the "Zulu girl," while the question of to whom the jewelry and clothing that this woman wore during the photographic session belonged—to her or to the photographer—is certainly of interest, its recurrence in the context of the study of so-called tribal types conceals more than it reveals about the broader context of imperial plunder and the subsequent separation between people and objects. It creates a tension between the Euro-American photographer's "projected fantasies" and the photographed person's lack or possession of modern subjectivity as performed in this individual occurrence. It ignores the different types of plunder that were involved in imposing the meaning of the photograph as a frozen instant, a discrete piece of visual information that is meaningful for itself, accounting for the fraction of a second of the duration of its production but leaving everything else outside, including that which lies literally outside of the frame.

This separation, procured by the snap of the camera's shutter, is instrumental in the mass plunder of objects such as necklaces made of beads, whose owner prior to its plunder and deposit in the British Museum will forever remain unknown, as well as objects whose provenance is known and has been documented as part of a campaign to defeat their direct owners, such as this walking stick that belonged to the Zulu king Cetshwayo (figs. 5.5 & 5.6). The ramifications of this separation between objects and people, between captured and recorded moments and centuries of violence, by far exceed the personal dispossession of this or that photographed person. After all, imperial plunder aimed at systematically destroying the worlds of other peoples and replacing them with the white supremacist regime, under which nonwhite people were forced to be included while remaining bereft of much of their worlds.

The forced deportation of plundered objects to the British Museum (among other institutions) was facilitated by multiple campaigns of violence and by specific procedures of documentation, as illustrated in such records.[9] These procedures, of which the ideology of the document consists, naturalized the separation of objects from the people among whom their presence was and could continue to be meaningful, while at the same time naturalizing

their new existence as inseparable from their precise records. The documents that allowed the object's transfer replaced that object's attachment to people and worldly environments with attachment to the object's new legal, museological, and archival title and to the institutions that were created to "protect" them from their people. This new attachment was then used as a post-factum justification for the transfer and the ongoing holding of the transferred objects.

Throughout the years, a wide variety of objects that once had different statuses and functions in their communities and were differentially accessible to their members were denied their singularity and became tokens of one type of object: museum objects, consigned to experts of all sorts. The different statuses and functions of these objects then became part of an expert knowledge acquired violently from their communities (whose members were often forced to act as informants), as part of the attempt to render them ignorant of their own cultures, another justification for its requisition, often named "salvage," by those who were made experts due to this separation of objects from their people. Many of those experts, who acted as if authorized to rescue "vanishing" cultures, were known as ethnographers or collectors, were armed or roamed around with armed actors, and exercised the power of requisition. This process is often detailed in their personal diaries.

Let me present briefly one such example: This is from the diary of the French explorer Robert Hottot, kept during his multiple tours to Congo, where he plundered hundreds of objects that became part of the collection of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Hottot traveled to Congo with his cousin Albert, who was in charge of exercising violence against the villagers, thus helping Hottot obtain both their objects and their labor in loading and carrying his trophies to the port. In one of many detailed cases, we can read about the way the Hottots combined deception and violence to obtain objects. Acting as if authorized to punish the villagers for not paying their taxes, Hottot describes how while Albert took the men as prisoners he enjoyed free access to their huts. Pretending to look for forbidden weapons, he actually looked for objects: "In the middle of the village, a stone, a kind of altar surrounded by creepers, serves as the fetish of agglomeration. The head of the chief is covered with a sort of cocked ridge of hair.... Entering the huts, I made a study of the hearth, of its place and of the way the natives install its objects."[10] It is worth emphasizing that the use of such violence is often a sign that those who exercised it encountered a refusal to satisfy their lust to own those people's objects.

The use of violence for the acquisition of objects is not incidental or specific to this or that collector, nor is it "old news" about the way objects were once plundered. Such objects could not be kept where and as they are—the property of Euro-American museums and other collectors—if members of their previous owners' communities were not denied the right to exist and to act in the countries where the objects are preserved. In other words, there is a direct line between the walls and conservation procedures that protect these objects in museums, and the walls, borders, and police that prevent

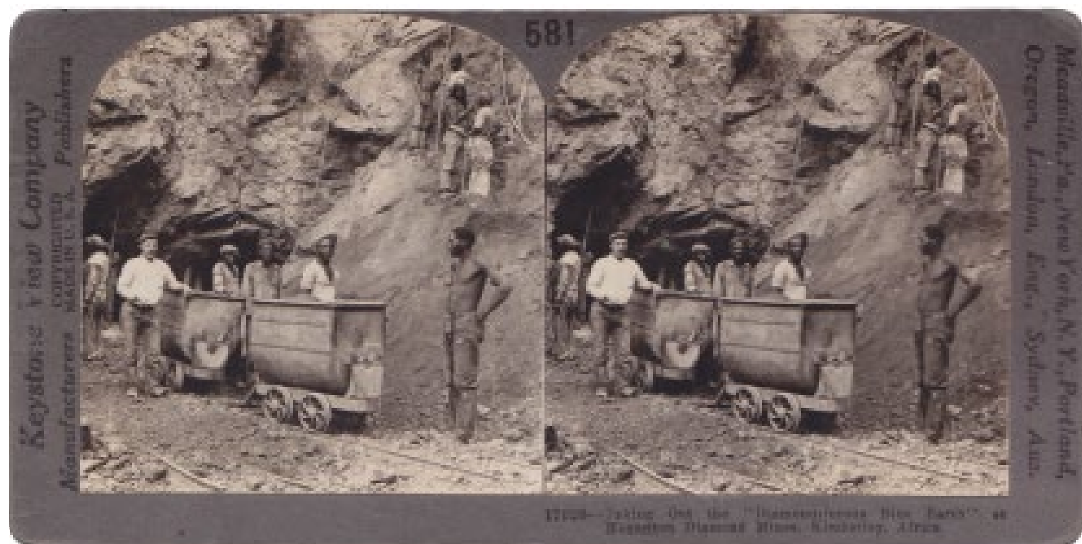

FIG. 5.7 A.B. Cross (American, 1881–unknown), attr., "Taking Out the 'Diamondiferous Blue Earth' at Wesselton Diamond Mines, Kimberley, Africa," 1911. Stereoscopic card published by Keystone View Company.

FIG. 5.8 Unidentified photographer (South African), [Compound sleeping quarters, Witwatersrand gold mines], ca. 1905. Gelatin silver print.

their people from crossing those barriers and acting as legitimate claimants in the public sphere. A series of scholarly and political separations enables the handling of plundered objects, as well as their study, display, trade, and appreciation as though separate from the violence of their expropriation. The everlasting effects of the violence of plunder on communities of their origin are maintained through seemingly neutral procedures and standardized norms of how to handle objects, which experts around the world are trained to embrace and required to follow.

Organizations such as UNESCO or ICOM—formed as part of the "new world order" imposed by colonizing powers in the wake of World War II, when the pressure of decolonization could no longer be denied—were appointed as guardians of the *bien-être* of objects in museums, as if their presence within those walls was not disputed. The "new world order" was a violent campaign of repression directed at diverse anti-colonial and non-imperial revolts, protests, and strikes that aspired toward a just world. Though these international organizations elaborated different norms of care for different objects, this quasi-divergence of types of objects overshadows their commonality; these objects are kept separate from their communities, and the rights of their communities in and to these objects are denied. This is made possible since these are not worldly procedures (i.e., procedures tasked with a care for the shared world), but rather procedures conceived to treat objects in their isolated form, already separated from their communities. In other words, the world in which these various procedures makes sense is that of experts in imperial institutions such as museums, archives, and libraries. The establishment of global professional standards was key in completing the process of expropriating objects from different communities and handing them over to a new stratum of experts whose rights, authority, knowledge, and practices were shaped, by definition, against the interests of the communities from which these objects originated. The standardized language and regulations generated by these organizations, foreign to the local customs and dialects of the people by and among whom these objects were created, continue to provide the excuses for centuries of looting.

In the late 1960s, UNESCO expressed overt concerns regarding the increase in the "illicit import" and "theft" of objects from archeological sites and museums in the Global South. In 1970, the organization issued the "Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property" and reaffirmed itself as the guardian of objects against new looters. With that convention, however, UNESCO, like the United Nations in politics, acted

FIG. 5.9 Digital simulation of a body search.

as liberators and protectors of law and order, thus drawing a line distinguishing the new occurrences of looting from the centuries of unrecognized looting of objects that were kept in the museums of which they were the guardians. This convention provided the language to delegitimize looting, but only insofar as it started in the 1970s; it did not impact the massive imperial plunder that consists of millions of objects already "legally" registered in inventories of museums in Europe and the US.

With a certain endlessly recurring brevity, similar to that of the operation of a camera shutter, the unending instantiation of the separation between people and artifacts—that have become objects of observation, study, conservation, care, command, and control by two seemingly unrelated sets of disciplines, institutions, and their distinct scholars and experts—is constantly reaffirmed. This separation between objects and people, reproduced through the radical difference between the careful treatment given to objects and the maltreatment and negligence of people and their worldly environments, is not limited to objects eligible to become tokens of art. It recurs in relation to other types of precious objects—such as gold or diamonds—whose extraction and accumulation equally generate wealth and profit from the resources of others for those who enjoy imperial rights at their expense.

As has been already argued, this separation is not given, and its existence requires the active and constant exercise of violence on different levels against those targeted by it and who do not recognize such violence as the order of things. It is not of the nature of artifacts to exist outside of their communities, nor of minerals such as diamonds to benefit only the few—especially as these few were not laboring for the extraction of these diamonds as others did, nor were they the owners of the lands where the diamonds were found. From the very early days when diamonds were found in Kimberley, South Africa, blacks were sought after to labor and dig but were "prohibited, at least by the regulations that the white diggers drew up, from holding claims."[11] Though in rare cases blacks were able to hold claims, the image of white overseers and black laborers (fig. 5.7) was closer to the norm—as the text at its back emphasizes: "most of the actual digging is done by native blacks. But white men are in charge."[12] Regulations were not enough to gradually force black people to work in conditions of servitude, extract diamonds for lower wages, and continue to be deprived of the profit they generated.[13] Blacks sought ways to alleviate the burden of work, to struggle for the increase of their wages, to steal some diamonds, to organize themselves and negotiate their conditions, to go on strike or completely leave the mines, and to revolt. Each such action threatened the foundational separations whose preservation required the use of more violence, at times local and spontaneous and at others planned and legalized.[14]

FIG. 5.10 Unidentified photographer (South African), [Incriminating mitten-handcuff], late 19th century (detail). Albumen print.

Let me mention two such planned apparatuses of violence and subjugation. First, there was the establishment of what was euphemistically called a "compound" but actually operated like a work camp or a concentration camp (fig. 5.8). The camps enabled employers to deepen their control over different aspects of black workers' lives and make sure that during the six to twelve months of their contract they would be at their employers' disposal, captives of the horrifying labor conditions the employers imposed. The second form of subjugation was the right to search the workers' bodies and, oftentimes, to force them to work naked in order to make sure that if they stole diamonds they would be caught (fig. 5.9). This brutal measure reveals, in a nutshell, the centrality of the separation between objects and people in perpetrating imperial crimes and preparing the justification of further crimes. An example of this is the special mitten-handcuff, invented in order to prevent already captive workers from recovering the diamonds they may have swallowed (fig. 5.10).[15] The complete vulnerability of the workers contrasted sharply with the care for and protection of the diamonds, which had to be protected from "culprits" and salvaged for the sake of the few who had created a complex legal apparatus that enabled them to proclaim themselves owners of the diamonds, even before they were found.

Searching bodies for stolen diamonds was presented as a necessary security measure and as an adequate and reasonable response to theft (as only the organized theft, expropriation, and exploitation initiated and orchestrated by the few so-called owners were legalized). In the same vein, the Diamond Trade Act, issued in 1882 against illicit trade in diamonds, was directed against the laborers—thus normalizing and legalizing the European trade in diamonds found in indigenous lands, from which indigenous people were gradually evacuated. And while there were no restrictions on white entrepreneurs regarding how to invest their profits, and no limit to the profit they could earn at the expense of others, black workers were not free to invest their wages in many ways that could have improved their living conditions. Not surprisingly, the profit earned by the Randlords—the European entrepreneurs responsible for extracting diamonds and gold, whose disproportionate value justified different forms of labor and servitude—was invested in man-made gold: works of art.[16]

It is a commonplace in the discourse of photography that an operating shutter is necessary for obtaining a legible, sharp, and precise image out of the flow of light. Understood as a subservient element of the photographic apparatus, a means toward an end, the shutter is discussed mainly in technical terms related to the rapidity of its closure, the ability to control and change its velocity, and the swiftness of its performance. The picture to be obtained is presumed to exist, even if for a brief moment, as a petty sovereign. The petty sovereign is *not* what is recorded in the photograph—in terms of its final content or image—but, rather, is the *stand-alone photograph to be,* the image that prefigures and conditions the closing and opening of a shutter. Thus, photography, too, operates through a separation between people and objects. This petty sovereign asserts itself at that moment, simultaneously preceding and separated from the photographic event *and* from the situation out of which a photograph is about to be extracted. It commands what sorts of things have to be distanced, bracketed, removed, forgotten, suppressed, ignored, overcome, and made irrelevant for the shutter of the camera to function, as well as for a photograph to be taken and its meaning accepted. What is suppressed and made irrelevant is excised by the shutter. In the technological and historical discussion of the shutter, two things matter: the quality of the end product—the image, evaluated in terms of precision, sharpness, clarity, or recognizability—and the erasure of the traces of the shutter's operation. This is an effect of the means/ends relationship between the camera and the images it produces; it also reflects the dissociation of the camera's shutter from other imperial shutters. The shutter, as I have shown elsewhere, is a synecdoche for the operation of the entire imperial enterprise on which the invention of photography was modeled.[17]

If the shutter is an imperial apparatus, photography itself should also be understood within the context of European imperialism. In a radical way, I propose to locate the origins of photography not around the beginning of the 19th century, when the device of the camera was invented, but back in 1492. To fully embrace the meaning of this potential history, we have to unlearn the experts' knowledge that calls upon us to account for photography as having its own origins, histories, practices, and futures and instead explore it as part of the imperial world within which it emerged. After all, when photography emerged, *the right to dissect worlds* was already taken for granted. This right is exercised with each and every click of any of the imperial

FIG. 5.11 Digitally altered scan of Lawrence Brothers, Cape Town (South African, active 1870s), [Lawrence Brothers studio], ca. 1870. Carte de visite.

FIG. 5.12 Digitally altered scan of John Salmon (British, active South Africa, 1870s), [Indoor studio], ca. 1870. Carte de visite.

FIG. 5.13 Digitally altered scan of John Salmon (British, active South Africa, 1870s), [Outdoor studio], ca. 1870. Carte de visite.

shutters, operated by the military, by museums, or in academia. With every click, the fragmentation, categorization, expropriation, and accumulation of shards of people's shuttered worlds is facilitated, enabled, naturalized, and reaffirmed. Confronting the Zulu kingdom, the British forces were equipped with a host of imperial shutters that had already been in place, capable of *dividing* people against each other, forcing them—or incentivizing them through a lack of other choices—to collaborate against their own people. Oftentimes, they did this against their own interests, *partitioning* their lands and *fragmenting* the worldliness of which they had been part. To give one example, following their invasion of the Zululand, the British divided the Zulu empire into thirteen "kinglets," so as to make sure that at least some of those would fight against each other.

Photography operated in proximity to the mines in South Africa, and without the photographed person—usually the center of our attention—these photographers' studios emerge in all their nakedness (figs. 5.11–5.13). Suspending the presence of these photographed persons affords an opportunity to examine this space of the studio and to reflect on the conditions under which such images were made. Simply by having access to the presence of people to photograph—the most precious element of photographs in general and a desired exotic commodity in particular—photographers in colonized places could begin making their name, glory, and sometimes even fortune with a relatively low investment on their part: a camera and some recycled accessories. With the help of an improvised screen, they could sometimes even operate without a studio, installing the screen outdoors and thus benefiting from the availability of the precious free labor of photographed persons. Attention to the ground in this "photographer's studio" discloses that it is actually not an indoor studio but an outdoor space that could be transformed momentarily into a studio to benefit from the presence of people, the precious free gold of photography. Similar to many other practices of extraction, the photographers' profit often enriched other imperial actors who made further profit off of this visual wealth, thus taking part in the feast of racial and colonial accumulation, on the ruins of yet another culture that had been "opened up."

Images like this or the next ones are often studied as instantiations of epistemological violence and described as "racist misconceptions," "a timeless image of people beyond history," or "imagery that essentializes men, women, and children as representations of such and such 'tribe.'"[18] This critique is important but insufficient. Photography did not inaugurate a "new era" or a "new world," nor did it open up worlds; it was built upon and benefited from imperial looting, divisions, and rights that were operative in the colonization of the world in which photography was assigned the role of documenting, recording, and contemplating



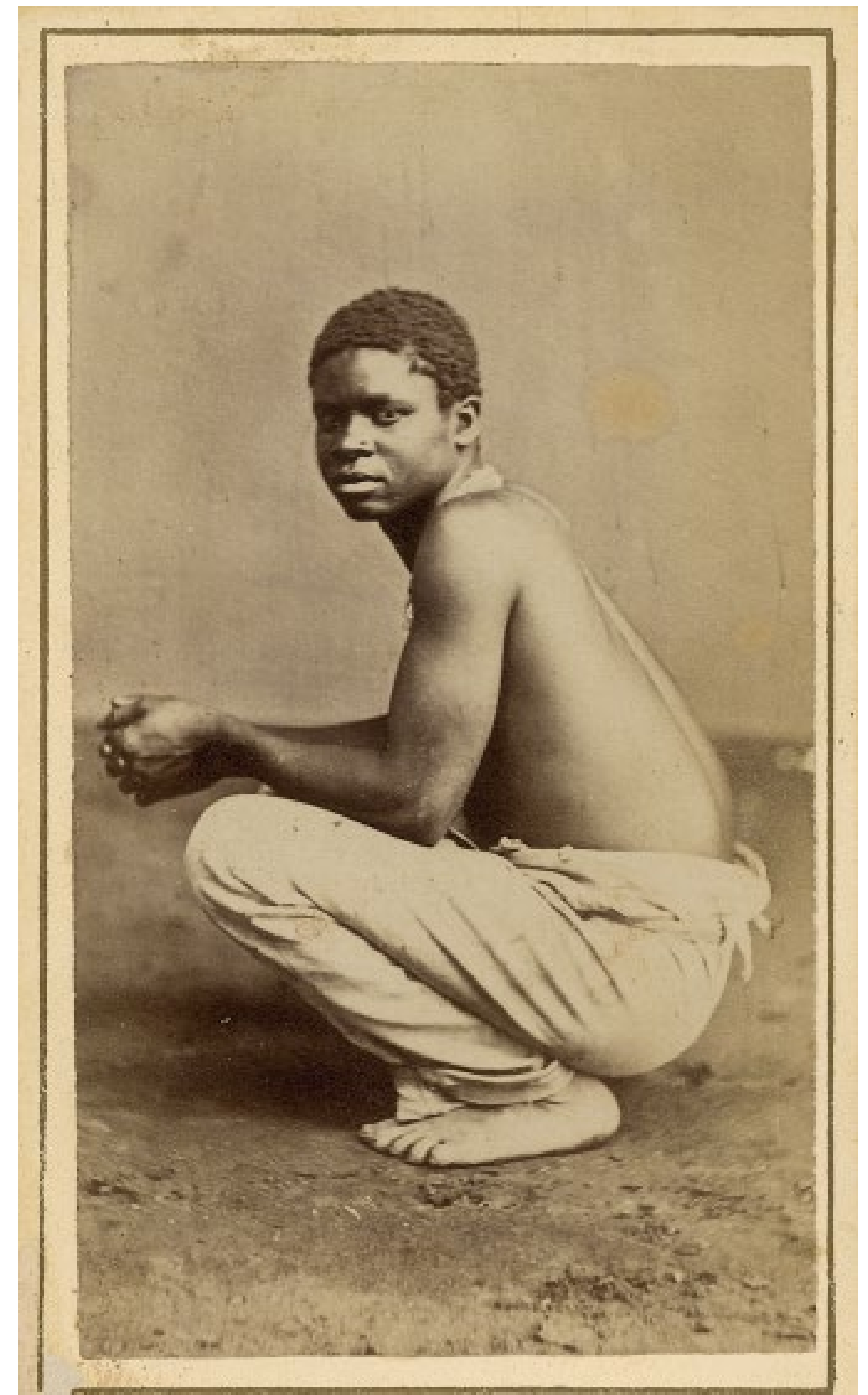

FIG. 5.14 John Salmon (British, active South Africa, 1870s), "Basuto domestique assis" (Basuto boy squatting), ca. 1870. Carte de visite.

what was already there. Hence, without underestimating initiatives taken by photographers in staging, styling, and manipulating the visual rendering of the images, and without excusing any epistemological violence studied in relation to such images, a different kind of violence should be acknowledged. In addition to listening to images, as Tina M. Campt calls on us to do, we have to listen to the violence of imperial shutters that literally shutter worlds; the violence that reduces these children to their abled bodies cannot be said to be epistemological. It is, rather, an ontological violence, part of the global economy of slavery.[19]

Consider this image (fig. 5.14). Why is this boy performing for the camera his capacity to sit squatted for a long time? It is "as if to explain this costume as that of a deracinated immigrant, whose posture still recalls the culture and costumes of his tribe," as one reading of this image claims.[20] The boy may be an immigrant, but this doesn't explain his pose. Nor does it explain the posture of this next image (fig. 5.15). Why is this boy seen carrying two buckets? In some of the captions, these boys are described as "servants" or "maids." However, what they are required to perform for the camera seems due more to the repertoire of the body language of laborers in the mines than that of housemaids. As noted above, one of these photographs was not taken in the photographer's studio, but rather in an improvised setup outdoors. We cannot specify the exact circumstances, but we can suspect.

FIG. 5.15 John Salmon (British, active South Africa, 1870s), "Jeune garçon Basuto servant comme domestique à Kimberley mines de diamants" (Basuto boy, a servant at the Diamond Kimberley mines), ca. 1870. Carte de visite.

These children were forced to work, and their servitude was part of the enduring patterns that gained normalcy during centuries of slavery, *inboekseling*, indenture, etc. In this period, the servitude of children in private residences or in mines was often regularized as a form of apprenticeship. These roles, as historians have already made clear, often involved their kidnapping. What is still not clear is what exactly their status was in this labor market at the moment these photographs were taken, and what role photography had in the transaction of their "labor power." Was the photo a proof that they had carried out their employment obligations satisfactorily? Was the photo required for those who commanded their labor power in case they wanted to trade them? Was it an unofficial document that supplemented the daily pass that black workers were already required to carry with them in order not to be arrested? What role did photography play in putting in place the infrastructure of the apartheid regime that would be installed several decades later?

What makes these photographs so troubling is that they were not taken in order to witness or report *about* a certain situation, as with the image of the workers' compound, but rather they featured, on the one hand, able-bodied workers during a period of labor shortage and, on the other hand, an already existing labor system that monopolized the time of the workers and made sure that they were not leaving their posts. Three generations of historians have ignored the question of slavery in South Africa after 1834, the official year of its abolition. And, as historian Fred Morton notes, the possibility that South Africans themselves were "systematically enslaved, has not been entertained until recently."[21] Even if we do not yet have the answers for them, raising these questions is necessary in order to disrupt the normalcy of euphemisms such as "servants," "maids," and "apprentices"—used at this time in South Africa to refer to kidnapping, forced migration, and the enslavement of women and children. Many of these children, already separated from their parents, were enslaved in this way. Sitting like that is not about lost vernacular customs or gestures. This photograph (fig. 5.16), as well as the image of the

FIG. 5.16 Unidentified photographer (South African), [Workers in the Kimberley Diamond Mines], late 19th century (detail). Gelatin silver print.

barefoot young boy carrying two heavy buckets, are emblems of miners. See how his arms, similar to those of miners in the field, are straightened by the weight of the buckets. This is a performance of and advertisement for exactly those skills, which were in shortage in Kimberley at the time of the diamond rush. The photographers of these images seem to refrain from acknowledging that the boys they were photographing were made orphans and enslaved. As in other places in the world, the abolition of slavery was followed by different forms of servitude, legalized through contracts of indenture or apprenticeship. In this context, nothing impeded those photographers from advertising the bodily qualities of the photographed children and recording their endurance: "Color pale yellow, rather pleasant during early youth, but sickly in appearance in persons of thirty."[22]

As I have tried to show throughout this text, collecting—especially in large quantities and from places that were forcibly invaded and colonized under imperial conditions—without giving anything in return to the communities from which the artifacts (including photographs) are acquired, risks being a form of extraction. In a world destroyed by imperial extraction, nothing can be collected in significant quantities without adding to this destruction. Acquisition for what may become "the largest collection of African photography" cannot be neutral.[23] Diversifying collections of photography in Euro-American museums after centuries of profiting from Africa's visual wealth, while at the same time denying its existence, would once again benefit mainly the Euro-American audience of these institutions.[24] No closure in the form of agreed upon, substantial reparations to the world destroyed by imperialism has taken place; therefore it is not enough today for the institutions and the collectors to prove the innocence of their motives and the neutrality of their procedures. Any later market transaction cannot abolish decades of plunder. Collecting, studying, displaying, and interpreting: none of these can be neutral procedures in the context of institutions that were established and have flourished under imperial conditions. Since the early days of modern imperialism these practices have been pursued mostly unilaterally, while excluding the communities from which artifacts were extracted in large quantities from participating in shaping their meaning or deciding on their displacement or distribution, let alone on how to repair the harm caused by their extraction. Using the power of already existing collections, such as that of The Walther Collection, to undo the imperial configuration that has brought them into existence and maintained their prestige is infinitely more important than aggrandizing any of these collections for the benefit of Euro-American audiences. It is not too late to put these images and artifacts at the disposal of the communities from which they were extracted. Here is an opportunity to practice restitution not out of duty, but out of justice.

1 On the rebellions against taxation in South Africa from 1880 to 1963, see Sean Redding, *Sorcery and Sovereignty: Taxation, Power, and Rebellion in South Africa, 1880–1963* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); on the beadwork, see 104–05.

2 Describing the conditions, Frank B. Wilderson III uses an analogy to chess: "vest the rook with the powers of the queen (before the game begins, of course) and it is not the outcome of the game that is in jeopardy so much as the integrity of the paradigm itself—it is no longer chess but something else." Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 8. For a discussion of "Potential History," see my book on the subject: Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (New York: Verso, 2019).

3 The same photograph, with the same pattern of beadwork, is used once with an accompanying caption stating that this is a married woman (*Ingodusi*), and another stating she is unmarried (*Intombi*).

4 Ian Knight, *The Zulu War* (Isle of Man: Pan Books, 2003), 4.

5 To illustrate this, it is enough to mention a similarly destructive campaign against the Benin kingdom that is still widely referred to today as a "punitive expedition." "When diplomacy failed," as William H. Worger describes it, "more forceful measures were adopted … a series of wars by British and colonial troops followed: against Xhosa on the Cape's eastern frontier in 1877–78; against Sekhukhune's Pedi in 1877; against Cetshwayo's Zulu in 1879; and against the Sotho from 1880 onward." William H. Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds: Mine Workers and Monopoly Capitalism in Kimberley 1867–1895* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 98.

6 One such example of the history of photography in South Africa can be found in Marjorie Bull and Joseph Denfield's book, where they describe as a matter of fact the propagation of photographers' studios around the Indian Ocean. They also describe the opening of the first studios in India, Australia, Mauritius, and other places, as though photography were an object whose historical unfolding could be narrated based on archival records that prove the accuracy of dates, locations, and photographs. "Fortunately," they write, "photography in South Africa was unhampered by patent rights … until 1854 all overseas professional photographers to set up studios in this country came from France, Germany and the Americas." Marjorie Bull and Joseph Denfield, *Secure the Shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from its Beginnings to the End of 1870* (Cape Town: Terence McNally, 1970), 32.

7 On the market of postcards, see Christraud Geary, *Postcards from Africa: Photographers of the Colonial Era* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2018). Corporate image banks such as Getty Images or Alamy act as owners of this wealth extracted from colonized places and sell these images.

8 See my book on the subject: Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008).

9 On the multiple campaigns against the Zulu people, see Knight, *The Zulu War*.

10 The diary was written in French; the translation is mine. From the diary kept at the Pitt Rivers archives, 105–06.

11 Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds*, 17.

12 On the few blacks that held claims, see Michael Morris, *Every Step of the Way: The Journey to Freedom in South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2005). A photograph of one of them, Reverend Gwayi Tymzashe, appears in Tamar Garb, "Colonialism's Corpus: Kimberley and the Case of the Carte de Visite," in *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive*, ed. Tamar Garb (Göttingen: Steidl/The Walther Collection, 2013), 64.

13 Though they were never allowed equality in the mines, in the first years before the establishment of the monopoly, blacks had more freedom to negotiate their labor conditions. See Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds*, 87.

14 In a series of reports he wrote in the mid-1870s, based on the use of slave labor in the mines in Brazil, the mining engineer Thomas Kitto recommended that in order to "ensure employers of a regular and plentiful supply of cheap black workers … similar means of controlling their workers by housing them in fenced and guarded barracks" should be adopted. Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds*, 43.

15 When previously published, this photograph from which I cropped only the mitten—in order to associate it with the white entrepreneurs who invented such an instrument, rather than with those who were forced to wear it—was accompanied by this text: "Just look at the culprit overleaf. The ten gems seen in his hand weigh 210 carats, and were swallowed by the man, but ultimately recovered. It will be seen that leather mittens are chained on his hands to prevent his further manipulation or secretion of the stones." J. Bucknall Smith, "Diamond Mining in South Africa," *Strand*, March 1896, 353.

16 On the Randlords of South Africa and their art collections, see Michael Stevenson, *Art & Aspirations: The Randlords of South Africa and Their Collections* (Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press, 1998).

17 See Azoulay, *Potential History*.

18 Garb, "Colonialism's Corpus," 67, 73.

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

20 Garb, "Colonialism's Corpus," 66.

21 Fred Morton, "Slavery and South African Historiography," in *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labor on the Dutch Frontier*, ed. Elizabeth Eldredge and Fred Morton (New York: Routledge, 2019), 1. In the same volume, anthropologist Jan C.A. Boeyens observes that the 1851 Apprentice Act "facilitated the procurement of labor, which was its underlying purpose." Jan C.A. Boeyens, "'Black Ivory': The Indenture System and Slavery in Zoutpansberg, 1848–1869," in Eldredge and Morton, *Slavery in South Africa*, 189–90. The provision of labor for the mines impacted the availability of domestic servants among Boer families who were not involved in the mines, a conflict that generated more astute ways of procuring laborers.

22 Handwritten note attached to a carte de visite (no. 58) by an unknown photographer, in Garb, *Distance and Desire*, 325.

23 This is how art critic Jon Feinstein describes The Walther Collection. Jon Feinstein, "Artur Walther May Have the Largest Collection of African Photography," *Whitewall*, January 31, 2013, https://www.whitewall.art/art/artur-walther-may-have-the-largest-collection-of-african-photography.

24 See the activity of the artist Renzo Martens and the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (Congolese Plantation Workers Art League or CATPC) aiming to reverse gentrification and keep part of the profit produced through art from fleeing to the West. "SC Conversations: Matter of Critique, Part IV," SculptureCenter, New York, January 29, 2017, https://www.sculpture-center.org/materials/11148/sc-conversations-matter-of-critique-part-iv. See also the book they published: Els Roelandt and Eva Barois de Caevel, eds., *CATPC: Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise / Congolese Plantation Workers Art League* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017).