



Philosophische Fakultät

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Imperial Images and Sentient Critique

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Universität Potsdam

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Reflections of Lusáni Cissé:
Imperial Images and Sentient Critique

Lars Eckstein

I.

On the last sunny October weekend in 2015 I decided to cycle from my home in Berlin to the small town of Wünsdorf some 40 kilometres south of the city. I was hoping to see the remains of the first mosque that was built on German soil, consecrated 100 years ago, in July 1915. I read in the papers that the foundations had been discovered during construction work in July, and excavated by archaeologists from Berlin's Freie Universität over summer. The mosque was not just any mosque. It had been the landmark of a prison camp during the First World War. Half Moon Camp (Halbmondlager) in Wünsberg was established in late 1914 to accommodate around 4.000 colonial prisoners of war from the armies of the Entente. They were West and North Africans, Afghans and Indians, most of them of Islamic faith. The wild idea behind Half Moon Camp which mainly held prisoners from the British and French colonies, and its neighbouring Weinberg Camp, which mainly held Russian Tartars, was to win over its inmates for the confederate cause of the German and Ottoman Empires. It is for this end that the Germans built the mosque. They initially treated their prisoners well by standards, offered Islamic instruction together with political propaganda, distributed a biweekly newspaper published in several languages titled *Al Dschihad*, and hoped to send their captives back as proper germanophiles who would start anti-colonial revolts in their native lands. The camp was an attraction. I was in a way cycling down the same trail that thousands of weekend visitors trod 100 years earlier: My mother's grandparents who lived in nearby Potsdam may well have been among those who came to marvel at the people of colour behind the fences, in the same way that they would have visited *Völkerschauen* and colonial spectacles.



Fig. 1: Half Moon Camp

When I got to the place, though, the excavation site was gone. The place was deserted except for a group of some 20 migrant builders having coffee. They kindly asked me to leave the construction site, and told me they knew nothing of any mosque. Back on

the road I hit upon an elderly lady, the only other person I saw in town. She told me that the excavation is indeed gone, and what is now built on the site of the former mosque is to be part of a refugee camp, designed to become a dependency of the only central reception camp (Erstaufnahmelaager) in the State of Brandenburg. The 2015 Wünsdorf camp is destined to accommodate the growing numbers of refugees arriving via the Balkan route, most of whom, incidentally, begin their journey in former colonies of the Entente. Why that new construction she did not know; after all, Wünsdorf is full of empty buildings, the Lady argued. The town is most famous for its convoluted military history: The first barracks were built in 1910; Wünsdorf served as headquarters of the *Reichswehr* during the First World War; after the mosque was torn down in 1930, the Nazis constructed a panzer shed in place, dug a system of bunkers, built more barracks, and used the parade ground to train their Olympic athletes for the 1936 games. After the war the Russians took over to install their military headquarters in East Germany. They declared Wünsdorf a forbidden area, relocated the local population, and moved in 30.000 Russian forces in 1953. They moved out again in 1994 to leave a ghost town full of toxic waste and scrap ammunition. Wünsdorf has not structurally recovered yet. In May 2015, it hit the national news after two young men attempted to burn down a barrack designated for refugees shortly after the plans for the new Camp were announced. There is a civil alliance in the district confronting hate crimes and welcoming refugees; yet most local politicians are in denial of any traces of structural racism.

The excavation of the foundations of Germany's very first mosque thus dug deep through convoluted layers of history; and it is no surprise, perhaps, that the remains of 1915 were speedily covered up again. All that is left now is a street name, and an information board at the entrance of 'Moscheestrasse' with an historical photograph and some basic information. And there is an interconfessional graveyard, some two kilometres from the former site of Half Moon Camp, hidden away in the Brandenburg forest. 988 inmates of Half Moon and Weinberg Camp were buried here between 1915 and 1919. Only the section of the graveyard for soldiers from the British colonies was restored after the Russians left by the Commonwealth War Grave Commission and reopened in 2005 as the Zehrendorf Indian Cemetery, with new stones for 206 Indian soldiers. Without any stones for the French and Russian sections, the rest of the graveyard resembles a shady park; at its centre, a memorial stele lists the names of all those whose death in the Camps was documented. It was here, in that deserted forest glade, on a ridiculously beautiful and golden autumn Saturday, that I felt some of the affective traces of 1915 still at work.

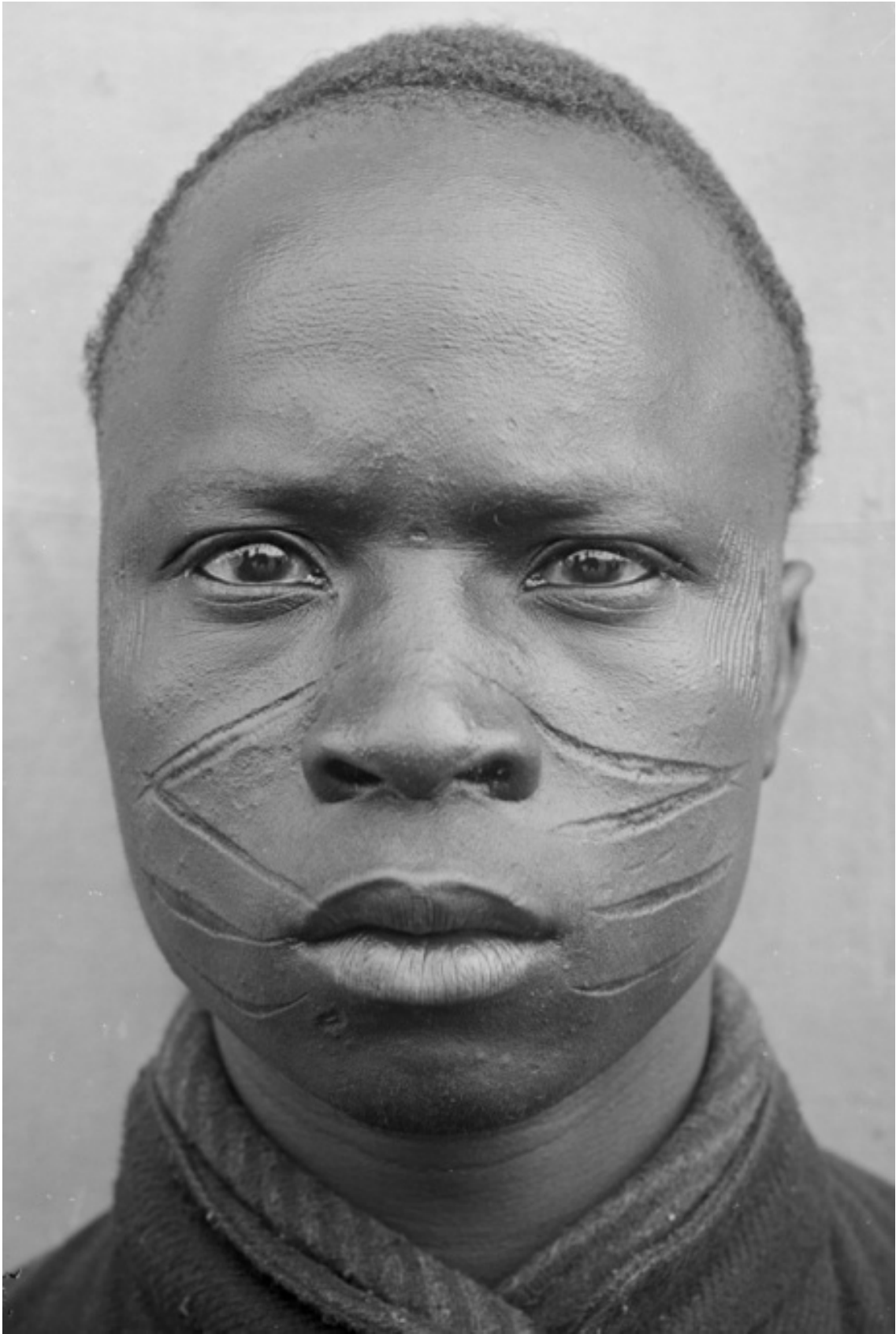


Fig. 2: Lusáni Cissé, digital archive of the Frobenius Institute

II.

The reason why I set off on that day to see the remains of the mosque and Half Moon Camp in the first place was a photograph. I had come across it almost exactly a year earlier for the first time. I was invited to speak at a conference in Dakar on 19th- and 20th-century photography in Africa, without really knowing too much about the topic. In my desperation, I typed in “African colonial photography” in Google Images, and one image, the one that ultimately brought me out to Wünsdorf, somehow stood out from all the other thumbnail sized pictures popping up on my screen. The black and white frontal shot of a young African man inexplicably affected me, calmly holding my gaze, and strangely throwing it back. When the photograph materialised full screen on the webpages of *The Guardian* in London, I was stunned. I was looking at the face of a man entirely unknown to me, yet at the same time disconcertingly familiar, a face suggestive of an intimacy that is at the same time deflected and foreclosed, just as the eyes are partly shaded by a reflexion of light. I was especially affected, I suppose, by the vivid material presence of a life that is at the same time an absence: an absence which materializes in the photographic grain, relative lack of depth, and the black-and-white contours which highlight the image’s status as an historical representation, yet which also paradoxically effect its mimetic realism in the presence. In other words, I felt haunted by the image, by a trick of light for which I had no rational explanation. I was struggling with an enchanted agency in what by all means should have been a fully disenchanting object in the age of mechanical reproduction. Rather than shrugging it off as would have been my first instinct, I decided to somehow deal with it.

But how think and write about this enchantment and its uncanny relational pull in a more reflexive way? And how work it into a critical materialist reading of the colonial archive in which the photograph would have circulated? For of course I expected to find images in my search that are dramatically ideological: images that are informed by radically asymmetrical relations of power, images that are staged in the interest of Empire, that travelled in the services of imperial propaganda or racist science. The enchanting pull thus almost felt like a betrayal: It seemingly bracketed a proper political response that attends to the image’s discursive frames in order to demystify and deconstruct its colonial ideology. It seemingly displaced political critique with presumably pre-discursive affect and apolitical (re)mystification. This dilemma forms the starting point of this essay. It is about coming to terms with the imperial image of the young African I encountered: to

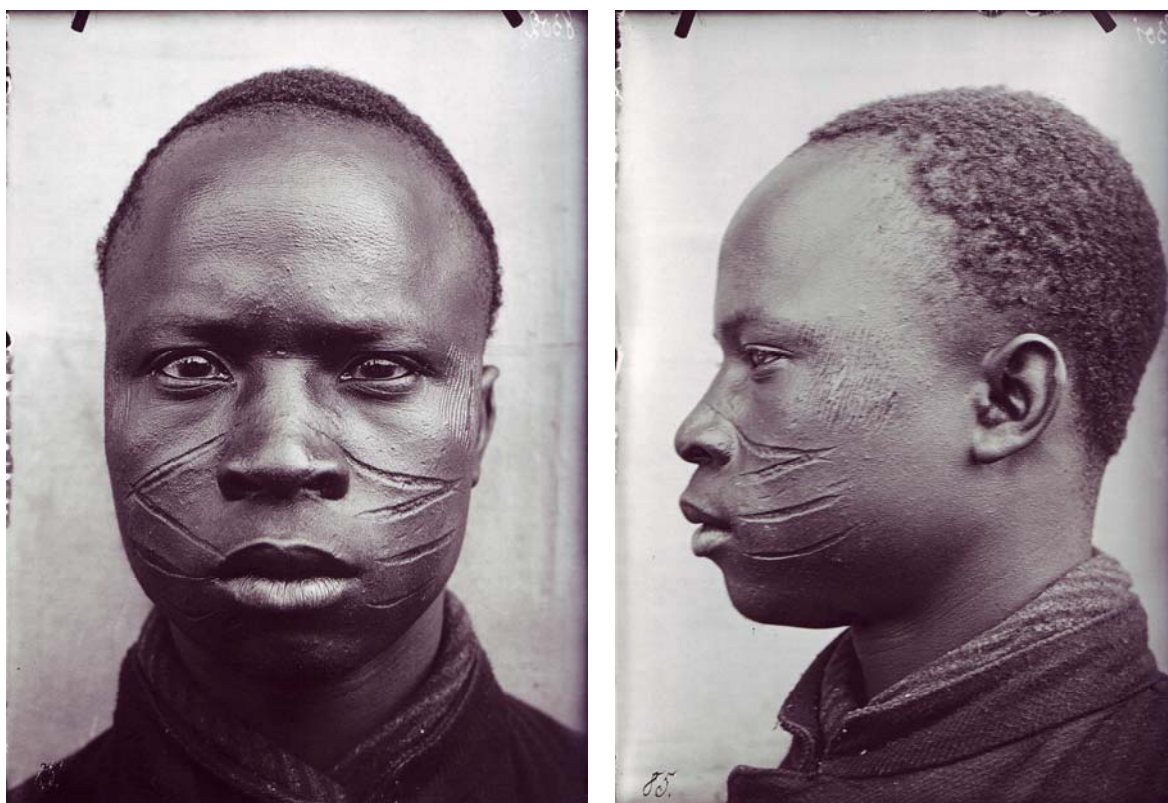
explore ways of deconstructing the colonial ideologies that are underwriting the representation, yet without disavowing the affective surge across colonial and historical differences. What I am interested in, ultimately, is a sentient mode of postcolonial critique, a critique which does not foreclose what Michael Taussig refers to as the “sympathetic magic” of the representational objects it studies.

III.

It was not difficult to find out more about the young African. What I did not expect was that it would take me so close to home; not to the realms of colonial Africa, as I had assumed, but to the very grounds of Half Moon Camp south of Berlin, just a three hour cycling trip away. The photo on the pages of *The Guardian* belonged to the coverage of an exhibition which opened in September 2014 at the Historical Museum in Frankfurt. It was titled *Captured Images (Gefangene Bilder)*. At its centre were larger than life reproductions of portrait photographs of ten West and North African men, all taken on the grounds of Half Moon Camp. The images were uncovered from the photographic archive of Frankfurt’s own Frobenius Institute on occasion of the First World War centenary, as part of an exhibition project devoted to the intimate entanglements of colonial propaganda, science, and the Great War. The exhibition, and the exhibition catalogue were a revelation. Next to a wealth of information about Half Moon Camp, they gave me more images of the young African man.

To begin with, these were two alternative prints of the same image that so struck me. *The Guardian* article obviously took its reproduction from the Frobenius Institute’s digital archive. I found it difficult, at first, to recognise the face so familiar to me in its digital form in either the catalogue print, or in the exhibition context where the image was mounted in large scale, before backlighting, to stunning effect. Professionally reproduced with contemporary analogue technology from the original negative, the sharply added contrast, grain, and depth of these prints not only changed the man almost beyond my recognition, perhaps by deflecting attention away from the gaze by a surplus of available grain and detail. They also foreground the reproduction process itself, and support the framing of the image as an artistic, rather than ordinary object. For me they, paradoxically, perhaps, take away some of the traces of life that the flat digital copy seems to maintain. It is the digital copy that I therefore still prefer to think with. Yet the more consequential revelation was the fact that the image did not stand alone; that it is only one half of a pair,

and not just any pair: a mug shot pair – one full frontal, and one profile shot. With this realisation at last, ideology kicked in with a vengeance.



Figs. 3 and 4: Lusáni Cissé, analogue print, in exhibition catalogue *Gefangene Bilder*

It should not have come as a surprise. I had known a thing or two about Half Moon Camp and its darker sides before I hit upon the photograph and the exhibition in Frankfurt, mainly through conversations with Britta Lange, a Berlin-based cultural historian who has done extensive research on the legacies of the Camp. Her research was integral to the *Halfmoon Files* project, which includes a highly acclaimed documentary film of the same title directed by Philip Scheffner which premiered at the 2007 Berlinale, and a sound and video installation curated by Philip Scheffner and Britta Lange. The film and exhibition intricately expose some of the haunting medial traces of Half Moon Camp inmates, and explore the uncanny entanglements of colonialism, new media technologies, and the sciences. For the original ideological idea of the prison as a breeding ground for would-be anticolonial revolutionaries in the services of the German Reich only lasted so long: When the more obvious unlikeliness of the project transpired, a new set of interests in the inmates came to the fore. Already in early 1915, German universities and academics began to put pressure on the government to gain access to the readily available ‘human material’

conveniently gathered at their doorstep to pursue different types of anthropological research. And the authorities soon gave in.

One of the first to be allowed entry to the Camp, building on his excellent contacts to Berlin's political elite, was Leo Frobenius. Frobenius, a self-made anthropologist who at the turn of the century developed the concept of a 'cultural morphology' underwriting different 'culture areas' (*Kulturkreise*) across the globe, a concept that would later influence Oswald Spengler, had just returned from a secret mission to Abyssinia in the name of the Kaiser. He was to instigate a rebellion against the British-Egyptian dominance in Sudan, yet without receiving the necessary papers by the Italians in Massawa returned to Berlin looking for other ways of promoting his mission. Half Moon Camp must have given him the idea to put together a propaganda volume rallying against the forces of the Entente and their treatment of colonial soldiers in particular, which he titled *Der Völkerzirkus unserer Feinde*.¹ Published in 1916, it presents a wide array of photographs of colonial prisoners of war to support claims that the Entente treated their imperial regiments inhumanely and wasted them as cannon fodder. The volume contains the frontal shot of the young African man that so struck me, subtitled "Senegalschütze aus dem Sudan, nördlich Kolonie Goldküste".² It seems unlikely that Frobenius took the photograph on the grounds of Half Moon Camp himself, or that he specifically commissioned it in 1916; still, the negative slide, together with the profile shot and the images of the other Africans that were exhibited 98 years later in Frankfurt somehow found their way into his personal collection. The ideological work to which Frobenius put the photograph in the propaganda volume is as ambivalent as Frobenius himself, whom the likes of Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire hailed as the harbinger of a new image of Africa, while others, among them Wole Soyinka, challenged that same image as thoroughly racist. *Der Völkerzirkus* denounces the injustices of colonial exploitation in the War; yet by attacking Britain in particular as "the greatest animal trainer [Dompteur]" in a perverse menagerie of 'exotic' aliens,³ it also effectively dehumanises the colonial soldiers. The images of Arabs and Africans are staged specifically for a German audience in a racist spectacle; on the one hand to evidence the cross-cultural degenerations of the enemy, yet on the other to scare Germans of that same degeneration, calling to protect their women and daughters against an imminent racial invasion.

¹ Leo Frobenius, *Der Völkerzirkus unserer Feinde* (Berlin: Eckart, 1916).

² "Senegal rifleman from Sudan, north of Gold Coast colony"

³ Frobenius, *Der Völkerzirkus*, 3.

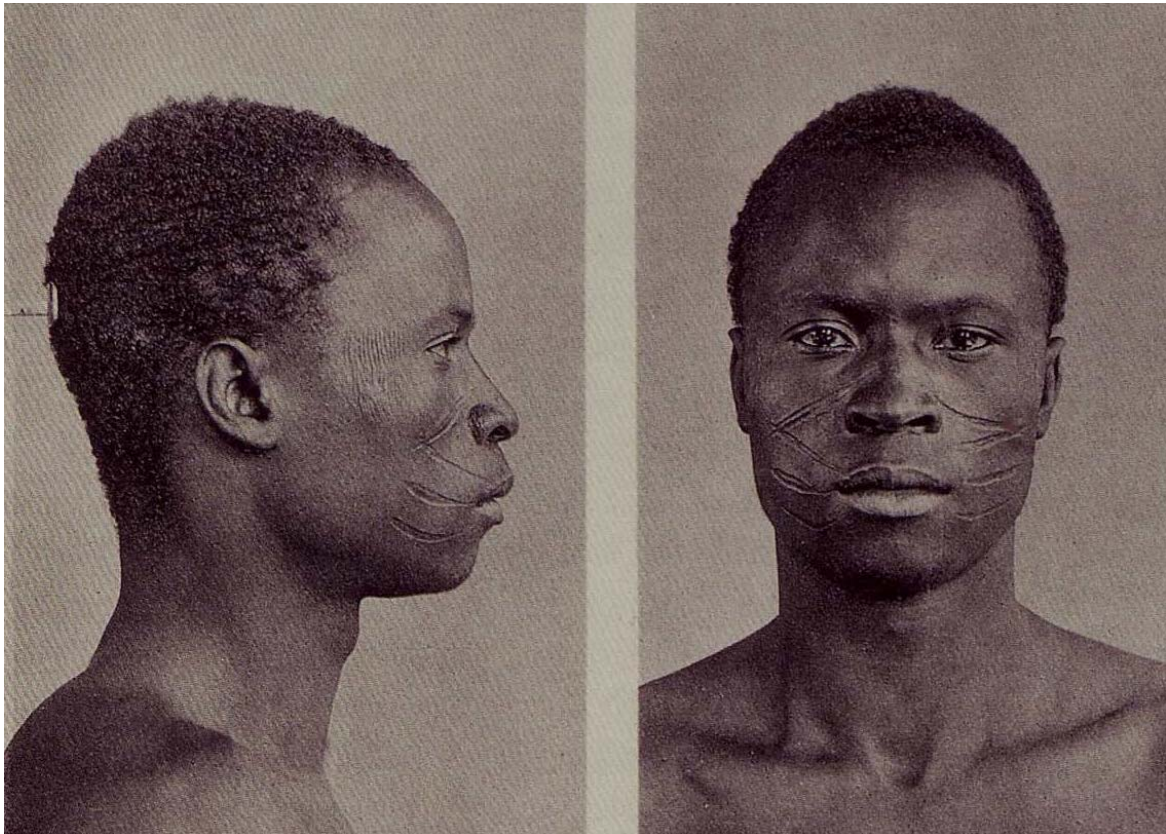
It is odd in this context that the director of the Frobenius Institute should insist that the photographs on display at the Frankfurt Historical Museum were not conceived “to display types of ‘races’ or ‘people’”, but that they were shot with the explicit purpose to “show personalities”.⁴ That the opposite is much more likely is strongly supported by the fact that all West African men in the series (as opposed to the representations of North Africans) come as mug shot pairs: one frontal and one profile shot. The arrangement of standardised frontal and profile photographic portraits was first used by the anthropologist and criminologist Alphonse Bertillon in the 1880s. It served as a key documentation in Bertillon’s morphometric system, a system he developed by measuring the physical proportions of the inmates of Le Santé Prison in Paris, as a means to reliably document and (re)identify criminal individuals. The anthropometric mug shot pair was almost immediately adopted, though, by physical anthropologists, and here it was no longer used to identify individuals, but specifically to document the characteristics of racial types.

European anthropology at the time was deeply divided over the question whether mankind had one singular origin (monogenesis), as most famously promoted by Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection, or several origins (polygenesis), as most infamously promoted by Arthur de Gobineau and his notion of a divine racial inequality between Arians and two other, inferior ur-races, one ‘yellow’, and one ‘black’. In order to gather empirical evidence for their theories, anthropologists systematically exploited the European imperial machine to ‘collect’ as much anthropological ‘material’ as possible; Berlin’s museums and collections alone still hold an estimated 10.000 skulls today, gathered from colonial battle fields, burial grounds, prison camps and shipped to Germany in the decades before the First World War. It is easy to see how excited Berlin’s anthropologists must have been about Weinberg and Half Moon Camp in this context. Felix von Luschan, first professor of anthropology at the Charité, secretary of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory, and an ardent advocate of the monogenetic paradigm wrote in 1917: “We have in our prison camps an immense amount of representatives of the different races, of all parts of the earth and all colours ever observed in man. A visit in some of these camps is just as profitable for the expert as is a voyage round the world”.⁵ Von Luschan regularly visited Half Moon Camp to document

⁴ Karl-Heinz Kohl, “Vorwort,” Benedik Burkhard, unter Mitarbeit von Céline Lebret (ed.), *Gefangene Bilder: Wissenschaft und Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Historisches Museum Frankfurt (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2014), 7-8, qtd. 8, my trans.

⁵ Felix von Luschan, *Kriegsgefangene: Ein Beitrag zur Völkerkunde im Weltkrieg. Einführung in die Grundzüge der Anthropologie* (Berlin: Reimer und Vohsen, 1917), 2, my trans.

languages on Edison wax cylinders, to take plaster casts of human heads, and to systematically measure body surfaces of the colonial prisoners of war. And he invited his scientific peers to come to Berlin to do the same: among them, fellow Austrian Rudolf Pöch, head of the Viennese Anthropological Commission, and an ardent believer in the polygenesis of human races.



Figs. 5 and 6: Lusáni Cissé, in Josef Weninger, *Morphologisch-anthropologische Studie*, Tafel XXXVIII

Pöch and his assistant, Josef Weninger, readily followed the invitation and went to work with rigor, first in Wünsdorf from August 1917, then in the final years of the War in Romania, to where inmates of Half Moon Camp were transported who suffered under the Northern climate. As part of their encompassing raciological documentation, they photographed the young African a second time, in 1918, in a Camp in Turnu Măgurele in Romania. Again, the images come in an anthropometric setup, if this time taken under standardized laboratory conditions rather than outdoors, using artificial light, the head fixed by a small metal strut, the body naked. Ideologically, though, there are more continuities than differences between both sets of images, those in Frobenius's collection

and those taken by Pöch: Both are designed in the conventions of the day for displaying particular racial types, for objectifying them in a normalised system, and fixing them in an imperial taxonomic order.

Josef Weninger published Pöch's set of images of the young African next to other biometrical photographs taken in prison camps in his 1927 Habilitationsschrift *Eine morphologisch-anthropologische Studie*.⁶ The study purports to empirically underscore the polygenetic paradigm; it proposes a minutely detailed racial taxonomy in-between 'primitive forms' and the 'European type', based on nearly 100 morphometric criteria of the face. The man in the image clearly lost weight; to me, he neither resembles the man in the digital print of the 1916 image I had first encountered, nor the man in the analogue prints of the same negative used in the Frankfurt exhibition and catalogue. It is an irony hard to bear that it is through the racist documentary rigour of Pöch that his name and identity have been preserved, dutifully recorded in Weninger's study next to the minute catalogue of morphometric proportions: He is listed as Lusáni Cissé, a farmer from the Cercle Dédoungou in what is today Burkina Faso, Catholic, unmarried. He was 26 years old when Pöch and Weninger dealt with him.⁷

IV.

What does all this mean when imperial images like the portrait of Lusáni Cissé begin to travel, often in unforeseeable ways, beyond the storerooms of colonial archives; in exhibitions like the one in Frankfurt; in volumes like the exhibition catalogue; and not least across viral space, from the digital collections of the Frobenius Institute to the webpages of the Guardian and beyond? The question I am grappling with is whether such travels really have a capacity to liberate imperial images from their racist framings and strategies of objectification, from the unrelenting taxonomic order of their imperial conception, and from the physical, the psychological, and the epistemic violence built into them. Whether exhibiting these images anew, as I do in this essay, really breaks what Adorno called "the catastrophic spell of things" in his "Portrait of Walter Benjamin",⁸ or

⁶ Josef Weninger, *Eine morphologisch-anthropologische Studie, durchgeführt an 100 westafrikanischen Negern, als Beitrag zur Anthropologie von Afrika* (Wien: Verlag der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft).

⁷ Cf. János Riesz, "Afrikanische Kriegsgefangene in der deutschen Propaganda," Burkhard, *Gefangene Bilder*. 58-71.

⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Spearman 1967), 233.

whether it, as Britta Lange fears, merely “adds yet another layer to that spell”.⁹ And if this ethical conundrum were not enough: What about my own initial and presumably uncritical response to the image of Lusáni Cissé, this experience of an inter-subjective, affective surge strangely carrying across the colonial difference and 100 years of convoluted history? After all that I found out about the photograph, it felt imperative to know how that spell possibly relates to the catastrophic spell of racist and fascist history that Adorno intimates; to know whether there is inevitable complicity, or whether there is a potential for postcolonial critique. To come to terms with such questions in more reflexive ways, I had to come up with some kind of conceptualisation of the affective capacities of imperial photographs like the portrait of Lusáni Cissé; and I found Michael Taussig’s Benjaminian reflections on the “sympathetic magic” of mimetic objects extremely helpful to think with in this context.¹⁰ Let me begin, however, by addressing some of the medial and material dimensions of photography more generally which would have affected my encounter with its reflections.

Photographs are the output of mimetic machines which create visual semblance. Their most radical intervention into the history of representation is, of course, that they do so without human interference into the core mimetic process which is essentially a chemical reaction, even if photographs are always staged and discursively framed, and thus invariably ideological. From the earliest beginnings of photography, viewers have struggled with a destabilisation of representational authority and agency, a destabilisation which crucially fed into associations of photography as ‘magical’.¹¹ If, as expressed in the Greek etymology of the word, it is the light itself – rather than a human hand – which does the drawing, agency in photography turns into something fairly liquid and uncannily relational. Put differently, it remains essentially unclear “what exactly happens between

⁹ Britta Lange, “Die Kriegsgefangenen als Untersuchungsobjekte: Krieg, Ausstellung, Wissenschaft,” Burkhard, *Gefangene Bilder*, 94-101, qtd. 101, my trans.

¹⁰ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹¹ European philosophies of the photograph have been riddled by its ‘spectral’ propositions, ranging from spiritualist convictions that photography allows portraits of the dead transmitted through ether and manifested in ectoplasm, all the way to Roland Barthes’s meditations in *La chambre claire*, who described the photograph as an “ectoplasm of ‘what-has-been’: neither image nor reality, a new being really, a reality one can no longer touch.” Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Fontana, 1984), 87. The indexical quality of the photograph as a direct imprint from the real, and its temporal ambiguity as a presence of the past have persistently fed into conceptions of a sympathetic magic which ties together, in perception at least, photographic subject and object, self and other, life and death. Marxist critiques of the disenchantment inherent in photographic technologies such as by Walter Benjamin do not fundamentally question this magic, either; rather, they tend to see it displaced by capitalist dissemination and mass reproduction.

subject, object, and machine” when a photograph is taken; and it remains ultimately unpredictable which messages “seep into” it.¹²

Despite the radically asymmetrical relation of power between the photographer and Lusáni Cissé on the grounds of Half Moon Camp in 1916, and despite the ideological frames which invariably aimed at objectively fixing him (be it in propagandistic orders or raciological taxonomies), the imperial authority of the image is undercut by this dissemination of agency. In other words, while the conventional sense is that what the viewer is looking at is a photograph *by* an imperial German photographer *of* Lusáni Cissé, in a more technical sense, what they are looking at is also an image *by* Lusáni Cissé *of* Lusáni Cissé. It is perhaps easier to accept this idea if one attends to a barely visible detail, a light drawing which materially seeped into the image: For on the irises of Lusáni Cissé, there is a miniature reflection of the photographic machine, of the photographer, and the grounds of Half Moon Camp.¹³ The imperial gaze of ideological fixation is intriguingly refracted in the photographic process, and literally thrown back upon the colonial apparatus. The reflections of Lusáni Cissé thus effectively blur the boundaries between representational subject and object, between self and other, already in the moment of historical representation. 100 years later, I suppose, my own gaze at the photographic reproduction is similarly challenged by this relational pull and dissemination of agency. This argument must not be misunderstood: I am not claiming any emancipatory representational powers for Lusáni Cissé. It is vitally important to resist, as Britta Lange warns, the desire to discursively “heal” the objectified victims of imperial science; that it is our task, rather, to come to terms with the fact that the physical, psychological and epistemic injustices of colonial violence cannot be healed.¹⁴ What I am arguing instead is that the dissemination of agency in the photograph may challenge our own habits of relating to and ordering the world. That it feeds into our perception of the photograph as something uncannily animated; as a relational representation which undercuts that

¹² Gesine Krüger, “Zirkulation, Umdeutung, Aufladung: Zur kolonialen Fotografie,” *NCCR Mediality Newsletter* 9 (2013): 3-11, qtd. 3, my trans.

¹³ Peter Steigerwald, who reproduced the image for the Frankfurt exhibition and was struck to discover this additional “level” telling “a small story on a few millimetres of an old photographic negative”, finds in this a reflexion of the collaborative discipline required from both photographer *and* photographed to meet the complex technical demands of the photographic machine in 1916. Peter Steigerwald, “Den Feind im Auge,” Burkhard, *Gefangene Bilder*, 54-57, qtd. 55.

¹⁴ Britta Lange, “Die Kriegsgefangenen als Untersuchungsobjekte: Krieg, Ausstellung, Wissenschaft,” Burkhard, *Gefangene Bilder*, 94-101, qtd. 101.

conceptual hallmark of modernity: the duality of subject and object, self and other, mind and matter, life and death.



Fig. 7: Detail of fig. 3, reflection in the iris of Lusáni Cissé

My central proposition is that we might acknowledge the sympathetic magic in images like the portrait of Lusáni Cissé as an initial step towards decolonising our own epistemic relations to the world; that we might value the reflections of Lusáni Cissé as an occasion to interrogate the ways in which we access, process, store, and share sensorial data more generally. This would entail that we reflexively question the ways in which our habits of managing and ordering perceived differences are still entangled in the joint trajectories of coloniality and modernity; and to perhaps develop alternative practices of relation. This project is not at all at odds with, but crucially builds on a thorough critical materialist reworking of the past; it is not about ‘healing’ past injustice, but projected towards epistemic dispositions in the present and future. Even though I have used the first person plural in this paragraph, I guess it really needs to start with the ‘I’; with a reflexion about how I myself have been discursively shaped in my dispositions toward world,

including those of body and affect which, following a trajectory from Spinoza to Judith Butler, I assume to be always already political.¹⁵

So let me begin with myself: Following Michael Taussig's explorations in *Mimesis and Alterity*, I speculate that the photograph of Lusáni Cissé so haunts me because it resists possessive appropriation by my senses in the ways I have come accustomed to by the joint avenues of the Enlightenment and commercial capitalism; that it affects me because it refuses to be accumulated in the "bank of the Self" as private property, "quantifiable", as Taussig puts it, "so as to pass muster at the gates of new definitions of Truth and Accountability." Put differently, the mimetic faculty of the photographic machine propels me out of a relation to my Self prescribed for me by scientific modernity: out of a "paranoid, possessive, individualized sense of self severed from and dominant over a dead and nonspiritualized nature",¹⁶ and into a more volatile sense of relational being, if only momentarily, a sense of being that overcomes the dualism of self and other entrenched, not least, by the taxonomic ordering function of imperial discourse. Partly against Taussig, I argue that appreciating this charge does not entail having to buy into the philosophical propositions of a primitivist animism: The kind of sympathetic magic I am interested in in mimetic objects like the photograph of Lusáni Cissé does not speculate about how the mimetic correspondence between material copy and historical original, between signifier and signified allows us to reach across that difference, as in the concept of the fetish. I take no interest in questions about how we might access, or even affect, the figure of Lusáni Cissé across history or the colonial difference, be it in the spirit of harm or healing. Rather, I would like to frame the magic of the imperial image in the spirit of Walter Benjamin's notion of "sentience": as a non-possessive, non-accumulative, non-dualistic and embodied way of perceiving the Other which "tak[es] us outside of ourselves".¹⁷

V.

I thus propose that the charge and challenge of the reflections of Lusáni Cissé is their capacity for depropriation. I take this term from Marcus Boon, who draws on a trajectory

¹⁵ Cf. Lars Eckstein and Dirk Wiemann, "Introduction: Towards a Cultural Politics of Passion," Eckstein and Wiemann (eds.), *The Politics of Passion: Reframing Affect and Emotion in Global Modernity* (New York: Lang, 2013), 7-31.

¹⁶ Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 92, 97.

¹⁷ Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 97.

from Karl Marx and Hélène Cixous to Giorgio Agamben and Mahayana Buddhism to position it against the concept of appropriation, both imperial and subaltern, and thus against a dialectic dualism that progressively enters world into the realms of property and belonging. Boon anticipates reservations against the notion of depropriation in postcolonial discourse, especially from a subaltern perspective: “that to let go of a claim of belonging is to lose everything, made all the more traumatic since this would repeat the violent appropriation of colonization”.¹⁸ Sentient critique in the spirit of depropriation must continue, therefore, to self-reflexively interrogate privilege and power, hegemony and different local frames of speaking, even while insisting that the self is not bound by the logic of appropriation and belonging. Sentient critique must acknowledge and appreciate a plurality of epistemic positions across the colonial difference in the spirit of postcolonial justice, even while promoting and sustaining a community across that difference, an open community that is inherently political, yet operates beyond the need for singular ideological identification. As Marcus Boon puts it: “Depropriation means to allow a movement to happen, to allow a different relation between beings to open up, because that is how the world is changed, i.e. through transformative mimesis”.¹⁹

How write this depropriating charge? Michael Taussig, in his fictocritical meditation on “The Corn-Wolf”, calls for a “Nervous System writing” in this context, for writing which breaks out of the managerial ordering functions of generic academic discourse, for a critique which encounters and counters the excess of imperial violence that is built into imperial images like that of Lusáni Cissé, not by “giving the Nervous System its fix, its craving for order”, but rather by finding ways of “cutting across and deflecting those violence-stories” in writing that is “apotropaic”, or counter-magical: writing that demystifies, yet “implies and involves reenchantment” as the only strategy to “break the catastrophic spell of things”.²⁰ That reenchantment, as I read it, is not a license to be obscure. Rather, it foregrounds that critique itself is an experiment in “transformative mimesis”, caught up in genealogies of knowledge and power which it cannot escape, yet can attempt to turn reflexive in its own modes of narrative. Part of this is to make room, I suppose, in writing, for that nervous ‘sentience’ in the reflections of Lusáni Cisse, and

¹⁸ Marcus Boon, “Depropriation: The Real Pirate’s Dilemma,” Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz, *Postcolonial Piracy: Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South* (London: Bloomsbury 2014), 135-147, qtd. 144.

¹⁹ Boon, “Depropriation”, 144.

²⁰ Michael Taussig, “The Corn-Wolf: Writing Apotropaic Texts,” *Critical Inquiry* 37 (Autumn 2010): 26-33, qtd. 32, 33.

open up to its volatility rather than foreclosing it; to appreciate its charge as already critical in itself in the institutional orders of a capitalist world system, rather than denouncing it as deflecting from materialist critique.

Yet writing, surely, is not enough. Writing can only be an extension of a larger sentient practice in the spirit of depropriation, of depropriation which, to insist with Marcus Boon again, allows “a movement to happen” across and beyond ideological difference, by allowing “a different relation between beings to open up”. Back in that forest glade again, on that graveyard for the dead of Half Moon and Weinberg Camp, I am struck at how powerfully the reflections of Lusáni Cissé still speak across a century of history: toward that new camp that is being built on the grounds of Germany’s first mosque; toward the racist mob that will march past my apartment backing on Germany’s largest synagogue in Berlin two weeks later, on the 9th of November, rallying loudly against refugees and the ‘Volksverräter’ (traitors of the people) who let them in; toward the necropolitical militarisation of the Mediterranean; yet also toward a growing and thoroughly diverse community of beings who collectively engage in “practices that render things unownable”²¹ by the taxonomic border regimes of race, religion, nation or empire.

²¹ Boon, “Depropriation”, 146.