

These eight projects presented at the Fundació are part of an attempt to intervene in the imperial grammar of photographic archives, to interfere in imperial knowledge printed in books, to unlearn imperial structures such as nation states, borders or status of 'undocumented' imposed as *fait accompli* and foreground the imperial origins of numerous gestures inherited by scholars, artists, photographers and curators, and used in their practices.

This exhibition consists of a series of rehearsals in non-imperial modes of archival literacy. Photography is being used here as part of a 'potential history', a way of unlearning the imperial habits and gestures through which citizens of differentially ruled body politics have been trained to inhabit the privileged position of experts – in photography, art, politics and human rights discourse – and explore the plight of others, congealed in objects, books and documents, while those others with whom they share the world are forced to endure secondary and subservient roles.

Imperial archival literacy is predicated not simply on the ability to read but rather on knowing how to read 'properly' and recognize legal, political and historical texts as compelling and authoritative documents—regardless of the degree of abuse and destruction their production has caused and their continuing uses entail. This paper trail culture is nurtured by a certain sacredness of objects, which are relegated to the past and considered 'historical,' seeking to limit us to the role of external readers, viewers and interpreters.

One of the exhibition's projects entitled *Errata*, is an attempt to practice in negating this sacredness and amending some of the substantial and secondary errors inscribed in these papers and objects. Books, documents, and images are not understood here as final objects that can be interpreted differently as long as they reaffirm their untouchable status as historical items that 'ought to be preserved.' Instead, through textual and visual interventions, including erasure, replacement, juxtaposition, addition and subtraction, the untouchable status of objects of knowledge – books, documents, and art works – is herein called to question. *Errata* is premised on the right to intervene in and reverse imperial knowledge.

Related to this project, Azoulay's new film *Un-documented: Undoing Imperial Plunder* is an attempt to make coincide the two regimes imperialism seeks to keep separated – the treatment of objects (as 'well documented') and maltreatment of people (as 'undocumented'). Focusing on plundered objects in European museums and listening to the call of asylum seekers to enter European countries, their former colonizing powers,

the film defends the idea that their rights are inscribed in these objects, that were kept well documented all these years.

Four of the projects attempt to show the systemic violence used to end the Second World War with a 'new world order' and foreground other imaginaries that emerged from the chaos created by the war. The plan to impose a new world order was conceived way before the war came to its end by the three heads of state that led the Allied camp: Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. With no constituencies, parliaments, votes or other institutions of representative democracy, they imposed themselves as representatives of this new world and set out to destroy the old one. A singular vision of the new world order was approved by a new organ, the United Nations, and the Allies were determined to stifle competing local and regional models of rule and to suppress imaginative civil experimentations. The latter aspired to different political formations that would not only put an end to the Nazi and Fascist regimes but also to the imperial one, and enable colonized people, as well as dispossessed and exploited populations, to claim their rights and attempt to renew systems of rights that had been so grossly violated during centuries of worldwide colonization, enslavement and various forms of apartheid.

The transition to a new U.N.-approved world order in 1945 marked the end of an era dominated by the Second World War and heralded a 'new beginning'. This was by no means an ephemeral moment of celebration, a swift transition from dark to light. Rather, it was a prolonged and meticulously crafted transformation, enacted violently using massive destruction, forced migration, rape, dispossession, deprivation, massacres, food shortages, the privatization and policing of public spaces, the dismantling of workers' unions and other techniques of oppression. The violence of ending the Second World War was facilitated by a global campaign, conducted by the Allies, to teach 'visual literacy' in the new language of human rights. At the core of the Allies' global 'curriculum' were two tenets: the violence exercised by the Allies is legitimate and justified as a means to achieve universal ends and purposes; and this violence must be differentiated from similar acts of violence by others, which are presented as driven by the sheer thirst for power of this or that particular group seeking to achieve its oppressive ideals.

This section weaves together two sets of 63 images. One consists of plates from an exhibition kit prepared by UNESCO in 1950, conceived as a visual illustration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) drafted by the UN. The second consists of photographs from different parts of the world in which people claim their rights in a different language and grammar, articulating aspirations that differ from those imposed by the UDHR. For them, the end of the Second World War should have made room for non-imperial political imaginations and formations, substantial processes of decolonization, equal rights, and equal access to education and housing. Together they assert their power as workers and fellow citizens who are more than obedient subjects, hungry mouths to be fed and able hands to be employed for the profit of others.

The UNESCO plates feature abstracted images of conquest, discovery and slavery, together with images of people's rights to education, to participation in political life and freedom of thought and opinion. These texts and images disavow the role that the same imperial actors that drafted and imposed this declaration played in the destruction of cultures and systems of rights around which different communities were organized prior to imperial invasions.

The second set of vintage images of people claiming their rights interrupt the political and visual imaginary of the U.N.'s imperial conception of rights. Juxtaposed with the plurality of rights claimed by the many, the UNESCO panels emerge as part of the imperial visual literacy lessons exercised at the end of the Second World War, whose goal was to teach citizens how not to see imperial violence and to foreclose accountability for this violence.

Declaring themselves authorized to devise a declaration of rights for people that they were still actively involved in oppressing, these same actors avoid accountability. By depicting the Nazi regime as the ultimate evil, they themselves posed as agents of progress and translated their own violence into maps, international treaties and books of law. Through a series of institutions such as archives, museums and libraries in which the mass plunder of the world was preserved as specimens of knowledge, imperial actors acquired the power and authority to shape their acts of dispossession and exhibition as progressive phases in contradistinction to previous dark eras. One such example is plate n<sup>o</sup>. 9 in the UNESCO kit that shows a relief of Hammurabi, the King of Babylon. Hammurabi's code of laws, it is written, is 'based on a system of retribution which was harsh, unjust

and rigid. Since that day, justice has made great progress'. What the narrator of this caption doesn't admit is that this image itself testifies to the degree to which 'this progressive phase' is rooted in plunder. After all, such a narrative could not have come into existence were such objects and representations from 'previous' phases and 'uncivilized' societies not plundered en masse and kept in the possession of institutions such as the Louvre; and from such possessions the authority of the 'expert' is drawn.

Distrustful of the Allied leaders who whitewashed the crimes perpetrated by their own regimes, these fellow citizens contest the authority of international treaties and make claims for reparative justice. Their public demonstrations were often marginalized or blatantly prohibited, and attempts to imagine and experiment with different political formations and forms of sharing and cohabiting the world based on the heterogeneous customs of diverse

## 2

### *Natural History of Rape*

From the end of April 1945, and over the course of several weeks, anywhere between a few hundred thousand and two million German women were raped, often in urban spaces where cameras were certainly present, as documented by the

populations were systematically blocked and repressed. Everywhere, policemen were trained to break up civil movements and protests and bust strikes using direct and indirect violence, always in the name of the law that is constituted through this violence.

Resistance to the violence of the law, as well as the violence that gave rise to the law, is presented here not as capsules of given facts or discrete visual proofs of rights, claims and violations, but rather as viable, competing political models. Images of such resistance should not be processed as bygone moments in a linear history of the consolidation of postwar imperial formations but as open claims for which the regimes of the 'new world order' should still be held accountable. The resulting structures of racialized, gendered and class-based hierarchies can and should be viewed as reversible.

careful recording of the destruction of buildings in numerous trophy photographs. Destroyed cities were quickly crowded with photographers, some of whom acted as if nothing could stop them as they journeyed through the destruction, seeking out

sights that constituted prime objects for the photographic gaze. Though the mass violence of rape of German women is not denied and proof of its prevalence could be found in the archive, it is dissociated from the photographic imaginary of the end of the Second World War. Given the number of photographers present in the same places where rape took place, the section *Natural History of Rape* questions the common ontology of

the photograph and the archive that is based on the assumption that data assumed absent is necessarily encoded in photographs taken in disaster zones. Decoding photographs requires a different onto-epistemological approach.

## 3

### *Master Pieces*

Along with the forced migration of millions and millions of people, the 'new world order' that followed the formal ending of the Second World War involved the displacement of objects, books and works of art to their 'rightful place', that is, the places created for them by a renewed global imperial regime. This unprecedented transfer of cultural objects was a way to consolidate imperial power, dominate new markets, expand the collections of libraries and archives, and legitimize Western imperial powers as rescuers of art objects looted by the Nazis, rather than criminalizing them for still holding vast treasures looted from Africa, India and elsewhere.

*Master Pieces* consists of documents showing the U.S. Congress's deliberations regarding whether or not to show the masterpieces

'rescued' from Germany after war and images of big crowds viewing masterpieces from the Kaiser Museum in the National Gallery in Washington, where they had been invited to inhabit and identify themselves in the position of rescuers, paying entrance fees that would be donated to charities for German orphans. It is this imperial circulation of morals, virtues, money and objects as part of the mission of shaping global citizens who would care for the rights of others – at the same time as these others were being kept as *others* – that this re-exhibition of spectators of art attempts to show.

Of the almost one million books looted by the Nazis from Jewish public and private collections in Europe, only twenty percent were returned to the European communities from which they were taken. The series of photos show the rest, distributed between the newly created Jewish nation-state of Israel and the Library of Congress (forty percent each).

This section is another example of the manipulation and appropriation of objects, this time books. Of the almost one million books looted by the Nazis from Jewish institutions and families in Europe, only twenty percent were returned to the European communities from which they were taken. The rest were distributed between the newly created Jewish nation-state of Israel and the Library of Congress (forty percent each), as if to help complete both the evacuation from Europe of a Jewish presence, as pursued by the Nazis, and the imperial disregard for the enduring components of material cultures that imperialism constantly threatens to replace with new, instantly fabricated, secluded cultural shrines such as museums, archives, etc. Contrary to the way this history is framed by the National Library in Jerusalem, the books in its collection were not 'rescued' by the National Library, nor 'repatriated' by the U.S. army, since they had never belonged to Jewish communities in the United

States and their appropriation was not accompanied by opening the gates for those Jews who sought a new home outside of Europe after the end of the Second World War. The Library of Congress was by no means their rightful place. On the contrary, there is evidence that the remaining Jews in Europe hoped to have these books returned to their communities, but the few who were not exterminated by the Nazis were not considered qualified enough to have them back.

Through a series of 20 annotated photographs, this section replaces the well-established framework of a 'two-sided conflict' projected retroactively on the twentieth century, with an account of a shared world cared for by Palestinian Arabs and Jews who did not conceive of themselves as enemies and were not reduced to their membership in their communities.

The U.N. partition resolution of Palestine was not accepted by the majority of the population whose futures the partition plan wished to alter, nor did it attempt to preserve the forms of co-existence between Jews and Arabs that had previously prevailed in Palestine. In order to realize the plan, military force was needed to overcome the opposition of the majority of the land's inhabitants – most of the Palestinians and a segment of the Jewish population whose size is unknown. Jews who had not been in the national struggle before had to be recruited to form this military force, and many of them were forced into military service. The might of war as an existential threat had to be imposed on the population; the dividing line between Jews and Arabs had to be constituted as essential and absolute.

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Potential should be understood here in the dual sense of unrealized possibilities that still motivate and direct the actions of various actors in the past, and of possibilities that can still become our own and may be reactivated to guide our actions. *Potential History of Palestine* insists on restoring within the order of things assumed as a *fait accompli* a polyphony of civil relations and forms of being together that existed at any moment in history without being shaped solely, let alone exhausted, by national and racial division.

A group of photographs taken in Palestine between 1947 and 1950 are accessible to the public but in order to show them, one needs the permission of CICR (Comité international de la Croix-Rouge, or International Committee of the Red Cross), and such permission depends on the CICR's approval of the text accompanying them. This series rejects the right of 'neutral' institutions to monitor and censor the interpretation of imperial violence.

The accessibility of a photograph is often controlled and monitored by the archive. There are, however, photographs that are accessible to the public who visit the archive, but their public display and distribution outside of the archive are controlled, limited and often completely forbidden by the institutions that claim them. This means that members of the public can be the addressees of these photographs but are not allowed to become their addressors: they cannot occupy the position of the one who shows them to others, calls attention to their presence, narrates their content and context, writes the captions or shares one's experience viewing them. These photographs can be shown in public only when embedded in the discourse authorized by the institutions that control their distribution. A group of photographs taken in Palestine between 1947 and 1950 that I viewed

at the CICR archive in Geneva in 2009 belong to this category. They are accessible to the public but in order to show them, one needs the permission of CICR, and such permission depends on the CICR's approval of any text that an archive user might write to accompany the photographs. These photographs were taken during the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine. Since I was not allowed to show the photographs with my annotations, I relied on my memory of them to produce 'unshowable photographs' that I could share with others. I could draw them as they were already imprinted on my memory, and could do so because the photographs were *unshowable* but not *inaccessible*. Through these substitutes of a sort, the photographs have come to exist outside the archival protocol, and the hegemonic CICR captions that act as euphemisms for exile, avoiding to state overtly what is recorded in them: deportation.

Imperial inscriptions in books, documents and images are not understood here as final. Rather than sealed and unalterable objects, what is visually and textually inscribed in them is fragmented and transformed into elements that can be re-composed, amended and erased. This project challenges the separation of objects and people by imperial regimes whose careful treatment of objects (the 'well documented') and maltreatment of people (the 'undocumented') has defined and maintained neocolonial and imperial forms of knowledge production.

Books, written and unwritten orders, archival documents, treaties and declarations are both media and means for the exercise of imperial violence. Also, the imperial use of force is always an assertion of a right: the right to take, to impose, to destroy, to enslave, to plunder and so forth. These rights are inserted and inscribed into the life-world of political communities so as to deprive those who are targeted by them of the power to contradict and refute the validity of the records that place them under imperial categories such as 'refugees', 'slaves', 'asylum seekers', 'undocumented' or 'infiltrators'. Imperial archival literacy is predicated not simply on the ability to read, but rather on knowing how to read and use relevant texts as compelling and authoritative documents

– regardless of the degree of abuse and destruction their production has caused and their continuing uses entail. This paper-trail culture is premised on a certain sacredness of objects, which are sealed in the past and considered 'historical', relegating us to a role of external readers, viewers and interpreters. Upon viewing such documents, we become implicated in the imperial apparatus of preservation perpetuated by how and what we read.

*Errata* is an attempt to practice in negating this sacredness and amending some of the substantial or secondary errors inscribed in these papers. *Errata* consist of approximately sixty books, and a few dozen images, drawings and other elements. Using diverse procedures, including erasure, replacement, juxtaposition, addition and subtraction, this assemblage is the outcome of exercises in rejecting imperial spatial, temporal and political dividing lines that shape many of the gestures we have inherited from imperial modalities of knowledge production. *Errata* is an attempt to make the two regimes that imperialism seeks to keep separated coincide: the treatment of objects (as 'well documented') and the maltreatment of people (as 'undocumented'). Books, documents and images are not understood here as final, sealed objects that are open to

multiple interpretations, only as long as they reaffirm the untouchable status of these objects as historical items that 'ought to be preserved'. Instead, through textual and visual interventions, the untouchable status of objects of knowledge – books, documents and art works – is herein

called to question. *Errata* is premised on the right to intervene in and reverse imperial knowledge.

8

*Un-Documented – Undoing Imperial Plunder*  
[A film]

Unlike Resnais and Marker's claim in *Statues also Die*, I show that statues do not die. It's true, that those who plundered them and forced them to exist isolated in showcases ought to be charged with attempted murder, but the objects themselves survived, and stand alert in glass cases in museums awaiting reunion with their people, here or there, in the places from whence they were plundered or in the places where they landed. The plundered objects and materials were uprooted from the communities in which they were made; they were forced to leave the people with whom they shared a world. Since their exile, their people have become endangered. Not that they ceased to produce objects as part of their life, but under the imperial regime, their new objects stood for no objects, which made them objectless of a sort, exposed to different types of violence. On their quests to ensure their unavoidable reunion with their objects, they are

often deemed 'undocumented' by a different regime, the one that takes care of people at the borders. As 'undocumented' they are denied movement in the world and unduly criminalized for attempts to cross internationally imposed borders. Focusing on plundered objects in European museums and listening to the call of asylum seekers to enter European countries, their former colonizing powers, the film defends the idea that their rights are inscribed in these objects that were kept well documented all these years.

*Seminar and guided visits*

**Modalities and Initiatives of Repair,  
Restitution and Reparations**

**Public institutions such as libraries, museums and archives today own a huge amount of plundered material and they are organized around imperial structures that facilitate the normalization of these holdings in these institutions. Based on this assumption, the seminar aims to provide a framework for discussion of transformative potentialities of imperial collections and different modalities of undoing their legacies.**

Seminar participants: Ariella Aïsha Azoullay, Kader Attia, Françoise Vergès, Hagar Ophir. | Date: Tuesday 11 October 2019. | Admission: free. | Advance booking not required. Limited places.

**Approximations**

**Guided visits to the exhibitions *Antoni Tàpies. Profound Certainty*, *Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. Errata* and *Hannah Collins. I will make up a song and sing it in a theatre with night air above my head*.**

Dates: Fridays, at 18.00 h. | Duration: 1 h 15 min. | Language: Catalan. | Admission: free with museum entrance ticket. | Advance booking not required. Limited places.

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