

Coloniality in the 'objective' contemporary critical art image

Ariella Azoulay and the problem of
eurocentric visual citizenship

Rosanne Jonkhout (January 2018)

Introduction.

The last few years I have become exceptionally interested in decoloniality, and especially its relation to white allyship; the extend of want/need thereof and/or its undesirability. First, a few words on what I mean by this possibly confusing sentence. If 'colonialism' is the political invasion, control, and economic exploitation of one state over another, then 'decolonialism', is the undoing of this control.¹ However, even after there is no longer official political control, the structures generated by longstanding colonial thought are still articulated today and called 'coloniality'.² The undoing, or reshaping of these overarching structures, is considered 'decoloniality'. White allyship refers to white people who see the importance of undermining coloniality, and their agency therein. I will depart the essay with the presumption that the legitimacy of decoloniality is a given.³

I have written three essays on the interrelation between coloniality and art from a white perspective before. The very first essay in this theme, *The sterility in critical art* (2017) described how the white cube⁴ demobilizes any agency of an artwork (made by a white artist) that is critical of social and economic inequality.⁵ This conclusion led me to assume that discussing agency of the artwork itself was pointless until decolonised; any agency the art object could have was rendered immobile by agency of the institution, artist and viewer.

However, to surpass the artwork completely when talking about 'decoloniality and art' is disregarding any potentiality it might possess, even in its flawed state. Upon reading Ariella Azoulay's theories about 'the photograph', I was introduced to a fresh perspective on how the artwork (read; the photograph) might possess a decolonial agency. This theory gave me incentive on how to approach coloniality within the artwork itself in a new way. This essay will be based off of two of Azoulay's texts; *What is a photograph? What is photography?* (2010) and *Citizenship Beyond Sovereignty: Towards a Redefinition of Spectatorship* (2008). In these texts, Azoulay examines the photograph in relation to 'objectivity'. I will play off of Azoulay's term of 'the photograph/photography', because it focusses on the standalone image, seen as having agency in and of itself. Richard Mosse and his artwork *The Enclave* (2013) will function as a case study. The reason I connect an artwork that is primarily a video-installation instead of a photograph is because I want to show that any lines that Azoulay casts out, extend beyond that of the photograph and into a wider perspective of art. I chose *The Enclave* specifically because it is a very influential

¹ *Oxford Dictionaries*, s.v. "colonialism" (accessed 15 July 2017)

² Jonkhout, Rosanne. "Decolonising the white artist's practice: Along the lines of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Nelson Maldonado-Torres". Rosanne Jonkhout website (Jul 2017), Rosannejonkhout.com (accessed December 29, 2017). p.2

³ Defending validity of decoloniality is an extensive endeavour that will be at the expense of its power to act. The length of this essay denies this. For more information on this subject I suggest reading *Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality* by Nelson Maldonado-Torres.

⁴ I use the term 'white cube' the same as in my previous essays; the four white-walled space and everything that follows in its wake such as art centres, lecture halls, art festivals, etc. Usually the big, renowned institutions are located within western cities. In *The sterility in critical art* I list the various ways in which the white cube connects to capitalism, and partakes in and propels coloniality.

⁵ 'Critical art' refers to contemporary artworks that are critical of social and economic inequality. Jonkhout, Rosanne. "The sterility in critical art". Rosanne Jonkhout website (Feb 2017), Rosannejonkhout.com (accessed June 25, 2017). p.1

work and in many ways very illustrative for the problem I want to pose; that critical art displays coloniality. Furthermore, as Mosse self-identifies as a documentary photographer, which is strongly reflected in his work, the jump from Azoulay's the photograph/photography to a wider sense of art seems like a natural one. To still ground this essay to Azoulay somewhat, I will limit this research to critical artwork that deals with a mechanically-obtained image; contemporary 'photograph'/photography' and 'video'/videography' art that is critical of social and economic inequality. I will refer to this under the term 'critical art'. In this essay I revisit the artwork by way of Azoulay's approach of objectivity and hypothesise that contemporary critical art is exhibiting a colonial notion of objectivity.

First, I will examine the history and origination of the objective image. Secondly, I will determine how Azoulay pulls the term apart with her notion of the photograph. In the third paragraph it will become clear if Azoulay's theory is sufficient enough to function as a solution for the problem in critical art. To put this to the test, Azoulay's texts will be applied here to Richard Mosse's *The Enclave*.

'Objectivity'

It would be good to start off this paragraph with a definition. Judy Payne and Geoff Payne wrote an extensive definition on objectivity in *Key Concepts in Social Research* (2004):

*'Objectivity in social research is the principle drawn from positivism that, as far as is possible, researchers should remain distanced from what they study so findings depend on the nature of what was studied rather than on the personality, beliefs and values of the researcher (an approach not accepted by researchers in the critical, standpoint or interpretivist traditions).'*⁶

Objectivity is the quality of being objective; not influenced by personal feelings or opinions, rather, representing facts. In *The Image of Objectivity* (1992) Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison write about the emergence and role of the photographic image in objective scientific research. For roughly two centuries preceding the 19th century, images accompanying scientific research were drawn by illustrators. These images were meant to be as clear as possible and therefore represent a generalized example of its subject matter.⁷ Scientists struggled for the most helpful images, namely those that were most true to nature. An illustrator could have a lapse of judgement, or tire, and make mistakes, and so human agency was perceived more and more as unstable. Scientist pushed the ambition to break with the human as much as possible to remain with intentness on objects.

As Daston and Galison write, *'[s]eventeenth-century epistemology aspired to the viewpoint of angels; nineteenth-century objectivity aspired to the self-discipline of saints.'*⁸ The impossible task of restraining the self meant that the constitution of

⁶ Payne, Judy. Payne, Geoff. *Key Concepts in Social Research*. London: SAGE Publications, 2004.

⁷ Daston, Lorraine. Galison, Peter. "The Image of Objectivity". *Representations*, 40:1 (Sep 1992). p.92

⁸ Daston, Lorraine. Galison, Peter. "The Image of Objectivity". *Representations*, 40:1 (Sep 1992). p.82

photography was a welcome sight. The natural sciences trusted their illustrators increasingly less and the camera was a machine, which meant it was tireless.⁹ Supposedly, the image produced was truthful, as it was all mechanical and no feelings. A camera is substantially less prone to making mistakes; it captures everything. Unlike the illustrator, a camera does not make a normative distinction and was therefore considered to have no subjective influences. However, Daston and Galison already describe an unfavourable side of objectivity with becoming '*dangerously objective*'.¹⁰ Being that the camera is impartial to the significance of information, details that were previously brought to the fore by the illustrator may in a photograph get lost in a sea of details. This in turn, can skew knowledge production.

*“The photograph has acquired a symbolic value, and its fine grain and evenness of detail have come to imply objectivity; photographic vision has become a primary metaphor for objective truth”. This was not because the photograph was necessarily truer to nature than handmade images – many paintings bore a closer resemblance to their subject matter than early photographs, if only because they used color- but rather because the camera apparently eliminated human agency.*¹¹

The photograph is therefore arguably not a 'more truthful' image, but just another method; one of many. In the 19th century however, the mechanically-obtained image was still considered the better alternative, for human agency was to be shunned for its untrustworthiness. Natural science demonized human agency to such an extent that 'objectivity' became synonymous with truth.¹²

Clinging to this objectivity/truth means to adhere to one particular kind of narrative. Daston and Galison at one point describe the '*wish for a uniform truth*', a significant choice of words.¹³ This wish for a *uniform* truth is a poignant symptom of imperialism.¹⁴ Political philosopher James Tully writes in *Public Philosophy in a New Key* (2008) that cultural imperialism means to rank '*all non-European cultures as 'inferior' or 'lower' from the point of view of the presumed direction of European civilisation towards **the** universal culture; it serves to legitimate European imperialism, not in the sense of being 'right' [...] but, nevertheless, in being the direction of nature and history and the precondition of an eventual, just, national and world order.*¹⁵ 19th century imperialism did by no means completely evaporate; it takes form in contemporary liberalism.¹⁶ Social and economic exploitation by the

⁹ Daston, Lorraine. Galison, Peter. "The Image of Objectivity". *Representations*, 40:1 (Sep 1992). p.82

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.120

¹² Daston, Lorraine. Galison, Peter. "The Image of Objectivity". *Representations*, 40:1 (Sep 1992): p.123

¹³ *Ibid.* p.81

¹⁴ Tully, James. *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume II Imperialism and Civic Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. p.27

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality".

Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013. p.6, 7

¹⁵ Tully, James. *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume II Imperialism and Civic Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. p.27

¹⁶ Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality".

Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013. p.5

west is still happening in non-western countries today, labelled under the liberalist 'equality' of the global market.¹⁷

To apply this coloniality perspective to Daston and Galison's *The Image of Objectivity* a bit more, I equate this text to another; Nell Irvin Painter's book *The History of White People* (2011). Here Painter describes racial history and its implications on science from a perspective of white people. Comparing these two history texts revealed a particular commonality in timeframe, as Painter describes how light-skinned people felt the need to differentiate the white race already during medieval times.¹⁸ Throughout this time but prominent in the 18th century, whiteness and symbols of whiteness became a beauty ideal which translated itself to science; in research contents and its subsequent results.¹⁹ White western society wanted to find any scientific (read: *objective*) proof of biological superiority behind their fixation.²⁰ Western scientists spent centuries attempting and reattempting, having ambiguous implications on scientific 'truths', while the fact that race is but a social construct has been, and continues to be established.²¹ While trying to find scientific evidence to support this, the white beauty ideal translated into the science itself and contributed to whiteness becoming culturally equivalent to intelligence and objective reasoning and thus; truth.²² Western institutions of knowledge production became synonymous with objectivity.

*'Western(-style) education and knowledge production is viewed as neutral while non-western intellectuals advocating decoloniality are put aside as biased or sensitive.'*²³

Everything other than the expediting of 'modernity/coloniality'²⁴ is seen as biased and emotional; contaminated with feelings. This colonial manner of viewing objectivity is recognisable everywhere, even at the University of Amsterdam. Upon judging my essay on 'black feminism vs. white feminism' my professor signed my work as '*too much like an opinion-piece*' and argued me to remain more 'neutral'.²⁵ In *Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality* (2013) Nelson Maldonado-Torres acknowledges that when anything decolonial comes into contact with western modernity, it is met with what he calls 'decadent responses' in attempt to delegitimize

¹⁷ Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality".

Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013. p.17

¹⁸ Painter, Nell Irvin. *The History of White People*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011. p.39

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.43

²⁰ Painter, Nell Irvin. *The History of White People*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011. p.59

²¹ Applebaum, Barbara. *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011. p.8

²² Painter, Nell Irvin. *The History of White People*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011. p.70

²³ Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality".

Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013. p.6, 9

²⁴ Modernity and coloniality are closely associated according to Maldonado-Torres. So closely, in fact, that he uses the term 'modernity/coloniality' to symbolise their synonymity and inextricability.

²⁵ Jonkhout, Rosanne. "Decolonising the white artist's practice: Along the lines of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Nelson Maldonado-Torres". Rosanne Jonkhout website (Jul 2017), Rosannejonkhout.com (accessed December 29, 2017). p.1

decoloniality.²⁶ White westerners can go as far as becoming violent in order to protect this status quo.²⁷

If everything that is decolonial is not neutral, the conclusion can be made that whatever is objective must be white western modernity. As a term originated out of coloniality, instead of it being synonymous with truth, objectivity is henceforth synonymous with coloniality. Now that one knows that objectivity is in need of decolonisation, it becomes possible to think on how to go about this.

The contemporary critical art image

After discussing objectivity in terms of the *scientific* image, it will now be linked to critical art by way of Ariella Azoulay's notion of the photograph. In *What is a photograph? What is photography?* (2010) Azoulay provides us with a context of how we work with, and regard objectivity in relation to the photograph/photography. Azoulay describes, whereas 19th century western institutions of knowledge production put the mechanically-obtained image on a pedestal, nowadays they view photographs as highly problematic. A photograph is considered subjective, a certain perspective.²⁸ The most forgiving example to describe this is by way of photojournalism. Richard Mosse mentioned in an interview that photojournalism is not a reflection of true events.²⁹ Instead, photojournalism is supposed to act as an emblematic representation of its subject matter, and to accomplish this, images are often staged or embellished. This aspect of the image as 'biased' is a similar issue to what the illustrator in Daston and Galison's text ran into.

Both images are problematic for the alterations that had to be made to make them more symbolic, generalized or illustrative. They therefore show an individual's perspective on what illustrates this certain event, and are thus not objective. The same can be said for artworks; in some way they *always* represent certain choices made by the artist. Especially critical art images are there to transmit some sort of information. To make sure this message arrives, images are chosen, designed or edited in some way, which is a hugely different praxis compared to the image from 19th century objectivity ideals, and more towards the highlighting power of the 17th and 18th century illustrator. Then there is an added departure from the idea of objectivity in photojournalism and critical art images, as they are often inextricably accompanied by text:

'In the press, and in archives in general, photographs are shown or stored as reference to an event, and are thenceforth brought out and replicated time and again

²⁶ Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality". Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013. p.5

²⁷ Ibid. p.11

²⁸ Azoulay, Ariella. "What is a photograph? What is photography?". *Philosophy of Photography*, 1:1 (2010): p.9

²⁹ FRIEZE. "Richard Mosse: The Impossible Image." Vimeo (May 2013) vimeo.com (accessed January 5, 2017).

*in the simple and problematic signifying relations attested to by the language of captions common in archives like 'refugees', 'expulsion' or 'torture'.*³⁰

Titles, references, captions, headers, tags, explaining tour guides, etc., all influence the information one processes when looking at an image. The photograph then fully becomes the illustrator of Daston and Galison's text; photography is too influenced by human agency to be objective. In the meantime, objectivity as goal now seems to slip away from view. However, Azoulay does not see this as a bad thing, these referents can help one to shift the attention to parts of the photograph that would be otherwise overlooked.³¹

Azoulay provides us with another perspective in her intention to move away from the photographer/viewer dualism (what Azoulay calls the inside/outside relation) and presents an ability of the photograph/photography that is generally overlooked. Azoulay argues that to force objectivity onto photography and thereafter rejecting it for being too open for interpretation, is to imply that it needs to be flawless. Azoulay argues it would be a shame to dismiss the method completely for not being objective enough, as this would ignore its rich substance.³²

Azoulay asserts that a photograph can never be objective because it establishes three positions when it reaches the viewer's eye; the photographer, what is photographed and the one responsible for the photograph's settings. Thus, a photograph already has three inherent narratives instead of the one narrative that western liberalism commands. However, Azoulay insists it is not that the photograph is unreliable because it does not contain the 'one uniform truth'; this multi-narrative is the photograph's strength. This way of viewing the photograph moves it out of a space of unreliability and into a space where it is allowed to be a multifaceted hotbed of information. Azoulay argues that the photographic image is always more than it portrays; it holds an array of individual, social, economic and environmental worlds. At the same time Azoulay claims it is also always less than it portrays; it can never represent a full story and will therefore never do any of the three positions justice.³³ Still, Azoulay's interpretation would mean that the photograph has incredible strength as it places different agents on equal footing; the person behind the camera is no longer the sovereign. Because photography can never conform to 'one uniform truth' if it already houses three truths, it can be seen as something inherently decolonial; it resists western liberalism of one grand narrative.

Deriving from *Citizenship Beyond Sovereignty*, it does so in yet another way. Azoulay involves a political aspect of the photograph, namely 'visual citizenship'. Azoulay insists that the image has the power to resist social or economic inequality

³⁰ Azoulay, Ariella. "What is a photograph? What is photography?". *Philosophy of Photography*, 1:1 (2010): p.9

³¹ Azoulay, Ariella. "What is a photograph? What is photography?". *Philosophy of Photography*, 1:1 (2010): p.10

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. p.12

by becoming photography's civic subject.³⁴ And the best part; everyone can be a citizen of photography:

*'Neither a local, sectarian or national politics nor a politics of identity, photography remains part of the res publica of the citizenry and is or can become one of the last lines of defence in the battle over citizenship for those who still see citizenship as something worth fighting for.'*³⁵

Photography can perhaps not provide individuals with conventional citizenship, but a different kind of citizenship; the citizenry of photography. When lacking in 'human rights' or a passport, photography makes their existence, their being-human, known. In this way photography can be a weapon that may not fire, but aim at where conventional citizenship fails.³⁶

Azoulay provides us with the knowledge that the image, besides the threefold narrative, can contain a certain political demand, a claimed space for those who are disenfranchised. Azoulay's theory on the photograph is a clear departure from objectivity/coloniality and therefore possesses promising features for decoloniality.

Objective coloniality in art

By analysing Azoulay's theory of the contemporary art image to Richard Mosse's *The Enclave* it will be put to the test whether it is truly decolonial.

Richard Mosse is an Irish conceptual documentary photographer. His work *The Enclave* is a video-installation consisting of six large screens, floating in a darkened room. The images on these screens vary. Some show the same footage, suddenly change footage, or turn black.

The images often portray soldiers and war-affected scenes in Congo. The work is shot with a 16mm infrared film, which turns all green colours to different hues of pink. This infrared film has been used since WWII to discern soldiers' camouflage from greenery.³⁷ At the same time, the pink -a colour usually associated with softness- contradicts the harsh images of war-zones.

In *The Enclave*, Richard Mosse drifts between the role of the illustrator and the scientist. There is a clear influence of documentary photography, as Mosse captures an event in a way that echoes of noninterventionism; he is never in the images himself, there is no narration, no storyline. Mosse lets the images speak for themselves. Meanwhile, he did edit the images in a certain order. Even the choice to have no storyline tells a certain story. All of Mosse's choices made *The Enclave* the way it is, as does its consequent placement; exhibition, projection or transmission.

³⁴ Azoulay, Ariella. "Citizenship Beyond Sovereignty: Towards a Redefinition of Spectatorship". Documents of Contemporary Art. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013. p.133

³⁵ Ibid. p.133

³⁶ Azoulay, Ariella. "Citizenship Beyond Sovereignty: Towards a Redefinition of Spectatorship". Documents of Contemporary Art. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013. p.133

³⁷ FRIEZE. "Richard Mosse: The Impossible Image." Vimeo (May 2013) vimeo.com (accessed January 5, 2017).

Azoulay's image elevates the agency of multiple individuals and aspects of the image besides that of the photographer.³⁸ *The Enclave* then, does not just portray what Mosse decided to portray; the individuals (Congolese citizens and soldiers) portray a certain self as well as political struggles and its environment. Agents include the Congolese government, remnants of its colonialist history with Belgium, its affiliations with western countries today, and many other aspects. The photograph does not necessarily hold them all responsible, but it implicates, or at the very least acknowledges inequality. Elevating to include all these multiple narratives in one image seems a decolonial act. Still, Azoulay's potentials for photography fall short to be a decolonial method for critical art images. It does so in two different, but equally pressing ways: 'white complicity' and 'white validation'.

Azoulay successfully maps out potentialities of decoloniality in the two discussed texts on the photograph/photography. However, and unfortunately, they stay in the realm of potentialities. The image has the *potential* to provide a platform for a diverse set of narratives, but still the most renowned art spaces are in the west; they are largely managed by white people; they are occupied by white artists substantially more than artists of colour. The social engagement of *The Enclave* and comparative artworks are well-intended. However, this creates space for misrepresentation and generalization and stereotyping of the 'other'. All the while, the actual subjects of the critical artworks are left disenfranchised.

One could argue *The Enclave* does more harm than good. With this famed work, Mosse signifies a larger trend in the art-world of white people extracting goods from people of colour and/or non-western spaces. A lot of artworks in contemporary art spaces express criticality towards social and economic inequality, yet the ones on the receiving end of the inequality are rarely to never the recipient of the success of a work.³⁹ As I described in *The sterility in critical art*, artworks like *The Enclave* did substantially little to nothing for the situation in Congo, but did aid in a trend of extraction of materials that generated a lot of profit for the west.⁴⁰ Mosse being able to make *The Enclave* comes from a place of social and economic privilege. Mosse could have chosen to collaborate with a Congolese artist or cinematographer, but instead enlists the help of Ben Frost and Trevor Tweeten, two white men. Mosse and similar white artists thereby fall short in making a truly decolonial image. Even though *The Enclave* harmonises sufficiently with Azoulay's demands of the image, *The Enclave* merely *performs* inclusivity, but does not embody it. Azoulay makes a false assumption that the equality created by the photograph can be wielded just as equally. In truth, Mosse and *The Enclave* exhibit white complicity; the agency of a white person in furthering coloniality.

³⁸ Azoulay, Ariella. "What is a photograph? What is photography?". *Philosophy of Photography*, 1:1 (2010): p.10

³⁹ Jonkhout, Rosanne. "The sterility in critical art". Rosanne Jonkhout website (Feb 2017), Rosannejonkhout.com (accessed June 25, 2017). p.5

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.6

*'What is of specific interest about white complicity is the claim that white people can reproduce and maintain racist practices even when, and especially when, they believe themselves to be morally good.'*⁴¹

Azoulay argues another potential for photographs; they gift identity to those who are without one or who are forgotten. Azoulay involves a socio-political/civil contract that photography is able to possess as deviating from the aesthetic judgement she distinguishes from Susan Sontag, or compared to the merely mechanical abilities it can possess in science.⁴² However, and this is my main point, the problem is that when all people involved in the decision-making on which artwork gets to be shown are white, and the artists are white, therefore means it is white people that have to gift this citizenship.

*'The colonized have to continually pay to the colonizer for allowing them to continue existing, which is why any demand from the colonized is considered to be a call for an undeserved "entitlement," if not a declaration of war.'*⁴³

What happens once Azoulay's involves the NGO in *Citizenship Beyond Sovereignty* is that white westerners become the dispenser of human rights. What remains of *The Enclave* is then a self-congratulatory form of coloniality masquerading as decoloniality and supposed diversity and inclusivity. Through *The Enclave*, Richard Mosse is exhibiting coloniality while still meeting the circumstances of Azoulay's image. Therefore, Azoulay's theory on photography is certainly not a sign of decoloniality.

Conclusion.

In this essay I have attempted to sketch out the way in which contemporary critical art adheres to objectivity as a sign of coloniality, and whether Ariella Azoulay's theory could aid in its decolonisation. objectivity proved to be a colonial ideal that was, and in many ways still is, considered synonymous with truth. The camera became a figurehead for this objectivity that still finds ways to articulate itself in contemporary critical art. Instead of being closer to truth, objectivity, as it turns out, is just one out of many methods. objectivity as method is not necessarily dangerous, but its continued association with 'truth' is.

Now, besides the art space, artists and their practice, I have analysed the implications of coloniality of the critical artwork. This research provided me with a new perspective towards articulating a decolonial artwork. Azoulay's theory starts out promising. It breaks from the western desire to abstract any- and everything to a single truth and paves the way for multiple narratives to have agency. The theory on

⁴¹ Applebaum, Barbara. *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011. p.3

⁴² Azoulay, Ariella. "Citizenship Beyond Sovereignty: Towards a Redefinition of Spectatorship". *Documents of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013. p.132

⁴³ Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality". *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013. p.15

images Azoulay discusses, works on the assumption that the different narratives depart from equal footing. Unfortunately, this is still not the case; there exist social and economic inequalities and privileges that allow certain bodies and deny others. In this way, Azoulay's theory on 'the photograph'/'photography' departs from a uniform, liberalist standpoint of assumed equality and difference-blindness. When used by a white artist, Azoulay's photograph merely exhibits white complicity and white validation, which are signs of coloniality.

It is for this reason I deliberately referred to Richard Mosse instead of *The Enclave* in this essay as much as possible, because even if we follow Azoulay's theory and assume Mosse creates agency for different factors portrayed in *The Enclave*, he is still able to have made this work out of a certain economic and social privilege. Mosse might not be a sovereign, but this privilege still attaches him to a certain responsibility that goes unaccounted for in Azoulay's texts of the photograph. This is the conclusion to be made then: the white artist's necessity to decolonise their own practice. The discovering of this unaccountability presently leaves no other alternative but to move responsibility from the artwork, back to the artist.

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