



The University of
Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM • CHINA • MALAYSIA

Trodd, Zoe (2013) Am I still not a man and a brother?:
protest memory in contemporary antislavery visual
culture. *Slavery and Abolition*, 34 (2). pp. 338-352. ISSN
1743-9523

Access from the University of Nottingham repository:

http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/2986/1/Trodd_Am_I_still.pdf

Copyright and reuse:

The Nottingham ePrints service makes this work by researchers of the University of Nottingham available open access under the following conditions.

This article is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution licence and may be reused according to the conditions of the licence. For more details see:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/>

A note on versions:

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the repository url above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

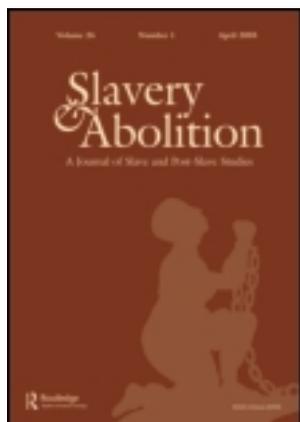
For more information, please contact eprints@nottingham.ac.uk

This article was downloaded by: [University of Nottingham]

On: 17 April 2014, At: 01:10

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fsla20>

Am I Still Not a Man and a Brother? Protest Memory in Contemporary Antislavery Visual Culture

Zoe Trodd

Published online: 31 May 2013.

To cite this article: Zoe Trodd (2013) Am I Still Not a Man and a Brother? Protest Memory in Contemporary Antislavery Visual Culture, *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 34:2, 338-352, DOI: [10.1080/0144039X.2013.791172](https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2013.791172)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2013.791172>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Versions of published Taylor & Francis and Routledge Open articles and Taylor & Francis and Routledge Open Select articles posted to institutional or subject repositories or any other third-party website are without warranty from Taylor & Francis of any kind, either expressed or implied, including, but not limited to, warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose, or non-infringement. Any opinions and views expressed in this article are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor & Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Taylor & Francis and Routledge Open articles are normally published under a Creative Commons Attribution License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>. However, authors may opt to publish under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> Taylor & Francis and Routledge Open Select articles are currently published under a license to publish, which is based upon the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial No-Derivatives License, but allows for text and data mining of work. Authors also have the option of publishing an Open Select article under the Creative Commons Attribution License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.

It is essential that you check the license status of any given Open and Open Select article to confirm conditions of access and use.

Am I Still Not a Man and a Brother? Protest Memory in Contemporary Antislavery Visual Culture

Zoe Trodd

This article examines the visual culture of the twenty-first century antislavery movement, arguing that it adapts four main icons of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century abolitionism for its contemporary campaigns against global slavery and human trafficking: the ‘Am I Not a Man and a Brother’ icon, the diagram of the ‘Brookes’ slave ship, the ‘Scourged Back’ photograph and the auction-block detail from the Liberator masthead. Finding some of the same limitations of paternalism, dehumanisation and sensationalism as dominated much of the first antislavery movement’s visual culture, the article nonetheless identifies a liberatory aesthetic and a protest memory in the antislavery imagery of several contemporary artists, including Charles Campbell and Romuald Hazoumè.

In September 2012, President Barack Obama gave the longest speech about slavery by any US President since Abraham Lincoln. Using the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation to issue a new executive order about slavery in federal contracts and announce a platform of new antislavery policies and funding, Obama said it was time to ‘draw strength from the movements of the past’. He ended the speech with a series of word pictures: ‘a man on a boat, casting the net with his bleeding hands . . . a woman, hunched over a sewing machine, glancing beyond the bars on the window . . . a young boy, in a brick factory, covered in dust, hauling his heavy load under a blazing sun . . . a girl, somewhere trapped in a brothel . . . [treated] like a piece of property’. Obama’s message to these enslaved individuals, he said, was: ‘we see you.’¹

Over the past decade, the American and British publics *have* seen these precise pictures: bleeding hands, hunched bodies, barred windows, dust-covered arms, meat-market brothels. In the twenty-first century, a new antislavery movement led by groups like Anti-Slavery International (ASI) in the UK and Free the Slaves (FTS) in the USA has developed a new antislavery visual culture: logos, photographs, paintings,

Zoe Trodd is Professor of American Literature, Department of American and Canadian Studies, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK. Email: zoe.trodd@nottingham.ac.uk

© 2013 The Author. Published by Taylor & Francis.

This is an Open Access article. Non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly attributed, cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way, is permitted. The moral rights of the named author(s) have been asserted.

sculptures and installations that depict a world of 27 million slaves, individuals forced to work for no pay, held against their will through violence or its threat, sometimes trafficked across borders for further exploitation.²

Obama's speech capped not only a decade of this proliferating antislavery imagery, but of sporadic attempts by activists and policy makers to do the very thing he suggests – engage with the antislavery past. ASI, which has its origins in the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society of the early nineteenth century, has published pamphlets that trace the history of abolitionism through to today and offer lessons that nineteenth-century abolitionism can teach contemporary activists. FTS, founded in 2001 as the American sister group to ASI, aids community self-liberations around the world and awards the Harriet Tubman Community Award annually to an organisation that works to end slavery and the Frederick Douglass Survivor Award to a former slave who helps to liberate others. Beyond these two organisations, the Atlanta-based Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives (FDFI), which Douglass' direct descendants founded in 2007, works against contemporary slavery and explains it as continuing the work of agitation that Douglass began. The D.C.-based Polaris Project, launched in 2002, takes its name from the North Star of Underground Railroad mythology. The San Francisco-based Not for Sale Campaign calls its newsletter 'The Underground', with a logo of rail tracks to cement the association with the Underground Railroad.

Often these two elements of historical memory and visual culture have come together in the contemporary movement, so that historical memory extends not just to Douglass and the abolitionists but to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antislavery imagery. Today's abolitionists depict not just the bleeding hands of Obama's speech but also bleeding backs that visually update the famous 'scourged back' *carte-de-visite* (CDV) of 1863, not just the hunched shoulders of Obama's speech but also crouching bodies that replicate the depiction of the slave ship Brookes, not just dust-covered, labouring arms but outstretched, supplicant hands that imitate the antislavery icon 'Am I Not a Man and Brother', not just girls treated like property but people displayed and sold at auctions that restage famous nineteenth-century slave auction scenes, including in the *Liberator* masthead.

Attempting to use the British and American eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antislavery visual culture as a model and a guide, contemporary artists and activists often repeat the same mistakes as their abolitionist forbears. As it has developed over the past decade, incorporating and adapting earlier abolitionist iconography, contemporary antislavery visual culture has reinforced the paternalism, dehumanisation, depersonalisation and sensationalism that marked the visual culture of the first abolitionist movement. With some exceptions, this is a visual culture that heroises the abolitionist liberator, minimises slave agency, pornifies violence and indulges in voyeurism.

The supplicant slave

Beyond the inevitable presence of chains, ropes, handcuffs and bars, much of today's antislavery visual culture uses four main tropes: the supplicant slave, the scourged

back, the auction block and the slave ship, all of which have their antecedents in influential nineteenth-century icons. Of these, the most common is the supplicant slave, which has somehow become the unofficial logo for contemporary antislavery, shared across groups that may part ways on definitions and solutions for slavery and trafficking but unite in their use of this imagery. The originating image dates to October 1787, when members of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade met and approved a design by for their group's seal. Designed and then distributed widely by Josiah Wedgwood's pottery firm, it featured a supplicant slave, kneeling with manacled legs and arms, hands raised beseechingly, and the slogan 'am I not a man and a brother?' The image was hugely popular. In Britain and the USA, abolitionists used the design on broadsides, pamphlet frontispieces and medallions, and citizens purchased decorative objects that featured the pleading black figure, from chinaware to cufflinks. Benjamin Franklin told Wedgwood that the design 'may have an Effect equal to that of the best written Pamphlet in procuring favour to those oppressed people', while leading abolitionist Thomas Clarkson claimed the design contributed to 'turning the attention of our countrymen to the case of the injured Africans and of procuring a warm interest in their favour'. The language here reveals the limitations of the image to ever truly answer the slave's question in the affirmative: it tries to 'procure favour', with its kneeling, pleading figure who asks humbly for pity and compassion, suffers passively in chains, poses no threat through rebellion or resistance, and would gratefully receive a generously bestowed freedom. The image invites not solidarity with the enslaved but paternalistic association with the morally righteous abolitionists who will answer the helpless captive's question by releasing his chains.³

In twenty-first century antislavery visual culture, the original Wedgwood figure has a second life. The Liverpool and Stoke-on-Trent performances of the multi-media play *Am I Not a Man And A Brother* (2008), which wove together past and present forms of slavery, were accompanied by publicity material featuring the original icon, while the Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site, a museum in Yonkers, New York, advertised its 2010 exhibit called 'Banish Modern Slavery' with an image that juxtaposed the original icon and a contemporary hand. Enhancing the visual rhetoric of humility even beyond its original inscription, in 2010 the artist Ken King issued an antislavery medallion, the sales of which will benefit the anti-sex trafficking group Shared Hope International, that features a woman in contemporary dress, her clothes half off, her feet bare, with the message: Am I Not a Daughter and a Sister? This slave cannot even reach out hands in supplication, instead buries her head despairingly in her knees, and King confirmed the enhanced emphasis on helplessness by adding to the medallion's back the words: 'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves' (from Proverbs 31).

As well as these explicit reuses of the original design, supplicant hands are raised again in updated form across contemporary imagery, reinscribing the association of passivity and gratitude. Hands are clasped together like those in the Wedgwood cameo or have palms open in appeal, sometimes are bound at the wrist by chains, rope, airline luggage labels, barcodes or price tags, sometimes lift to rest against walls, windows or bars, sometimes with a message ('help me' or 'stop slavery') written on the outstretched palms. The Singapore Inter-Agency Taskforce on

Trafficking in Persons (TiP) uses as its logo a raised red palm with a chain across the centre. In the UK, the group Stop the Traffik's logo is an outstretched hand with a key imprinted on the palm; the Anti-Slavery Day logo is a raised red palm with shackles around the wrist; and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's logo for its work on contemporary slavery features uplifted arms and hands. In the USA, the group Stop Modern Slavery's logo is a raised red palm imprinted on the outline of the globe; the short-lived group Let Us Go used as its logo a colour photograph of outstretched arms with clasped hands and shackled wrists; and the Texas Young Lawyer's Association promotes its resources on human trafficking with five raised, shackled arms. Even the organisation Made In A Free World, which has operated the survey SlaveryFootprint.org since 2011, where people can calculate how many slaves work to produce the goods they buy, has used not footprints to promote Slavery Footprint and National Human Trafficking Awareness Day but raised arms and hands in silhouette.

Beyond these logos, other groups turn to the supplicant slave to promote one-off events or publications. The Child Welfare League of America used a sketch of two uplifted arms bound by rope for its *Children's Voice* feature of July 2006 titled 'Slavery Undercover'; the World Bank Art Program promoted its 2008 exhibition 'Borderless Captivity' with a photograph by Pete Pattison of a supplicant hand, fingers bound in rags, reaching towards the camera; the cover design for Sibel Hodge's *Trafficked: the Diary of a Sex Slave* (2011) shows a woman with her face hidden, arms outstretched, and 'help me' written on her open palms; the promotional imagery for the slavery documentary *Not My Life* (2012) includes the silhouetted outline of a raised hand and arm; the University of Dayton, Ohio, advertised a 'social justice convention' called 'Stop Human Trafficking' in March 2012 with a drawing of two pleading arms bound by barbed wire; and Callahan McDonough's series of 2012 prints for the Not For Sale Campaign featured hands lifted high, bound by rope at the wrists.

Suggesting a focus on the original design's Christian message ('a brother'), the supplicant slave has been particularly popular with Christian antislavery groups and campaigns in the USA. The Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking distributes a poster of a raised arm (with the Proverbs text again about speaking up 'for those who cannot speak for themselves'); the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family use a logo of outstretched uplifted arms bound by a price tag for its antislavery work; the US branch of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate circulates a drawing of uplifted arms shackled with a tag that reads 'human trafficking'; and the Christian group G92 used an image of uplifted arms with wrists wrapped in chains to announce its Human Trafficking Prevention Month in January 2012. One of the most astonishingly paternalistic uses of the supplicant slave has come via activist Aaron Cohen, author of the unfortunately titled *Slave Hunter: One Man's Global Quest to Free Victims of Human Trafficking* (2009), who proclaims he has a 'Jubilee' dream, borrows from the Bible to explain his approach to slave liberation, and works with Christian Solidarity International to 'redeem' slaves in Sudan (purchase their freedom). As part of the publicity surrounding his self-proclaimed heroic quest to purchase the freedom of others, one photograph circulated in the media of

him holding a 'slave baby' he had 'redeemed' for \$50, the child's thin brown arm reaching upwards to touch Cohen's face in yet another echo of the Wedgwood gesture.

However, there *have* been a few exceptions to this revival of abolitionist paternalism. Though ASI uses a raised arm and hand for its logo, the hand is closer to a power fist, lifted upwards against a blood red background and clenched around a large key. This slave firmly grasps the key to his or her own freedom and raises an arm in victory rather than supplication. And Nicolas Lambert, an interdisciplinary artist in the Midwest, has gone even further in rejecting the original icon. Lambert produces large silkscreens with anti-corporate, prisoner rights and migrant rights themes, including one in 2010 that adapted the fonts and phrasing of an 1851 abolitionist broadside about the Fugitive Slave Act to warn migrant workers in Arizona about police. In 2012, he made the one-colour silkscreen 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother REDUX', which replaces the original figure with a slave beating a slave master. The master lies prostrate, a whip coiled on the ground by his side as the slave steps on his chest and lifts an arm – not to plead but to bring down a stick. More than 200 years after Wedgwood's slave knelt down, someone finally imagined him standing up.

The scourged back

After the supplicant slave, the second most commonly revived trope of antislavery visual culture is the whipped back. Most famously in the nineteenth century, this image circulated as a CDV photograph called 'The Scourged Back', which showed a slave identified only as Gordon with a back scarred from whippings. He had escaped from Mississippi, reached the Union camp at Baton Rouge, enlisted in the Union Army, and was photographed by itinerant photographers McPherson and Oliver in March 1863. Abolitionists circulated copies of the image and *Harper's Weekly* published a woodcut version on 4 July 1863. A journalist for the *New York Independent* demanded that 100,000 copies of the photograph be distributed across the USA, because it 'tells the story in a way that even Mrs. Stowe cannot approach, because it tells the story to the eye'.⁴

The photograph was the latest and most widely circulated in a long line of abolitionist images that depicted violence against the slave body. In their pamphlets and newspapers, abolitionists published prints of ritual violence, which risked dehumanisation within what Karen Halttunen has termed an abolitionist 'pornography of pain'. Viewers encountered slavery's violence as a spectacle within which – as one abolitionist, Sarah Grimké, put it – 'the speechless agony of the fettered slave may unceasingly appeal to the heart'. Most often the scenes showed whippings; slaves flogged with whips and paddles, or branded, sometimes naked, sometimes hanging from trees by their wrists, and often surrounded by observers who gaze at the victims' bare backs, exposed buttocks and breasts. As Jacqueline Goldsby has argued, this 'iconography of the black slave in painful distress' helped forge an aesthetic that 'conferred narrative value on the wounded or otherwise defiled black body'. The 'Scourged Back' photograph extended this iconography one stage further, so that the slave's body is not only a spectacle but a whole story. Slavery's ritual violence is inscribed on the slave's

body, a story for all to read and understand. No one apparently sought Gordon's personal account. *Harper's* simply labelled the photograph 'Typical Negro', the *Liberator* called him 'Louisiana Slave'. His scars were biography enough.⁵

In contemporary antislavery visual culture, the whipped back is exposed again as a symbol of slavery's brutality and as a stand-in for an enslaved person's whole experience. Photographs published in newspapers or by NGOs show backs scarred by traffickers who melted plastic onto the skin (in one photograph used by CNN in September 2012 for a report on Eritrean slaves in the Sinai desert) or scourged by slave holders' whips (in a photograph of a sugarcane cutter in Brazil by Ricardo Funari, taken in 2009, used in the press and on a bookcover in 2011). When The No Project, based in Greece, produced an installation about slavery in the West African cocoa farming area in 2011 it featured six photographs of a child slave's back, scarred from beatings, accompanied by the written message: 'when you eat chocolate you have my blood in your mouth'. As with Gordon, this slave's story and body is offered up for viewer consumption (the message suggesting that we literally eat his body). His scars are slavery's inscription on his body; a readable, consumable narrative.

The scourged back imagery has also extended to several manipulated photographs of women with words, wounds or barcodes on their backs, the scars of the original CDV updated as messages or coded lines that brand individuals as property and tell slavery's story. In 2005, the Vietnamese Alliance to Combat Trafficking launched its Not for Sale campaign with a series of images released online and featured in the US State Department's 'Trafficking in Persons Report' of 2006. The series consisted of colour and black-and-white photographs of women's backs inscribed with the words 'Not for Sale', their faces turned slightly sideways and hidden from full view. In 2007, the Brazilian government inscribed a different message ('be wary') on a woman's back and issued the photograph as part of an antislavery awareness campaign. In 2012, photographer Andrea Waldrop contributed a series of photographs to the Not for Sale campaign of a woman's back with the words 'Help Me' apparently inscribed in blood, and that same year, Keri Mills finished *Meat: Not for Sale*, a composite photo series about against human trafficking that includes one image of a woman's back cut open to expose the flesh, her status marking her as raw meat.

By 2010, barcodes accompanied these words and wounds on women's backs. Buy Art Not People, an initiative that engages artists to create artwork, with sales proceeds going to anti-trafficking organisations, issued a Call for Artists in 2010 that featured an altered photograph of an individual's back imprinted with a barcode. That same year, the Not for Sale campaign distributed a poster featuring a close-up black-and-white photograph of a woman's neck marked with a barcode and price. In 2011, Amnesty International issued a photographic poster depicting a woman's back with a barcode where a bra strap would be and the instruction to 'stop slavery', while the US group Stop Slavery used an altered photograph by Ira Gelb titled 'Not for Sale' of a woman's back imprinted with a barcode and the word 'SLAVE'. In January 2013, the *Orlando Sentinel* featured a painting that was exhibited at the Florida Awareness Day (an anti-trafficking initiative) of a woman's back with a barcode branded on, freshly bleeding.

One artist has even managed to combine the scourged back with the Am I Not a Man image, offering perhaps the very worst of contemporary antislavery visual culture. In 2012, a California-based photographer named Steven James Collins exhibited a series of 21 stylised colour photographs titled *Modern Day Slavery*, accompanied by facts and figures. The exhibition attracted a partnership with FDFI and toured the USA as a travelling exhibition. In one photograph, a black man stands with vacant eyes and a blank expression, his head bowed, shackles round his neck, rain or sweat glistening in rivulets down his naked, muscled chest. In another, the same model, with the same empty eyes and naked chest, raises shackled hands in an 'Am I Not a Man' gesture. In a third, the model stands and reveals a muscular back covered in bleeding scars. And in a fourth, the same scourged back is on display while the man kneels, shackled, one arm and hand outstretched pleadingly – here managing to ask 'Am I Not a Man?' *and* reveal the Scourged Back. Confirming the white emancipatory fantasy behind the installation, a fifth photograph is of Aaron Cohen blowing his horn of Jubilee, while a host of black individuals celebrate this white man's announcement of freedom.

This category of imagery brands or inscribes individuals' experiences onto their backs. But as with the supplicant slave imagery, there is the occasional exception. In 2012, The No Project released a poster titled 'Wearing Her Story', made by Bulgarian artist Ismini Black. A woman's dress hangs alongside meat carcasses, as though in a butcher's window. There are letters cut out of the dress, and the missing fabric spells out 'name is', 'I was bought', 'sex industry', 'piece of meat'. The many other words are impossible to piece together, so the effect is of jumbled fragments. By naming this whole sub-genre of imagery – wearing the story images – the poster acknowledges the process by which the scarred, inscribed or branded bodies of enslaved individuals become symbols of slavery's horrors. And by replacing a woman's actual body with just her dress, the poster refuses to inscribe slavery's story onto her. She might wear her story like a removable, changeable item of clothing, but it is not written forever into her flesh as the last word on her total identity. Instead her story remains impossible to grasp and, therefore, consume, unlike the exposed chunks of meat alongside which it hangs. We are given a few words, mere 'marks, traces, possibles, and probabilities', as Douglass described the story of Madison Washington, and even these are traced through absence – the words are cut-outs, missing pieces of the dress, not letters inscribed onto a surface. More than 150 years after Gordon exposed his back to photographers, someone finally refused to display the scars.⁶

The auction block

Connected in theme to some of the scourged back imagery is a third trope of contemporary antislavery visual culture: the auction block. As activists circulate images of barcodes branded onto flesh and meat hanging from hooks, they also develop the wider context for these images – flesh for sale – and depict twenty-first century auction blocks. An auction scene featured in the first *Liberator* masthead, designed by David

Claypoole Johnson in 1831 and used by William Lloyd Garrison until 1850, which depicted a slave mother at an auction, standing beneath a sign for a 'Horse Market' as an auctioneer raises a hammer and his podium announces: 'Slaves, Horses and Other Cattle to be Sold'. Hammatt Billings' redesigned masthead, used from 1850 until the last issue of the newspaper in 1865, also featured an auction scene, with an auctioneer selling a child slave beneath a sign promising: 'Slaves, horses & other cattle in lots to suit purchaser'.⁷

Both scenes, with their crowds of onlookers, reveal what Saidiya Hartman calls slavery's 'obscene theatricality'. If a slave society has to *demonstrate* enslavement, relying on the power of spectacle to create its prevailing order, as Joe Lockard has argued, then the auction block was a public demonstration of the slave's chattel status – a spectacle of submission. Abolitionists, however, repeated the spectacle. After Garrison's first masthead, they published numerous tableau illustrations of slave auctions, many of which could be mistaken for theatrical performances, and on October 23, 1848, abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher even conducted an auction sale of two sisters who were about to be sold for exportation to New Orleans, believing his congregation needed to glimpse the living presence of slavery – to become an audience at a real auction. Beecher's excited audience members contributed enough money to buy the sisters' freedom.⁸

The antislavery auction block returned in 2008, when Stop the Traffik advertised a slave auction in the centre of London. Signs read 'Human Sale, Just a Short Walk Away' while fliers promised a 'Great Selection of Humans New & Used'. By 2010, campaigners had gone one step further and inserted actual people into the performance. The Salvation Army in South Africa put nine children of different ethnicities and ages in boutique windows in a Johannesburg shopping mall. They stood behind glass for 30-minute intervals with a banner behind them that read: 'Sale. 3–6 year olds. 7–10 year olds. 11–14 year olds'. The same year, the Task Force on Human Trafficking in Israel opened an installation called 'Woman to Go', featuring real women sitting or standing on blocks behind glass in a shopping centre in Tel Aviv, each with a price tag and barcode around her wrist.

The auction block has returned in imagery as well as performance. One of its first returns came in 2005, when the Union of Finnish Feminists launched an anti-trafficking campaign called 'Fresh Meat'. Print and outdoor advertisements showed a photograph of 14 young women packed tightly into a supermarket refrigeration case and offered for sale, a sign on the tiled walls promising 'fresh meat daily'. The following year, the National Domestic Workers Movement in Mumbai imagined the new auction block not as a supermarket refrigerator but a toy store. It published a full-page advertisement in several fashion magazines that featured a child encased in packaging and standing on a shelf for sale alongside dolls in similar packaging. The labelling on his box notes that he is Akash, 'the boy with a passion for work'. At the bottom of the page, the organisation explains that 6 out of 10 child domestic workers are put up for sale in India. A few years later, in 2009, Save the Children tried a visually similar approach in a national exhibition that toured Australia. Colour photographs show groups of child workers and child soldiers. Within each

frame, one child sits or stands inside a glass case, as though in a museum. The idea was to suggest that child soldiers and workers should be historic specimens only and the campaign's tag line was 'we must make this a thing of the past'. But the effect is to put the children on display, like the Finnish women for sale in a supermarket display case and the Indian child for sale inside a doll's box. This effect is even more pronounced in another photograph in the series that shows a line of prostitutes sitting in front of their brothel rooms. One is encased in glass, labelled 'child prostitute' and raised above the others on a stool, as though up for bidding.

Like the scourged back imagery, these updated auction scenes put slaves on display, reaching for shock value but risking sensationalism and objectification. Just as nineteenth-century abolitionists put the slave back on the auction block in their visual culture, so today's activists make us onlookers at a spectacle where the slave is centre-stage but powerless, audience members at performance orchestrated by a slave-trader. Perhaps just one exception exists within this third category of images. In 2012, MTV's End Exploitation and Trafficking Foundation opened an exhibition in Hanoi that included an installation by Doan Hoang Kiensaid of crystal bottles containing pieces of hair from 120 different people. Each bottle was labelled with codes for sale. Reminiscent of Lorna Simpson's 1990s installations that used different body parts – mouths, hair braids, necklines – to resist the commodification and consumption of the black female body, the installation refused the idea that a human being can ever be truly bought, sold, traded or owned, offering for sale only a small, replaceable part. Nearly 200 years after the *Liberator's* slave mother stepped onto the auction block, someone finally acknowledged that she could not be bought.

The slave ship

The last major trope in contemporary antislavery visual culture is the slave ship. Here campaigners borrow explicitly and implicitly from the famous cutaway diagram of the 'Brookes' slave ship, which used rows of tiny black figures to show the cramped conditions of the Middle Passage. Designed by British abolitionists in 1788, it was widely distributed and hung in homes and public spaces across Britain and the USA. Intended to depict the horror of human beings packed like sardines, the diagram reinforced notions of black passivity with its supine, motionless figures; sterilised the journey with its organised, orderly rows that do not depict violence, death, nudity, filth, vermin, sickness; standardised experience and denied individuation with its lack of any distinguishing features for the slaves.⁹

Apparently unaware of the diagram's reductive qualities, contemporary abolitionists revisit it for the twenty-first century, making new contributions to what Marcus Wood terms 'the horrible flotsam and jetsam that the Brookes now tows along with it'. In 2007, the organisation CHASTE (Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking Across Europe) distributed two posters based on the original diagram, where the slave ship became a van and a contemporary speed boat, while artist Tess Cooling issued a calligraphy print titled 'Words On A Slave Ship' that added quotes from contemporary campaigners to a piece of the original diagram, with proceeds from the print's sales going to

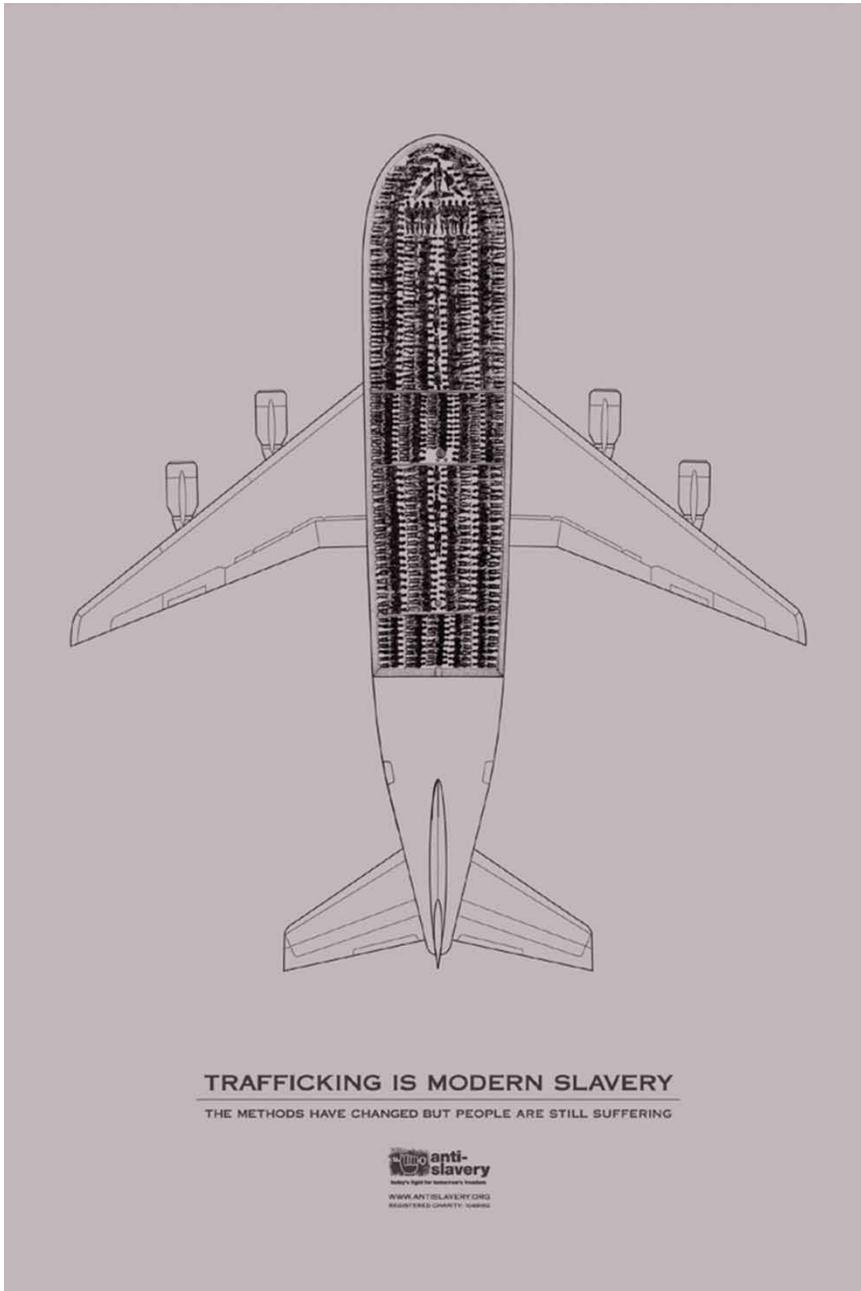


Figure 1. Anti-Slavery International, *Trafficking is Modern Day Slavery*, 2007.

CHASTE. That same year, ASI released two cutaway diagrams of a plane's cargo hold packed with rows of tiny black figures, accompanied by the message: 'the methods have changed but people are still suffering' (Figure 1). And in 2010, the Mexican American cartoonist Felipe Galindo made an editorial illustration that used the original Brookes

image, labelled XVI–XIX Centuries, above a contemporary truck with rows of men, women and children of different races in supine position, labelled XXI Century. Even more recently, the CNN Freedom Project (launched in 2011) used graphics that – perhaps unwittingly – echo the Brookes diagram, showing tiny black stick-figures packed together in rows to represent the numbers of people trafficked or enslaved today.¹⁰

Beyond these direct references to the Brookes diagram, artists and activists also circulate a host of Middle Passage and Brookes allusions. Some of these overlap with the auction block imagery: for example, in 2006 a Danish anti-trafficking organisation called Reden International produced a photograph called ‘Stop Trafficking’ of 10 women lying tightly packed against one another in Styrofoam packaging marked ‘Fresh Meat’. There is no background of a store or display case, just the rows of ordered, faceless bodies shot from above. Here the emphasis is less on the sale and display of the meat and more on the tightly packed bodies, recalling the Brookes’ interior. Similarly, in 2011, the Salvation Army World Service published an advertisement about slavery in the USA today that depicted women and children inside bottles of gherkins on a store shelf. Again, absent any price tags or commercial signage, the emphasis is on the tiny hunched figures squeezed tight into their neat rows. And at least one image of this kind managed to bring together all four major antislavery tropes while still emphasising the process of a new Middle Passage that packages people for sale, consumption or transportation: in 2009, the Luxembourg Government’s anti-trafficking campaign included a photograph of a naked woman packed neatly under tight plastic wrap (slave ship), marked by a barcode as a slave (scourged back), arms raised pleadingly (suppliant slave), placed on the glass counter of a supermarket (auction block).

Other artists abandon the orderly rows of the Brookes, but retain its emphasis on confined space. In 2008, Amnesty International staged a guerrilla performance piece called ‘Frau im Koffer’ (‘Woman in Suitcase’) in several German airports where a contortionist was squeezed into a small glass suitcase with a transport label that read ‘Stop Human Trafficking’ and tossed onto a moving conveyor belt in baggage claim. Welsh artist Glenn Ibbitson’s series of paintings titled *Consignment* (2009) show a naked man folded up into a small box, with a barcode layered on top of each canvas. Natasha Leto’s photographic series *Sale is Over* (2011) for the Not for Sale Campaign includes a photograph of an anonymous woman being forced into a small box for transport. And David Derr’s assemblage ‘Sex Slavery’ (2011) packed naked Barbie dolls haphazardly into a small bird cage, their arms and legs akimbo and poking through the bars.

One artist, however, has revived the Brookes diagram but refused to replicate its de-individualising emphasis on rows of passively transported bodies. Romuald Hazoumè, an artist from the Republic of Bénin, first exhibited his installation *La Bouche du Roi* (1997–2000) in Bénin in 1999. The work was purchased by the British Museum and exhibited in the UK in 2007 as part of the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade. When exhibited in 1999, it comprised 304 masks made from black plastic petrol cans laid out in the shape of the Brookes slave ship, each can representing a person. From 2005 onwards, the installation connected the Brookes’ journey to

contemporary slave passages by including a film about the experiences of people enslaved in the industry that smuggles petrol between Nigeria and Benin. Hazoumè restored individuality to the slaves on board by also including the sounds of people speaking in the indigenous languages of Benin, as well as beads, shells, spices, feathers and small wooden figures related to the customs of the Yoruba people, which individualised each mask and insisted on the survival of cultural identities beyond the Middle Passage. More than 200 years after the Brookes first opened its top-deck to reveal the tiny people packed inside, someone had seen their faces.

New directions

These four main tropes of antislavery visual culture extend even to the US government's official publications on global slavery and human trafficking, which since the election of President Obama have harnessed historical memory and adapted historic iconography. Since 2001, the State Department has published an annual 'Trafficking in Persons (TiP) Report'. The first reports of 2001 and 2002 had no images at all, the 2003 report had a few photographs of children in the opening pages, and the reports of 2004–2008 featured a range of non-descript photographs of labouring slaves. Then suddenly in 2009, the first TiP report by the Obama administration's State Department drew on historical memory for its visual depictions of contemporary slavery. We see slaves picking cotton for the first time and a heavier emphasis than before on black slaves. The first ever TiP report quotation from Douglass (a passage about life in slavery from the *Narrative*) sat alongside the story of Hadizatou Mani, a woman born into hereditary slavery in Niger who liberated herself and became an antislavery activist, accompanied by a photograph of Mani with Michelle Obama. In 2010, the TiP report featured Douglass again, this time the famous 'struggle' passage from his 1857 West India Emancipation speech, on a page following the TiP Office's first ever supplicant slave image: a photograph by Enrico Dagnino from May 2009 of a Black Libyan man crouching, weeping and raising clasped hands upwards in an appeal for help. The same report also featured the TiP Office's first ever scourged back (with scars from boiling water). As confirmation of the Obama-era familiarity with nineteenth-century antislavery visual culture, a later page in the report juxtaposed two slavery documents, one a bill of sale from Virginia dated 1819, the other an official release of a man from bonded labour dated 2007.

The 2011 report demonstrated that same familiarity, printing a photograph of slavery-free sugar advertising by English merchants from the 1820s with an observation that this was a precursor to modern fair-trade labelling. And 2011 saw another supplicant slave – a Malaysian man behind bars, lifting handcuffed arms before his body – as well as the TiP report's first Brookes echo – a photograph shot from above of a room of supine, tightly packed slave bodies in Kuwait City. Finally, the most recent report, 2012, featured several more photographs of slaves picking cotton (including one of contemporary African slaves) and quoted Harriet Tubman for the first time in the report's history, pairing her words – 'Children if you are tired, keep going . . . if you want to taste freedom, keep going' – with a

photograph of contemporary child slaves sheltering from the rain. Demonstrating further familiarity with nineteenth-century history and imagery, the report included a photograph of the Emancipation Oak in Virginia, where the first public reading of the Proclamation took place, to a group of escaped slaves, and then featured two reward notices together under the heading ‘Then and Now’: a nineteenth-century notice for runaway slaves, and a notice from 2007 about returning an escaped Indonesian slave. Continuing to adapt nineteenth-century iconography, the report included a photograph of a slave with a barcode tattooed on the back of her neck as well as two other scourged back photographs of slaves scarred by whippings or scaldings, and another Brookes echo in a tightly cropped photograph shot from above of women packed close together en route to enslavement.¹¹

The TiP report has journeyed from an image-less, memory-less state to its current state of engagement with nineteenth-century figures and imagery. And though its use of the historic tropes means repeating their limiting paternalism, a few signs suggest that it might be journeying still onwards towards a different aesthetic. In the tradition of nineteenth-century former slaves who represented *themselves*, like Douglass with his many commissioned and self-directed studio photographic portraits, since 2009 the TiP report has included drawings by former slaves of their enslavements, liberations and lives, as well as photographs of former slaves performing plays or dances about their experiences. It has also tried to summon the unrepresented, unrepresentable voices of the past and present, ending the 2011 report with a photograph of a child labourer’s skeleton from 1665 and the observation that ‘this child’s story speaks across the centuries’, that we fight slavery for ‘those who deserve a real life, not an anonymous death – in honour of this child’s mute testimony from the grave’. Perhaps their engagement with nineteenth-century visual culture has offered the TiP report authors the kind of lesson that Luis CdeBaca described in his opening letter to the 2012 report. As the Ambassador in the Office to Monitor and Combat TiPs (appointed in 2009), CdeBaca insisted in 2012 that past voices tell us slaves are not ‘waiting helplessly for a rescuer, but are willing to take the chance to get out Our challenge as we face the 150th anniversary of Emancipation is to . . . apply history’s lessons to the modern crime’. In this spirit, perhaps the TiP office under CdeBaca, having now established its visual connections to nineteenth-century slavery, might build on its established protest connections to Douglass, Tubman, and the voices of anonymous millions who speak of agency not passivity, to offer a new visual culture in its remaining TiP reports of 2013–2016.¹²

Other artists have already applied history’s lessons, moving beyond any replication of nineteenth-century victimhood to a liberatory aesthetic. Like the post-2009 TiP reports with their drawings by former slaves, artists and activists have begun to emphasise self-representation. World Vision and PhotoVoice have sponsored photo-advocacy workshops for street children in Pakistan, Lebanon, Armenia and Romania, where at-risk children represent their own perspectives. A 2010 exhibit by photographer and artist Kay Chernush called *Bought and Sold* consisted of abstract large-scale images that she made after meeting with former slaves to hear their

stories. Chernush, who runs ArtWorks for Freedom, calls her canvasses re-imaginings and bases them on the slave narratives.

In the realm of sculpture and painting, this liberatory aesthetic includes the Freedom sculpture (2007) created by Haitian children and artists with Mario Benjamin from scrap metal and junk found in Port au Prince, Haiti, and unveiled at the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. The complex, angular structure responds to historic and contemporary forms of slavery in Haiti with its recycled chains, pikes, coils, masks, wheels and candlesticks. Sculptor John Soderberg has produced a sculpture called *Emergence* (2008), used by FTS as its 'Freedom Award' logo and trophy, that is a fully erect woman, one arm lifted in graceful motion, the other balanced behind her. Her outstretched arm is that of a dancer, not a supplicant slave. And Designers Against Child Slavery, a non-profit in Florida that networks artists from 20 countries to raise awareness and antislavery funds, has held three exhibitions (in 2010, 2011 and 2013) featuring dozens of artworks, with not a single supplicant arm, scarred back, auction block or slave ship anywhere in sight.

In the realm of installation, Jamaica-born Canadian artist Charles Campbell has exhibited *Transporter*, which he first produced for the 'Human Traffic: Past and Present' conference at Duke University in October 2011. A painting of sugar cane remnants is the backdrop to standing cardboard globes made of interlacing patterns of slave shackles, slave ships and migrating birds going in different directions, which Campbell has described as symbolic of forced migration. Campbell imprints two major visual symbols (the shackles from 'Am I Not a Man' and the slave ship) on his globe, instead of the imprinting slavery on the body (in the scourged back tradition). Where scars exist in the installation, they are in the sugar cane painting, the stalks abandoned after production on a ruined land, but not on slaves' bodies, which instead are represented by birds in flight.

As for photography, Lisa Kristine's photographs, featured in her *Slavery: The Book* (2010), are intimate, confrontational portraits that focus on faces and eyes. Where slaves turn their backs, it is to carry huge slates across their shoulders, not to display scars; slavery's story is contained in its burdens and labour, not in their flesh. Where Kristine features uplifted arms, they carry bricks; hands rise only in labour, not in supplication. Similarly, Tom Goldner's series about slavery in the fishing communities of Lake Volta, Ghana, titled *Photo for Freedom* (2011), includes stark, simple, black-and-white portraits of enslaved individuals who return the viewer's gaze with the self-contained, sometimes quizzical expressions of an equal.

Moving forward, artists and activists might take their lead from Chernush, Benjamin, Campbell, Kristine and Goldner, as well as from Nicolas Lambert with his 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother REDUX' silkscreen, Ismini Black with the 'Wearing Her Story' poster, Doan Hoang Kiensaid with his crystal bottles installation, and Romuald Hazoumè with *La Bouche du Roi*. Activists and artists should work to replace nostalgia with protest memory – memory of protest and memory used to protest. They should continue turning to the antislavery past, but seek there an aesthetic of freedom and engage in a radical *bricolage* that transforms ideas, images, language, cultural representations and political acts into a living protest legacy. They

should salvage a visual culture of slave rebellion and black activism, rather than slave passivity and white paternalism. Taking their lead from the handful of contemporary artists who *have* offered politically engaged memories that function as liberating counter-myths, today's antislavery artists should find a less abusive usable past. Learning lessons from the first antislavery movement's failures, successes, contradictions and unfinished work, they should forever forego the kneeling slave of the 'Am I Not a Man' medallion, a figure who stood tall long before Emancipation, who answered his own question again in Memphis in 1968 with banners that read 'I Am a Man', then again with a black power fist raised instead of supplicant hands – and who wonders disbelievingly of most contemporary antislavery imagery: am I *still* not a man?

Notes

- [1] 'Remarks by the President to the Clinton Global Initiative, September 25, 2012', White House Office of the Press Secretary.
- [2] For more on contemporary slavery, see Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd, and Alex Kent Williamson, *Modern Slavery* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2009).
- [3] Benjamin Franklin, 'To Josiah Wedgwood, May 15, 1788', Benjamin Franklin Collection and Papers (unpublished, Yale University); Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London: John W. Parker, 1839), 261. For more on the Wedgwood design, see Marcus Wood, *The Horrible Gift of Freedom: Atlantic Slavery and the Representation of Emancipation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), chapter 2.
- [4] Quoted in Cassandra Jackson, *Violence, Visual Culture, and the Black Male Body* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 14. For more on the 'Scourged Back' photograph, see Jackson, chapter 1, and Kathleen Collins, 'The Scourged Back', *History of Photography* 9.1 (1985): 43–5.
- [5] Karen Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture', *American Historical Review* 100.2 (1995): 303–34 (325); Sarah Grimké, in *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women* (New York: William S. Dorr, 1837), 14; Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 186.
- [6] Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, in *Autographs for Freedom* (Cleveland: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853), 176.
- [7] For more on the iconography of the slave auction, see Maurie D. McInnis, *Slaves Waiting for Sale: Abolitionist Art and the American Slave Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- [8] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17; Joe Lockard, *Watching Slavery: Witness Texts and Travel Reports* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).
- [9] For more on Brookes imagery, see Cheryl Finley, 'Committed to Memory: The Slave-Ship Icon and the Black-Atlantic Imagination', *Chicago Art Journal* 9 (1999): 2–21.
- [10] Wood, *The Horrible Gift of Freedom*, 277.
- [11] Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TiP Office), *Trafficking in Persons Report 2009* (Washington, DC: USDS, 2009), 35, 19, 20, 23, 24, 37, 38; TiP Office, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2010* (Washington, DC: USDS, 2010), 5, 4, 9, 33; TiP Office, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2011* (Washington, DC: USDS, 2011), 21, 31, 34; TiP Office, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2012* (Washington, DC: USDS, 2012), 20, 40, 6, 14, 19, 31, 24, 61, 16.
- [12] TiP 2011, 412; TiP 2012, 3. For slave drawings and performances, see TiP 2009, 20, TiP 2011, 32, 43, and TiP 2012, 12, 34, 43.