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(In)Visible Histories:

Postcolonial Histories of Gender and Sexuality Through the Lens of South African Visual Activism

By

VANESA MEDINA-GODOY

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the work of South African photographer and visual activist Zanele Muholi. It argues that what makes their visual project successful is its engagement with the multiple histories and discourses that inform Black queer identities and experiences in South Africa. To illustrate this point, I focus on a little-discussed image called ID Crisis *from 2003, a black and white photograph of a Black woman binding her breasts. Using this picture as a starting point, the article explores the ways in which Muholi's photography brings viewers into contact with transnational histories of Black queerness, from Western colonialism to Apartheid in South Africa. Throughout this discussion, I use the idea of (in)visibility as a guiding concept, understood as a simultaneous visibility and invisibility that allows Muholi to allude to several historical narratives without directly reproducing them. As such, it is this (in)visible articulation of history that allows Muholi to engage with Black queer histories and re-contextualise them from a Black queer perspective.*

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The question of queerness in Africa remains a contentious one, despite the recent boom in African scholarship, research, and activism around the topics of gender and sexuality. The history of lesbian and gay rights movements in Africa has been characterised by a complicated relationship with the West. Sexual rights circulate transnationally and their existence is closely linked to ideas of modernity and globalisation.[1] Western activism and academia have served as a starting point for discussions on gender and sexuality in an African context. Despite this, notions of queerness and queer identities remain ideas that are mostly informed by Western values and experiences. The concept of queer becomes potentially problematic, failing to acknowledge the different ways in which race, class, and nationality interact with gender and sexual identities around the world.

In South Africa, the work of photographer Zanele Muholi has become representative of a bourgeoning field of queer visual activism that seeks to challenge the lack of African perspectives in global discussions on gender and sexuality. Muholi's first visual project, *Only Half the Picture* (2002-2006), focused on the Black queer community in South Africa and offered an intimate peek into the world that queer and gender non-conforming individuals inhabit. Upon their first solo exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2004, Muholi's work gained both national and international recognition and made evident the need for more discussions around issues of race, gender, and sexuality in post-Apartheid South Africa. The 1996 South African constitution is famous for being the first in the world to explicitly protect gay and lesbian rights.[2] Yet, even today, queer individuals still find themselves marginalised, perceived as outsiders and not fully *African*. In 2009, the then South African Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana, walked out of an exhibition showcasing some of Muholi's photographs from *Only Half the Picture*. Xingwana justified her decision by calling the images immoral and pornographic, saying that they represented the opposite of "social cohesion and nation-building."[3] Images that displayed the semi-naked bodies of Black lesbians were considered too radical. By calling such pictures the opposite of nation-building, Xingwana became one of the many voices claiming homosexuality to be un-African.

Muholi's visual activism is a direct response to this misrepresentation of Black queer communities. Muholi uses photography for advocacy, to raise awareness of the challenges these communities face, and to create a Black queer visual history. In the last decades, the lack of representation for racial, gender, and sexual minorities has dominated debates around identity and cultural production around the world. Yet, even though it is true that Black gender non-conforming individuals have been historically subjected to systemic silencing and erasure, this does not mean that their existence has gone entirely unrecognised. Pumla Dineo Gqola notes that Black queer people can never be truly invisible. The hate and violence targeted towards them mark them as "highly visible manifestations of the undesirable."[4] As a visual activist, what sets Muholi's work apart is the complexity of its exploration of Black queer identities and experiences, going beyond the mere production of iconic images to consider the complex ways in which gender, sexuality, race, and nationality come together in an African historical and cultural context.

This article investigates the ways in which Muholi's images bring viewers into contact with transnational histories of Black queerness, from Western colonialism to Apartheid in South Africa. In particular, I focus on a little-discussed photograph taken in 2003 called *ID Crisis*. The image shows a semi-naked Black woman in the middle of a darkly lit room as she binds her chest with white strips of cloth. She looks intently at the bandages as the composition leads the viewer's eyes to the half-covered breasts. Critics praised Muholi's photographic series for its political engagement and message but have often dismissed the images as too disturbing to merit study on their artistic and aesthetic qualities.[5] Yet, photographs like *ID Crisis* make evident Muholi's expert use of the medium to craft intricate images that reflect on the experience of Black queerness. In its subject and composition, *ID Crisis* alludes to the complex history of Black female sexuality while avoiding direct references. Through this (in)visible articulation of history Muholi is able to navigate the variety of often contradicting narratives and histories that inform Black queer experiences. It is exactly because of this nuance and complexity that images like *ID Crisis* continue to warrant study.

Muholi's project necessarily leads to an inquest into what constitutes queer experience in an African context. In Western academia, queer has long been a concept characterised by indeterminacy and mutability. The idea of queerness represented a shift from established identities to practices and experiences primarily defined by their transgressiveness. However, it is this very indeterminacy that can make the concept potentially problematic, for queer is never completely unbiased. As Hiram Pérez has noted, there is a tendency towards anti-identitarianism in queer studies, a rejection of identity politics in favour of a "politics of difference" that often ends up catering to "the habits of the university's ideal bourgeois subject, among them, his imperial gaze, his universalism, and his claims to a race-neutral objectivity."[6]

The work of scholars like Pérez made evident the need to address issues of race and class in the context of queer studies. With the advent of queer of color critique in American academia, intersectional frameworks began to be used in the study of queerness.[7] African perspectives, however, remained largely absent. Queer studies and queer of color critique are both informed by Western values and experiences. They can often fail to acknowledge the ways in which race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality are experienced differently in the global South. The concept of queer carries within itself the legacy and history of Western activism and academia. Thus, discussions of queerness in Africa often entail a re-evaluation of the concept itself.

In recent years, scholars have sought to redefine queer to reflect the complicated ways race, sexuality, and nationality come together in African queer identities.[8] Queerness must not only acknowledge sexual diversity, but also the ways in which the history of race and colonialism inform notions of Black sexuality, and how that colonial history, in turn, affects the attitudes of post-colonial nationalisms towards gender non-conformity. This new critical queerness is reflected in Muholi's practice and involves the creation of alternative historiographies of queerness that look at sexual identities in the context of Black history and experience.

Scholars such as Anne McClintock, Sander Gilman, and Zine Magubane have noted how the legacy of colonial narratives on race and Black bodies have inevitably influenced the way we think about Black sexuality.[9] This racial stigmatisation that places Black bodies as deviant and degenerate has in turn informed post-colonial narratives on gender and sexuality. The work of Neville Hoad is particularly notable in this area, highlighting the need to explore the influence of colonial narratives and Western globalisation on the way homosexuality is perceived in Africa.[10] Indeed, discussions of homosexuality over the past decades have been characterised by narratives portraying it as un-African in an attempt to distance African culture from colonial notions of Black deviancy. At the same time, queer rights and activism are often perceived as foreign impositions and a possible new Western civilising mission.

By revisiting these histories of race and sexuality, Muholi's work allows viewers to explore their complexity and re-contextualise them from a Black queer perspective. A key aspect of their visual activism is the fact that Muholi is part of the Black queer community themself. As such, Muholi has always been concerned with the lack of Black queer voices and perspectives in mainstream culture and history. Muholi was born in 1972, at the height of Apartheid in South Africa. In 2002, Muholi co-founded the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) and it was through their work as an activist that they met many of those who would later feature in their photographs. This sense of community is what inspires Muholi to refer to the people they photograph as "participants" rather than "subjects," choosing to highlight collaboration and empowerment as crucial aspects of their practice.[11] In this way, Muholi's visual activism centres the Black queer subject and uses their perspective and experiences to re-frame the different histories of Black sexuality, from ethnography and colonial representations of the Black female body to Apartheid and the experience of institutional and hate-based violence.

BLACK BODIES AND FEMALE SEXUALITIES

One of the biggest challenges to Muholi's mission was reflected in the Lulu Xingwana incident of 2009. At the sight of naked Black women, the then Minister of Arts and Culture immediately thought of pornography and the long tradition of degrading images that presented Black bodies as specimens to be viewed and studied. Indeed, Black female sexuality exists within a complex social and historical context. As such, images of Black queer women cannot ignore the narratives that throughout history have defined how Black female bodies are meant to be displayed and consumed. Desiree Lewis points out that "sexuality is culturally mediated, and the body is a social signifier."[12] For Muholi, such cultural mediation is important and they are highly aware of the meanings and legacies invoked by pictures like *ID Crisis*, in which the Black female body is the main focus. The question, then, is how to address this complex history and racial stigma that Black bodies carry while producing positive images of Black queer representation.

ID Crisis' focus on a semi-naked female torso inevitably conjures up traditional ethnographic images of "native" women. The history of photography in Africa is filled with typological images of Black people, here presented as scientific specimens for study, classification, and collection. The development of ethnographic photography came with its own language and set of conventions to denote ideas of exoticism and primitivism. The typical female prototype involved a semi-naked woman with bare breasts, wearing beaded necklaces and bracelets or bound in colourful cloth. In Muholi's photograph, there is a clear parallel with these earlier pictures: the participant's body is also bound in cloth, while her breasts are left visible to the camera.

This traditional representation of Black women evokes colonialist stereotypes that declared Black people as primitive and uncivilised. Moreover, their perceived inferiority meant that Black bodies were often seen as degenerate and deviant. The colonial imagination turned to pathologising narratives on Black sexuality, which was defined by bestiality and lasciviousness. Anne McClintock notes that the colonies presented "a porno-tropics for the European imagination – a fantastic magic lantern of the mind out into which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears."[13] This denigration of African subjects served in turn to justify the systems put in place to control and exploit them. In the case of African women, the hypersexualised prototype meant that the Black female body could only be defined in terms of physical labour or as a sex object. This is the narrative behind the popular figure of the "African Venus," the epitome of African femininity.[14]

The African Venus archetype was perhaps best embodied by Sarah Baartman, a Khoisan woman who in 1810 was taken to Europe to be displayed in freak shows as an ethnographic specimen. Baartman's popularity in Europe meant the consolidation of these female stereotypes in scientific circles and Western popular culture. Prints of Baartman were circulated across Europe, highlighting her voluptuous body as a sign of sexual deviancy.[15] It is this voluptuousness that has come to characterise Black female bodies even today. Thus, the image of naked breasts in Muholi's *ID Crisis* necessarily invokes these notions of African sexuality and womanhood. In an echo to depictions of Baartman's unruly body, the participant's breasts stick out from underneath the binding, as though they cannot be contained.

The negative connotations of naked Black bodies are not lost on Muholi's audience. In 2005, Muholi directed a short film for the Gay and Lesbian Festival in South Africa titled *Enraged by a Picture*. The film documents responses that Muholi received to exhibitions of their early work in Johannesburg, *ID Crisis* among them. Most of the negative feedback was based around the photographs' focus on Black female sexuality. A visitor to one of their exhibitions left a comment saying, "It is truly unacceptable for you to undermine our race's especially black portraying nudity and sexual explicit content images as if they are the only one who are involved these inhuman activities."[16] Another visitor claimed Muholi's work to be discriminatory in its debasement of Black female bodies.[17] The attitudes displayed by these visitors reflect on the long history of images that have used sexuality to objectify and denigrate Black women. Their rejection of hypersexualised stereotypes means that, in their eyes, Black women must never be represented in relation to sex.

The disavowal of Black sexuality is a prominent feature of post-colonial African discourses around gender, sexuality, and queerness. Indeed, narratives that say “homosexuality is un-African” have been supported by political figures throughout the continent. Most relevant to Muholi’s work is a speech given by the then South African president Thabo Mbeki in 2002, when Sarah Baartman’s remains were returned to South Africa. In the speech, Mbeki denounced how the European imperialist project used Baartman to spread lies of Black sexual deviancy and depravity.[18] Likewise, in subsequent speeches that addressed HIV, Mbeki rejected the idea of an AIDS emergency in South Africa by saying such claims relied on imperial notions of Black promiscuity.[19] In his refusal to address African sex, Mbeki established discussions of Black sexuality as foreign impositions. His approach was mirrored by other African leaders such as Zimbabwean Robert Mugabe, who characterised homosexuality as an external threat.[20] This is what Brenna Munro calls the “postcolonial politics of stigma,” defined as “imperial shaming at the intersection of race, sexuality, and gender and the corresponding emergence of a desire for the postcolonial ‘dignity’ which is all too often formulated through the politics of a reconstituted heteronormative ‘respectability.’”[21]

Muholi’s visual activism is a direct response to this return to heteronormativity in Africa. As a result, Muholi finds themself in the difficult position of having to address these negative historical narratives and the negative connotations carried by depictions of sensuous, Black female bodies. Ethnographic photography is part of the history of Black female representation. Considering the negative consequences that the rejection of African sexuality can bring to gender non-conforming people in Africa, it is best to acknowledge, explore, and reframe this part of history.

Muholi is not alone in this endeavour. In 2001, South African artist Tracey Rose fashioned herself as a stereotypical Black Venus in her famous self-portrait titled *Venus Baartman*. In the photograph, Rose explores her own identity and sexuality. The figure of Sarah Baartman becomes representative of female struggle and the way Black women’s identities have historically been defined by others. A similar reframing happens in *ID Crisis*. Muholi uses certain conventions of ethnographic photography to explore queer sexuality. In the same way that Baartman was usually depicted with artefacts and ornaments meant to represent her “ethnic” identity, in *ID Crisis* Muholi shows the participant wearing breast binders, a practice often coded as queer and thus a signifier of her queer identity.

The act of breast binding can also inspire a different reading of *ID Crisis*. If bare breasts have become the symbol of stereotypical representations of hypersexualised Black female bodies, then the act of binding can be read as a direct rejection of the trope. The participant might be covering her breasts as a way of protecting herself from a sexualising gaze. The hands that hold the bandages are positioned between the participant and the camera, obscuring part of the torso. In this way, the binding represents a barrier for the viewer, the parts of her body that the participant does not want to make available. Even though the breasts are still visible, the fact that the participant is covering them forces viewers to think of the photograph as more than just the image of a naked Black woman.

Breast binding as a rejection of the ethnographic hypersexualised prototype has another effect. By highlighting the naked breasts of a woman, ethnographic photography draws attention to the biological side of womanhood. Breasts are signifiers of fertility and thus it is not uncommon to find images of semi-naked African women holding infants. This narrative of fertility and womanhood persists even in post-Apartheid South Africa. With the abolition of Apartheid came a nation-building project that relied on metaphors of kinship, family, and the body. Deborah Posel has argued that the idea of a unified and prospering South African nation was inextricably tied to the promotion of a "productive, life-giving sexuality."[22] The idea of rebirth became a popular metaphor for the renewal of the nation. However, thinking of sexuality exclusively in terms of fertility is inherently problematic when considering queer sexualities because, in many ways, non-reproduction has become a defining feature of queer people's identities and queer politics.[23] In *ID Crisis*, Muholi's use of the conventions of ethnographic photography alludes to traditional African femininity and its reliance on fertility. Nevertheless, through the act of breast binding, Muholi simultaneously rejects the prominence of fertility and affirms the participant's queer identity.

It is also important to consider the ways in which *ID Crisis* diverges from the ethnographic tradition. Most notably, the way the participant is presented in *ID Crisis* is distinctly different from ethnographic photography. The camera does not have a clear view of her whole body and most of her features are obscured by shadows. Instead, by highlighting intimacy and immediacy with the participant, Muholi's photograph evokes the visual language of social documentary. Doing this avoids the risks and complications that come from directly reproducing a genre as controversial as ethnography. *ID Crisis* alludes to ethnographic images of Black female sexuality without directly replicating them. It is this (in)visibility of the ethnographic type that allows Muholi to explore the complex history of Black queer female sexuality while centring Black queer perspectives, an approach that continues to define Muholi's engagement with all other aspects of Black queer history.

Queer in South Africa

Muholi's exploration of Black queer histories highlights the different ways in which Black bodies have been historically policed. Moving beyond Western imperialism, Black bodies remained subjects to be measured and controlled during Apartheid in South Africa. Muholi was born at the height of Apartheid. As such, their photographs inevitably carry within them the legacy of that period of South African history, one that is particularly relevant in *ID Crisis*. The title references identity cards and South African pass books. Up until 1986, South African pass laws became one of the defining features of the Apartheid system. They restricted the movement of people of colour, who were forced to carry a document to move into and across different spaces. The spaces that were available to them were determined by their race. Pass books put people into three categories: white, coloured, and native or Bantu.

Muholi's reference to pass books in *ID Crisis* reflects on a long history of systems that have sought to police the identities of Black individuals. In a similar way to how being classified Bantu or coloured would limit the mobility of individuals, being recognised as queer in contemporary Africa can bring its own set of dangers and limitations.[24] This does not mean that race and sexuality are analogous. Nonetheless, it exemplifies the ways in which both inform the experience of Black queerness. Nadine Gordimer put it best when she said, "There may be a particular connection between sexuality, sensuality, and politics uniquely inside South Africa. Because, after all, what is apartheid all about? It's about the body. It's about physical differences."[25]

Among the series, *ID Crisis* stands out as one of the few photographs that does not completely hide the participant's face, even though the woman remains anonymous. It is through this tension between showing and hiding the face and body that *ID Crisis* tells the story of South African pass books and Black identity. The participant faces the viewer, and the camera seems to have stopped in the middle of its journey from the body to the face. The face is not fully visible, but the possibility is there, encouraged by the tension produced by the cropped frame. Muholi alludes to the possibility of a conventional headshot while denying viewers the certainty of a clear portrait. The participant remains unknown. In this way, *ID Crisis* hints at the history of photo identification without replicating the type.

It is this double-edged approach that sets Muholi's photography apart. Indeed, Muholi is not the only South African artist to have taken an interest in racial profiling and the photographic conventions that are associated with it. Pass books, identity cards, and mug shots present a unique opportunity to comment on the power of Apartheid and its policing of identity. Roelof van Wyk's 2009 series *Young Afrikaner – A Self Portrait* employs the visual language of racial typology to investigate white Afrikaner identity. Van Wyk's approach consciously subverts racial expectations and questions the power of these types of images as tools for state regulation. Like van Wyk, Muholi is also aware of the effects that racial profiling techniques have on the subject. There is, however, an important difference in their approaches. Van Wyk is capable of reproducing the conventions of racial typology because his subjects' appearances do not carry the same racial stigma that traditionally Black subjects do. Despite the cool gaze of the camera, Van Wyk's Afrikaners are neither diminished nor objectified. They seem comfortable, looking back at the camera even with a hint of pride. As such, Van Wyk's series represents the failure of taxonomy. By turning the camera towards white Afrikaners, it is the conventions of racial typology that are exposed and undermined instead. In contrast, Muholi's participants carry the stigma of being not only Black, but also queer. In this case, the reproduction of photographic typologies of race becomes a more dangerous endeavour. Racial profiling, like ethnographic photography, is an undeniable part of Black South Africans' history. Muholi is nonetheless aware of the racist readings that such conventions might welcome. Muholi's solution is a more ambiguous approach to this historical tradition that alludes to its existence without replicating it. Muholi's *ID Crisis* thus acknowledges the history of racial typology while protecting the participant from reliving the experience.

A protective attitude towards the participants is indeed characteristic of Muholi's approach to photography. Muholi addresses the issue of Black queer stigmatisation from the perspective of social documentary. Their photographs acknowledge the histories of ethnography and racial profiling, but also stand in distinct opposition to these dynamics. While the objective of ethnographic photography and racial typology is to expose the subject's body to the viewer, Muholi's pictures are instead presented as intimate insights into the lives and struggles of Black gender non-conforming individuals in South Africa. Their visual language invokes the work of notable South African social documentary photographers such as David Goldblatt and Ernest Cole, who gained notoriety for their work documenting the lives of South Africans under Apartheid. Muholi's photographs in *Only Half the Picture* are often in black and white and the framing tends to emphasise a sense of immediacy with the subject. Indeed, the South African documentary tradition is particularly suited to Muholi's project because of its historical relationship to political struggle. As a genre, social documentary rose to prominence in South Africa during Apartheid as photographers set to use their medium to record the harsh conditions and abuses endured by Black individuals. Besides documentary photographers like Goldblatt and Cole, the 1980s saw the rise of photographers that identified as political activists. A collective of amateur and professional photographers under the name "Afrapix" became one of the strongest voices speaking against the violence and abuses experienced by South Africans under Apartheid. Their work became known as "struggle photography," a photographic practice characterised by its political and social engagement.[26]

Muholi's visual project is not only concerned with the visual representation of the Black queer experience. Part of their advocacy is their concern with the gender-based violence that is so prevalent in South Africa, particularly against Black queer women. Lesbian women are often raped by family and friends who think that the act can cure them of their lesbianism. In the aftermath, they lack support from medical practitioners and local authorities, often facing further stigmatisation because of their gender and sexuality. As such, corrective rape stands as representative of the oppression that Black queer individuals experience in being rejected by society, let down by those meant to protect them. This political engagement is characteristic of Muholi's whole photographic practice.

Muholi's preoccupation with corrective rape parallels documentary photographers' interest in the struggle against Apartheid. In both cases, the goal is to create an archive documenting the plight of disenfranchised communities—a record of the systemic abuse they endure—as a way of pushing for a political agenda of social change. This point can be exemplified by the way Muholi's photographs often invoke images of this period of struggle. *ID Crisis*, in particular, recalls a picture by David Goldblatt of a fifteen-year-old boy that had been the victim of police violence. Both pictures focus on a semi-naked Black body partly enveloped by something white. In the case of *ID Crisis*, it is the participant's torso that is bound in what might be medical bandages. In Goldblatt's picture, it is the boy's arms that are in casts after being assaulted by the Security Police. This reading sees both photographs as records of the effects of systemic violence on the Black body.

By considering the strengths of struggle photography, one must also acknowledge its limitations. Social documentary was used as a powerful tool that undermined the oppressor's authority. However, struggle photography often achieved its political impact through techniques of shock and spectacle, as it often focused on images of Black suffering, creating the impression of a country riddled with violence and misery. Given its emphasis on Apartheid oppression, this was not necessarily wrong. Nevertheless, it inevitably interacted with the legacy of colonial narratives that depicted Africa as a continent of darkness and death. To counteract this pessimistic view, struggle photography needed to be balanced by positive images of other aspects of South African life. Photographers like Santu Mofokeng, a member of Afrapix, recognised that oppression and violence were only partial realities and that there was more to people's lives.[27] Mofokeng's pictures are now remembered as nuanced looks into the everyday lives of Black South Africans.

Muholi's reference to struggle photography and social documentary brings with it this risk of spectacularisation. Corrective rape in South Africa has become somewhat of an international fixation; news agencies across the globe often present stories of this hate crime as distinctly South African.[28] And while corrective rape is an important issue that needs to be acknowledged, the fact that South African lesbians can only be thought of as victims in mass media is a traumatising event in itself. In 2011, reflecting on the popularity of the corrective rape narrative, Mary Hames noted that:

> Black lesbian bodies and stories, in particular, became the new commodities that need financial assistance. We see this in the way 'activists' are organising and forming new non-profit organisations around this new phenomenon. We read the media reports; we listen and watch television programmes and we see the horrific images of lesbians who have been beaten and raped. We have experienced how the mythical statistics become 'reality'; in fact we see how the spectacles are being created. All of us become re-traumatised.[29]

Muholi seeks to avoid this re-traumatising by following a similar approach to that of Mofokeng. They acknowledge that violence is only a limited part of the story. The participants of Muholi's photographs are either past or potential victims of corrective rape. However, the pictures never portray an actual instance of assault. Instead, Muholi alludes to a past event or the potential for future violence. This simultaneous visibility and invisibility of violence allows Muholi to address other aspects of Black queerness in the same image. The photographs in *Only Half the Picture* become stories not only of victimhood but also of strength, intimacy, and sexuality.

The (in)visibility of referents endows Muholi's photographs with a sense of ambiguity. An image of a semi-naked Black woman inevitably invokes the complicated history of Black female sexuality and representation, as well the systemic violence enacted by Apartheid and contemporary narratives of corrective rape. However, because these historical referents are being alluded to without being reproduced, their existence can be read in multiple ways. As mentioned previously, the image of *ID Crisis* encodes within itself the complex history of Black sexuality. It alludes to the history of colonialism and Apartheid and their legacies in the way Black sexuality is understood in South Africa today. By doing so, *ID Crisis* can be read itself as a sort of queer historical archive.

How successful Muholi's photograph is as an archive of Black queer experience depends on its ability to navigate often conflicting narratives and histories. Muholi achieves this through showing and hiding, through visibility and invisibility. It is the photograph's uncertainty that allows viewers to revisit these histories and re-contextualise them from a Black queer perspective. However, this archival approach to photography is not without its risks. In addressing the full, complex history of Black sexuality, Muholi also alludes to the ways Black people, and women in particular, have been historically objectified and degraded—and it is this acknowledgement of history that makes Muholi so successful. Muholi's visual activism is about escaping the orthodoxies of Black female representation to reveal the true experience of Black queerness in South Africa, with all its contradictions and intricacies. To do so requires avoiding what Neville Hoad calls "the politics of moral outrage," which he describes as outrage "that only lingers long enough to establish a shared 'gayness' and does not care enough to learn the worldings of those it purports to help."[30] In the case of Muholi, this means addressing the negative episodes of history that have nonetheless influenced how Black queer women experience their own identities and sexualities. Homi K. Bhabha provides a useful way of thinking about this:

> To judge the stereotyped image on the basis of a prior normativity is to dismiss it, not to displace it, which is only possible by engaging with its effectivity, with the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence that constructs colonial identification subject.[31]

It is in this (in)visible articulation of historical narratives that Muholi ultimately finds success. Since their first solo exhibition in Johannesburg in 2004, Muholi has gained international recognition as a photographer and visual activist. Their images of Black queer communities continue to be praised for their political engagement and message, for how they address the contemporary issues that Black queer individuals constantly face. However, Muholi's project is successful not only because it provides images of an under-represented group, but also because it takes the time to explore the different historical narratives and discourses that influence Black queer identities. In this way, Muholi's photography provides a new approach to queer advocacy that centres Black queer histories.

As a series, Muholi's *Only Half the Picture* directly addresses the struggles and experiences of queer and gender non-conforming individuals in South Africa. The photographs remain relevant for their layered representation of Black queerness, using techniques of (in)visibility to bring viewers into contact with the complicated and often problematic histories of racial, gender, and sexual identities, and their intersections. By reframing these histories from a Black queer perspective, Muholi's pictures offer an insight into the multiple worlds that Black queer people inhabit. The participants in images such as *ID Crisis* are Black people, South African nationals, women, and queer individuals. Recent years have seen Muholi gain international fame as their work is exhibited around the world. Yet, as their first visual project, *Only Half the Picture* remains an important subject of study and a starting point from which to consider the place of transnational histories of race, gender, and sexuality in South African visual activism. Muholi's engagement with Black queer histories remains a key aspect of their practice, even as their work continues to evolve through their role as a transnational spokesperson for Black queer and gender non-conforming individuals in South Africa and the world.

NOTES

[1] See Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Neville Hoad, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality and Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

[2] *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, section 9(3), explicitly bans discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

[3] Sally Evans, "Minister slams 'porn' exhibition," *The Times* (South Africa), 02 March 2010, accessed 21 November 2019, https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2010-03-01-minister-slams-porn-exhibition/.

[4] Pumla Dineo Gqola, "Through Zanele Muholi's eyes: Re/imagining ways of seeing Black lesbians," in *Zanele Muholi: Only Half the Picture*, ed. Sophie Perryer (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2006), 83.

[5] Gail Smith, in particular, describes Muholi's photographs as "not artistically or technically brilliant" in "Outlaw Culture," *Mail & Guardian*, 8 September 2004, accessed 14 November 2019, https://mg.co.za/article/2004-09-08-outlaw-culture/.

[6] Hiram Pérez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!" *Social Text* 23, no. 3-4 (2005): 172, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-23-3-4_84-85-171.

[7] See for example Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color* Critique (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire, Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Robert Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man: Essays* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

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[9] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Postcolonial Context* (London: Routledge, 1995); Sander Gilman, "Black bodies, white bodies: towards an iconography of female sexuality in late 19th-century art, medicine and literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 204-242, https://doi.org/10.1086/448327; Zine Magubane, "Which bodies matter? Feminism, poststructuralism, race and the curious theoretical odyssey of the "Hottentot Venus"," *Gender and Society* 15, no. 6 (2001): 816-834, https://doi.org/10.1177/089124301015006003.

[10] Hoad, *African Intimacies*.

[11] See Zanele Muholi and Deborah Willis, "Zanele Muholi Faces & Phases: Conversation with Deborah Willis," *Aperture*, no. 218 (2015): 63, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24475138.

[12] Desiree Lewis, "Against the Grain: Black Women and Sexuality," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 19, no. 63 (2005): 17, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4066624.

[13] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 22.

[14] See Deborah Willis, *Black Venus 2010: They Called Her 'Hottentot'* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010). Nicolas Monti also discusses the figure of the African Venus in relation to photography in *Africa Then, Photographs 1840-1918* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), 72-76.

[15] Janell Hobson, *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 46. Also see Zoë Strother, "Display of the Body Hottentot," in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1-61.

[16] *Enraged by a Picture*, directed by Zanele Muholi (Out in Africa Films, 2005), accessed 8th January 2020, https://youtu.be/JLSMCBWDKSU. The viewer comment is reprinted here as it was originally written, including misspellings.

[17] *Enraged by a Picture*.

[18] Cited in Hoad, *African Intimacies*, 93-94.

[19] Cited in Deborah Posel, "'Getting the nation talking about sex': reflexions on the politics of sexuality and nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa," in *African Sexualities: A Reader*, ed. Sylvia Tamale (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2011), 135-139.

[20] Epprecht, *Hungochani*, 4-5.

[21] Brenna M. Munro, *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xvi.

[22] Posel, "Getting the Nation," 139.

[23] A key text in queer studies that discusses the politics of reproduction is Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

[24] See the work of psychologist Jacqueline Marx, who explores situations in which invisibility might be desirable for queer people of colour in Africa as a result of surveillance and disciplinary power in "Negotiating Homosexual In/Visibility," in *Reclaiming Afrikan*, ed. Zethu Matebeni (Athlone: Modjaji Books, 2014), 29-32.

[25] Nadine Gordimer in Jill Fullerton-Smith, "Off the Page: Nadine Gordimer," in *Conversations with Nadine Gordimer*, ed. Nancy Topping Bazin and Marilyn Dallman Seymour (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 304.

[26] See Patricia Hayes, "Power, Secrecy, Proximity: A Short History of South African Photography," *Kronos*, no. 33, (2007): 139-162, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41056585; Darren Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2009); John Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[27] See Jon Soske, "In Defence of Social Documentary Photography," *South African History Online* (2010), accessed 12 February 2020, https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/In_Defence_Social_Documentary_Photography.pdf

[28] See, for example, Claire Carter, “The Brutality of ‘Corrective Rape’,” *The New York Times*, 27 July 2013, accessed 17 February 2020, http://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/07/26/opinion/26corrective-rape.html; Patrick Strudwick, “Crisis in South Africa: The shocking practice of ‘corrective rape’ – aimed at ‘curing’ lesbians,” *The Independent*, 4 January 2014, accessed 17 February 2020, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/ africa/crisis-in-south-africa-the-shocking-practice-of-corrective-rape-aimed-at-curing-lesbians-9033224.html.

[29] Mary Hames, “Violence against black lesbians: minding our language,” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 25, no. 4 (2011): 89, https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2011.631774.

[30] Hoad, *African Intimacies*, xiii.

[31] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 95.