

Liquid Gold:  
Lactation as Labor and Human Milk as Commodity in Transatlantic Visual Culture

Hannah Ryan  
Cornell University  
History of Art & Visual Studies

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LIQUID GOLD: LACTATION AS LABOR AND HUMAN MILK  
AS COMMODITY IN TRANSATLANTIC VISUAL CULTURE

Hannah Ryan, Ph.D.  
Cornell University 2019

“Liquid Gold: Lactation as Labor and Human Milk as Commodity in Transatlantic Visual Culture” traces the commoditization of milk and lactating bodies throughout American history. Geographically and temporally ambitious, this dissertation is a visual, social history of America as transatlantic encounter, told through lactation history and imagery. Further, among a growing corpus of texts on transatlantic commodities that reveal previously hidden labor histories, here I position milk as not just a commodity, like gold, but as a valuable consumable good, like chocolate; in tracing its production, commoditization, and consumption, I make visible the foodways of human milk. This project makes a place for human milk as valuable food commodity among the recent explosion of foodway projects. In my project, milk is revealed for its value, and lactation as a valuable form of labor, in unique case studies throughout North American history: the European vision of the New World as a lactating body; lactation as a vital component of racial inscription in colonial Mexican *casta* paintings, midwifery and lactation support as cause for witchcraft suspicion in colonial New England and seen in illustrated witch hunting manuals, daguerreotypes of enslaved wet nurses and their charges, the rich visual evidence of attempts to replace human milk via industrialization and immigration in the early twentieth century, photographs chronicling a century of innovative milk banking in New York, and finally, how modern and contemporary artists deploy lactation imagery to examine American history and Transatlantic interaction.

## Biographical Sketch

Hannah Ryan researches representations of women and children within the visual and literary culture of the Transatlantic. Through a decolonial and feminist approach, her work is informed by theories of labor, domesticity, consumption, and resistance, and is inherently interdisciplinary, crossing into economics, feminism and gender studies, medical history, and beyond. Hannah holds a B.F.A. (magna cum laude), B.A. (magna cum laude), and M.A. from the University of Colorado, and M.A. and Ph.D. in Art History from Cornell University, and has held positions at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, The Norton Museum of Art, and the Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell. She has curated exhibitions of contemporary female artists, including *Ana Mendieta in Exile: Selected Films*, for which she wrote the accompanying catalogue, and Coco Fusco, *Empty Plaza*. She has contributed sections to Ananda Cohen Aponte's book *Paintings of Colonial Cusco*, a chapter to an edited collection of interdisciplinary research on milk published by Bloomsbury Academic, and a chapter on the midwife-witch in an edited volume on Villains. She represented Cornell at the 2015 Institute of Fine Arts / Frick Symposium, and has given papers at Princeton, McGill, the Yale, and the University of Michigan. She was invited to participate in an international workshop on milk, co-hosted by SOAS University of London and École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. At Cornell, she was the Instructor of Record for courses on tourism as neocolonialism, the recurrent visual motif of women's literacy, and dangerous women, and in 2019 was Visiting Professor of Art History at Colorado College. Hannah was awarded the 2017-18 American Association of University Women Dissertation

Fellowship and named an AAUW Fellow. Beginning August 2019, she will be Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.

For Mara & Anders

*You want to keep the blood and milk hidden as if the womb and breast never fed you.*

- Rupi Kaur

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Print Culture (2015), Cornell University Visual Culture Colloquium (2016 and 2018), the Making Milk Workshop co-hosted by SOAS University of London and École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris (2016), the University of Michigan Conference on Early Modernity (2017), a panel on Motherhood at the Southwest Popular and American Culture Association Annual Conference in Albuquerque (2018), a Milk Studies panel at the Annual Yale University Food Systems Symposium (2018), and the conference Food and the Humanities at Texas Tech University (2018).

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## Introduction

### Colonial Fantasy: Visions of a Lactating New World

Reporting to the Crown on his third successful voyage to the New World, Columbus declared that the earth was not in fact round, but instead shaped like *a pear or a woman's breast*. As his ships crossed the Atlantic, Columbus wrote that they moved up the slope of the breast toward a nipple, an earthly paradise, an apex nearing heaven.<sup>1</sup> While ample scholarship has connected land with a fertile, eroticized, female body awaiting European, male insemination, this project begins with this bodily allegory of America as a lactating woman, itself a hegemonic vision, and investigates milk as valued commodity throughout European exploitation of this space and its inhabitants.

How did Columbus come to believe the earth to be shaped like a breast? Margarita Zamora writes in *Reading Columbus* that Thomas Aquinas posited that Paradise was situated in the East, at the highest place on earth, and so as Columbus believed he sailed east, a change in altitude could account for a sudden change in climate and skin color. To Columbus, the tropical landscape, temperate climate, “people as white as we are,” presence of fresh water, and a continuous ascent toward what he believed was the end of the east, signaled that he had located Eden. Thus, this elevated point on an otherwise spherical earth indicated to Columbus that the earth was indeed breast-shaped.

This maternal image makes all the more sense given its context, as Columbus referred to a passage from Judges 5: “He asked for water and she gave him milk.” With paradise as a liminal space, a point of contact between heaven and earth, the breast image

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<sup>1</sup> Margarita Zamora, *Reading Columbus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 174.

also accommodates a vision of mother earth nourishing her son. The breast as a fountain at the source of the world's great rivers, distributing the essence nourishment through maternity harkens the iconography of Mary offering her milk to Christ; within art history this recurrent coupling is known as *Maria Lactans*. The prevalence of breasts in Columbus's quest for Eden can also be conflated with a New Jerusalem, as it is described in Isaiah, as a mother whose children come to "suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts."<sup>2</sup>

As Zamora asserts, this claim connotes a decided framing of the New World as feminized and eroticized, fertile, female ground awaiting European, male domination and fertilization. Columbus's fruit-breast thus becomes an eroticized object, its consumability underscored by further accounts of its sensual delights and a calculated feminization of its inhabitants. Further, read among Columbus's unflagging interest in mercantilism, imagining paradise as a fruit-breast renders it an attainable good, one he can bring to his patrons.<sup>3</sup>

In early modern Europe, visual representations of four unique continents concretized, and from the beginning, America was fetishized with nude breasts. In Hugh Honour's catalogue for the 1975 exhibition "European Visions of America," which was mounted at the National Gallery to celebrate the bicentennial of the United States, he writes, "The discovery of America was, indeed, largely responsible for the popular idea of continents, each with their individual characteristics which distinguished them from the European norm, and thus for the notion of Europe as a cultural and geographical

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Graziano, *The Millennial New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 163–64.

<sup>3</sup> Zamora, *Reading Columbus*, 174.

entity.”<sup>4</sup> Beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century, the allegories of the four continents reflected Europe’s conceptions of these other spaces, and artists conflated into a single allegory as many distinguishing features of the land and people as possible. Honour notices that America is “almost invariably represented naked with feather ornaments and some indication of the riches of the continent in gold and silver. A parrot and some four-footed beast – armadillo, alligator, opossum, or llama – accompany her” and monstrous and cannibalistic tendencies are assigned to her, through severed limbs and the like.<sup>5</sup>

In the fifteen initial personifications of America, her bared breasts are prominently depicted; with her genitalia covered by drapery or a skirt, or her lower half turned away – the emphasis on the breast. This paradigm of visible breasts and invisible genitalia reinforces a reading of America as bountiful and fecund, rather than simply erotic. Surrounded by mouthwatering fruits of the New World, women’s bodies, breasts, and the milk they produce are emblematic of the exotic bounty awaiting European consumption, a colonial fantasy visualized.

Upon the Iberians’ arrival, what had initially existed as metaphor was enacted as lived experience, swiftly implementing the prevalent European system of wet nursing in the Americas and exploiting Indigenous American and enslaved African women in order to provide milk for European infants. Through the colonial encounter and subsequent imposition of the transatlantic slave trade, human milk—like oranges, chocolate, and

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<sup>4</sup> Hugh Honour, Cleveland Museum of Art, National Gallery of Art (US), and Réunion des musées nationaux, *The European Vision of America: A Special Exhibition to Honor the Bicentennial of the United States, Organized by the Cleveland Museum of Art with the Collaboration of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Réunion Des Musées Nationaux, Paris* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1975), 112.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

tomatoes—became a coveted and commoditized food product. Just as these systems exploited labor to produce these goods and others, like sugar, spices, and tobacco, so too were Indigenous and African women exploited and commoditized to produce milk.

This project considers milk as an essential food of the Americas—its creation an essential act of labor that has often been exploited—and identifies through five unique case studies the ways in which the social and racial aspects of milk are evidenced in visual culture. “Liquid Gold: Lactation as Labor and Human Milk as Commodity in Transatlantic Visual Culture” traces the commoditization of milk and lactating bodies throughout American history, with a particular emphasis on the exploitation of African and Indigenous women via transatlantic slavery and colonization. Geographically and temporally ambitious, this dissertation is a visual, social history of America as transatlantic encounter, told through lactation history and imagery. Further, among a growing corpus of texts on transatlantic commodities that reveal previously hidden labor histories,<sup>6</sup> here I position milk as not just a transatlantic commodity, like gold, but as a valuable consumable good; in tracing its production, commoditization, and consumption as it moves throughout the Atlantic, I make visible the food pathways of human milk.

The case studies in this project are intentionally diverse, spanning space and time in order to demonstrate the variety of ways in which milk has shaped American history. To clearly connect them, each chapter addresses four questions: (1) What is the social value of milk at this moment? (2) How does milk move in unexpected ways, and how are

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. (Reprint edition. New York: Penguin Books, 1986); and David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.)

those food pathways visible in visual and textual culture? (3) Who (a) makes and (b) moves the milk, and (c) facilitates its production? How does milk production and transport impact women (particularly via exploitation and commoditization), and how do women resist oppressive systems? (4) What are the politics of visibility in these images of milk and lactation? This exercise creates a thread that links these diverse case studies to emphasize what unites them, to provide a brief abstract of the chapter, and to stress that in this history of human milk women's roles are prioritized.

Ultimately, this framing of milk as both kinetic and social is meant to disrupt a prevailing concept of human milk as a stagnant and replaceable substance, and one that is limited to only one use. I also aim to dismantle the notion that milk movement (donation, sale, banking, transport, etc.) is a recent phenomenon or abnormal: rather, it is quite ingrained in culture, having been normalized through various systems, many of which are tied to the evolving history of American capitalism. In this case, I selected case studies spanning American history to generate this dialogue between and across eras, which I consider inter-historical. After conducting research on the visibility of milk movement in several disparate spaces and time periods, I consider inter-historical dialogue (researching one topic in several unique spaces) to be a productive and fruitful exercise that provides insight into both similarities and differences, and in this case some of the threads that run through women's lived experiences.

That said, a primary risk of researching human milk is falling into antiquated modes of essentialized and limiting definitions of gender/femininity. As such, this project resists previous methods that addressed the lactating body, within modes of first, second, and third wave feminism, traditionally working toward rights for women who were

consistently white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, financially secure, and able-bodied. This dissertation engages with intersectional feminism as it was introduced and is defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in that it is concerned with women's positions and identities as they are manifest by overlapping categories of race, sexuality, gender, socio-economic standing, immigration status, and bodily abilities, and how these overlapping identities contribute to their historic oppression.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, I consider how their lactation experiences and access to milk have been impacted by these overlapping identities. I am also concerned with the ways in which the processes of slavery and colonialism (together supporting American capitalism), through which the country was initially founded, have maintained oppressive control over women. At the time of this writing, American culture is witnessing the concretization of intersectional feminist movement and scholarship—a new awareness of, and resistance to, a patriarchal, heteronormative, hegemonic, violent, and oppressive infrastructure. Thus, with a focus on lactation in American visual culture, this project, Janus-like, looks both to the past and its complexities, and toward a liberatory future.

### **Transporting Milk to Visual Studies**

Recent decades have seen unflagging interest in the body and its functions in the realms of art production and interpretation. Artists have used their own bodies as makers of meaning and medium in art-making, from Ana Mendieta, who inscribed her own body into the landscape in her ephemeral interventions, to Janine Antoni, who cast her portrait in chocolate and soap, then “licked and lathered” the busts in intimate processes she

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<sup>7</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (July 1, 1991): 1241–99.

considered both tender and humorous. The most banal and base bodily functions have also notably and contentiously been the subjects and media of contemporary artists, as Andres Serrano worked with urine, Chris Ofili with feces, Tracey Emin with used tampons and condoms, Janine Antoni with saliva, Marc Quinn with his own blood, David Hammons with hair, and beyond. Deborah Willis and Carrie Mae Weems have powerfully deployed their own bodies to reflect on the histories of subjugation and exploitation of non-white female bodies, along with Coco Fusco, Maria Magdalena Campos Pons, and others. Each of these artists has garnered critical and scholarly attention. Yet in all this body talk, one particular bodily function goes notably absent among scholarship. Where, in this obsession with the body, is breastfeeding?

Feminist sociologist Rhonda Shaw grapples with this very question in her work on the maternal subject and what she considers “the absence of breastfeeding as a legitimate philosophical topic.”<sup>8</sup> In essence, Shaw argues that the somatic, “in-the-body” nature of breastfeeding, like other “caring activities” understood as a natural predisposition, is posited as outside of (or against) “rational self-consciousness.” Its conception as “mundane, quotidian, and embodied” precludes it a valid subject worthy of study in philosophy and the humanities. The emotion and affect of breastfeeding are relegated to instinct and thus posited against reason, and additionally, binary spheres of public and private contextualize breastfeeding as familial and thus outside of commerce and politics. Shaw’s research in the social sciences echoes a popular dichotomy in the humanities situating private female space against public male space, a binary the above artists subvert): “Women’s association with the activities of the private and domestic

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<sup>8</sup> Rhonda Shaw, “Performing Breastfeeding: Embodiment, Ethics and the Maternal Subject,” *Feminist Review*, no. 78 (January 1, 2004): 77.

sphere has meant that their lives are constituted less by putatively rational or calculative actions and more by affection and emotional relationships with others.”<sup>9</sup> Shaw goes on to argue that it is when images of lactating bodies transgress this boundary of private to public that controversy occurs. Thus, the art I will discuss in this chapter can be considered a “performance that calls into question the kind of theater that is acceptable to perform in.”<sup>10</sup>

Shaw argues that the perception of women’s bodies and their functions (such as lactation, for the purposes of this dissertation) as disconnected from reason, choice, and autonomy, generates a cultural perception that the maternal body *does not think*. The implication is that the lactating body is unthinking, passively engaged in innate function, and is thus not a viable subject in the humanities. However, Shaw asserts that because lactation is intrinsically embedded in socio-cultural practices, it should increasingly be acknowledged as a viable subject of study. “In contrast with the view of breastfeeding as a natural and passive somatic act, I would argue that breastfeeding is part of a process through which a maternal subject is constituted.”<sup>11</sup>

Scholars across fields push back against this paradigm and the essentialization of breastfeeding as simple (unthinking, passive) bodily function. Shaw writes, “By referring to the various ways of doing breastfeeding as discursive knowledges, breastfeeding researchers underline the socially and culturally constructed nature of these practices. As

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<sup>9</sup> Shaw, 100.

<sup>10</sup> Shaw, 111.

<sup>11</sup> Shaw, 101.

these researchers reveal, breastfeeding practices, both at the practical level of the doing and at the interpretive level... differ across space and time.”<sup>12</sup>

The very nature of lactating bodies as contentious (and indeed, unwaveringly so) signals that they are not just essential, bodily, or somatic, but rather, constructed by shifting societal norms, and regulated by cultural, hegemonic, and indeed academic systems of control. An ongoing issue of how the lactating body can enter the academy persists. I believe that labor is an apt and accessible way that breastfeeding can productively enter the scholarship of visual culture. By considering the lactating body a laboring body, and reflecting on these scenes within a larger dialogue on consumption and socio-economics, this reframing further situates breastfeeding as a viable subject requiring further investigation within the field of Art History.

In addition to Shaw’s invocations of Butler and Foucault, progressive theorists of labor can also provide a theoretical framework for this investigation. In particular, affective labor theory, rooted in autofeminist critique and Marx’s notion of the invisibility of labor, can nuance our perspective of breastfeeding as labor: that which is produces or modifies emotional experiences or falls in line with marginalized or invisible labor, and discussed by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, among others. Affective labor has increasingly entered discussions of modern economies, heralded by mass culture of the nineteenth century. Domestic work has frequently been ignored by analysts of labor as outside of commerce, and thus outside of economy, and has recently become a critical focus of theorists of affective labor. These theories give value to “women’s work,” or the

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<sup>12</sup> Shaw, 105.

labor done in the private sphere, again referencing a pervasive dichotomy of the female private against the male public.

In the early 1970s, powerful messages regarding domesticity and the limitations thereof were generated by artists and art historians as well. Women artists concerned themselves with these issues through visual interventions, perhaps manifesting most palpably in the 1971 creation of Womanhouse. A collaborative initiative of the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of Arts and helmed by feminist art powerhouses Miriam Shapiro and Judy Chicago, Womanhouse took over an abandoned mansion to address issues of domesticity and labor through installation art. Some primary goals of the project were to confront the limited roles of women, to foster new skills beyond traditional women's work, and foster a sense of communal action, and individually, to push themselves beyond their limitations as women and as artists. Though fraught with difficulty, the project was considered successful, and lives as a model of communal action for feminists to this day.<sup>13</sup> Concurrently, feminist vanguard Linda Nochlin wrote her iconic essay addressing Janson's claim that there were no great female artists, and within it, acknowledged limited access to the academy, coupled with domestic and familial obligations, as some of the many limitations women faced within the arts. In the 1990s, Nochlin expanded her discussion to consider the ways in which female artists chose exile as a fruitful creative space, free from domestic and familial obligations, in which to work. In her research, she found that many women believed they could not function as working artists while living at home; only abroad and freed of domestic

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<sup>13</sup> Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, California Institute of the Arts, *Womanhouse* (Valencia, CA: Feminist Art Program, California Institute of the Arts, 1972).

responsibilities could they attain the freedom and time to immerse themselves in their work.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, it came to be recognized that many of these early feminist statements regarding the limitations of the domestic life reflected a very select, and privileged population, and women of color voiced concern about the ways in which they and their experiences were omitted from the dominant feminist dialogue of the time. Audrey Lorde responded to these issues with an address at the Second Sex Conference in 1979 titled “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in which she asserted that the experiences of women of color were rarely, if ever, discussed in feminist dialogue, and further, argued that white feminists were engaged with patriarchal tactics to continue to oppress women marginalized by their identities as non-white, homosexual, or working class. “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” she said, and equality would only be achieved if feminists learned “how to take our differences and make them strengths.”<sup>15</sup>

The domestic sphere again served as a site of conflict, as women of color argued that wealthy white women who struggled with domesticity had very little understanding of the ways in which women of color had worked for generations in these privileged white households, while separated from their own families and homes. Of this, and white women’s comparison of marriage to slavery, Lorde remarked:

Poor women and women of Color know there is a difference between the daily manifestations of marital slavery and prostitution because it is our daughters who

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<sup>14</sup> Linda Nochlin, “Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation,” *Poetics Today* 17, no. 3 (1996): 317–37.

<sup>15</sup> Audrey Lorde, “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 110–14.

line 42nd Street. If white American feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting difference in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Color? What is the theory behind racist feminism?<sup>16</sup>

Artists like Betye Saar took up the legacies of Black women performing domestic labor in white households, as these discussions played out. In 1972 she created her iconic work, “The Liberation of Aunt Jemima,” in which she reappropriated a racist “Mammy” figure and armed her with a shotgun. She would go on to address domestic labor in her sweeping body of work by collecting and reinvigorating objects that reference Black subjugation and labor, like washboards, irons, and beyond. Through her “junking,” as she calls it, Saar removes racist memorabilia from the market, and also salvages domestic items that go on to memorialize the individuals, many of whom are women who spent their lives in domestic labor. Further, she draws connections between contemporary domestic labor and the legacy of slavery, maintaining the notion that these systems do not lay dormant in the past, but have manifest in the prevalence of non-white women performing domestic duties in white households.

Saar and other artists reference the emotional and psychological toil of this labor, and within white feminist communities as well, the notion of domestic bliss began to be recognized as a myth, and a continuation of the nineteenth century cult of domesticity. The emotional toll of domestic labor, or the requirement to love the arduous work at hand, has recently been discussed by contemporary theorists of affect and labor.

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<sup>16</sup> Audrey Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 110–14.

First, Hardt and Negri tease out the distinction between the emotional and affective elements of domestic labor:

Unlike emotions, which are mental phenomena, affects refer equally to body and mind. In fact, affects, such as joy and sadness, reveal the present state of life in the entire organism, expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking. Affective labor, then, is labor that produces or manipulates affects.... One can recognize affective labor, for example, in the work of legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile). One indication of the rising importance of affective labor, at least in the dominant countries, is the tendency for employers to highlight education, attitude, character, and ‘prosocial’ behavior as the primary skills employees need. A worker with a good attitude and social skills is another way of saying a worker is adept at affective labor.<sup>17</sup>

Hardt and Negri’s theory of affective labor can easily be applied to motherhood, as mothers are not just expected to perform a lengthy and regimented prescribed list of tasks, but to do so lovingly and happily, along the lines of the “service with a smile,” they describe. This notion can further extend to breastfeeding, a task that has been assigned specific emotional requirements: contentedness, selflessness, and nurturing adoration.

Drawing upon Marx’s work on labor, Hardt and Negri’s scholarship on affect also positions the emergence of immaterial labor (of which affect is one specific form) over material labor. Essentially, they argue that contemporary culture values labor which produces immaterial products over that which produces material products: a stockbroker over a mason, a clinical psychologist over a seamstress, an attorney over a factory worker. Within the context of breastfeeding, one might then consider the ways in which the immaterial, affective production is valued over the material production: bonding and nurturing over physical, nutritional, and even medicinal nourishment.

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 108.

The visual materials were selected for this project because they disrupt a primary way that breastfeeding is canonized in Western art history as leisure, and instead inscribes lactation as labor, a form of labor made visible in these materials: *casta* paintings, colonial Mexican codices, witch hunting manuals, portable portraits, industrial and medical photographs, advertisements, amusement zone plans, nursing manuals, and motorcycle club regalia.

### **A Hemispheric, Transatlantic Approach**

The scope of this project reflects a turn away from a nationalist model and toward a theoretical approach that considers the transnational movement of people, goods, and ideas. This framing of North America as an interaction between populations of that continent acknowledges European colonization and the intrinsically connected transatlantic slave trade as central to its existence. Like the rejection of white feminism outlined above, this transnational, hemispheric approach rejects an antiquated but prevalent paradigm of “America” as an independent and dominant nation-state, as well as a conflation of “America” and “American” with the United States.

Thus, this project seeks to articulate the visual culture and literature of breastfeeding within the theoretical framework of Atlantic Studies, a relatively new and evolving field. To that end, this section begins with an investigation and synthesization of four particularly relevant works of transatlantic theory, that reveal its goals and manifestations, and identifies the primary themes that run throughout these texts. This exercise provides insight into the current trends in Atlantic Studies, opportunities in specific subfields, challenges, and questions.

Four primary texts demonstrate a new, productive application of Atlantic theory to scholarship of the Americas: Walter Mignolo's *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995),<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn's "Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America" (2003), Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Benjamin Breen's "Hybrid Atlantics: Future Directions for the History of the Atlantic World" (2013), and Ernesto Bassi's "Beyond Compartmentalized Atlantics: A Case for Embracing the Atlantic from Spanish American Shores" (2014). These texts serve not just as barometers of the current state of Atlantic studies but also do much to determine and identify best practices and future opportunities.

These four selections are indebted to concepts of hybridity and the transatlantic as articulated by Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Homi Bhabha, whose important work not only provides a stable groundwork, but often runs current with these more contemporary scholars.<sup>19</sup> With this in mind, I have elected to integrate some of their concepts into this discussion, as a means to underscore their work as not "prior to" or "followed by" these more recent scholars, but rather to emphasize the ways in which Hall, Gilroy, and Bhabha continue to contribute to these ever-evolving articulations of the Atlantic.

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<sup>18</sup> This swing toward Atlantic-oriented scholarship emerged in the aftermath of 1992, with the Quincentennial celebration becoming a point of departure for new critical studies on the making of the Americas.

<sup>19</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (Psychology Press, 1994). Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993). Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff, 21–33. (New York: Routledge, 2000).

Hall, Gilroy, and Bhabha did not endeavor to articulate hybridity as a master narrative, but rather, as a means of antagonizing the dominant imperial narrative of the academy, that culture flowed in one direction, from the center to the periphery. Bhabha introduced “non-traditional” texts to the academy, and proposed “hybridization” as the culmination of poly-cultural practices. Gilroy articulated *The Black Atlantic* as a construct through which to understand the dual consciousness of African American identity, as being of Africa, in America, and confronted by European hegemony. Hall identified and confronted the dominant narrative (in the academy and popular culture) of culture moving from center to periphery, and instead asserted that culture moved in many directions, and was in fact shaped by the ways in which content was produced, distributed, and viewed, empowering viewers as actively shaping culture. Further, Hall identified contemporary moments of societal struggle as manifestations of systems of colonialism and slavery, dismantling the condition he termed “colonial amnesia,” and suggesting that these systems are not relegated to the distant past but very much a part of contemporary culture and identity, which is itself, in flux, rather than fixed: “Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in an essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the

narratives of the past.”<sup>20</sup> These theories inform Atlantic scholarship and my approach to this material.

This project is inherently discursive, and through a close reading of four key texts by Mignolo (a literary scholar), Dean and Leibsohn (art historians), Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen (historians), and Bassi (a historian), some primary themes emerge. First, the texts call into question a perception of history as truthful and universal, and rather, assert that history has been written and recorded from a position of power. This is especially evidenced in colonial binaries, but also can be found among European centers as well. To combat this hegemonic and limited method, Mignolo endeavored to write a history of colonization from an Indigenous perspective, and to reconsider how the Renaissance has been defined as centered in the Mediterranean, and genealogically tied to classicism, thus extending the perception of the center as one deeply rooted and justified by genealogy. He rejects this genealogy by writing about early modern history with a historiographic acknowledgement, from a colonial perspective, and with a decolonial objective.<sup>21</sup>

He writes that Atlantic studies dissolves the center-periphery model and uncovers “the perspective of the colonies.”<sup>22</sup> Further, Mignolo conceptualizes writing as a colonial tool, and articulates the limited European understanding of Indigenous writing as evidence of the systems of power established through different types of writing, describing the ways in which the writing of history has been colonized – for example, those who wrote in ways unlike Europeans, were marked as “without history.” Mignolo

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<sup>20</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 2000), 23.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 24–25.

<sup>22</sup> Mignolo, 1.

dismantles this misrepresentation by describing Indigenous methods of recording information, as well as the ways in which these modes of recording information were systematically destroyed and suppressed; this colonization of both space and language has thus resulted in a creation of history that does not reflect the experience of colonization, and must be rewritten.

Mignolo problematizes the universal subject as a position of patriarchal and colonial power, and instead acknowledges multiple traditions of equal validity, or *pluritopic hermeneutics*, as described by Raimundo Panikkar. This pluritopic hermeneutic approach “moves toward an interactive concept of knowledge and understanding that reflects on the very process of constructing that portion of the world to be known... (emphasizing) not cultural relativity or multiculturalism, but the social and human interests in the act of telling a story as political intervention.”<sup>23</sup> Like Hall, Mignolo implicates and enables readers as responsible for the formation of knowledge, in articulating the ethical dimensions of understanding, implying that “while the understanding subject has to assume the truth of what is known and understood, he or she also has to assume the existence of alternative politics of location with equal rights to claim the truth...” Within this process of understanding, “a problem arises when relativism overlooks the fact that coexistences of perspective does not always take place without a display of power relations and sometimes violence.” Thus, readers are also responsible for acknowledging systems of power and violence that contribute to the writing of history, and cultural relativism does not work if it does not acknowledge these systems.

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<sup>23</sup> Mignolo, 11–15.

Based on the acknowledgement that history has been written from a place of power, that which goes invisible or unaddressed is rendered a viable scholarly topic. Within their discussion of hybridity and its discontents, Dean and Leibsohn assert that “Both visibility and invisibility, then, are fundamental to the descriptive and evocative power of the term “hybrid.”<sup>24</sup> In their recent and influential essay on hybrid atlantics, Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen tease out the ways in which history was written within certain European spaces to position themselves more favorably, referencing Liam Brockey’s observation that “the way that Northern European historians have written about their own imperial enterprises has purposefully marginalized the history of their competitors,” ultimately positing northern European colonies as modern against a perceived primitivism and barbarism in Iberian colonies.<sup>25</sup>

Bassi concurs with this perspective and asserts that burgeoning interest in Spanish America can “rebalance” perspectives of the Atlantic as unduly British. Increased attention to colonial Latin America in the study of the Atlantic can also, Bassi notes, help contemporary scholars to see the world more like the people who lived there during that time (a concept I build upon further shortly). Bassi, like Mignolo, calls for an increased incorporation of Indigenous perspectives in the rewriting of Atlantic history – and it seems that there is a need for increased attention to African and African diasporic perspectives as well—this signals some disjointedness between scholars of the Atlantic and those of the Black Atlantic, which I will also discuss further below. Through these

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<sup>24</sup> Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, “Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 12, no. 1 (2003): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10609160302341>.

<sup>25</sup> Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Benjamin Breen, “Hybrid Atlantics: Future Directions for the History of the Atlantic World,” *History Compass* 11, no. 8 (August 1, 2013): 599, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12051>.

examples, these four scholars identify the problematic and limited nature of the traditional writing of history in this space, itself an important scholarly endeavor, and in doing so, point toward opportunities to revise this history.

The second primary point that emerges in these works is the way in which they work against histories rooted in nationalism and imperialism, and instead, acknowledge the histories of the Americas, Europe, and Africa (and how they come together in these spaces and in the Caribbean) as inherently entangled. Or as Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen put it, “All Atlantics are the product of multiple “entangled histories.”<sup>26</sup> History rooted in conceptions and constructions of nationalism fails to recognize the entangled nature of these interactions, citing for a palpable example the fact that up to four fifths of immigrants in the New World prior to 1800 were enslaved Africans, and asserting that the middle passage itself cannot be read as it once was, a simple binary, but can more accurately be understood as hybrid in nature.<sup>27</sup> A more constructive approach, they assert, is to write “histories of the Atlantic world (and beyond) that de-emphasize the nation and instead focus on local contingencies, cultural exchanges, extra-national groups, Indigenous perspectives, and the roles of nonhuman actors like objects, environments, and ecologies.”<sup>28</sup>

Bassi asserts that the deployment of nationalist and imperial approaches does not accurately reflect how individuals who lived in these spaces saw the world at the time. Rather, an approach that considers the entangled histories of the transatlantic space, better reflects that perspective. Contemporary scholars must commit to acknowledging that our

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<sup>26</sup> Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen, 600.

<sup>27</sup> Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen, 599.

<sup>28</sup> Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen, 599.

conceptions of boundaries simply did not exist in the same way in the maritime world, and further suggests that the multitude of people who were mobilized across these boundaries should be considered “transimperial” and “transnational.”<sup>29</sup> This final point is critical to my discussion of wet nurses as individuals who cross these boundaries to provide a critical resource, and also can be held in conversation with Anne McClintock’s notion of domestic workers as colonial boundary markers in themselves, which I evoke throughout the following chapters.

The third point that emerges in these readings articulates modernity as a product of systemizations of subjugation, and proposes new approaches to combat, or as Stuart Hall writes, *antagonize*, these historical systems and their contemporary manifestations. Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen acknowledge that many of the networks that have been lauded as the benchmarks of modernity relied heavily on slave labor, an important point that is neglected in traditional scholarship that posits Western modernity against the primitive other, and of course, is written from that perspective of power. It is precisely this type of selective memory that Hall articulates as “colonial amnesia, a decisive mental repression.”<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, it is the acknowledgement of this amnesia, and an intolerance of it, that fuels this mode of scholarship, or as Dean and Leibsohn put it, “Hybridity is produced and enacted when particular kinds of things and practices are brought together that in

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<sup>29</sup> Ernesto Bassi, “Beyond Compartmentalized Atlantics: A Case for Embracing the Atlantic from Spanish American Shores,” *History Compass* 12, no. 9 (September 1, 2014): 706, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12186>.

<sup>30</sup> Stuart Hall, David Morley, and Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (Routledge, 1996), 25.

some way challenge presumptive norms.”<sup>31</sup> Hybridity, itself a way of marking difference, is a methodology generated by intolerance, and responds to a need to address traditional modes of history writing that are deemed unacceptable. Mignolo writes:

Thus, if scholarship cannot represent the colonized faithfully or allow the subaltern to speak, it can at least break up a monolithic notion of the subaltern and maintain an alternative discursive practice, parallel to both the official discourse of the state, for which maps represent territories and histories account for the truth of events, and the established discourse of the state, for which maps represent territories and histories account for the truth of events, and the established discourse of official scholarship, in which the rules of the academic game are the sound warranty for the value of knowledge independent of any political agenda or personal interest.”<sup>32</sup>

Mobilized by this intolerance, scholars nonetheless take up the tools and platforms of the academy whose missteps they address, or to put it vernacularly, take up the tools of the master to dismantle his house. Mignolo acknowledges this problem yet maintains, “I do not perceive contradictions in using philological procedures and comparisons to deal critically with colonial situations when, in fact, the methods I am proposing as a decolonizing venture have been forged by members of the same cultures that produced the colonial expansion.”<sup>33</sup> Here, Mignolo also articulates this particular methodology as decolonial in nature, an active dismantling of the very systems, within and outside of the academy, that contributed to a hegemonic history. While I acknowledge the limitations and issues of decoloniality, it is in this spirit that I address my own work, most essentially as a project that has some potential to more accurately reflect these histories, and in doing so, revise a hegemonic history and thus contemporary cultural and societal perceptions.

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<sup>31</sup> Dean and Leibsohn, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Mignolo, *Darker Side*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Mignolo, 9.

The final point shared among these readings is that they work against a problematically popular conception of colonization as a completely successful process of Europeanization, contained in the past. Or, as Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen put it succinctly once again, “No place in the Atlantic world contains a past that can be said to belong neatly and exclusively to one or another empire.”<sup>34</sup> There remained, in fact, many places and populations that went undominated, or “only nominally controlled by any European state in the colonial era.” And a primary problem with traditional history is how it articulates a “Europeanization of conquered peoples...” Instead, they suggest, “a more nuanced use of the term that reflects the complex nature of colonial societies, which were mutually influenced by African, Indigenous American, and European actors and by violence and coercion as well as peaceable exchanges.”<sup>35</sup>

Mignolo asserts that colonization is not relegated to the past, but rather “has acquired a new form in a transnational world.”<sup>36</sup> And indeed, his own comparative analysis of the Renaissance, as well as other projects to do with modernity, make clear the contemporary manifestations of these systems of oppression. And in fact, it could be said that this goal of relating the past to the present is a hallmark of contemporary Atlantic studies, rendering the investigations critical to a revision of history, but also to contemporary societal and cultural perspectives. This characteristic of Atlantic studies also sheds light on the difficulties of projects like these finding traditional academic homes – this new field of scholarship rebukes traditional notions of time and place within historical study, instead drawing temporal connections, and arguing for entangled

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<sup>34</sup> Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen, “Hybrid Atlantics,” 600.

<sup>35</sup> Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen, 602.

<sup>36</sup> Mignolo, *Darker Side*, 1.

histories of places. While the field, and the primary methodologies described here certainly present unique challenges, the opportunities are manifold: to better understand this space of movement is to better understand our contemporary world, to track a particular theme across culture, and to participate in an evolving field that is currently and actively revising conceptions of history and contemporary culture.

To that end, these scholars present some particularly successful projects and trends. Bassi, in his essay also represents the culmination of a seminar on entangled histories, finds that biographies and microhistories do much to “disrupt broad generalizations and grand preconceptions,” pushing back against the dominant narratives rooted in imperialism and nationalism, “bounded by political geographies.” In this way, people and commodities are perceived as “transnational” and “transimperial,” which again, according to Bassi, more accurately reflect how they would have been understood at the time, working against traditional histories framed by nationalism and imperialism.

Bassi cites studies of islands as a recent and productive trend, and more particularly, islands as spaces through which to study entangled histories. Additionally, biographies of individuals moving through this space contribute to nuanced understandings of entangled histories, again, against nationalist and imperialist models. Could it be said, then, that studies of single commodities could do something similar? Both Bassi and Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen cite David Hancock’s study of Madeiran wine (*Oceans of Wine*, 2009) as an exemplary project. Hancock actively engages in a critique of previous studies to “explain the intertwined nature of the early modern Atlantic economy” and characterizes the Atlantic through its “frequent transgression of imperial boundaries.” Bassi writes that from the Portuguese archipelago of Madeira, the

Atlantic is “decentralized (not centered on mother countries), networked (connected by an infrastructure that bound together subjects of different imperial powers), and self-organized by those who made connections possible (not by imperial authorities).”

Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen laud Hancock for his mining of the underused archives on Madeira Island, and for avoiding “the pitfalls typical of some commodity histories, which have been criticized for their overreliance on secondary sources and broad generalizations.”

Bassi and Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen also identify scientific archives, and specifically those of medicine and botany, to be particularly ripe possibilities right now for further Atlantic investigations. Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen bring up exiting opportunities for research into medicine and botany in the realm of transatlantic networks and commodities,<sup>37</sup> and Bassi points toward recent investigations into scientific knowledge and how it travels throughout the Atlantic for its potential to disrupt the hegemonic notion that Enlightenment ideals flowed only from Europe to elsewhere. Through these investigations it can be proven that knowledge was also transmitted from Indigenous and African sources, and was strengthened in some cases through these interactions, and elsewhere they were, as Mignolo put it, suppressed and destroyed by colonial powers.

This project is aligned with Atlantic studies in its current incarnation, in what Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen consider an emerging and evolving field,<sup>38</sup> one that Bassi writes has only recently developed from “a perspective into a legitimate field of study.” Bassi concludes that Atlantic studies and thus perspectives of American, Latin American,

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<sup>37</sup> Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen, “Hybrid Atlantics,” 602.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 604.

and Atlantic history will continue to shift, based on these new perspectives and methodologies, an exciting prospect, indeed, and one that encourages further integration of African and African diasporic perspectives as well.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Emerging Field of Milk Studies**

Melanie Dupuis has come to be known as the “Mother of Milk Studies,” having written the foundational text in the field, *Nature’s Perfect Food: How Milk Became America’s Drink* (2002), with the following: “A number of years ago, it became clear to me that I could spend the rest of my life writing this book... Milk, as many people who study it have told me, is a black hole that sucks you in and never lets you escape. The real truth is that people who study milk never want to escape because the topic is endlessly fascinating.”<sup>40</sup> The conversations that this research encouraged me to engage in have been some of the most absorbing, intriguing, and haunting of my life, including, most recently, on a panel with Dupuis herself at the Annual Yale Foods Symposium. Also participating were Mathilde Cohen, who organized the panel and is an expert on milk and law, and Diana Mincyte, who studies milk from the perspective of agrarian studies. Each of these people considers milk in a unique and compelling way. Other foundational milk scholars are eco-feminists Carol J. Adams and Greta Gaard. My research relies upon

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<sup>39</sup> Looking forward, transnational projects such as this should integrate these recent works: Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacy of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015; and Jennifer L. Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> E. Melanie Dupuis, *Nature’s Perfect Food* (New York: NYU Press, 2002), vii.

foundational texts on infant feeding and wet nursing by Janet Golden and Valerie Fildes, who wrote the initial social histories of these practices in America.<sup>41</sup>

Recent, innovative research on milk with feminist and decolonial perspectives include work by Deborah Valenze,<sup>42</sup> Greta Gaard,<sup>43</sup> Katherine Carroll,<sup>44</sup> Kara Swanson,<sup>45</sup> Narin Hassan,<sup>46</sup> Rhonda Shaw and Alison Bartlett,<sup>47</sup> and my collaborator, Mathilde Cohen.<sup>48</sup> These scholars work within fields of the social sciences, history, and the law, and comprise an excellent cohort of forward thinking researchers of human milk. Cohen, for example, is working toward rendering the legal definition of breastfeeding in the United States as a protected relationship, and, with women's rights at the core of her inquiries, considers whether or not human milk should be regulated.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Valerie A. Fildes, *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present*. Family, Sexuality, and Social Relations in Past Times. Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA: Basil Blackwell, 1988. Janet Golden, *A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle* (Cambridge History of Medicine. Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> Deborah Valenze, *Milk: A Local and Global History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Greta Gaard, "Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies," *American Quarterly* 65 (2013): 595-618, 599.

<sup>44</sup> Katherine Carroll, "Breast Milk Donation as Care Work," in *Ethnographies of Breastfeeding: Cultural Contexts and Confrontations*, ed. Tanya Cassidy and Abdullahi El-Tom (Bloomsbury: London), 173-86; Parker et al.

<sup>45</sup> Kara W. Swanson, "Human Milk as Technology and Technologies of Human Milk: Medical Imaginings in the Early 20th Century United States," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 37 (2009): 20-37; and Kara W. Swanson, *Banking on the Body. The Market in Blood, Milk, and Sperm in Modern America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> Narin Hassan, "Milk Markets: Technology, the Lactating Body, and New Forms of Consumption," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 38 (2010): 209-228;

<sup>47</sup> Rhonda Shaw and Alison Bartlett, eds., *Giving Breastmilk: Body Ethics and Contemporary Breastfeeding Practice* (Bedford: Demeter Press, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> Mathilde Cohen, "Regulating Milk. Women and Cows in France and the United States," *American Journal of Comparative Law* 65, no. 3 (2017): 349-526.

<sup>49</sup> Mathilde Cohen, *Should Human Milk Be Regulated?* 9 U.C. Irvine L. Rev. 555 (2019): 557.

The burgeoning field of milk studies, and a number of innovative approaches to milk, all point to a bright future of milk scholarship, especially in the humanities, where there remains a notable lack of research on the topic. This dissertation takes one step toward filling that gap. In taking an interdisciplinary approach to milk movement that is rooted in feminism, visual studies, transatlantic theory, and with a steady focus on lactation as labor, I endeavor through this project to both intervene and make an original contribution to art historical scholarship.

### **Outline of the Dissertation**

Ultimately milk is revealed for its value, and lactation as a valuable form of labor, throughout transatlantic interaction, in five unique case studies throughout North American history. In Chapter 1, I consider some of the ways that human milk was considered an active agent in the social, medical, and racial spheres of colonial Mexico. By asking what milk could do, I hope to disrupt a notion of milk as a static substance relegated to one use. In this chapter, milk has several uses, malevolent and benevolent, which can be seen, respectively, in *casta* paintings and codices containing medical and pharmacological data. In a closely related chapter, Chapter 2 takes up a similar set of questions, and asks them in another colonized space in the Americas: colonial New England. In each, the people who are primarily responsible for human milk are midwives, and through this responsibility and proximity to fertility, lactation, and morbidity, these threshold figures are rendered vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft. In chapter 2, I consider the ways in which lactation was surprisingly central to the witchcraft frenzy, and antagonize the intellectual conflict over the midwife witch, ultimately to extrapolate on

why the witch has become an important talisman for feminists. Specifically, I consider visual representations of milk and lactation as these feminist evocations of the witch evolve, along with feminism, toward intersectionality. A thread of systemic violence against women trails into Chapter 3, which addresses lactation as a justification for slavery in the American south, and the contemporaneous invention of photography, which was used to both capture lactation relationships and to offer continued rationalization for the institution of slavery. As in the previous two chapters, I conclude Chapter 3 with a contemporary woman who, through her art, is able to both bring attention to and undo some of the damage inflicted upon these women. Chapter 4 considers how the Industrial Revolution endeavored to eradicate human lactation, and industrial, medical photographs that capture the labor of the development of formula, those resisting that attempt, and the women whose labor in that process have gone unacknowledged. This chapter is set in Boston, which was the hotbed of the scramble to develop a dairy-based human milk substitute, and includes photographs of these processes as well as advertisements. Chapter 5 is connected to Chapter 4 in positioning the early twentieth century as a turning point for human lactation and how milk moves through societies, interrogating specifically how milk has been transported in innovative ways throughout New York City for a century, from 1918 to 2018. This chapter relies upon photographs from nursing manuals, archives of Worlds Fairs and sideshows, and contemporary photographs of the very recent collaboration between the New York Milk Bank and the Sirens Women's Motorcycle Club. Finally the Epilogue questions the contentiousness of the visibility of lactation, and as in other sections, discusses

contemporary female artists who are grappling with the larger issues that are threaded throughout this project.

Throughout these case studies, the visual materials encourage a conception of lactation as a form of labor, and that this labor has been exploited throughout American history to the detriment of the most vulnerable women and children in societies. Yet, they also demonstrate, time and time again, ways in which networks of women have resisted these oppressive regimes, at the time as well as later on. Sometimes this happens when a poet sees a centuries old painting and it troubles her. Sometimes an underground rapper has a utopic, intersectional vision of witchcraft. Sometimes this happens among clandestine groups in the middle of the night. Sometimes immigrant wet nurses organize and demand rights for themselves and their infants. Sometimes Sirens deliver milk on motorcycles.

## Chapter 1

### **An Active Agent: Human Milk in *Casta* Paintings and Codices of Colonial Mexico**

In a recent series of experiments at the University of Western Australia, cell biologist Foteini Kakulas uncovered something quite remarkable: lactation is not a one-way street, but rather, an exchange of fluids. As babies nurse, some of their saliva enters the nipple, and the milk composition radically shifts based on the infant's health. Specifically, Kakulas found a rapid response in milk to infection; while milk normally has a minimal amount of leukocytes (cells which fight infection), when a baby is ill and infection is present in saliva, the amount of leukocytes drastically increase. Through this trade of fluids, lactating women create an effective medicine for babies.<sup>50</sup>

This remarkable finding has generated a great deal of attention and excitement. But the notion of human milk as medicinal is in fact quite established, and has been both erased and trivialized. In colonial Mexico, midwives recognized the curative quality of milk and included it in pharmacological and medical texts, prescribing it for a number of ailments, as I shall discuss later in this chapter. This notion of milk as medicinal extends to colonial New England as well, where midwives also play a prominent role in the social and curative lives of milk.

This is just one example of the ways in which milk was an active and interactive substance in colonial Mexico, and disavows contemporary readers of the notion that milk is just a stagnant fluid. The very recent discovery that milk does not flow in one direction

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<sup>50</sup> Laura Sanders, "Backwash from Nursing Babies May Trigger Infection Fighters," *Science News*, May 15, 2017, <https://www.sciencenews.org/blog/growth-curve/backwash-nursing-babies-may-trigger-infection-fighters>.

but, rather, is exchanged with saliva, is both remarkable and builds upon centuries of knowledge of the extraordinary things this ordinary substance can do, as well as how its agency has also been misunderstood, improperly put to use.

This chapter highlights the ways in which human milk was understood in the Viceroyalty of New Spain as an active agent with the power to alter racial identity and socio-economic standing, and its practitioners (namely Nahua midwives) as revered for their important roles of supporting lactation, medically, culturally, and spiritually.<sup>51</sup> Through analyses of *casta* paintings and colonial codices, and tracking them as they circulated between Europe and Mexico, it becomes clear that milk held unique import in colonial culture, as an esteemed substance that could not only alter identity, but sustained fragile life and served as a remedy for various ailments. This visual approach to the various methods of infant feeding provides needed attention to the history of women and children during this period, recovers Indigenous knowledge about breastfeeding, reveals some interesting understandings of breast milk, and illuminates how colonialism reached and impacted the most intimate of spaces, acts, and relationships. As scholarship of early modernity increasingly turns toward a global Renaissance, milk emerges as a unique substance to better understand transatlantic interaction. Within the context of the material Atlantic, the archival corpus is observed in transatlantic motion, but moreover, milk (and lactating bodies) move as well, commoditized and transported to provide a substance integral to colonization, slavery, and the very notion of the New World.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The Viceroyalty of New Spain was established in 1535 by Spain to maintain control over its colonies and ended with Mexican Independence in 1821.

<sup>52</sup> The material Atlantic is a concept that positions the circulation of materials throughout the transatlantic space as foundational to capitalism.

## Human Milk and Conceptions of Racial Categories in Colonial Mexico

A woman modestly nurses her infant, while her husband turns to gaze on his wife and son contentedly (fig 1.1). The illuminated text above him reads in Spanish, *Spaniard and Morisca Produce an Albino*, concisely describing the way in which a Spanish man and Morisca – a woman of  $\frac{3}{4}$  Spanish lineage and  $\frac{1}{4}$  African – have married and produced an Albino, a boy thus  $\frac{7}{8}$  Spanish and  $\frac{1}{8}$  African. Their features carefully represent each of the distinct races, and though the setting is minimal and tone subtle, it emanates with the sense of order assigned to this particular coupling, common to those in which the union results in offspring oriented toward whiteness. This painting is one panel in a series of fourteen, each representing a unique racial category of New Spain. Painted by Juan Rodríguez Juárez in Mexico City in 1715, it is part of the first known *casta* set.<sup>53</sup> While the genre mainly comprises sets of paintings, cases in which all sixteen categories are rendered on one canvas can help viewers visualize the genre (fig. 1.2). The miscegenation of Europeans, Africans, and Americans is neatly imagined as sixteen distinct races, arranged hierarchically according to notions of purity and taintedness. Each panel depicts a mother, a father, and a child to demonstrate how each new racial category was created through the reproduction of two others. The paintings can be understood as highly regulated visual representations of an invention of race with significant social import, as the taxonomies maintained insidious and persistent

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<sup>53</sup> Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 14–16.

implications in subsequent centuries, in spite of Nationalists dismantling the system during the Mexican Revolution.<sup>54</sup>

While the paintings may seem to *observe* culture, Magali Carrera argues instead that they reflect an authoritative desire to control the colonial body, or in Homi Bhabha's words, they comprise "a voyeuristic [view that] enacts the complexity and contradiction of [the] desire to see, to fix cultural difference in a containable, visible object."<sup>55</sup> As Nicholas Mirzoeff writes on the visual culture of colonialism, "The emphasis on difference was necessary to convince Europeans that the Other played no part in the Self, that the colonizer was radically different from, and superior to, the colonized... the taxonomic impulse was above all a search for convincing visual signs of difference."<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, Carrera asserts, this attempt to fix identity in order to maintain control was made futile – not just by revolution – but by the "complexity of hybridity lived daily"<sup>57</sup> by the inhabitants of this newly entangled world.

*Casta* sets were, and are, transatlantic objects that largely have been split apart, the panels reimagined as individual works of art. The primary clientele were visiting Spanish bureaucrats, military officials, and clergy who brought the panels back to Spain as souvenirs of the Americas that uniquely represented a new ethnography and racial

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<sup>54</sup> See authoritative, foundational texts on *casta* paintings: Katzew, *Casta Painting*. Magali Marie Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings*, Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art and Culture (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003). Susan Deans-Smith, "Creating the Colonial Subject: *Casta* Paintings, Collectors, and Critics in Eighteenth-Century Mexico and Spain," *Colonial Latin American Review* 14, no. 2 (December 1, 2005): 169–204.

<sup>55</sup> Carrera, *Imagining Identity*, 150.

<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Photography at the Heart of Darkness," in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London: Routledge, 1998), 158.

<sup>57</sup> Carrera, *Imagining Identity*, 153.

mixing that stirred European curiosity and were displayed in official public spaces, including the Natural History Museum of Madrid, as well as aristocratic homes.<sup>58</sup> They were built for export and assembled to be shipped, although some were purchased by Spaniards living in the viceroyalty and remain in Mexico.<sup>59</sup> Popular sets were copied, as evidenced in how the first set was faithfully duplicated decades later by an unknown artist (Fig. 1.3 and 1.4).<sup>60</sup> Reconstructing full sets proves quite difficult, so viewing panels in relation to one another provides viewers with access to the values assigned through the stratified registers. This section investigates these values as they pertain to breastfeeding practices and how they, in turn, contributed to the invention of race at this moment. Breast milk, understood as processed blood, but with its own unique properties as a product of laboring women's bodies as well as a transatlantic commodity, was an active contagion with the power to alter individuals' social and racial identities.

Through an examination of the functions of breastfeeding in *casta* paintings, this chapter makes the following claims; with few exceptions: 1) Breastfeeding appears solely in upper registers and functions as a marker of European civility and are situated against lower registers in which children are denied breast milk, revealing a calculated misrepresentation that justified colonialism; 2) Breastfeeding only appears in panels with Spanish fathers, whose gazes oversee the action, signaling Spanish patrimony as a civilizing force and thus a need for colonial control; 3) Breastfeeding couples solely produce male offspring, maintaining patrilineal power; 4) Wet nurses go absent in these panels, directly opposing documentation that supports wet nursing as the primary mode

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<sup>58</sup> Susan Deans-Smith, "Creating the Colonial Subject," 169–204.

<sup>59</sup> Maria Concepcion Garcia Saiz, *Las castas mexicanas: Un genero pictorico americano* (Milan: Olivetti, 1989), 44.

<sup>60</sup> Saiz, 57–62.

of feeding white infants in this culture. Wet nurses, and the dominant system of Indigenous and African women breastfeeding Spanish infants, have been systematically erased from the visual record. Theoretically, this project acknowledges invisibility as subject, and interrogates how each panel, and thus each racial category, functions as a framing device, defining its substantive meaning through omission.

To understand *casta* sets, histories of science, gender and sexuality, and colonialism must be considered. I argue that they can be interpreted as a convergence of the following hegemonic ideals: colonization as a civilizing force, Enlightenment-era advances in medicine, productivity- and hygiene-centered Bourbon reforms, and an Inquisition-era obsession with blood purity, which encouraged European women to nurse their infants in order to avoid the tainted breast milk of non-European women, who in reality labored as wet nurses for these European and creole families. The deployment of breastfeeding imagery functioned as an effective trope through which to transmit these values visually to a transatlantic and multilingual audience.

Much has been made of the ways in which the New World was eroticized by the European imagination as virginal and penetrable, but it also was *maternalized*: from the early moments that the viceroyalty and her subjects were conjured in the colonial imagination, they were imagined as fertile and lactating, and quickly commoditized for their ability to nourish Europeans. During the initial phases of colonization, Iberians swiftly established wet nursing as a primary means to feed their children through the employment of Indigenous women and the enslavement of African women, who were marveled at in travel narratives touting their physiognomy and breastfeeding abilities; enslaved African women were monetarily valued for both their ability to reproduce and

lactate.<sup>61</sup> These enterprises were implemented in tandem with those of Catholic missionaries, who established “foundling hospitals” for abandoned infants, seen as an unfortunate result of racial mixing. Foundling hospitals served a secondary function of allowing wet nurses to continue producing milk between more lucrative positions in homes, and with a 75% mortality rate were observed as “an organized system of infanticide.”<sup>62</sup>

The eighteenth century heralded sweeping philosophical changes as Enlightenment ideals moved from Europe into the colonies. As taxonomic systems were introduced to decipher the natural world, so were they wielded to delineate racial differences among humanity, just as advances in science and medicine significantly altered breastfeeding and wet nursing practices in the colonies, and colonization and conversion ended significant breastfeeding practices among Indigenous communities.<sup>63</sup> In the mid-eighteenth century, the burgeoning interest in medicine brought about discussions of women’s health, and particularly in relation to that of children. Many factors influenced the sweeping movement toward middle and upper-class women throughout Europe and the colonies breastfeeding their own children. In 1748 British physician William Cadogan published a groundbreaking essay, in which he strongly

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<sup>61</sup> Jennifer L. Morgan, “‘Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder’: Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500–1770,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1, 1997): 167–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2953316>.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Ford and John Murray, *The Handbook for Travellers in Spain* (London: J. Murray, 1892), 210.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Migden Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 165.

encouraged women to nurse their own infants.<sup>64</sup> New attention was paid to the vital importance of colostrum in British and French medical scholarship, ending the practice of purging (expressing and disposing of) colostrum, and encouraging women to breastfeed immediately after birth. These ideas circulated in journals and via physicians among the elite in Europe and the colonies and then disseminated to the middle and lower classes in the 18th century. In 1750 a well-known London physician recommended that infants be nursed within 24 hours of delivery instead of 3-4 days, as had been customary, which thereby reduced incidences of milk fever in mothers, an infection caused by stagnant milk that resulted in high fevers and maternal morbidity. Due to these ideological evolutions, both maternal morbidity and infant morbidity fell dramatically in the 18th century.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to health and science, the Enlightenment interest in science and Bourbon reforms that encouraged women to be good mothers dovetailed to emphasize the mother-infant bond forged through the nursing in the critical time post-childbirth. Marilyn Yalom explains, “the family unity, seen as a microcosm, was judged to be best served when the mother undertook to breastfeed with the same dedication she brought to her rigorous house cleaning.”<sup>66</sup> Through breastfeeding, then, elite Spanish women were seen as productive members of society.

In her work on *casta* paintings, Ilona Katzew describes the sacred importance of milk in Spain and the colonies, that the “concocted blood that could shape the entire character of a republic was at the forefront of the political discourse.” Spanish intellectual

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<sup>64</sup> William Cadogan. *An Essay Upon Nursing, and the Management of Children: From Their Birth to Three Years of Age*. J. Roberts, 1748.

<sup>65</sup> Valerie A. Fildes. *Breasts, Bottles, and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986, 100.

José Clavijo y Fajardo joined the ranks of Linnaeus and Rousseau in stating, “the practice of giving children to wet nurses is detrimental to the State, to the health of the mother, and to her most inalienable rights... If [this] habit continues, it will lead to depraved customs, and to the depletion of our country.” Ajofrin called wet nursing a capital sin because many wet nurses were unmarried (yet necessarily had given birth, therefore out of wedlock), that the babies would imbibe these sinful characteristics. Ajofrin went on to vocally blame the practice of wet nursing for many of the ills of the colonies.<sup>67</sup>

The philosophies articulated in these foundational texts moved through the colonies, as Susan Socolow writes in *The Women of Colonial Latin America*: “Wet nurses were denounced as ignorant practitioners responsible for a large degree of infant mortality,”<sup>68</sup> and the non-white women who had served as wet nurses were associated with danger to the white body. Simultaneously, the Indigenous midwives who were highly esteemed culturally and spiritually, were targeted by colonial officials as threats to European medicine and by the Catholic Church as practitioners of the bride of Satan. The Aztec goddess associated with midwifery, Cihuacoatl, was conflated visually with the European witch (fig. 1.5), and countless midwives were subsequently lynched; consequently, a primary figure of the Aztec belief system and a vital occupation, both of which supported breastfeeding in profound ways, were obliterated.<sup>69</sup> Thus, in the visual

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<sup>67</sup> Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 112–15.

<sup>68</sup> Katzew, 170–72.

<sup>69</sup> Cecelia Klein, “‘Wild Woman in Colonial Mexico: An Encounter of European and Aztec Concepts of the Other,’ 1995,” in *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450–1650*, ed. Claire Farago (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 245–265.

record, wet nurses are systematically erased and midwives, with whom they were closely associated, are identified as dangerous witches.

This striking omission of wet nurses from the *casta* genre also reflects an investment in *limpieza de sangre*, a concept of blood purity that originated in sixteenth-century Spain as a means to authenticate the absence of Semitic and Muslim blood that grew into social frenzy in the subsequent two centuries. Maria Elena Martínez reveals how women's reproduction was implicated as contributing to the various *castas*.<sup>70</sup> As the Inquisition endeavored to cease the transmission of characteristics it deemed undesirable, impurity was feminized and preexistent beliefs about contamination became more closely associated with women's reproductive and familial roles; women's blood and milk as vehicles originated in a medieval physiological theory in which the mother's blood fed the child in the womb and then, transformed into milk, fed the baby outside the womb as well."<sup>71</sup> Attention turned toward milk as a contagion that could transmit racial and religious impurity to children, and lactating women as conduits.<sup>72</sup> The notion that breast milk was "concocted blood that could shape the entire character of a republic was at the forefront of political discourse,"<sup>73</sup> and the dangers of wet nursing to the state were expounded upon by intellectuals who warned that the practice would, no doubt, be the

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<sup>70</sup> María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Anne Kuznesof, "Ethnic and Gender Influences on 'Spanish' Creole Society in Colonial Spanish America," *Colonial Latin American Review* 4, no. 1 (1995): 160.

<sup>72</sup> Mary Douglas has identified breast milk as a bodily fluid that can transgress physical boundaries and is vulnerable to contamination, and thus figures prominently in imagery of purity and contagion. See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>73</sup> Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 113.

ruin of the viceroyalty.<sup>74</sup> The lactating body thus became a site of contestation, as non-white wet nurses were disproportionately prosecuted by the Inquisition, their milk referenced as “slime” that contaminated infants ethnically, for life.<sup>75</sup> As Rebecca Earle writes in *The Body of the Conquistador*, “... Spanish texts ranging from law codes to domestic manuals advised against or prohibited outright the use of Jewish and Islamic converts to nurse Christian children. Writers alerted readers to cases in which men of pureblood became Judaizers because they had been suckled by Jewish wet nurses. Similar fears were expressed that children fed by morisca wet nurses would become ‘amoriscados’, or moorified.”<sup>76</sup>

Characteristics that endangered the viceroyalty were assigned to stratified racial categories, as evidenced in panel 10 in a set by José Joaquín Magón, which reads, “From Black father and Indian mother, the Lobo is bad blood: thieves and pickpockets,” (fig. 1.6) and panel 11, captioned, “From Lobo and Indian woman, the Cambujo is usually slow, lazy and cumbersome” (fig. 1.7).<sup>77</sup>

As Spanish power waned in the late eighteenth century, the Bourbon Reforms were implemented to maintain military and economic control.<sup>78</sup> The objective was to

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<sup>74</sup> Katzew, 112–15.

<sup>75</sup> François Soyer, *Popularizing Anti-Semitism in Early Modern Spain and Its Empire: Francisco de Torrejoncillo and the Centinela Contra Judíos (1674)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 38.

<sup>76</sup> Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 209.

<sup>77</sup> Saiz, *Las Castas Mexicanas*, 108.

<sup>78</sup> Spanish Bourbon King Philip V and his successors Ferdinand VI, Charles III, and Charles IV carried out policy changes throughout the empire, throughout the eighteenth century. Known collectively as the Bourbon Reforms, the policies reasserted Spanish

civilize New Spain through increased productivity, domesticity, hygiene, and surveillance, all of which were enacted through breastfeeding practices.<sup>79</sup> The reforms encouraged elite Spanish women to become more productive members of society, and most of this productive energy was focused on the home, through behaviors assigned to hardworking wives and mothers, and the good behavior forged early in life through breastfeeding. The family household was seen as a synecdoche of society that was “best served when the mother undertook to breastfeed with the same dedication she brought to her rigorous house cleaning.”<sup>80</sup> The productivity assigned to Spanish maternity can be seen in uppermost panels (often panels 2-3 in a set) such as this one, in which a Spanish mother breastfeeds her son while her similarly productive Morisco husband works as a tailor (fig. 1.8), and others in which Spanish, Castiza, Mestiza, and Morisca women, all situated closest to purity in this spectrum of whiteness, care for their children in orderly, happy homes; in the top panel, a Spanish mother and mestizo father (fig. 1.9), and in the bottom, a Spanish father and Castizo mother (fig. 1.10). In both of these images, Spanish

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control of economics, trade, modernization, and technology, and stronger control of politics and administration. Foundational texts on the Bourbon Reforms are: Jacques Barbier, “The Culmination of the Bourbon Reforms, 1787–1792,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 57 (February 1977): 51–68; David A. Brading, “Bourbon Spain and Its American Empire,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 1, *Colonial Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell, 389–439 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984); John Fisher, “Soldiers, Societies, and Politics in Spanish America,” *Latin American Research Review* 17, no. 1 (1982): 217–22. Allan J. Kuethe, “La desregulación comercial y la reforma imperial en la época de Carlos III: Los casos de Nueva España y Cuba,” *Historia Mexicana* 41, no. 2 (1991): 265–92; Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain, America, and the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759–1789* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); and Barbara H. Stein and Stanley J. Stein, *Edge of Crisis: War and Trade in the Spanish Atlantic, 1789–1808* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>79</sup> Carrera, *Imagining Identity*, 33–34.

fathers and Mestizo mothers produce Castizo boys (fig. 1.11 and fig. 1.12) and in these four panels, Spanish fathers and Morisca mothers produce Albino boys, all in harmonious scenes (figs. 1.13, 1.14, 1.15, 1.16).<sup>81</sup>

With startlingly few exceptions, breastfeeding couples produce sons rather than daughters, assuring that through this act of productivity, patrilineal power would be maintained. The domestic harmony of the scenes in which predominantly Spanish women breastfeed their infants can be held in stark contrast with the discord of the violent panels in which Spanish men reproduce with Negras, couplings coded as volatile and dangerous. This dichotomy is exemplified in two pairings, in which the harmonious production of a Castizo can be held in sharp contrast with the production of a Mulatto.

In the first pairing, from a set painted by Ignacio de Castro between 1775 and 1800, the panel *From Spaniard and Mestiza, Castizo* (fig. 1.17), emanates with domestic harmony. The mother is seated and focused on peacefully nursing her infant son, who rests comfortably on her lap. Her left arm embraces him, while her right hand makes her breast available to him through a modest opening in her dress. The baby's father stands protectively over them, overseeing the scene with one hand rested on the mother's shoulder and the other gestured toward them, as if available for assistance. They are well dressed and the room adorned with gold-framed mirrors, signaling their wealth and status. They are physically connected as a cohesive family unit. In the lower panel, *From*

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<sup>81</sup> It should be noted that during this time, among Spaniards in the colonies, there were two distinct categories: criollos (creoles) who had been in the colonies for generations, and peninsulares, arriving from the Iberian peninsula. The Bourbon Reforms privileged the more newly arrived Spaniards, and criollos were considered "tainted" due to being immersed in the environment of the Americas. I have not seen evidence of a distinction between criollo and peninsular in the casta sets, but this warrants further investigation.

*Spaniard and Negra, Mulatta*, reverberates with chaotic violence. The woman approaches the man with arms raised, as he grips her arms. Between them, their offspring, a daughter, attempts to hold her mother back. The child's eyes are fearful and wary, while the man's are enraged. The room is dark and sparsely decorated. The natural and productive coupling in the top register produces a son, whereas the chaotic pairing of the lower register yields a daughter. This pairing is very closely replicated in nearly identical panels (fig. 1.18) by an unknown artist, who painted a *casta* set based on Ignacio de Castro's.

In spite of the reforms, wet nursing maintained popularity, and because of them, non-Spanish maternal bodies were subjected to increased surveillance, and a more regimented attempt to maintain a distance between elite bodies, deemed clean and pure, and plebian bodies, feared as contagious. The persistent attempts by the Bourbon government to define, contain, and order these bodies reflects "their failure to control the body," and *casta* paintings can in turn be read productively as visual manifestations of this failure.<sup>82</sup>

The races rendered lowest in the *casta* system are defined by that which they lack, according to these regimes: whiteness, purity, clothing, productivity, order, and, I argue, breastfeeding. In a set by Ramón Torres from 1770, in which domestic harmony emanates in upper registers, the bottommost panel (fig. 1.19), depicting full-blooded Indians, speaks volumes. While the father hunts across the river, the bare-breasted mother reclines on the ground, and her determined baby tries in vain to get to her breast, while she shields herself from him. In these lowest registers, hungry babies are denied their

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<sup>82</sup> Carrera, *Imagining Identity*, 134.

mother's milk, and these races are coded as uncivilized, unenlightened, and negligent in allowing their children to go hungry while breasts, and therefore milk, is readily available.<sup>83</sup> Within this genre, the bared breast must be engaged in productive empire building while the other is modestly covered, connoting civility. Breasts bared for any other reason signify a lack of, and need for, Spanish control.

Ultimately, in this attempt to fix and thus control sixteen unique races, human milk held unique agency, and a discursive approach that considers the social history of breastfeeding proves instrumental in untangling a complicated genre and the ways in which it can be productively engaged – while uniquely considering the particular vulnerabilities of women and children under colonialism. Recent work in critical race theory acknowledges racism not as a byproduct of racial difference but as the process through which race, or various races, are created,<sup>84</sup> what *casta* sets ultimately reveal, then, is a distinct moment of racism, an attempt to assert control through the invention of race in a uniquely visual form. Conceptions of race are, of course, quite different now than they were at that time, in that unique zone. As Ananda Cohen Suarez writes in “Making Race Visible in the Colonial Andes:”

The ‘invention’ of race in colonial Latin America was born out of a necessity for Spaniards to establish power distinctions based on skin color, physiognomy, lineage, dress, and a host of other factors, in order to demarcate themselves from their colonial subjects. Indigenous, African-descended, and mixed race peoples

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<sup>83</sup> The medical documents circulating at this time encouraged breastfeeding until between ages two and three, and the nonwhite children who are denied milk in these panels are well within this age range; thus these racial types are coded as not just uncivilized but unenlightened in their understandings of children's health and negligent in allowing their children to go hungry while breasts, and therefore milk, are readily available.

<sup>84</sup> Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2014).

continually pushed the boundaries of racial prescription in their daily lives as a means of asserting agency within a restrictive social hierarchy.<sup>85</sup>

The *casta* paintings offer a way to visualize the Spanish attempt to exact control through this process of categorization and differentiation. They do not reflect culture, so much as they reflect a primary objective of the colonial regime. In doing so, the evocation of lactation is only accurate in so far as it reveals strategic modes of colonization.

Poet Natasha Trethewey wrote a series of poems on the *casta* set by Juan Rodriguez Juarez, as part of her 2012 collection, *Thrall*,<sup>86</sup> through which she explores themes of race and identity. In one poem, she reflects on the panel *De Español y Negra Produce Mulato* (fig. 1.20), at the center of which is an unhappy boy with exaggerated features. She writes:

Still, the centuries have not dulled  
the sullenness of the child's expression.

If there is light inside him, it does not shine  
through the paint that holds his face

in profile—his domed forehead, eyes  
nearly closed beneath a heavy brow.<sup>87</sup>

She describes the scene, the way in which the father does not look at his son, how the woman's necklace looks like blood, how their categories are affixed to the wall behind them. "What should we make of this?" she asks. This has got to be a feeling shared by many people who have tried to understand this strange and troubling genre of painting.

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<sup>85</sup> Ananda Cohen-Aponte, "Making Race Visible in the Colonial Andes," *Envisioning Others: Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America*, Pamela A. Patton, ed. Boston: Brill, 2016, 187.

<sup>86</sup> Natasha Trethewey. *Thrall*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Trethewey, 19.

She reflects that the child is like an object, and ultimately that he is just paint. He is not a real boy, but entirely imagined and reimagined:

... The boy is a palimpsest of paint—  
layers of color, history rendering him

that precise shade of in-between.  
Before this he was nothing: blank

canvas—before image or word, before  
a last brush stroke fixed him in his place.<sup>88</sup>

Tretheway draws a connection between the conjuring of an unhappy boy with exaggerated features to the creation of racial categories. In a 2015 interview she responded to a question about her perspective of the Enlightenment:

... When I introduce those poems and talk about the Enlightenment, what I talk about is how good the Enlightenment was and how much it gave us, but there is complexity in that it also began to codify for us the ideas of racial difference. What's interesting to me about the Enlightenment is that it did both of those things together, at the same time. So what I'm interested in in *Thrall* are the ideas that come to us from the Enlightenment about racial difference—these deeply engrained and unexamined notions of “white supremacy” and the twin “black inferiority” that we see manifest around us all the time, and come to us from the language of the Enlightenment. How can something so wonderful do something so not wonderful at the same time?<sup>89</sup>

*Casta* paintings are extremely complex objects that are difficult to understand. They are also dangerous, in that they can easily be misunderstood as accurate reflections of culture. With this poem, and the others, Tretheway makes it clear that they more accurately reflect the calculated system of racial categorization as it emerged during the Enlightenment. Like several other women featured throughout these chapters, she undoes some of the initial damage these images wrought.

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<sup>88</sup> Tretheway, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Chard deNiord, “The Typology of Taint, in *Thrall to a Word: A Conversation with Natasha Trethewey*.” *World Literature Today*, May 27, 2015.

## Lactation Information in Colonial Codices

While breastfeeding is adopted as a means to codify and visualize racial categorization, other visual materials convey perceptions of milk in the culture of colonial Mexico. This section considers the presence of lactation in codices that are rich with medical and pharmacological data, and how this information has been kept and implemented by Indigenous women for centuries. The very nature of defining these objects geographically presents multiple problems, as they are not simply Indigenous or European, and thus there has been some inclination to consider them hybrid. Daniela Bleichmar insists that they not be considered hybrid. The Codex Mendoza (1542) (fig. 1.21), for example, includes both Indigenous and European elements, yet its makers consistently kept the elements separate, even on the same page. Bleichmar notes a commitment to the juxtaposition of Nahua image and European text, which again thwarts a definition of hybridity. Rather, she points toward *translation* as their core purpose, noting that translation, of course, was a primary component of life in New Spain.

Alessandra Russo's 2014 book *The Untranslatable Image: A Mestizo History of the Arts in New Spain, 1500-1600*, rejects dominant perspectives of hybridity, and inserts instead a new type of scholarship, a mestizo art history, rather than a history of mestizo art. What results is the notion that, rather than two cultures coming together to create one type, the objects themselves are by nature transatlantic, each reflecting movement, conveying multiple meanings, and re-contextualizing their current environment. They were, she argues, created in order to travel, to both represent a space and to dazzle and transport their viewers; and indeed they gained value by crossing the Atlantic. She asserts

that rather than a syncretic model, which emphasizes two influences coming together in each object, the objects can reveal the formation of an entirely new, transatlantic culture.<sup>90</sup> In essence, then, Russo warns art historians against looking at these objects and determining what is Spanish and what is Indigenous within them; instead she suggests that we consider the ways in which they are unique to this culture, and made possible through transatlantic movement. It is this complicated process of the creation of new forms that renders the objects and texts “untranslatable,” and positioned against the previous, simpler model, in which concepts and techniques are reduced into two distinct types, subject to easy translation.<sup>91</sup>

This further complicates and nuances codices, and their processes of translations. Through these translations, in this case just twenty years after colonization, we are able to glean information about Nahua culture, but also colonial contact and interaction. The critical importance of access to Nahua data cannot be overstated, as the vast majority of the pre-contact pictorial manuscripts were destroyed by missionaries. The targeted destruction of these visual materials that contained critical cultural information was implemented for their purportedly anti-Christian characteristics, and can be juxtaposed with the ways they have been celebrated with feverish curiosity by the Europeans who have since “collected” and displayed them; in this case, Oxford displays it as a

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<sup>90</sup> Russo’s theories are influenced by preceding works by Serge Gruzinski such as: Gruzinski, Serge. *The Mestizo Mind: the Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

<sup>91</sup> Asslessandra Russo, *The Untranslatable Image: A Mestizo History of the Arts in New Spain, 1500-1600*. First English-Language edition. Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art and Culture. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014.

“treasure.”<sup>92</sup> To make matters more complicated, the collectors of these manuscripts were patrons who commissioned and paid for their creation, so they would not have existed were it not for these patrons. However, it is undeniable that the knowledge contained within them was stolen.

We must also be wary of a simple binary that posits Indigenous drawings against European writing. Rather, each is a form of writing: Nahua or Aztec pictorial writing and alphabetic glosses, some of which were included during the time of production, and others later by Spanish patrons and readers. The Indigenous people who worked on them were known as *tlacuiloque*, or painter-scribes.<sup>93</sup> In these pages, we can access the long tradition of pictorial writing, most of the examples of which were systematically destroyed through colonization, that include layers of Spanish translation through a complicated process: the painter scribes first:

recorded information about Mexica history, culture, religion, and tributary practices pictorially, leaving blank pages in between their paintings. Secondly, a narrator provided an oral account of what the drawings represented, rendering images into spoken words in Nahuatl. Then... an interpreter translated this text into oral Spanish. Finally, a scribe wrote the lengthy Spanish text on a page adjacent to the images it translated. Then, the scribe annotated each figure with an explanatory gloss. It was later reviewed by an additional person who corrected errors in the Spanish text and included commentary about how the manuscript was produced.<sup>94</sup>

The codices were commissioned by Spaniards who intended them to serve as a record of the viceroyalty to be viewed in Spain. The Codex Mendoza, for example, was purportedly commissioned by Antonio de Mendoza, the first Viceroy of New Spain;

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<sup>92</sup> Daniela Bleichmar, “History in Pictures: Translating the Codex Mendoza,” *Art History* 38, no. 4 (September 1, 2015): 683–86.

<sup>93</sup> Bleichmar, 683.

<sup>94</sup> Bleichmar, 689.

while that history is not clear, it is telling that the document takes the name of the Spaniard who may have commissioned it.<sup>95</sup>

These histories underscore pharmacology as a primary impetus of Spanish colonization; Bleichmar situates European interest in botanical and medical data of the Americas as inherently commercial, and plants as commodities: “Interest in New World nature was inextricably linked to interest in its commercial exploitation... [and] colonial botany was practiced not only in the Americas, but in the courts, gardens, battlefields, consulting rooms, and pharmacies throughout [this transatlantic] world.”<sup>96</sup> This emphasis on commercial pharmacology as primary impetus for colonization further refutes any notion of celebratory exploration.

Here, I consider the inclusion of lactation in three primary texts created in and removed from the Viceroyalty of New Spain: The Codex Mendoza (1521), The Florentine Codex (1545-90), and the Codex de la Cruz-Badiano (1552). Through these texts, I analyze the ways in which breastfeeding is represented, to understand the value of breastfeeding and breast milk in Nahua culture, and further, to investigate the implications of Spanish colonization on these practices. Doing so reveals the extent to which colonization infiltrated the most intimate of spaces, activities, and relationships, and thus this inquiry is very much aligned with and indebted to Anne McClintock, who activates the domestic sphere in her pioneering work on coloniality, and is “concerned

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<sup>95</sup> Bleichmar, 683.

<sup>96</sup> Daniela Bleichmar, “Sixteenth-Century Transatlantic Encounters with New World *Materia Medica*,” in *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World*, ed. Londa L. Schiebinger and Claudia Swan (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 83–84.

with the intimate – if often conflicting – relations between textual and institutional power.”<sup>97</sup>

The primary objective of this investigation is to recover this valuable medical information, including the detailed directives for the care of infants, pharmacology for lactation ailments, the use of breast milk in remedies, and how breast milk was valued culturally and spiritually. These cases can be compared to the startling ways in which Indigenous breastfeeding practices occur in European texts as a marker of incivility, ethnographic curiosity, record of potential wet nurses to serve Iberians in the colonies, and in rare cases of paternalistic sympathy. In doing so, histories wrought by colonialism emerge, including the shifting roles of female medical practitioners, the commoditization of the lactating body through the industrialization and systemization of European wet nursing trends in the colonies, the transatlantic lives of medical texts as colonial booty, and finally, through a decolonial recovery of these texts, how Nahua medical data is being reclaimed and put to use today.

What did the loss of these books (and destruction of many others) mean for women’s access to information about their bodies? Through the recovery of these texts, art historical attention to them, and projects that reactivate Nahuatl language, breastfeeding emerges as an understudied and valuable means to access cultural and medical information, particularly about the lives of women and children in early modern Mexico, and collectively functions as a recovery effort to return this data of medical, pharmacological, and cultural value to its community.

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<sup>97</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 6–10.

This project relies on a search for words related to breastfeeding, made possible by the scholars currently reactivating the Nahuatl language, as well as Indigenous Nahua people. In his exhaustive text on Nahua perceptions of the human body, Mexican historian Alfredo López Austin gathers and synthesizes Nahua perceptions of seemingly every body part and function from the extant, original Nahuatl texts. Throughout this astounding 800-page resource, it becomes clear that breastfeeding was exceedingly valued, as highly regarded as pregnancy and childbirth, and heavily associated with women's childbearing years. Breast milk, or *chichihualoyotl*, was precious and revered in many ways, and figured prominently within Nahua beliefs and the rites that marked the early stages of life.

His synthesis of these texts reveals how they reassured readers that infants were meant to cry and to be breastfed, and assured mothers that infants did know how to breastfeed when they were first born, but had to be taught by mothers, whose patience was lauded. "A good infant... is a master of joy. He sucks, takes on weight, he grows." Babies and young children were milkfed to gain strength, be healthy, and "fly around."<sup>98</sup> These thriving babies are compared to "bad infants" who "cause hardships." Women are encouraged to breastfeed well into toddlerhood and discouraged from sexual intercourse during these years in which they nursed, as it was believed that a gestating child would harm breast milk. In turn, this led to a "moral condemnation of pregnancy in a woman who is breastfeeding a child."<sup>99</sup> The *Florentine Codex* describes these early years as the time that children are given strength through mother's milk and the *Codex Mendoza*

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<sup>98</sup> Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 272–73.

<sup>99</sup> López Austin, 416.

reveals that suckling and nursing were fundamental to Aztec belief, related to a “warrior afterlife of paradisiacal oblivion”<sup>100</sup>

The years between the birth of a child and the ceremony that marks his weaning around age three, go barely mentioned in the original texts. When babies and toddlers are addressed, it is with “affection and tolerance and these years together forged powerful mother-child bonds, as women nursed their own babies if physically able, and regardless of class.”<sup>101</sup> Women’s full responsibility during these years was to their children, and men were also very involved in childrearing, particularly of boys. Children lived among their parents, accompanying them throughout their days, rather than being relegated to separate spaces, and thus learned the activities they were engaged in: “sons learned fishing, gathering firewood and learning a trade, while daughters learned spinning, weaving and cooking from their mothers.”<sup>102</sup> During these years, Nahua children were almost exclusively breastfed, which allowed mothers to keep them close by and feed them easily, and allowed the children to spend their early years with their mothers. These practices can be held in sharp contrast to the prevalent practice among elite Spanish families of birthing, bathing, and baptizing babies in the first few days of life and then immediately sending them to live with wet nurses for two years.<sup>103</sup> Iberian colonization wrought cataclysmic changes to these practices, as Spaniards systemized wet nursing, through the employment and enslavement of Indigenous and African women.

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<sup>100</sup> López Austin, 420.

<sup>101</sup> Caroline Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood: Gender, Lifecycle and Sacrifice in Aztec Culture* (Houndmills, UK; Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 66.

<sup>102</sup> Pennock, 67.

<sup>103</sup> Valerie A. Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles, and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986), 77.

A pivotal moment for Nahua children occurred around age 3, when they weaned from exclusively consuming breast milk and ate their first solid food, a corn tortilla; this important moment is illustrated in the *Codex Mendoza*, in Folio 58 on the upbringing of children, (fig. 1.22). Through this symbolic act of consuming adult sustenance, “they began to be integrated into the duties that their community membership implied. Having eaten maize, a staple and a grain of both spiritual and practical importance, the children had accepted the benefits of their community’s efforts and were bound to corresponding obligations.”<sup>104</sup> From this young age, children were given tasks to complete, alongside their parents, and their hard work was highly regarded in a culture that valued cooperation and did not accept idleness.

The perilous nature of life and childbirth, and thus the communal reverence for the breast milk, which sustained humanity, cannot be overstated.<sup>105</sup> The texts emphasize childbirth as dangerous for both mother and infant, but also shared and honored among the family and community, through a celebration upon discovering pregnancy, and another gathering in the seventh or eighth month, to mark the beginning of birth preparations. The couple’s parents had the responsibility of selecting a midwife, and an agreement was then forged between a family matriarch and the practitioner she selected. Midwives were highly skilled female practitioners, trained in therapies and interventions, as well as massage and herbal remedies, and they used these various techniques to assist in delivery and tend to both mother and newborn. Holding an elevated place of respect within communities, midwives were recognized not just as medical practitioners, but as spiritual leaders, ensuring a child’s safe passage, and responsible for his well-being until

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<sup>104</sup> Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, 67.

<sup>105</sup> Pennock, 41.

his ceremony. Within each family, the midwife was considered “the artisan of our lord,” “empowered by him” to assist in the delivery, or his “work of creation and birth.” Midwives were clearly recognized as important and valued leaders in Nahua culture, and they held prominent roles in public life.<sup>106</sup> Meanwhile, as previously discussed, these Indigenous midwives who were highly esteemed culturally and spiritually, were targeted by the monarchy as threats to European medicine and by the Catholic Church as practitioners of the bride of Satan.

The Florentine Codex thus reveals important, counter-hegemonic data. While some of the midwives’ responsibilities were public, most were quite intimate, preparing mothers for childbirth and its possible outcomes. *The Florentine Codex* includes a section in which a young mother acknowledged these concerns during the occasion of her first banquet, the announcement of her pregnancy:

Perhaps he will see, perhaps he will know, perhaps he will behold the face of that which is his blood, his color, recognizable as his... But on the other hand... perhaps something will cause it to be stillborn; our lord will leave us [still] desiring a child.<sup>107</sup>

Communities also recognized the high maternal morbidity rate, and nurtured each pregnant woman completely, massaging her back and feet, providing her with whatever she desired, and allowing her a rare opportunity relax in the life of a busy Nahua woman. Each pregnancy was related to the mortality of the community at large, each successful

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<sup>106</sup> Pennock, 42–43.

<sup>107</sup> Sahagun, Bernardino de. *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain. Book 1 - The Gods*. Translated by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble. Revised edition. Santa Fe, New Mexico; Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1970. Book 6, Chapter 25, 147.

birth, the feat of a healthy mother and infant, nourished by the breast milk that was in turn duly appreciated for sustaining humanity.

During birth, midwives invoked the goddess Cihuacoatl, and encouraged women to face the pain bravely, as she did. Infants who did not survive were extracted with obsidian blades. Women who died in childbirth became *cihuateteo* goddesses. When mother and child survived, they were met with war cries, which lauded the new mother in how she had “fought a good battle, had become a brave warrior, had taken a captive, had captured a baby.”<sup>108</sup>

The midwife then performed spiritual and medical rites including bathing and swaddling the infant, to usher him safely through these perilous first days, and assisting the mother and infant, who spent them learning how to breastfeed. A naming ceremony a few days later signified the close of the most dangerous time, and welcomed him into the community. *The Codex Mendoza* includes a depiction of this naming ceremony (fig. 1.23), in which the midwife takes the infant to be bathed four days (represented by rosettes) after his birth. She holds the infant in her arms in a courtyard and offers prayers, and he is cleansed by water, as the mother recovers.

Infant mortality was common, recognized as a real possibility, and breastfeeding was identified as a primary way to sustain life. The value of breast milk is underscored in the *Codex de la Cruz-Badiano*, or the *Little Book of the Medicinal Herbs of the Indians*, an Aztec herbal manuscript which outlines the medicinal properties of plants and offers remedies to medical ailments. It was translated into Latin by Juan Badiano from a Nahuatl original that no longer exists, which was composed in the Colegio de Santa Cruz

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<sup>108</sup> Sahagún, 60: 30: 167.

de Tlatelolco in 1552 by Martin de la Cruz. The *Codex* was commissioned by the Jacobo de Grado of the Convent of Tlatelolco, for the son of the Viceroy of New Spain, who then sent the Latin text to the royal library of Spain. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century it came into the possession of the pharmacist to King Philip IV, and under hazy circumstances ended up in the Vatican Library. In 1990, Pope John Paul II returned it to Mexico, where it is now kept in the library of the National Institute of Anthropology and History in Mexico City.<sup>109</sup>

Dr. Miguel Leon Portilla, an authority on Nahua history, considers it one of five historical sources that offers insight into Indigenous medicine, since the majority were destroyed. On the occasion of its return he declared, “The *De la Cruz-Badiano Codex* is a treasure that awakens even more interest in Indigenous medicine.”<sup>110</sup> Among the remedies for 117 maladies, most of which are quite familiar to a contemporary reader, from alopecia to heart disease, are three sections that address the breast. These sections powerfully reveal the critical importance of breast milk at this time, as they address lactation issues on the part of the mother and infant, and also breast health, including how to treat benign and cancerous tumors.

Plate 111 (fig. 1.24) provides “Medicine to produce lactation,” It begins, “When the milk flows with difficulty,” and provides directions to identify specific herbs and a mineral, directives to crush them in *octli*, and boil them. Mothers are instructed to drink

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<sup>109</sup> Millie Gimmel, “Reading Medicine in the Codex de La Cruz Badiano,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, no. 2 (2008): 169–92, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2008.0017>.

<sup>110</sup> “Badiano Codex, Key to Study Indigenous Medicine,” accessed May 5, 2014, <http://artdaily.com/news/31507/Badiano-Codex--Key-to-Study-Indigenous-Medicine-#.U2exJ8dRGo8>.

the mixture frequently, in addition to another medicine made from the water in which corn is boiled, which is to be drunk after bathing.<sup>111</sup>

The liquid used to transmit the herbs in this first remedy is *octli*, the Nahuatl term for what is known in Spanish as *pulque*, a white, viscous liquid made by fermenting the sap of certain types of agave plants. An alcoholic beverage, it was considered sacred by the Nahua, though it became increasingly secular in the colonial era.<sup>112</sup> The inclusion of *pulque* provides us with the opportunity to consider how different dietary restrictions for lactating women shift across time and culture, and how alcohol has been required, encouraged, discouraged, and banned. It could be said that the only consistency is regulation itself, underscoring how highly regulated the lactating body is.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to offering medicines for the lactating mother, the *Codex de la Cruz-Badiano* provides a remedy for “When an infant is not willing to suck the breast because of some pain” (fig. 1.25): “If the infant is so affected that he now spits out the milk and does not wish to put his lips to his mother’s breasts, give him a drink of the small herbs

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<sup>111</sup> The text reads as follows: “When the milk flows with difficulty, the herb *chichilticxiuhtontli*, which recalls the salad herb by its smallness, *tohmiyoxihuitl* and a crystal are to be crushed in *octli* (wine – pulche), and boiled. The potion is to be drunk frequently. Besides the herb *memeyaxiuhtontli* is to be crushed in *octli*, the juice of which the woman should also drink; she should enter a bath, where she is to drink another potion made of corn. Yet when she comes out she is to take as a drink the sticky water of boiled corn.”

<sup>112</sup> Pulque was also increasingly policed and believed to be a substance that inspired idolatry. See: James Córdova “Drinking the Fifth Cup: Notes on the Drunken Indian Image in Colonial Mexico.” *Word & Image*, 31:1 (2015): 1-18.

<sup>113</sup> Within the Nahua community, *octli* was consumed by people of all ages, including infants, and to celebrate milestones of pregnancy, infancy, and childhood. *The Florentine Codex* reveals that during the festival of *Izcalli tlami*, when children received ear piercings and were assigned a guardian figure, the children were then given enough *pulque* to become drunk along with the adults, and even the infants were given a taste.<sup>113</sup> Medically speaking, alcohol has been prescribed across cultures to stimulate the letdown reflex, and thus encourage milk production.<sup>113</sup>

called *teamoxтли*.” The page provides instructions for drying quail liver, mixing them with ashes, and dissolving the brain of a weasel with a burned human bone in acid water. If lactation problems persisted on the part of the mother, another willing woman could nurse her child, but an infant who suffered from the inability to nurse was in grave danger, as breast milk was the only means of sustaining life during infancy. If not treated successfully, an infant who could not suckle was certain to die.

The *Florentine Codex* illustrates how to effectively administer human milk-based remedies. The third paragraph of Chapter 28 in Book 10 includes the following instructions to aid lactation, in a section called “Ailments of nursing women” (fig. 1.26):

a woman “is to drink [an infusion of] [a local] root, which is to be pulverized with a stone. Then one is to wash her breasts with saltpeter. Or [she is to drink the infusion] many times when she comes from the sweat bath. But when the milk comes, when it comes anew, it will still give the child diarrhea. Hence it is necessary that the little child shall drink two doses of the infusion], which will purge him. [The nursing woman] is not to eat avocados.”<sup>114</sup>

Human milk itself is deployed in remedies for other ailments, such as this case, from the section on Ailments of the Body (chapter 28), in the first paragraph, which provides remedies for ailments of the head, eyes, ears, nose, and teeth (fig. 1.27):

Snuffles, which affect little children – little babies. Morning dew is dropped into their nostrils, and [drops of] woman’s milk, and cimatl sap. And the inside of their mouths is massaged with tomato juice or with salt.”<sup>115</sup>

From the new Nahuatl dictionary, we also learn that the term *ilpichia* refers to the act of a lactating woman dripping her milk into the eye of a person with an eye infection, underscoring its value as a particularly healing substance.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, Chapter 28, paragraph 3, 151.

<sup>115</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*: Book 10, Chapter 28, paragraph 1, 145.

Other terms in the dictionary make clear the very common position of breast milk in language and thus culture. One such term (*Chichihualtomahua*) refers to a state of engorgement, the need to express. The dictionary includes some other interesting cases of Nahuatl vernacular and a cultural appreciation for breast milk, such as *cocomotza*: “for a baby to savor its milk while nursing; or, to make a noise by stamping feet.”<sup>117</sup> The contemporary creation of a Nahuatl dictionary, itself a text, is a recovery project, remedying what Mignolo defines as the colonization of language.

Much of this data remains in Europe, underscoring Mignolo’s notion of coloniality, which disputes the notion of colonization as a finite state, and instead encourages a perspective that recognizes the longstanding and contemporary manifestations of these foundational systems. Attempts to recover this data can be considered emblematic of a push to un-do the legacies of colonialism.

The fates of these texts underscore this data as particularly valued. The Codex Mendoza, in its journey to Spain, was stolen. The fleet was attacked by French privateers, and the Codex taken as booty. It was later purchased by an Englishman and deposited at Oxford where it was “discovered” in the early nineteenth century, and displayed as a treasure of Oxford’s collections. The Florentine Codex, a collaborative body of research conducted with Friar Sahagún and Nahua scholars and artists, amounting to 2,100 pages of information, has a murkier history. It is unknown how it became part of the collection at the Laurentian Library in Florence. It was “discovered” there in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and again in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Library allowed Mexican scholars to copy it

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<sup>116</sup> Nahuatl Dictionary/Diccionario Del Náhuatl, accessed May 14, 2014, <http://whp.uoregon.edu/dictionaries/nahuatl/>.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

and bring the copies back to Mexico. In 1979, the Mexican government published a full color limited edition of 2,000, in 1982 Dibble and Anderson published an important facsimile, and in 2012 it was digitized by the World Digital Library – though its “full accessibility” can be complicated by an acknowledgement of the digital divide, in that only people with the ability to go online have access to this information. Together they represent a physical loss of information, but moreover they demonstrate the prioritization of pharmacological data during colonization, disrupting notions of a benign curiosity in botany, which further glorifies the construct of European “exploration.” Further, the usefulness of this data is made clear in a study of lactation, and is worthy of inquiry and the recovery of this data can be considered a decolonial project.

The centuries-long loss of the Codex de la Cruz-Badiano in the Vatican libraries further underscores a disregard for non-European writing systems. Following its recovery and return to Mexico, today it is printed and distributed widely as a small book of medical remedies, translated in Spanish and English and available for around \$8; its printing and reintegration into Mexican life can also be read as a decolonial recovery project. It was printed by Johns Hopkins researcher William Gates in 1930 and today he is attributed as the author of the text.

At Cornell, Mexican-American chemical biologist Eloy Rodriguez, who specializes in plant-based pharmacology, leads teams of students on data recovery trips to Mexico, where they interview people who have intimate knowledge of the plants recorded in this Codex and their medical uses. He and his team are systematically testing

these remedies in his lab, with remarkable success. He is quick to note that most of the valuable information he has retrieved and tested comes from women.<sup>118</sup>

In conclusion, the access to the visual record allows us to understand the ways in which breast milk was valued as an active agent, for the various things it could do, and more broadly, the ways it was valued culturally and spiritually, and how Indigenous practices were impacted by colonization. Through the *casta* paintings, we can see a unique way in which breastfeeding was exploited by hegemony, in this case inappropriately utilized to demonstrate an attempt to establish racial hierarchies through conceptions of purity and taintedness that could be passed through milk. These notions of racial categorization persist to this day. Through other materials, the codices, we can glean a more nuanced understanding of breastfeeding practices in early colonial Mexico, among ordinary women. Through a pairing of text and image, it becomes clear that midwives were crucial to breastfeeding, and women and children's health, due in no small part to their expertise in lactation. This role extends into the next chapter, on midwives in colonial New England, who were also conflated with witches as European medical practices entered the Americas.

The overarching story of the codices—the ways in which they recorded medical data pertaining to midwifery and milk—leads to Dr. Rodriguez's work contemporary Mexican women, and how they have continued to maintain and pass along this information to one another. In turn, Dr. Rodriguez is able to make further advances in his laboratory that validate Indigenous women's knowledge. This flow of information

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<sup>118</sup> Eloy Rodriguez. "Contemporary Applications of Remedies in the Codex de La Cruz-Badiano," in the course Visual Encounters in the Early Modern World, co-taught by Ananda Cohen-Aponte and Claudia Lazzaro, Cornell University. March 19, 2014.

pertaining to milk can be seen as a network that resists oppression and exploitation, and is the first of several related networks that are discussed in each of the following case studies.

## Chapter 2

### Lactation and the Midwife-Witch in Colonial New England

For two hundred years, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, or *Hammer of Witches* (fig. 1.1) sold more copies than any other book but the Bible.<sup>119</sup> Written by powerful German Dominicans in 1486 as witch hunting reached its peak, it instructed Europeans how to identify and persecute witches, and circulated broadly throughout Europe and the colonies. It was instrumental in the Salem witch trials, which I shall discuss here. The text was uniquely influential in popularizing the construct of *witchcraft as heresy*, a crime against God, whereas previously it was understood as a lesser offense, a harmful act among humans. Through the rise of print culture and the broad dissemination of the text, and adopted by Catholics and Protestants alike, witchcraft hysteria spread globally.<sup>120</sup> While quantifying the impact on innocent women has challenged historians for centuries, recent scholarship suggests that 100,000 women were persecuted as witches, many of them executed.<sup>121</sup> The book itself was certainly far more dangerous than the witches it conjured.

The *Malleus Maleficarum* identifies the most dangerous type of witch as one who is also a midwife (fig. 1.2). The text asserts that witches posed as midwives in order to gain access to newborns. They caused miscarriages and stillbirths, feasted on infants, and

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<sup>119</sup> Rosemary. Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, 2nd ed. (New York: Facts On File, 1999), 222, <http://newcatalog.library.cornell.edu/catalog/3447847>.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> John Demos, *The Enemy Within: 2,000 Years of Witch-Hunting in the Western World* (New York: Viking, 2008), 38.

infected those that survived, creating more witches.<sup>122</sup> The precarious position of midwives during the witchcraft frenzy is dizzying; maternal and infant morbidity rates were high, and these women bore the responsibility, with their own reputations and lives at stake. As women who transgressed the domestic sphere and worked outside the home, they were already vulnerable to suspicions of witchcraft. “Clearly,” John Demos writes, “the wisest course in early modern community life—especially for a woman—was to blend in and not to seem too openly self-assertive. To be, or to behave, otherwise was to open oneself to suspicion of witchcraft.”<sup>123</sup>

While the guidebook certainly suggests that midwives were particularly demonized and imperiled, and leading scholars like David D. Hall have identified midwives as “especially vulnerable” to charges of witchcraft, the concept is hardly agreed upon. In fact, in the contentious field of witchcraft scholarship, there is perhaps no figure more controversial than the midwife. In recent decades, she has been adopted and rejected by competing camps of historians, with equal vitriol.

The intellectual conflict regarding the persecution of midwives as witches in colonial America, and particularly a strong interest among feminist scholars in the two groups and how they overlap historically, signal the value of female figures that transgressed social boundaries in their learnedness and ability to both heal and harm. Rather than offer superfluous argument to the debate of whether or not midwives were disproportionately accused of witchcraft, I instead survey this remarkably productive dialogue, and pivot slightly to assert: these educated and trusted, yet non-conforming

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<sup>122</sup> Heinrich Institoris, Jakob Sprenger, and Christopher Mackay, *Malleus maleficarum* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), folio 13.

<sup>123</sup> Demos, *Enemy Within*, 43.

women were uniquely imperiled by their learnedness and vocation, one critical to the survival, health, and well-being of their communities. The labor itself prompted a patriarchal perception that they were dangerous, and this can be evidenced in the visual record. This chapter first investigates the conflict, underscores the importance and stature of midwives in foundational America, and considers midwives as integral to supporting lactation in colonial New England. I argue that women possessing and implementing critical lactation information made them vulnerable to suspicions of witchcraft, as this special knowledge was perceived as threatening to the establishment of a European, male medical system, which barred women from medical practice. Finally, I consider a contemporary evocation of the witch that reclaim the figure through intersectional feminism to combat historic and contemporary oppression of women.

This initial case study demonstrates that attention to lactation can augment understandings of systematic oppression and violence against women during key moments in American history. An investigation of midwifery as educated labor supporting lactation, and the systematic violence that midwives faced, eradicates the sanitized witch trope of pop culture and forces recognition of systematic violence against women as integral to the violent birth of the American experiment.

### **The Midwife Problem**

Witchcraft historian Mary Beth Norton considers the ideological conflict at hand “the midwife problem.” On the types of women most susceptible to accusation, she asserts, “unmarried or widowed older women whose neighbors suspected them of causing harm to people or property were most frequently accused, tried and convicted. Witchcraft

was also thought to run in families, especially from mother to daughter, and to be prevalent in certain occupations, *not often, as once was thought, that of midwife* [emphasis mine] but in those of lower domestic servants.”<sup>124</sup>

Norton cites a 1990 article by David Harley, in which he positions historians who characterize midwives as susceptible to suspicion of witchcraft as demonologists. Harley argues that midwives were largely immune to accusation because they were generally respected and valued in their communities. He convincingly argues that the myth has been blown out of proportion, supported by only a few historical examples and the sensational vilification of midwives in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, and perpetuated by shoddy second wave feminist scholarship. Doing so, he argues, served to “create a multitude of imaginary martyrs for the modern women’s health movement.”<sup>125</sup>

According to Harley, the feminists who adopted the midwife-witch as a symbolic figure of women’s historical oppression did so without data to support the claim. He downplays the influence of the *Malleus Maleficarum* on everyday life, noting that large-scale witch-hunts came long after its initial publication, and argues that the suspicion of witch-midwives sacrificing infants seems rooted in myth and propaganda, untethered by examples of prosecuted midwives. Citing lack of proof, he contends that the suspicion was later inscribed by modern historians, yet concedes that occupations associated with food preparation and medicine were likely most at risk.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Edward Peters, “The Literature of Demonology and Witchcraft,” introduction to the Primary Source digital witchcraft project, Witchcraft Collection, The Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, 1998, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/w/witch/resources.html>.

<sup>125</sup> David Harley, “Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-Witch,” *Social History of Medicine* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 1990): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/3.1.1>.

<sup>126</sup> Harley, 5.

I argue that those very tasks were central to midwifery at the time; diaries reveal midwives to be gardeners, foragers, and botanists, who prescribed, prepared, and treated their patients with all manner of remedies. Many were ingested, and the line between medicine and food did not exist then as it does now. As Marylynn Salmon writes in her essay on the cultural significance of breastfeeding in early modern America, human milk was primarily valued as a medicine, administered to ailing people young and old, and included in a variety of treatments.<sup>127</sup>

Here, in the visual record, I invoke the iconic cauldron as the place where the midwife melts into witch. This scene is epitomized by a woodcut print included in the 1489 *De Lamiis*, in which two women face a cauldron, one adding a snake to the bubbling concoction, which boils over a fire (fig. 1.3). I argue that the image of an unaccompanied group of women working over a vessel together, creating medicines and tinctures from unidentifiable and sometimes worrisome natural materials, successfully ignited fears of midwives' unknown and uncontrollable power, and unjustly, conflated midwives with witches.

This role, along with the responsibility they bore in matters of life and death, would arguably render them all the more susceptible as the frenzy grew. Perhaps the suspicion that may have beleaguered the midwives was not well documented. But I ask: how could it have been? Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, in her Pulitzer Prize-winning book on early American midwife Martha Ballard, *A Midwife's Tale*, reveals midwives as highly trained and skillful medical practitioners who not only delivered babies but treated every

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<sup>127</sup> Marylynn Salmon, "The Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding and Infant Care in Early Modern England and America," *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 247–48.

malady and injury imaginable, using medicines they created and purchased.<sup>128</sup> At the very core of midwifery, then as now, are pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation support; through each, midwives were charged with preserving the lives of mothers and infants. Through Ballard, midwives are revealed as highly trained, skillful medical practitioners who not only delivered babies but treated every malady and injury imaginable, using medicines they created and procured.

The degree to which lactation and breast health is central to midwifery, as revealed in the diaries and manuals, may startle a contemporary reader; yet breast milk sustained fragile life in a time far fewer infants and mothers survived. Ballard's diary reveals the importance of teaching women breastfeeding techniques, as well as her disappointment when they sought wet nurses. When mothers did not survive childbirth, she sought neighbor women to nurse and care for the motherless newborns. In such cases, she takes note of the many women who came to the homes offering their milk. The transcripts of her diaries reveal the frequency with which she assisted women with breastfeeding and the various issues it can present for women, as she created balms to soothe sore nipples, provided medicines to aid lactation, and performed small surgeries as needed. Here, as in elsewhere, lactation was at the very core of human survival, and midwives were critical to success. This elevated role in communities and high levels of trust certainly buoyed midwives amid the witch hysteria, but the degree to which it protected them safely above it remains unclear.

If the witch-midwife is a misunderstanding, as Harley argues, how did it occur? He suggests that some women prosecuted for witchcraft were essentially misidentified as

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<sup>128</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

midwives, as in the case of Scottish Agnes Sampson, who, during her trial, admitted to “administering magical medicines to take away the pains of women in childbirth.”<sup>129</sup>

Though initially identified in the records as a servant girl, due to this particular offense she was re-inscribed as a midwife. While being tortured, she confessed to witchcraft, and was burned at the stake.

The ability to ease pain during childbirth, who had the authority to do so, and with what methods all appear in witchcraft trials. While Harley acknowledges that some midwives were prosecuted and executed, he essentially disconnects the two categories, dismissing them as coincidental, and positioning them within large numbers of other executions. Yet, a wealth of scholarship supports the notion that independent, educated women were feared for their ability to both harm *and* heal, which I shall discuss below.

While fear of physical harm may seem most likely to instigate an accusation of witchcraft, Carol Karlsen’s book *Devil in the Shape of a Woman* reveals that women who healed people with surprising degrees of success were also susceptible. This phenomenon included midwives: “... a woman who safely delivered infants that were not expected to survive might find herself accused of witchcraft. In these cases, it was not simply the effects of their actions that were at issue, but the means: the unexpected results were attributed to knowledge or skill that could only come from occult agencies.”<sup>130</sup> An uncanny ability to heal signaled a pact with the devil. This imagined agreement between a witch and the devil further underscored the suspected women as those who transgressed boundaries socially, sexually, and religiously; making the pact involved riotous drinking,

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<sup>129</sup> David Harley, “Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-Witch,” *Social History of Medicine* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 1990): 14.

<sup>130</sup> Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 9.

intercourse with the devil, and a renouncement of Christian baptism.<sup>131</sup> Ulrich Molitor warns of this type of coupling in a woodcut included in the 1489 printing of witch-hunting guide *De Lamiis et Pythonicis Mulieribus: Bibliotheca Daemonologica*, of a woman and devil embracing, through which she thereby makes a satanic pact (fig. 1.4). The *De Lamiis* was the first witch-hunting guide to be illustrated, and therefore provided the first visual markers that could warn people of the presence of witches, whether they be literate or illiterate. This image efficiently depicts the devil seducing a woman, and turning her into a witch, as his body presses against hers against the left frame of the image. The bodies are entangled in this “dance with the devil,” his animalistic talons coming between her own feet, a direct reference to sex.

Puritans believed that when the agreement was made, the witch’s body would bear a “witch’s teat.” While the witch’s teat survives in vernacular as a reference to feeling cold, its violent origin is lesser known. Witch-hunting guides contended that the devil marked his witches to easily identify them and markings near a woman’s breasts and groin were considered “witch’s teats” at which her animal familiars suckled. Well versed with their clients’ bodies, midwives were called to testify regarding marks on the skin, whether they were normal or abnormal, old or new. During trials, juries investigated their nude bodies, adding yet another layer of victimization, a public humiliation with terrifying consequences.<sup>132</sup>

This arrangement is invoked by Massachusetts painter Thompkins H. Matteson in 1853, in his *Examination of a Witch* (fig. 1.5). At the focal point of this chaotic scene, a woman has been forced to bare her nude back, while an audience of various onlookers

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<sup>131</sup> Karlsen, 10.

<sup>132</sup> Karlsen, 13.

search for a witch's teat. An older woman, likely a midwife, points toward a spot on her back and shows it to a male government official, who examines her body and records his findings with a quill pen. As her garments are pulled away, the young woman turns away from the examination, and protects her chest with her hands. While Matteson imagines an examination scene, the textual record affirms that an unusual or unexplainable mark would be recorded as a witch's teat or mark and the accused punished with banishment, torture, or execution.

Karlsen suggests that the designation of "midwife" and the way information was recorded were both ambiguous, and that the desire for quantifiable data to prove whether midwives were disproportionately accused of witchcraft is unfulfillable. "We cannot," she writes, "determine precise numbers—or how explicit a woman's identification as healer had to be to render her vulnerable to suspicion—because all colonial women provided for their neighbors as well. Medical knowledge and skills were handed down from mother to daughter, in much the same way colonists thought witchcraft arts were passed on."<sup>133</sup> All women were expected to learn "recipes for medicines," how to heal basic ailments and injuries, to assist in childbirth, and to provide their own milk and care when fellow women died in childbirth.

Yet midwives held unique positions in colonial New England as primary medical professionals in communities. As the European, patriarchal medical profession was slowly established, women healers were barred from the new training, and further vilified as dangerous quacks. This process cannot be easily disentangled from suspicions of witchcraft. In holding these first two case studies in conversation, what is most striking to

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<sup>133</sup> Karlsen, 142.

me is that in both cases, suspicion of independent women resulted in severed access to a rare, viable career option. Labor, in both cases, is a tremendous loss, one taken up by later feminist historians.

### **Empowerment Through Reclamation**

The intellectual conflict of the mid-wife question yields a fruitful question: how have midwives and witches become so important to feminist historians? Ultimately, this process of vilification is gendered violence against women who were uniquely empowered by their learnedness, rendered more vulnerable by working outside of the home, and existing outside of patriarchal, societal, monetary, and religious boundaries. That they may have been buffered from suspicion because their communities valued and respected them does not preclude them from being victimized by the process of vilification. Broadly speaking, an entire profession, and the very notion that women could be medical professionals was—and is—at stake.

During the 1970s, feminist historians cast new light on women's history; two in particular turned their to attention women healers. In 1973 the Feminist Press published *Witches, Midwives & Nurses* (fig. 1.7), a powerhouse of a pamphlet written by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English. Acknowledging profound sexism in the medical profession and women's mediated understandings of their own bodies, Ehrenreich and English had become aware "of a variety of ways women were abused or treated unjustly by the medical system," as both patients, subjected to cruel treatments with little information or choice, and workers, relegated to subordinate positions and supporting

male doctors. Women and girls were denied access to information about their bodies and its processes.<sup>134</sup>

In 2010, the authors reflected, “We were beginning to suspect that women had not always, in all circumstances, been so disempowered with respect to their own bodies and care. After all, medical technology and the medical profession that monopolized it were relatively recent historical developments, and yet somehow our female ancestors had, however imperfectly, negotiated the challenges of the female life cycle.”<sup>135</sup> In 1972, they convened a conference on women’s health to make and discuss one primary assertion:

... the medical profession as we knew it (still over 90 percent male) had replaced and driven out a much older tradition of female lay healing, including both midwifery and a range of healing skills, while closing medical education to women. In other words, the ignorance and disempowerment of women that we confronted in the 1970s were not longstanding conditions, but were the result of a prolonged power struggle that had taken place... well before the rise of scientific medicine. We traced a similar power struggle in Europe back to the early modern era... and how female lay healers of the same era were frequently targeted as ‘witches.’

The inexpensive booklet was wildly popular and influential, *The Village Voice* deeming it an “underground bestseller,” and soon it was translated and distributed globally.<sup>136</sup>

Central to the pamphlet is a powerful narrative describing the ways in which midwives and other female healers were disproportionately accused of witchcraft. Among the three primary accusations were “magical powers effecting health—of harming, but also of healing. They were often charged specifically with possessing

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<sup>134</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, 2nd ed. (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York), 7–8.

<sup>135</sup> Ehrenreich and English, 15.

<sup>136</sup> Ehrenreich and English, 12–13.

medical and obstetrical skills.”<sup>137</sup> They cite the *Malleus Maleficarum*: “No one does more harm to the Catholic Church than midwives.”<sup>138</sup> Positioning the midwife’s process as empirical, using trial and error to treat a vast variety of illnesses, Ehrenreich and English argue that she is ideological at odds with the church and thus a prime target of witchcraft suspicion.<sup>139</sup> Midwives were further oppressed by the growing establishment of the medical profession, from which they were excluded. Ultimately, Ehrenreich and English argue that the “witch hunts did not eliminate the lower-class woman healer, but they branded her forever as superstitious and possibly malevolent.”<sup>140</sup>

The 2010 edition has allowed Ehrenreich and English to reconsider some of their claims, offering corrections and nuances to their initial, bold assertions:

Looking back after all these years, what strikes us about the witch hunts are not only the bizarre beliefs that inspired them and the personal tragedies that ensued, but the sheer waste of talent and knowledge that they represented. The victims, beside the individual women who were tortured and executed, were also all the people who were consequently deprived of their healing or midwifery skills. At a time we now associate with the Renaissance in Europe and the first signs of the scientific revolution, the witch hunts were a step back toward ignorance and helplessness.... What could have been a proud occupation for women and a field for lively intellectual inquiry was discredited when not actually obliterated.<sup>141</sup>

Because this project is inherently about women’s labor, Ehrenreich and English’s statement drives home an important point – that the witch frenzy, in concert with other anti-woman initiatives, effectively precluded women from participating in the medical field for centuries. The fact that this happened during an era glorified for its advancements in science and medicine points toward a need for continued critique of

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<sup>137</sup> Ehrenreich and English, 39.

<sup>138</sup> Ehrenreich and English, 45.

<sup>139</sup> Ehrenreich and English, 49.

<sup>140</sup> Ehrenreich and English, 57.

<sup>141</sup> Ehrenreich and English, 21.

hegemonic celebration of conceptions of eras like the “Enlightenment,” and what these conceptions of time have wrought for marginalized people.

Ultimately, the 2010 edition provides a forum for Ehrenreich and English to respond to David Harley, who tried to discredit the connection they had drawn between midwives and witches: “While agreeing that witches were often folk healers, he criticized us, based on a survey of convictions in England, Scotland, and New England (data that was *not available* when we wrote), for exaggerating the proportion of midwives among convicted witches, saying we had maligned midwives and created ‘a multitude of imaginary martyrs for the modern women’s health movement.’”<sup>142</sup>

Ehrenreich and English refute Harley’s determined argument rooted in lack of data: “Even now, with all the archival data that has become available, it’s impossible for scholars to offer statistically firm generalizations about the occupations of women accused of witchcraft: usually, the convicted person’s occupation was not recorded. Yet, the association that witch hunters made between witches and midwives in Europe is inescapable.” They cite instances of midwives persecuted as witches and a study of witchcraft depositions by Brian P. Levack that confirms throughout Europe and New England that women “cooks, healers and midwives” were “vulnerable to the charge that they practice harmful magic.”<sup>143</sup> Further rebuking Harley, they cite colonial New England witchcraft scholar John Demos, whose research shows that a quarter to a third of suspected women were known for “making and administering special ‘remedies,’ providing expert forms of nursing, or serving in some regular way as midwives. A few

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<sup>142</sup> Ehrenreich and English, 17.

<sup>143</sup> Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman, 2006), 146.

were specifically described as ‘doctor women.’ ... The underlying linkage here is obvious enough; the ability to heal and the ability to harm seemed intimately related.”<sup>144</sup>

The original pamphlet stands as an example of productive and effective second wave feminist activism, and its impact on recent surges of female-centered healthcare, midwifery, and breastfeeding can only be guessed. Certainly, what began as a modest pamphlet contributed in the ensuing decades to a massive reclamation of women’s participation in health and medicine. Now established, senior scholars of mighty influence, Ehrenreich and English continue to make convincing claims for the persecution of midwives as witches.

Ultimately, regarding “the midwife problem,” and the question of the “midwife-witch,” I maintain that it is critical to acknowledge the imperiled position of midwives and their unjust vilification, and suggest a scholarly response that: (1) acknowledges the conjuring of witches as systematic violence against women, (2) extricates the midwife from the witch, (3) works toward a richer understanding of the critical role midwives have played, historically and across culture, and 4) adopts an intersectional approach, acknowledging that this discussion (like the second wave of feminism in which Ehrenreich and English’s pamphlet was conceived) has almost entirely focused on white women, and instead includes women of color and women outside of the United States.

Lest we believe this systematic subjugation lies in the distant past, amid myriad examples at the time of this writing, consider: the common practice of banning midwives from hospital delivery rooms, insurance companies refusing to cover midwifery by designating it “non-traditional,” and H.R. Bill 354, the proposition to defund Planned

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<sup>144</sup> Demos, *Enemy Within*, 119.

Parenthood, ending not just affordable, accessible reproductive health for over 5 million clients, but also the employment of thousands of female medical practitioners. Further, becoming acquainted with the process through which women were vilified can in turn nuance both the creation and consumption of witches in popular culture today.

### **Princes Nokia's "Urban Feminism," A Utopic Vision**

As midwives and other learned women who transcended social boundaries were persecuted for witchcraft, the witch trope grew in popular imagination, revered and feared for her ability to heal and harm, stubbornly resisting oppression and violence. Some progressive evocations of witches today demonstrate a new generation of intersectional feminism, as multidimensional women with overlapping racial, sexual, social, intellectual, economic, and social identities. In so doing, these characters dismantle the outdated modes through which witches have commonly been represented, reveal current forms of violence and oppression women face, display their rich interior lives, and play with agency and identity through reclamations of the witch. If witches of the past—and the women unjustly accused of witchcraft—have come to represent a violent subjugation of women, these contemporary evocations powerfully battle the systems of patriarchal oppression that initially conjured the witch. The witch is clearly an established icon of feminism; how will new evocations evolve along with the movement itself?

A New Yorker of Puerto Rican descent, underground rapper Princess Nokia mines Caribbean witchcraft and evokes *brujas* (witches) to sonically and visually explore her diasporic identity and Yoruba and Santeria spiritual heritage, and to celebrate

communities of women of color. On November 8, 2016, the day of the U.S. presidential election, Nokia independently released the video for her track, “Brujas”, in which she raps:

I’m the Black a-Rican bruja straight out from the Yoruba  
And my people come from Africa diaspora, Cuba  
And you mix that Arawak, that original people  
I’m that Black Native American, I vanquish all evil  
I’m the Black a-Rican bruja straight out from the Yoruba  
And my ancestors Nigerian, my grandmas was brujas  
And I come from an island and it’s called Puerto Rico  
And it’s one of the smallest but it got the most people.

Dreamy scenes of ethereal women moving in water visually convey brujas, important spiritual figures who exist not just in the distant past but today as well (fig. 1.8). Princess Nokia herself identifies as one, and she speaks of communicating with her deceased mother, who also identified as a bruja, through her spiritual practice. These hypnotic scenes are interspersed with recognizable, autonomous witches of pop culture: four young women visually referencing the 1996 cult classic *The Craft* (fig. 1.9),<sup>145</sup> in which a group of teenaged outsiders empower themselves through witchcraft. Princess Nokia replaces the four leads with herself and three friends (fig. 1.10). Damola Durosomo hails the grouping as “pure black and brown girl magic,”<sup>146</sup> a concept of empowerment and self-affirmation created by CaShawn Thompson in 2013 to celebrate women of color, their accomplishments, and support for one another.<sup>147</sup> “Brujas,” writes Durosomo, “is a

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<sup>145</sup> This astute observation was made by Anna Lee, a student in my course at Cornell University, *Dangerous Women*.

<sup>146</sup> Damola Durosomo, “Princess Nokia’s ‘Brujas’ Is the Afro-Latina Anthem America Needs This Week,” *OkayAfrica*, November 10, 2016, <http://www.okayafrika.com/video/princess-nokias-brujas-afro-latina-anthem/>.

<sup>147</sup> Dexter Thomas, “Why Everyone’s Saying ‘Black Girls Are Magic,’ ” *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-everyones-saying-black-girls-are-magic-20150909-htlstory.html>.

vibrant exploration of the unique cultural inheritance of Afro-Latina women,” an “anthem for women in the Diaspora who feel connected to the transcendental strength manifested by powerful deities like the Yoruba Orishas.”<sup>148</sup> In both depicting women as powerful in groups and connecting women across time and space, Princess Nokia references and venerates the coven, rapping:

Casting spells with my cousins  
I'm the head of this coven

History reveals that independent women who came together in groups were suspected of secretly participating in a coven and endangered precisely for that activity; Princess Nokia reclaims the coven and insists that it is a place of not just power, but joy, buffered from external oppression, repeatedly warning: “Don’t you fuck with my energy,” and promising:

I cast a circle in white and I can vanquish your spite  
And if you hex me with hate then I’m a conjure the light.

As an intersectional feminist reclamation of witchcraft, *Brujas* follows Princess Nokia’s 2015 track and video *Young Girls*, honoring motherhood in what Barbara Calderon-Douglass calls a “feminist paradise that is filled with strong and beautiful brown women.”<sup>149</sup> The video is remarkable in a number of ways: its body positivity, featuring a diverse group of women in what director Milah Libin calls “a visual representation of body types and colors that don’t get [offered] in media and in music videos.”<sup>150</sup> Strength forged among groups of women is central to what Nokia has termed “urban feminism,” a

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<sup>148</sup> Durosomo, “Afro-Latina Anthem.”

<sup>149</sup> Barbara Calderón-Douglass, “Explore Princess Nokia’s Feminist Utopia in Her New Video for ‘Young Girls,’” *Vice*, January 20, 2015. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/explore-princess-nokias-feminist-dream-paradise-in-her-new-music-video-815](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/explore-princess-nokias-feminist-dream-paradise-in-her-new-music-video-815).

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

concept which drives her work; during live shows she insists that women, and particularly women of color, come to the front of the audience and create a safe space there for one another. In *Young Girls*, she connects female empowerment to witchcraft:

We are old souls  
Protectors of the earth, guardians of children, worshippers of the moon, mermaids of the ocean  
We are followers of the sun, and women of magic  
We are witches  
We protect nature and fight against darkness  
And we live in harmony amongst ourselves and protect each other at all costs  
I carry the spirits of the ancients and come from a long line of wise women, the Taino and Yoruba people  
From deep in the Caribbean  
Witches, who lived by nature

Refusing to participate in a patriarchal music industry that exploits women and flattens the diversity of their lived experiences, identities, and bodies, Princess Nokia remains unsigned and thriving on her own, and among her community of women. Quickly garnering global acclaim, she speaks to and inspires an entirely new mode of feminism and an unencumbered way of being; that she evokes and reinvents authentic witchcraft of the past and present underscores the enduring, or perhaps ascending, symbolism of the witch and coven for women—and particularly those who are non-conforming, independent, and have experienced oppression and violence.

Her work is imbued with a deep respect for motherhood, and networks of mothers and children. “Young Girls” includes the lines:

Now there’s village and people, we all play our part,  
There’s naked children running all around,  
Mothers and sisters, daughters and sons,  
Room for everyone, room for everyone.  
Dancing and singing, no phone is ringing,  
Babies is peeing where their aunties is cleaning,  
Young girls, patrons of the earth,

Young girls, take care of all the earth,  
Young girls, they need their own respect,  
Young girls, carry babies from their neck.

In these final two lines, Nokia brings up women who become mothers at a young age, who, because they are themselves still considered girls, get little respect. About this song, she says, “People look down on teen moms and young mothers when they are the most gracious and significant women on this Earth,” said Nokia. “They sacrifice their freedom and their lives to give life. I don't think people realize what they have to go through—the shaming our society puts on them. I mean, we've been having children as teenagers since the beginning of time.”<sup>151</sup>

In this still shot from the video (fig. 2.11), Nokia and a young girl dance together in nature, clearly enjoying each other's company. Nokia gazes down at the girl, while smiling and laughing. As sunlight filters through leafy trees, another woman watches their exchange, clapping delightedly and encouraging the little girl to dance. The two women gaze lovingly at the girl, and she seems to soak in the positive attention and playful encouragement. She gazes up toward Nokia, her elder, with awe tempered by comfort. It is a scene of intergenerational joy shared among women. The generosity of maternity, and motherhood's connection to nature, are connected directly to breastfeeding, as she paints this utopic vision with the phrasing:

Nipples dripping nectar for the youth  
We play with plants and we don't watch cartoons  
Washing in rivers and prepare our food  
This is what young girls, young girls do

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<sup>151</sup> Barbara Calderón-Douglass, “Explore Princess Nokia's Feminist Utopia in Her New Video for ‘Young Girls,’” *Vice*, January 20, 2015.

That her utopic vision is one ripe with motherhood may have something to do with her own sense of mother-loss, in that she lost her own young mother to AIDS early in life. In this sense, her utopic vision is also one steeped in mourning.

Her 2016 song and accompanying video “Tomboy” made it clear that she had no intention of conforming to dominant conceptions of gender and sexuality in rap (in particular the eroticized woman fashioned for the male gaze), and provided a glimpse into her personal life in her New York neighborhood. She takes viewers onto the basketball court, on a joy ride, and a raucous time on an overpass, all with her friends. She also brings viewers into a most intimate space, her grandmother’s home. Early in the video, the two women sit together on a couch, the wall behind them covered in family photos, including images of her as a young girl (fig. 2.12). She slurps milk from her cereal bowl and, to provoke her grandmother, spits it back into the bowl. Her grandmother feigns a swat at her in disgust and Nokia laughs, spitting out more milk (fig. 2.13).

In this brief action—a fleeting exchange—Nokia becomes a child again, the girl on the wall behind her. And while the spat milk can be seen as nothing more than a silly thing, in its very childishness it becomes important. In positioning milk in close proximity to a surrogate mother figure, and in the context of her broader interest in sacred maternity and matrilineal witchcraft, as well as connections she has made to milk as symbolic of maternal generosity, this milk is magical. Suddenly she is not a motherless woman, but a girl sitting and playing next to one of her mothers.

Finally, through openly asserting her identity as a witch, Nokia subverts the cultural assumption that witches were entirely eradicated and that witchcraft lies dormant in the distant past. In making herself visible as a witch with a complex identity and

intersectional feminist vision, she emerges as a new and formidable witch. She thereby rejects the notion that the witches of contemporary popular culture can be entirely sterilized, packaged, and sold in ways that demean or misrepresent actual women and their lived experiences. She accomplishes all of this through her autonomous labor.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, the various processes of conjuring witches have been driven not just by fear, but desire. The initial patriarchal anxiety festered in a few primary areas: the existence of rare spaces in which women worked with total independence and agency, that these women were educated and non-conforming, the midwife's ability to both harm and heal, and her intimate knowledge of women's bodies and their processes, including lactation. Together, these kindled a burning desire to control and suppress these spaces and women. In turn, this desire fueled a process of vilification: turning women into witches. In hindsight, and with adequate archival data in hand,<sup>152</sup> this particular form of vilification is gendered violence, and should ignite fury for the lives and livelihoods lost, as well as newly informed concern about how this particular villain has endured unjustly and inaccurately in popular imagination. This chapter showcases the surprisingly prominent role that lactation and midwifery played in this systemic violence against women.

Centuries later, educated, empowered, and non-conforming witches like Princess Nokia rise up and face that violent history, and through their creators' progressive approaches, smash the patriarchy. Reclaiming the terms used to subjugate them, they combat systems of oppression, speak truth to power, and unapologetically display their

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multifaceted identities. What is owed to witches of the past and present? Creators and consumers of pop culture who are concerned with equity have a responsibility to remain attentive to the ways in which individuals who exist outside of a narrow construct of womanhood are endangered by systems of gendered oppression as they mutate and surface today.

In closing, if it is true that patriarchal desire conjured witches as a means to suppress women, the ways in which intersectional feminists reclaim and empower them sends a solemn warning to be heeded: be careful what you wish for.

## Chapter 3

### Early Photographs of Enslaved Wet Nurses and Charges in the American South

#### Introduction: “Desirous”

In October of 1792, Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to his daughter, Patsy, whose toddler, Anne, was ailing. Jefferson was very concerned about his first grandchild. “Having not received a letter by yesterday’s post, and that of the former week from Mr. Randolph [Patsy’s husband] having announced dear Anne’s indisposition, I am under much anxiety. In my last letter to Mr. Randolph I barely mentioned your being recovered, when somewhat younger than she is, by recurrence to a good breast of milk. Perhaps this might be worthy of proposing to the Doctor... I think it should however be some other than your own, if a breast of milk is to be tried... I hope you are perfectly well and the little one also... Adieu my dear yours affectionately.”<sup>153</sup>

This seemingly tender letter is encoded with insidious meaning, which emerges in archival data. Patsy was born to Thomas and Martha Jefferson in September of 1772, and failed to thrive. In January of 1773, Jefferson purchased an enslaved woman named Ursula Granger, and her two sons, George Jr. (age 14) and Bagwell (age 5). She gave birth to another son, Archy, in early 1773. Ursula was a particularly valuable enslaved woman because she was lactating. Martha wrote that she was “very desirous to get a favorite house woman of the name Ursula,” and she quickly became wet nurse to Patsy;

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<sup>153</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, October 26, 1792, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed July 11, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-24-02-0490>.

Jefferson noted that his daughter “recovered almost instantaneously.”<sup>154</sup> Deprived of his mother’s care and milk, one-year-old Archy Granger died in 1774 and is buried at Monticello.<sup>155</sup> It is likely that he was buried in a wooded area approximately 2,000 feet below the main house. In 2001, archaeologists identified this space as the burial ground for enslaved people at Monticello (fig. 3.1). While some graves were marked with stones placed near heads and feet, they were not inscribed, but most are not marked at all.

Ursula remained an integral part of the household, as a trained pastry chef, housekeeper, brewer of cider and beer, and wet nurse with notably high quality milk. Jefferson wrote, “There is nobody there but Ursula who unites trust and skill to do it.”<sup>156</sup>

In recent decades, historians have shed light on the cruel contradictions at Thomas Jefferson’s core. As Lucia Stanton puts it, “Although Jefferson was a lifelong enemy of the institution of slavery, he was continually making accommodations to it. His spoken ideals were often in conflict with the realities of his ownership of human property... He encouraged the formation of stable families within his holdings, but his actions to provide for his relatives or to make his operations more efficient often led to family disruption.”<sup>157</sup> In this case “disruption” led to the death of an infant. As Peter S. Onuf and Annette Gordon-Reed regard Jefferson’s Monticello, “No where is America’s

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<sup>154</sup> Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Ties That Bound: Founding First Ladies and Slaves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 12.

<sup>155</sup> Lucia C. Stanton, *Free Some Day: The African-American Families of Monticello* ([Charlottesville, VA]: Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2000).

<sup>156</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, February 4, 1800, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed September 20, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-31-02-0304>.

<sup>157</sup> Stanton, *Free Some Day*, 15.

foundational contradiction on more vivid display.”<sup>158</sup>

The essays “Manners,” and “Laws,” in Jefferson’s book *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), clearly demonstrate his belief that the institution of slavery was harmful to the republic, praying for means to end slavery. Yet, in “Laws” he expounds upon his belief in white supremacy, and argues for an innate inferiority of the “Negro” in terms of physical beauty and intellectualism, determining they are physically suited for manual labor.<sup>159</sup> This propensity for physical labor, when read alongside his letters, extends to wet nursing. In fact, Jefferson includes references to wet nursing in his meditation on slavery, worrying about the proximity of white children to the enslaved Africans, and how certain “manners” are passed on to young people. In “Manners,” he writes: “There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. This quality is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do.”<sup>160</sup> He muses on this modeling of behavior as motivation to refrain from violence against enslaved people:

If a parent could find no motive either in his philanthropy or his self-love, for restraining the intemperance of passion towards his slave, it should always be a sufficient one that his child is present. But generally it is not sufficient. The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with

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<sup>158</sup> Lucia C. Stanton, “*Those Who Labor for My Happiness*”: *Slavery at Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), vii.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Frank Shuffelton (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998).

<sup>160</sup> Jefferson, 270.

odious peculiarities.<sup>161</sup>

Here, Jefferson's contradictions are easily observed: he worries about the institution of slavery not for its effect on enslaved people, but how the "odious" traits of slave-ownership are passed on to children of slave owners. For Jefferson, this occurs through close proximity to enslaved people, including through the practice of wet nursing.

That Jefferson goes on, years later, to encourage his daughter to obtain milk "other than your own" underscores the cruel contradictions of a "Founding Father," the continued use of slave labor to benefit his family at the expense of African American lives. The short life of Archy Granger is all too common in the founding of the United States, and throughout the history of slavery in the American South. As I shall discuss in this chapter, human milk, and the women who produced it, were monetized, exploited, and separated from their own infants, who were in turn imperiled by this separation, to establish a white American population and prioritize it over all others.

As Marie Jenkins Schwartz writes in *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South*, the practice of removing young children and infants from their mothers was extremely common. Formerly enslaved, Stephen Williams later remembered, "They looked upon it as 'taking a little calf away from a cow.'" However, Schwartz writes that, "The separation of mothers and infants was a special cause for concern among enslaved people, because infants did not thrive without mother's milk in the days before sterilization of bottles became common... Everyone understood that separation from mother practically ensured the infant's death unless a wet nurse stood in

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<sup>161</sup> Jefferson, 240.

for her. Yet doctors took no notice.”<sup>162</sup>

Jefferson’s letter is indicative of the ways in which these histories are whitewashed in the textual record, which is fraught with contradiction. Images, though few and far between, have the potential to augment what is known about this moment in history; coupled with archival data, they can reveal important information. Thus, this chapter focuses on nineteenth-century photographs of breastfeeding relationships, particularly enslaved Black women with their white charges in the American South.

At the surface level, these small, cased daguerreotypes function simply as portraits of wet nurses and the children they fed and cared for. Archival data shows that lactating women held increased monetary value within the violent economy of slavery. Just as contemporaneous images of cotton picking reveal both commodity and commoditized body, so too do these seemingly innocuous portraits: the milk a substance of value, the body commoditized to make it. But what is important is not just what the images contain, but what they exclude: the wet nurses’ own infants, from whom they are violently removed in order to nurse white infants. While the cases—plushly lined with velvet and hinged with brass latches, exteriors decorated with fruits and flowers touting the bounty of the plantation—are meant to preserve the fragile photographs, they also protect the vulnerable, white body, the future of American white supremacy. Simultaneously, they separate the wet nurse from her child, a most intimate form of violence, in perpetuity. It could be said these objects reflect the lived experience of wet nurses, the cases emulating plantation architecture: while these women lived in some of the most comfortable spaces available to enslaved laborers, they were the most surveilled

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<sup>162</sup> Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birth of a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 210–12.

and regulated, trapped in a space in which they were most separated from their own children, laboring to nourish the white supremacist bedrock of American capitalism.

### **Lactation & American Slavery**

In 1808, the United States stopped the practice of importing slaves.<sup>163</sup> From then until the Abolition of Slavery in 1865, as aptly put by Marie Jenkins Schwartz in *Birthing a Slave*, “slavery and the southern way of life could continue only if children were both in bondage,” which “enhanced the importance of enslaved women in the eyes of southern planters, who hoped to exploit their capacity for bearing children along with their ability to perform productive labor. The vested interests of slaveholders in enslaved women’s childbearing encouraged owners to take measures, some coercive, to ensure that they had the opportunity to conceive and bring a baby to term.”<sup>164</sup> In this chapter, I build upon extant research on reproduction, to investigate the role of lactation in this history. How were Black women’s lactating bodies exploited by white, male doctors, in collusion with white, male owners? How did enslaved women resist this violent system and come to each other’s aid?

First, it is critical to understand the essential role that breastfeeding played throughout the history of American slavery; in short, I argue that the continued realization of American slavery depended on enslaved women’s breast milk. As women maintained and circulated knowledge of their own bodily processes, as Schwartz so aptly

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<sup>163</sup> The abolition of slavery was meant to end the practice of importing enslaved Africans, but the illegal slave trade flourished through the end of the civil war and even into the last years of the nineteenth century.

<sup>164</sup> Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1.

puts it, white, male doctors “asserted their professional status by classifying as ignorant the folkways of slaves and black women’s knowledge of their own bodies.” She goes on:

Women’s health is a particularly rich place to study efforts by the slaveholding class to exercise hegemonic sway over enslaved people... Encounters between enslaved women and slaveholders’ doctors endow the themes familiar in the historical literature on slavery—white dominance and brutality, black resistance and community—with stark immediacy. The importance of their wombs and breasts for the future of slavery meant that the struggle for domination centered on women’s bodies. The women suffered a peculiar form of violence as slaveholders and doctors exploited female anatomy for their own purposes.<sup>165</sup>

The ability to bear children and nurse them increased women’s monetary value; those who could not were considered a financial liability.<sup>166</sup> Those who demonstrated fertility and lactation were considered “good breeders” on the market, valued more than even the strongest men. For example, a formerly enslaved man, Boston Blackwell, recalls the sale of two women in Memphis Tennessee; one who had not born children sold for \$800, while another, advertised as a “breeding woman,” sold for \$1,500.<sup>167</sup> Those who were childless were at risk of being sold away from their families, and often put to harder work and subjected to more violence, than women who bore children.<sup>168</sup> Records show that individual women were sold multiple times due to infertility.<sup>169</sup>

Enslaved women obviously lacked a significant amount of control over their reproductive lives, as slaveholders regularly subjected women to rape and demanded couplings. However, one way in which enslaved women could and did exert control over their own reproductivity was birth spacing through strategic breastfeeding practices. They

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<sup>165</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 4–5.

<sup>166</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 11.

<sup>167</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 13.

<sup>168</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 19.

<sup>169</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 20.

understood that lactation suppressed ovulation, and in order to avoid pregnancy or increase amounts of time between pregnancies, they breastfed strategically. For this reason, as well as the health of their children, enslaved women generally endeavored to breastfeed for two to three years. Simultaneously acknowledging lactation as birth control, slaveholders required, to varying degrees of success, enslaved infants to wean at six months of age, as soon as possible. They directly controlled the weaning process by requiring mothers to work away from their babies, feeding babies solid foods, and decreasing the number of times throughout the work day that women could visit and nurse their babies. By age one, infants no longer had access to their mothers during daylight. However, mother and child often shared a relatively sheltered space in slave quarters at night, where they could covertly maintain a nursing relationship. A formerly enslaved woman, Amanda McCray recalled, “It was a common occurrence to see a child of two or three years still nursing at the mother’s breast.”<sup>170</sup> Through clandestine night-nursing, a woman could forge a maternal bond with her child, resist a white patriarchal control of her body and relationship, and exert control over her own fertility.<sup>171</sup> In other cases, nursing mothers were required to sleep in the house, to provide milk and care for slaveholders’ children throughout the night.<sup>172</sup>

White, male doctors contradicted established medical knowledge about the

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<sup>170</sup> Schwartz, *Birth of a Slave*, 95.

<sup>171</sup> For a similar account of white control of Black reproduction, and resistance via birth spacing and fertility, see Nancy Rose Hunt, “‘Le bebe en brousse’: European Women, African Birth Spacing, and Colonial Intervention in Breast Feeding in the Belgian Congo,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 21, no. 3 (January 1, 1988): 401–32.

<sup>172</sup> Emily West and R. J. Knight, “Mothers’ Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of Southern History* 83, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 53, <https://doi.org/10.1353/soh.2017.0001>.

benefits of breastfeeding, and aligned with slaveholders in discouraging enslaved women from “extended breastfeeding,” even making claims that doing so was detrimental to their reproductive health. This narrative supported slaveholders’ economic success, as on a plantation increased fertility among enslaved women equated to increased labor force. Southern doctors increasingly asserted that infants should wean between six and twelve months, against the wishes of mothers to wean between two and three years.<sup>173</sup> That this convention has continued centuries later, and further, that it originated as a means to more quickly populate the white economy and Black labor force in the United States, is critical historical information; that women resisted by continuing to nurse strategically, is as well.

While some women were forced to return to hard labor days after giving birth, some were excused for one month following the birth of a child so that they could breastfeed and recover. They were still required to keep up with less physically demanding work during that month. There are plentiful accounts of cruelty to women in the postpartum period, and of women returning to hard labor while wearing newborns on their backs, bringing them to their chests to nurse while continuing to work in the fields.<sup>174</sup>

Women understood that these forced arrangements were detrimental to newborns. After Abolition, Lou Williams, who had been enslaved on a plantation in Texas, remembered women bringing babies to the fields while they worked, resting them under the cotton in the heat of the day.<sup>175</sup> A formerly enslaved man, Charles Ball, recalled that

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<sup>173</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 95.

<sup>174</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 191.

<sup>175</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 224.

when the group took a break from picking cotton to drink water, mothers nursed their infants; while they breastfed, they relied upon others “to bring them water in gourds, which they were careful to carry to the field with them.”<sup>176</sup> This anecdote is significant in showing some of the ways in which people supported one another; in this case, providing water supported hydration that was necessary for hard labor as well as milk production.

Occasionally, nursing mothers formed a crew of workers on a plantation, such as on an Alabama estate in 1858, when a group of pregnant and nursing mothers called “sucklers” worked together to shuck corn, rather than the more demanding tasks of picking corn and cotton. Working in groups, nearer to the slave quarters, enabled them to nurse more frequently and prevented infants from interrupting fieldwork.<sup>177</sup> In other cases, infants were transported to the fields to nurse, such as on a plantation in Alabama, where babies were loaded up in a cart a few times a day and brought to their mothers to nurse. In another case, a couple in South Carolina required a wet nurse to work in the field and four times throughout the day suckle their infant, who was transported to her. There are some documented cases in which white mistresses nursed enslaved infants, while their mothers worked in the fields or had died in childbirth. In some cases, they required other enslaved women who were lactating to serve as wet nurses.<sup>178</sup>

Formerly enslaved people expressed concern for the ways in which work obligations kept women from breastfeeding frequently enough. To save their infant’s lives, they risked capital punishment by reconnecting with their infants, unnoticed; there are accounts of women being whipped for giving infants unapproved feedings. One

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<sup>176</sup> Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 61.

<sup>177</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 62.

<sup>178</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 66.

formerly enslaved woman, Peggy Perry, relayed how upon giving birth she was forced to return to work; when the overseer only allowed her a fifteen-minute break, which was not enough time to walk from the field to the cabin, nurse, and return, she decided instead to use that time to pray for her infant's death, to end their shared pain. One can only imagine the physical agony, in addition to the emotional, of being engorged and not able to relieve that pressure, while performing hard labor. Or more horrifically, for this scenario to end in an infant's death.

Fugitive and abolitionist William Wells Brown penned a poem about the misery of enslaved breastfeeding women, after witnessing an infant violently taken from a mother:

The morn was chill—I spoke no word,  
But feared my babe might die,  
And heard all day, or thought I heard  
My little baby cry.  
At noon, oh, how I ran and took  
My baby to my breast!  
I lingered—and the long lash broke  
My sleeping infant's rest.<sup>179</sup>

For good reason, the plight of mothers and infants became a primary issue for abolitionists; later it endured as a trope through which to explore slavery in fiction, perhaps most notably in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) in which the protagonist is sexually assaulted by men who doubly traumatize her by stealing her milk.<sup>180</sup>

### **Making Trauma Known through Fiction**

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<sup>179</sup> William Wells Brown, "Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave: Written by Himself" (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1847), 50–51, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brown47/brown47.html>.

<sup>180</sup> Toni Morrison, *Beloved: A Novel* (New York: Signet, 1991).

Through *Beloved*, Morrison's 1987 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, she conveyed the psychological and emotional impact of the experience of slavery on individuals, and in particular, on women. In reaching an international audience, Morrison made the world familiar with the trauma of slavery. It is through this type of work that readers, and more broadly contemporary culture, can grapple with the ramifications of this institution in ways that are simply not quantifiable. The struggle for freedom at the heart of the text is not just simply representative of the primary narrative of a group of enslaved people seeking an escape to freedom, but moreover a meditation on what the desire for freedom means for someone with little control of her life, and in ways that are quite intimate and thus little discussed. A palpable way to discuss this psychological effect and the legacy of intimate violations is through an examination of slavery's impact on motherhood, and mother-child relations. As Barbara Schapiro puts it:

For Morrison's characters, African-Americans in a racist, slave society, there is no *reliable other* to recognize and affirm their existence. The mother, the child's first vital other, is made unreliable or unavailable by a slave system which either separates her from her child or so enervates and depletes her that she has no self with which to confer recognition. The consequences on the inner life of the child – the emotional hunger, the obsessive and terrifying narcissistic fantasies – constitute the underlying psychological drama of the novel.<sup>181</sup>

*Beloved* is the story of Sethe, who was born into slavery by an African mother she never knew; her story begins and is peppered with a sense of mother-loss created by the institution of slavery. At the age of thirteen she is sold to the Garners of Kentucky, where she marries a fellow slave named Halle. The two have two sons, Howard and Buglar, and a daughter, who goes unnamed for most of the novel, and Sethe is pregnant with a fourth daughter, who will be named Denver. Upon the death of the fairly benevolent proprietor,

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<sup>181</sup> Barbara Schapiro, "The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison's 'Beloved,'" *Contemporary Literature* 32, no. 2 (July 1, 1991): 194, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1208361>.

Mr. Garner, a sadistic and wickedly racist new slavemaster named schoolteacher is brought on to run the farm, prompting the protagonists to plot their escape. Schoolteacher and his two nephews anticipate the escape, killing one and capturing another. Sethe sends her children ahead to Cincinnati, and is still nursing the unnamed baby girl when they are separated, and is thus engorged with milk. She had anticipated being separated for a matter of days, and dealt with the discomfort of her milk continuing to come in, with no one to suckle. She stored the milk and dealt with the discomfort, believing she would soon be reunited with her daughter, and if she kept her milk up, could feed her soon. It is then that schoolteacher's nephews seize her in the barn and violate her in a most intimate and brutal way. She recalls the experience:

*"I had milk," she said. "I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby girl. I hadn't stopped nursing her when I sent her on ahead with Howard and Buglar."*

*Now she rolled the dough out with a wooden pin. "Anybody could smell me long before he saw me. And when he saw me he'd see the drops of it on the front of my dress. Nothing I could do about that. All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it. Nobody knew that she couldn't pass her air if you held her up on your shoulder, only if she was lying on my knees. Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me. I told that to the women in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgotten me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it."*

*"Men don't know nothing much," said Paul D, tucking his pouch back into his vest pocket, "but they do know a suckling can't be away from its mother for long."*

*"Then they know what it's like to send your children off when your breasts are full." "We was talking 'bout a tree, Sethe."*

*"After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I*

*told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still.”*

*“They used cowhide on you?”*

*“And they took my milk.”*

*“They beat you and you was pregnant?”*

*“And they took my milk!”*

In addition to assaulting Sethe, and recognizing that she needed to nurse her baby, the two nephews brutalized her by then sucking her milk dry and rendering her unable to nurse her baby, effectively severing her from her child and harming both mother and child. The rape itself is eclipsed by the theft of her milk, as according to Schapiro, “She feels robbed of her essence, of her most precious substance, which is her maternal milk. We learn that as a child, Sethe was deprived of her own mother’s milk: ‘The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own.’”<sup>182</sup> Deprived of her own mother’s milk so that she could nurse the slave owner’s children, Sethe was breastfed by another enslaved woman, but she was further robbed of the attachment forged through nursing. While Schapiro connotes this bond as symbolic, in fact, the maternal bond forged through breastfeeding has been well documented and substantiated by a number of studies; it should not be minimized as merely symbolic. She goes on to write, “That relationship is associated with one’s core being or essence; if she has no nursing milk to call her own, she feels without a self to call her own. Thus before she was raped by the white farm boys, Sethe was ravaged as an

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<sup>182</sup> Schapiro, “Bonds of Love,” 198.

infant, robbed of her milk/essence by the white social structure.”<sup>183</sup> Put another way, Morrison makes clear through human milk the particular ways women and children were victimized via systems of slavery.

When she reports her assault and the theft of her milk to Mrs. Garner, schoolteacher has her brutally whipped in retaliation, in spite of her pregnancy. She goes on to escape and give birth to the baby, whom she names Denver, after the woman who helps her. She is reunited with her children for a blissful month in Cincinnati, in which they can appreciate one another’s company. But eventually, schoolteacher reappears, to take Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home. Rather than return, she kills her unnamed daughter, cutting her throat with a handsaw, in order to save her. “If I hadn’t killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her.”<sup>184</sup> Sethe arranges her headstone to read “Beloved,” and we come to understand later that it is the ghost of this child who narrates the story.

Sethe feels betrayed by Halle, in that he witnessed her rape but did nothing to stop it. Yet, he is not an uncaring character, but rendered as deeply wounded by this violation as well. He too is traumatized by the way in which Sethe’s is assaulted and her milk taken, and witnessing the trauma causes a severe mental breakdown. Later, he is observed squatting by a churn, with “butter all over his face,” leading Sethe to believe he smeared it everywhere “because the milk they took is on his mind.”<sup>185</sup>

Colson Whitehead’s 2016 novel *The Underground Railroad* also ruminates on mother-loss in the context of American slavery. As a child, the protagonist, Cora, loses

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<sup>183</sup> Schapiro, 198.

<sup>184</sup> Morrison, *Beloved*, 200.

<sup>185</sup> Morrison, 69–70.

her mother Mabel when she escapes the plantation under the cover of darkness.

Eventually, as a teenager, Cora decides to try her hand at escaping as well. Though she has come to hate her mother for abandoning her, she can no longer stay and be subjected to the horrors of being an enslaved woman, which include sexual assault and a new attention to her body as a woman. Though she experiences rape and a brutal beating, it is, in fact, the moment when the plantation master evaluates her breast that she decides to run. Upon the death of his brother, Terrance Randall has just accumulated his half of the plantation, including the many people enslaved there, including Cora. As a man is burned alive, Terrance unites the groups and performs an inspection, checking teeth and hair, and informing them of his new, oppressive rules in an inspection and orientation:

When Terrance got to Cora, he slipped his hand into her shift and cupped her breast. He squeezed. She did not move. . . . He nodded at Cora and continued his stroll among his Africans as he shared his improvements. . . . She had not been his and now she was his. Or she had always been his and just now knew it. Cora's attention detached itself. It floated someplace past the burning slave and the great house and the lines that defined the Randall domain. She tried to fill in its details from stories, sifting through the accounts of slaves who had seen it. Each time she caught hold of something—buildings of polished white stone, an ocean so vast there wasn't a tree in sight, the shop of a colored blacksmith who served no master but himself—it wriggled free like a fish and raced away. She would have to see it for herself if she were to keep it.<sup>186</sup>

It is ultimately this unspoken bodily act—the access to and evaluation of her breast followed by a meaning-laden nod of approval from her master—that compels Cora to completely understand her position as an enslaved woman and to commit herself to pursuing freedom, or perishing in that pursuit.

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<sup>186</sup> Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad*. New York: Anchor Books, 2018, 48.

## Testimony

Throughout American slavery, within an unquantifiable number of slave-owning families, enslaved Black wet nurses breastfed white infants. “Ultimately,” writes Emily West and R.J. Knight, “white women used wet nursing as a tool to manipulate enslaved women’s motherhood for slaveholders’ own ends.”<sup>187</sup> Yet, “wet nursing under slavery has proven rather elusive to historians.”<sup>188</sup> Certainly, wet nursing as a system, and human milk as a product, are difficult to track and quantify. As Marcus Wood writes, “Black milk, slave mother’s milk, was stolen in vast, unknown, incalculable quantities as generation after generation of white infants ‘drank, and drank’ from the nipples of the ‘Mammy,’”<sup>189</sup> revealing this theft as particularly traumatic. West and Knight reject previous approaches to wet nursing during slavery that implied these practices, “exemplified racial closeness, intimacy, and affection between black and white women who shared their breast milk. Instead it suggests wet nursing history [and particularly the visual culture thereof, as I shall discuss] showcases ways that white women manipulated enslaved women’s motherhood for their own purposes, [stressing] the complicity of white southern women in enslaved wet nurses’ abuse.”<sup>190</sup> Wilma A. Dunaway’s study on the African-American family during slavery and emancipation is illustrative in analyzing breastfeeding patterns during slavery: enslaved women were forced to wean their own infants at six months of age, but serve as wet nurses until their white charges were two

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<sup>187</sup> West and Knight, “Mothers’ Milk,” 37.

<sup>188</sup> West and Knight, 41.

<sup>189</sup> Marcus Wood, *Black Milk: Imagining Slavery in the Visual Cultures of Brazil and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>190</sup> West and Knight, “Mothers’ Milk,” 43.

years of age.<sup>191</sup>

In the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) conducted interviews with formerly enslaved individuals to record their first-hand accounts of slavery. Tellingly, many women discussed their experiences of slavery in relation to breastfeeding; a recurrent trope is the experience of being separated from their own young children in order to nurse white children in the main house. In Arkansas, Josephine Howell recalled that her mother “suckled Mrs. Will Thompson’s children... she lived in Mrs. Thompson’s back yard but she slept in their house to help with the babies.”<sup>192</sup> The arrangement separated mother from baby and made it impossible for Josephine’s mother to breastfeed her. Eugenia Woodberry nursed and cared for four children throughout the night, noting that she slept with all four children and was wholly responsible for nursing them, as “Miss Susan never did suckle none of them.”<sup>193</sup> Requiring enslaved wet nurses to night-feed provided white women with uninterrupted sleep.

When asked why the white women chose to use wet nurses, formerly enslaved women often cited convenience and freedom to move beyond the plantation. Others cited vanity, such as Betty Curtlett, who responded: “White women wouldn’t nurse their own babies cause it would make their breast fall. They would bring a healthy woman... up to the house... She would nurse her baby and the white baby, too. They would feed her everything she wanted. She didn’t have to work cause the milk would be hot to give the babies.... Rich women didn’t nurse their babies, never did, cause it would cause their

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<sup>191</sup> Wilma A. Dunaway, *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 134–41.

<sup>192</sup> Emily West and R. J. Knight, “Mothers’ Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of Southern History* 83, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 52, <https://doi.org/10.1353/soh.2017.0001>.

<sup>193</sup> West and Knight, “Mothers’ Milk,” 53.

breast to be flat.”<sup>194</sup> Others cited white women’s modesty, not wanting to reveal their breasts; Ellen Vader responded, “Me and [owner] Dave Johnson’s boy nursed together. When they had company, Miss Luiza was so modest she wouldn’t let Tobe have [milk]. He would come lead my mother behind the door and pull at her till she would take him and let him nurse.”<sup>195</sup> Correspondence among white women reveals the privileged agency they held in making these decisions; there is also evidence of both husbands and fathers pressuring white mothers to use wet nurses for a variety of reasons, including increased fertility and access to sexual encounters.

Enslaved women whose infants died were identified quickly as potential wet nurses, such as Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas who wrote in her journal, “On Sunday we went down to the Rowell plantation for America [an enslaved woman]. She has lost her baby which would have been three weeks old (had it lived) tonight. Pa has kindly permitted us to have her as a wet nurse for my baby. I do not give sufficient milk for him.”<sup>196</sup> It is difficult to imagine the disorientation that America, and other grieving mothers, must have felt when being required to nurse another baby upon losing her own.

In other cases, white women conversed about common health issues related to nursing, such as mastitis, which impelled them to obtain a wet nurse. In 1805, a new mother described in a letter to her mother, an infection in her breasts and fever. Her mother responded, “The fever you have had will... lessen what milk you had at first... I rather think you... will be forced to relinquish the pleasure of giving nourishment from your own breasts,” and suggests that she find a “good nurse.” Her mother wrote a

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<sup>194</sup> West and Knight, 53.

<sup>195</sup> West and Knight, 54.

<sup>196</sup> West and Knight, 59.

subsequent letter, “You certainly did right to wean your child from your own breast.”<sup>197</sup>

The emotional toll this took on enslaved women and children is revealed in WPA testimonies. William McWhorter testified:

My Aunt Mary b’longed to Marse John Craddock and when his wife died and left a little baby—dat was little Miss Lucy—Aunt Mary was nussn’ a new baby of her own, so Marse John made her let his baby suck too. If Aunt Mary was feedin’ her own baby and Miss Lucy started cryin’ Marse John would snatch her baby up by the legs and spank him, and tell Aunt Mary to go on and nuss his baby fust. Aunt Mary couldn’t answer him a word, but my ma said she offen seed Aunt Mary cry ‘til de tears met under her chin.<sup>198</sup>

Understanding the intricacies of these relationships is essential to viewing early photographs of wet nurses with their charges. Without these testimonies, the images may be inappropriately seen as benign, even benevolent. And similarly, viewing the images can augment the textual history, particularly in how the portraits convey affect, buttressing the textual record and providing an important means to better understand lactation as foundational to American history.

### **Early Photographs**

Since 2015, I have conducted research in several archives around the United States, looking for daguerreotypes of enslaved Black wet nurses with their white charges. This search began in The Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography, a recent gift to the Kroch Rare and Manuscript Collection at Cornell University, where I initially found eleven examples. With their haunting and painful imagery, and an utter

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<sup>197</sup> West and Knight, 60.

<sup>198</sup> Federal Writers’ Project. *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*. Vol. 4, *Georgia Narratives*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1941. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn044/>.

lack of information about the subjects and their relationships, they raise many questions. The many hours I spent with these objects led me to question whether, in other archives, objects like these could be paired with other extant archival materials to provide more information about the wet nurses and their charges and the nature of their relationships, the women's children made absent by this arrangement.

This line of inquiry led me to the Missouri History Museum, where I found a digitized image of a wet nurse and her charge, a rare case in which the image was labeled with names and a date (fig. 3.2). It is a remarkable image for a number of reasons, the high quality of the photograph, its crispness, the rich detail captured in such a diminutive object. Moreover, the coupling is compelling. Both woman and child face the camera and directly meet the viewer's gaze. Louisa's arms encircle the child with protective authority, while he sits comfortably on her lap, entwining her fingers with his own.

Further research yielded a deed of sale from April 30, 1858 (fig. 3.3) through which a 24-year-old woman, Louisa, was sold to the Hayward Family in New Orleans for \$900. This image was made around 1860 and depicts Louisa and H.E. Hayward. The son of Sawyer Hayward and Mary Frances (Burton) Hayward, Harry (H.E.) Hayward<sup>199</sup> was born November 1 1859, trained and worked as a physician, dying in New Orleans at 35 in 1895. Obituaries reveal that Dr. Hayward had contracted smallpox while treating a breakout in Mississippi City. Further digging reveals the Hayward family had recently relocated to New Orleans from the West Indies (Sawyer's mother and father were born in Bermuda, and the line traces back in Bermuda to the mid 1700s), and first grew cotton,

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<sup>199</sup> "Sawyer Hayward (1811–1892)," Find A Grave, accessed May 23, 2017, <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=123964262>.

then beans. To this day, the Hayward family produces and sells Camellia Beans.<sup>200</sup>

The Hayward family purchased Louisa six months before Harry's birth, anticipating the need to feed and care for the last of seven children. This image, and this narrative, is ultimately one of absence: specifically, what became of the baby Louisa had to have birthed in order to lactate? This portrait that ostensibly depicts a coupling is actually about forced separation, a violent system of separating Black women from their children, rendering the children all the more vulnerable.

In this case, the photograph itself is now absent. Its fate is unclear, but it cannot be located in the archives; it has either been lost or stolen.

## Recovery

These small objects can be found boxed and buried, as elusive as history itself. This research was conducted in the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans, where objects were displaced during Hurricane Katrina and the facility damaged. This research yielded three cased daguerreotypes depicting wet nursing relationships, including the one discussed at length in this chapter.<sup>201</sup>

Taken in 1850, "Portrait of D.L. Kernion with Slave and Nursemaid Marguerite,"<sup>202</sup> (figs. 3.4 and 3.5) depicts a young woman, who looks to be in her early twenties, who with bright eyes steadily meets the camera's gaze. In her lap she holds a baby boy, approximately one year of age, who reclines comfortably against her, resting

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<sup>200</sup> "About Camellia :'" *Camellia Brand* (blog), December 1, 2008.

<https://www.camelliabrand.com/about-camellia/>.

<sup>201</sup> I am including a second daguerreotype located during that research trip (fig. 3.6) as it has recently been digitized. Location Number 09818.5

<sup>202</sup> Louisiana State Museum Archives, Item Location Number 08516.

his head on her chest, and with sleepy eyes relents to being photographed. The two are formally dressed and groomed for the special occasion of having their picture made. She wears a dark plaid dress with lace collar, her hair swept back, he a light-colored romper, tall socks, and smart shoes. His right foot is obscured by movement, as he kicks his foot about. Prior to 1845, this portrait would have simply been impossible, as photography required exposures several minutes long. A technological advancement in 1845, the addition of bromine fumes to the process, reduced this time to several seconds. And yet, keeping a one-year-old child from moving for several seconds is no easy task, and the hands we see firmly clasping the child are not just holding and comforting the child, but preventing him from moving. This tension can augment an understanding of these images, that the caregivers were engaged in several types of labor while the photographs were being taken, one of which was the arduous task of keeping babies still so that the image could be made clearly. The boy appears comfortable, clearly at ease with his caregiver.

The Louisiana State Museum accessioned this cased daguerreotype in 1922, when it was given to the museum by Marie Kernion, a descendent of the sitter. As is the case with most of these objects, there is very little other information. The inclusion of names and a location enabled further archival research, which in turn revealed additional information. The Museum's biennial report from 1922 shows that the daguerreotype was part of a larger gift to the institution from Miss Marie Kernion, which included, among other items, an "infant's brassiere, batiste open work embroider, 1850; note for five pesos Constitutionalista de Mexico, 1914; two shell necklaces made by natives of Tahiti; Chitimacha double weave basket with cover; ambrotype picture of D. L. Kernion with

nurse made “Marguerite” slave, taken in 1850, in embossed case....”<sup>203</sup>

Further research stitches together the boy’s biography. In 1863, at the age of fourteen, D.L. Kernion was a Confederate Soldier. A telegraph (fig. 3.7) from D.L. to his brother A.L. from October of that year indicates that A.L. had recently been released as a prisoner of war. D.L. wrote that he was stopping in Mobile on his way to Richmond, and asked his brother if he needed anything.<sup>204</sup> Civil War enlistment records show that D.L. served in the Confederate Army, Orleans Guards Regiment Militia F-MC, listing his full name as Dangeville Kernion, and rank as Private.<sup>205</sup>

The Louisiana Wills and Probate Records of 1878-80 indicate that he died at that time, around thirty years of age, and include his full name: Louis Dangeville Labedoyen Huchet Kernion; little wonder it was shortened to D.L.<sup>206</sup> His death is also corroborated by the 1880 census, in which Mrs. D.L. Kernion is listed as a widow.<sup>207</sup> The book *Old Families of Louisiana* shows that Dangeville was an enduring family name, shared by this person’s father, and also by his son. The D.L. in this photograph married Anna du Buys, and had three children: Sidney, Dangeville, and Blanche.<sup>208</sup>

The Huchet de Kernion family extends to the initial colonization of Louisiana, when Jean Francois Huchet, Sieru de Kernion arrived in 1720 on the ship La Loire,

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<sup>203</sup> Louisiana State Museum, *Biennial Report*, 1922, 68.

<sup>204</sup> “Telegram from D.L. Kernion, Mobile, [Alabama], to [Private?] A.L. [H.] Kernion, 23rd Louisiana Regiment, Enterprise, Mississippi (with Envelope) | Tulane University Digital Library.”

<sup>205</sup> Military, Service Record, Civil War. “D L Kernion: “D L Kernion: Person, Pictures and Information - Fold3.Com.” Fold3.

<sup>206</sup> Louisiana, Wills and Probate Records, 1756-1984 for Louis Dangerille Kernion. Orleans: Wills, 1877-1880.

<sup>207</sup> “1900 United States Federal Census.”

<sup>208</sup> Arthur, Stanley Clisby, and George Campbell Huchet de Kernion. *Old Families of Louisiana*. New Orleans: Genealogical Publishing, 2009.

which had sailed from Lorient. The 1727 census records him living on a plantation on the river, and would soon marry a wealthy young widow, Jeanne Antoinette de Mirebaise de Villemont, who had come to Louisiana in 1719 from France. Jean Francois Huchet de Kernion served as a militia officer in the colony, and was actively engaged in the “Indian campaigns.” He established the Bayou St. John Plantation, and died there in 1769, leaving one son, Jean Rene, born in 1837, an officer in the French and Spanish colonial troops. The family was considered French nobility, and this status was confirmed by Louis XIV in a document dated 1668.<sup>209</sup>

Nothing can be found about the enslaved woman, Marguerite.

This archival and historical data troubles an interpretation of this object as a benign portrait of a caregiving relationship. This information reveals that the young boy would go on to fight as a Confederate soldier, part of a regime whose primary goal was to protect the institution of slavery, through which his caregiver was considered the property of his father, property that would be passed patrilineally to him. His military service supported a white supremacist control of the United States. Further, his family was deeply invested in the colonization of Louisiana; his ancestors only a few generations prior actively removing the Indigenous population from this land, establishing a European authoritarian regime that succeeded due to transatlantic slavery, and profited for generations on the labor of enslaved people, such as Marguerite. This portrait captures an unnatural coupling, a monetized relationship through an enslaved woman who was forced to provide her milk and labor to a European family as they established an stubborn presence in Louisiana. To do so, she was necessarily separated from her own child.

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<sup>209</sup> Stanley Clisby Arthur and George Campbell Huchet de Kernion, *Old Families of Louisiana* (New Orleans: Genealogical Publishing, 2009), 200–203.

Though we know little about her, and the absence of this information effectively obscures and white washes the history of American slavery, we do know that as an enslaved wet nurse Marguerite was separated from her own baby to care for D. L. Kernion. What does this information provide for the viewer, or someone able to handle this object? In turn, how does the history of wet nursing, augmented by this imagery, enrich an understanding of American history?

### **Photography as Tool of Oppression**

These cased photographs are contemporaneous with a trove of painful images created by Louis Agassiz, a Harvard zoologist. Through slave owners' complicity, Agassiz presented a philosophy of "polygenesis," through which he contended Europeans and Africans did not originate together but separately, and gained access to enslaved men and women, and hiring South Carolina photographer J.T. Zealy to photograph them in an attempt to support his claim. Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer write in

*Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery:*

Proponents of slavery and its bedrock ideology of black inferiority used these images to reinforce existing paradigms of racial difference and legitimate the ownership of black people as property. Photographs of enslaved people defy easy categorization because they are both the record and a relic of the brutal racism and domination at the core of chattel slavery. Images of enslaved women and men provide compelling and haunting documentation of individuals otherwise lost to the written historical record. Yet the history of such photographs is firmly embedded in the dynamics of exploitation and dehumanization that lay at the core of slavery.<sup>210</sup>

In the realm of this project, Willis and Krathamer's argument encourages viewers' perception of these cased daguerreotypes to evolve from one of simple portrait to visual

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<sup>210</sup> Deborah Willis, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 4.

tools that justified the institution of slavery to continue.

An iconic example, housed by the Peabody Museum at Harvard, depicts a woman identified as Drana whose clothing has been pulled aside to reveal and chronicle her breasts (fig. 3.8). As evidence, the photograph intends to specify her reproductive and presumably her lactation labor by revealing her breasts; a second image in which she is represented in profile further demonstrates physical changes wrought by the labor of wet nursing (fig. 3.9). I have chosen to omit these images from this project because of Drana's obvious lack of agency. Further, at the time of this writing, legal action has been taken against Harvard for profiting from these photographs.<sup>211</sup> For these reasons, I have made the decision to remove them from my dissertation, and to work toward the removal of a plaque commemorating Agassiz on the Cornell campus.

Sarah Sentilles considers the ethics of viewing violent images, among others, asking, "Do these images harm their subjects? Do I have a right to look at other people's pain?"<sup>212</sup> Ultimately, she turns to Ariella Azoulay's "The Civil Contract of Photography," through which the ethical question pivots away from empathy and toward a responsibility of action.<sup>213</sup> Azoulay centers this argument on Agassiz's images, in how he deployed the medium of photography in order to promote a white supremacist agenda, which in turn justified slavery. Sentilles writes, "To make humans appear to be marketable, sellable,

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<sup>211</sup> Kinsella, Eileen. "Morally, Harvard Has No Grounds': Inside the Explosive Lawsuit That Accuses the University of Profiting From Images of Slavery." *Artnet News*. March 28, 2019. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/harvard-university-slaves-images-1500412>

<sup>212</sup> Sarah Sentilles, "How We Should Respond to Photographs of Suffering," *New Yorker*, August 3, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/how-we-should-respond-to-photographs-of-suffering>.

<sup>213</sup> Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. New York: Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books, 2012.

disposable property—to create the illusion of bodies without kin—slavers separated parents from children, wives from husbands, sisters from brothers.” Azoulay asks readers to imagine the activity of this image-making, imagine:

*enslaved men subjected to the gazes of the camera and of the white men gathered there. Imagine fathers forced to watch their daughters as they, too, were subjected to those gazes, daughters who were ordered to strip, to peel down their dresses, expose their breasts, a reenactment of the auction block, where naked women were groped by sellers and potential buyers, their bellies and breasts grabbed so that slavers could determine how many children the women could bear and nurse, how many more enslaved people they could produce.*<sup>214</sup>

Azoulay argued that ultimately the medium itself betrays Agassiz, his tool of oppression and agenda of dehumanization, in that they are impactful in inscribing the photographer as inhumane, inhuman.

Visually, these images replicate how enslaved women’s bodies were examined and valued, against their will, and, as Deborah Willis and Carla Williams write, they convey “the pornography of their forced labor and of their inability to determine whether or how their bodies would be displayed.”<sup>215</sup> Recent advances in critical race theory by Karen and Barbara Fields acknowledge racism not as a byproduct of racial difference but as the process through which race, or various races, are created; in that regard, this photographic process is a unique, and uniquely painful, act of racism.<sup>216</sup>

They can also be situated among portraits of white families and children with their enslaved wet nurses and caregivers. Willis and Kraumather claim these women’s presence functions as a “mark of status,” a “sentimentality slaveholders projected onto

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<sup>214</sup> Sentilles.

<sup>215</sup> Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 21–22.

<sup>216</sup> Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2014).

the black women who worked in their homes,” and an opportunity to prove her to be “well cared for -- a counterweight to abolitionist arguments.”<sup>217</sup> In what Willis and Kraumather call “mammy photographs,” “black women were presented not as self-defined individuals but as implicitly bound to both the white child and its family as an object of subordination, however beloved,”<sup>218</sup> and present the relationship as natural. Jacqueline Goldsby calls this a “subjectively construed interpretation of reality, one that is imposed upon us formally -- through composition, framing, lighting, exposure, angle.”<sup>219</sup>

Returning to the photograph of Louisa, this scholarship allows viewers to see in Louisa, as Willis and Kraumather put it, her “vulnerability to exploitation, violence, and sexual abuse, as well as the erasure of enslaved women’s and girls’ labor and the countless acts of sale, gift, and bequest that ruptured enslaved people’s marriages and families.”<sup>220</sup>

### **Ambiguities and Recuperations**

In her book on African American photography, *Picturing Us*, Deborah Willis meditates on the experience of viewing an example of this subgenre, *Daguerreotype of Young Girl Holding a White Baby, c. 1850s* (fig. 3.8) in the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum. She notes that the girl’s youth subverts the prevalent notion of the “mammy” figure, as older and maternal. Willis analyzes the coupling:

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<sup>217</sup> Willis and Williams, *Black Female Body*, 129.

<sup>218</sup> Willis and Williams, *Black Female Body*, 130.

<sup>219</sup> Goldsby, Jacqueline. *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature*. University of Chicago Press, 2006, 279.

<sup>220</sup> Willis, *Envisioning Emancipation*, 8.

The woman's head is wrapped in a scarf and tied in the manner of West African women's headdresses. Other than the color of her skin, the headdress is the only signifier of her African heritage. Her mood is solemn, her mouth is closed tightly, creating a sad or resigned look on her face. It is clear that she is a teenager, possibly between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. The young child appears unaware of the photographer as she looks off to the right. Why was this photograph commissioned? Since this photograph was taken during the period of slavery, we may assume that the young black woman is human property. Then again, what was the purpose of this photograph? Are these the "master's" possessions? Or is the black woman the subject or object of the photograph?<sup>221</sup>

This series of series of unanswerable questions can only be followed by a troubled sense of wonder, steeped in loss:

In asking myself these questions, I began to answer them with more conjecture. Will her family ever see this image? If so, what will they make of her situation? Does she live with or near her biological family? The loneliness expressed in her eyes speaks to me 150 years later. It evokes for me the title of James Baldwin's book *Nobody Knows My Name*. . . . As the woman holds tightly to the baby's hand, her eyes speak of a sense of loss—loss of self and identity.<sup>222</sup>

Within the paradigms of my research, Willis's reading raises additional questions for me. Namely, based on Willis's reading of the girl's age, is it appropriate to include her among portraits of wet nurses? In doing so, do I inappropriately assign a type of bodily labor to her? Given the context, we can infer that she is the younger child's caregiver, but these images are fraught with ambiguities. In fact, ambiguity emerges as a productive theoretical framework with which to address them. These issues of ambiguity, absence, and nameless do not exist in a vacuum, but are the result of systems of degradation to Black women, from the plantation to the archive.

In "No More Auction Block for Me!," her contribution to *Pictures and Progress*:

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<sup>221</sup> Willis, Deborah, ed. *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography*. New York: New Press, 1994. 24-25.

<sup>222</sup> Willis, *Picturing Us*, 25.

*Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, Cheryl Finley writes about the experience of viewing early photographic family albums, introducing critical concepts of ambiguity and recuperation. Like Willis, Finley generously describes a person process of looking at these images. She recounts the experience, in her early career in fine arts appraisal, of encountering an early portrait of a young woman of African descent. Finley writes:

I looked at her, into her eyes... I could imagine my African ancestors, who were kidnapped and sold as commodities, slaves on the auction block. Objectified, naked, and submitted to public physical inspection, their identities—their histories—lay bare, prostrate, only to be forcibly reconfigured, compounded by the process of being sold and resold into human bondage... Yet, oddly, I felt a bittersweet pang of excitement at coming across this object, for it is seldom that photographs by or of people of African descent appear at the major New York City auction houses. What is more, it was pleasing, for a change, to see something of my heritage in my line of work as a photography appraiser—to find their portraits included in what is normally a sale of photographs almost exclusively by or about people of European descent.<sup>223</sup>

Building on this bewilderment, Finley goes on to consider the inclusion of vernacular photography within an auction of fine arts. As an authority on the history of photography and its processes, Finley is conscious of the accessibility of the tintype, calling it the “Polaroid of the nineteenth century.”<sup>224</sup> She also wonders about its inclusion in an album, whose origins itself is not clear. “The album’s indeterminate origins,” she writes, “while initially frustrating, became a symbol for its greater meaning.”<sup>225</sup>

As Finley studies the album and its fifty tintypes, she asks whether the respectful

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<sup>223</sup> Finley, “No More Auction Block For Me!,” Finley, Cheryl. “No More Auction Block for Me!” *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*. Edited by Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. 333-4.

<sup>224</sup> Finley, 334.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

portraits of individuals of African descent might serve as an alternative to the racist imagery that circulating in the market. And while the portraits highlight the uniqueness of each individual sitter, and again, in a respectful way, their names are notably absent. Indeed, the structure of the album itself did not allow for names to accompany the portraits, which was commonplace during the time in which it was made, between 1865-75. Finley notes that these spaces for writing became common to albums only after 1870.<sup>226</sup> Beyond the material or formal limitations of the book, Finley also notes that this information could have been conveyed orally, in keeping with the traditions of people of African descent, as bonding and family histories are told and maintained generationally. As an authority in the history of photography, Finley was able to understand the photograph and album more thoroughly through her expertise, but ultimately, no other information about the sitters was available: “Glancing at the portraits as I closed the album, I felt the weight of the sitters portrayed therein, their lives, their past histories.”<sup>227</sup> Ultimately, due to this lack of information, Finley imagines the biographies of each sitter, who has carefully compiled the album, how they are all interrelated, and she goes on to acquire the album itself; in concert, this constitutes recuperative labor in response to the absent information.

Finley begins this account with a series of questions that are at the core of my project as well:

...What can we deduce from old photograph albums whose narratives are no longer legible to us? What does it mean when the names of the people pictured in the photographs or their histories are not recorded? ... We must ask ourselves, when the narratives cease to be intelligible, is it possible to salvage, restore, or re-

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<sup>226</sup> Finley, 344.

<sup>227</sup> Finley, 345.

create them? And what are the risks of this kind of rescue work?<sup>228</sup>

These guiding questions provide an apt framework for approaching the portraits of wet nurses and their charges, and help to contextualize them in important ways. First, the experience of viewing these images is confounding, inextricable from the emotional. And it is perhaps that affective response that precipitates necessary recuperation. Like Finley, I have been both frustrated and excited to try to identify the sitters of these portraits, and have met similar barriers. It has been extremely important to consider that, as she so astutely suggests, perhaps they also relied upon oral histories. Additionally, due to my own positionality as a white woman who acknowledges her privilege, I extend Finley's line of questioning as it pertains to the "risks of this kind of rescue work," to include: Who has the authority to work with these images? How does a researcher's positionality contribute to the risk of mishandling the images, and thus the individuals depicted, and what best practices can be established to approach them in the most respectful ways?

Ultimately, the lack of information, or "indeterminate origins," as Finley puts it, "while initially frustrating, became a symbol for its greater meaning."<sup>229</sup> Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of this subgenre of portraiture is a compulsion to know more about the sitters and their relationship, and further, their relationships with their own families excluded from the frame, coupled with an utter lack of data.

Some of the barriers to recuperating this information can be exemplified in my research in the Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography, which was gifted to Cornell in 2012. I was granted access to this archive by Cheryl Finley, who

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<sup>228</sup> Finley, 331.

<sup>229</sup> Finley, 334.

generously lent her expertise as I searched for portraits of wet nurses and charges. Obviously, the primary barrier is a lack of information. I was able to generate biographies for the works described earlier in this chapter because they included some writing; even a couple of words could lead to a thorough biography. However, none of the photographs in the Loewentheil Collection that depict Black caregivers with white children include any written information. They are, in a sense, defined by ambiguity. Thus, it is impossible to determine the nature of these relationships, and in particular, whether or not the women served as the children's wet nurses. The inclusion of names could result in locating textual data that could reveal this information, but it is simply not there.

Archivists who accession these materials elect to use terminology such as "wet nurse," "nursemaid," and "nanny," that can helpfully lead researchers to the images, but these designations are fraught with layers of both perception and misperception, and I caution future researchers of this topic to tread carefully. These terms are not interchangeable; rather, they assign meaning as it pertains to women and children's relationships, bodies, and labor, and these sitters continue to lack any agency, in terms of how they are portrayed, and how they are remembered.

And finally, perhaps the most surprising barrier to spending time with these images is that they can be physically nauseating. For the first year of my research, beginning in November of 2015, I assumed that my emotional response to these images was troubling to the degree that I felt queasy when viewing them. In 2017, I was in the Louisiana State Museum Archives, opening boxes that had been accessioned in 1921 and moved up as the waters rose in the facilities during Katrina in 2005. It was literally dizzying. In each archive, I had the same experience of feeling physically ill while

opening these cased daguerreotypes and looking closely at them. Finally, I asked photography historians if they had ever felt sick when viewing older photographs. Indeed, the photographs, particularly the cased daguerreotypes that have long been closed and suddenly are opened, can emit silver fumes that can cause nausea, and irritation of the eyes and respiratory system, physically making the viewer feel ill.

The images compiled here can be considered the beginnings of an archive of this subgenre of portraiture, and are included as a group here as an opportunity to consider them en masse, and with these unanswered questions running throughout. In future, methods may develop to ascertain more information: material study could link objects to particular studios or photographers, which in turn could lead to firmer substantiation; for example, with the historical data in mind, a photograph taken in 1845 in Jackson, Mississippi rather than San Francisco, California would certainly be more likely to include an enslaved wet nurse rather than a paid caregiver. And while it is currently impossible to remove the photographs from their cases without damaging them, techniques may develop to scan or read the backs of the photographs (or areas currently covered by matting) for textual data that could lead to the development of biographic information. All of this is to say, this research is not complete; it cannot be.

As I offer this compilation of portraits of potential wet nurses and charges from the Loewentheil Collection of American Photography, I am compelled to include a quotation from a thesis Cornell student Elbert Cook Wixom wrote in 1903, collecting oral histories from conductors who had run the Underground Railroad in the areas surrounding Ithaca, which was, like this, a recuperative project and one without end: “If as a result of these investigations, any new material is provided for the use of later

students of this very interesting subject, the writer will feel that his work has not been in vain.”<sup>230</sup>

***1. Portraits of a nanny with a baby and two children, mid-nineteenth century (fig. 3.9)***

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0503**

The archivist’s description of this object reads: African American nurse with a baby on the left, and two small children on the right. In ornamental case.” In the photograph on the left side of the case, the turns toward the camera, with her face in ¾ view. Her expression is placid and content. However, her left hand reveals her labor, as she holds tightly onto the sleeping baby. The caregiver, here connoted as a nanny, could ostensibly have functioned, or could continue to function, as a wet nurse for the child, who appears to be well within the temporal range common to nurslings at that time. They are both neatly dressed and well groomed. The checkered plaid of the bow at the woman’s neck is mimicked by the gingham of the child’s garment. The woman’s hair is hidden by a scarf, remarkably like the one Deborah Willis describes as “tied in the manner of West African women’s headdresses,”<sup>231</sup> in analyzing a similar coupling. The setting of both photographs is the same: a simple chair next to a table, on which rests a book. In the image on the right, a young boy with blonde hair sits in the chair, as a girl, very close in age, stands next to him. He is blonde, and she has brown ringlets, but their expressions are nearly identical, glowering toward the camera with a combination of malice and disinterest. They have clearly been dressed and groomed carefully for the occasion of

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<sup>230</sup> Wixom, Elbert Cook. “The Under Ground Railway of the Lake Country of Western New York,” 1903.

<sup>231</sup> Willis, *Picturing Us*, 25.

having their photograph made, and seem none to happy about their role in this task: to remain still. This cased daguerreotype with two images provides an opportunity to pay close attention to time, and the sitters' reactions to needing to remain still. The woman grips the baby, positioning her face slightly toward the camera to have her portrait made. Her task is made slightly easier by virtue of the baby sleeping, nonetheless she must keep the baby still throughout the process, as any movement would result in a blurred photograph. She is able to complete this task and manages to exude a sense of self-possession and accomplishment in doing so. The baby's dress is arranged so that it fans out, showing off impressive ruffles, under which a delicate foot pokes out. It is no secret that it is very difficult for young children to hold still; the two in the right image appear to be around three and four years of age, and have clearly been told repeatedly that they must hold still. They look as though they are glaring at the photographer, or perhaps an authority figure standing near the camera—one cannot help but imagine their mother's presence—while being reminded throughout the exposure time, not to move the slightest bit. The girl dangles something from her hand that appears to be a fan, but she must have moved very slightly, as the object is blurred. Similarly, the boy must have moved his right arm a bit, as his shoulder is blurred as well, the gingham pattern of his garment floating into the backdrop. Reading this particular image closely lends a contemporary viewer the sense of anxiety that must have filled the studio; in order to have their photographs made, little children were told, with various degrees of success, to remain still.

## **2. Portrait of a nanny with a baby, mid-nineteenth century (fig. 3.10)**

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0505**

In this intimate portrait, a young African American woman wraps her arms around an infant, who appears around three months of age. The woman turns toward the infant, steadying the infant's head in the crook of her neck with her cheek, using much of her own body to steady themselves against one another. The woman gazes solidly to her left and toward the ground, perhaps having been directed to hold her gaze on one spot so that the photograph could capture her eyes; and in fact, her pupils can distinctly be seen. She exudes solemnity and seriousness, and sadness as well, emanating with the sense of loss that Willis describes above. She recedes into the background, with her dark dress similar in tone to the backdrop. Neatly dressed and groomed with her uncovered hair perfectly parted and pulled back, it seems as though she has prepared to have her portrait made, but because her gaze meets the ground rather than the viewer, and because she recedes into the background, this particular portrait is reminiscent of a contemporaneous subgenre of early photography known as "Hidden Mother Photography," and colloquially as the "Mother Chair." In this strange subgenre, women are draped with dark garments and hold children still on their laps; they are present in the images only functionally, to hold the children still, and are otherwise obscured from view. Hiding the caregiver from view, and tonally blending her into the background, is a technique to render the child the focal point of the image, and also speaks volume about the erasure of both the maternal caregiver and her labor.

As is common throughout both of these subgenres, the baby is dressed entirely in white, visually emphasizing the child as focal point. Prior to 1900, it was the norm for small children to wear gender-neutral, light-colored garments, made in the household and

passed from one child to the next, regardless of gender determination.<sup>232</sup> Thus, issues of ambiguity extend to the child's perceived gender, and while a contemporary viewer might assume, based on the frilly, white dress that the baby is a girl, that is not necessarily the case. This print is hand-tinted, and the only extant pigmentation is a rosy hue painted onto the baby's cheeks. With a furrowed brow, the infant gazes beyond the camera, and leans back comfortably against his caregiver.

In this seemingly relaxed portrait, the woman is engaged in multiple forms of hidden labor: using all of her body to hold herself and the child still, while also fanning the garment out to showcase the intricate lacework of the gown. The botanical motif of the lacework extends beyond the image, to the metallic framework that creates an oval vignette of the coupling. Contemporary viewers attuned to obscured labor might consider who was tasked with the arduous lacework, of sewing the gown, of weaving the fabric, of tending to the cotton itself. Turning back to the woman with this attentiveness to physical labor, one might question the degree to which her pose and gaze are influenced by fatigue.

### **3. Portrait of a nanny with two children, mid-nineteenth century (fig. 3.11)**

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0502**

In this photograph, all three of the sitters' eyes directly meet the viewer's, with a similar sense of tranquility. I look immediately to the caregivers' hands, seeking a grip that will

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<sup>232</sup> For more on this topic, see: Callahan, Colleen, and Jo B. Paoletti. *Is It a Girl or a Boy? Gender Identity and Children's Clothing*. Richmond, Va.: The Valentine Museum, 1999. Calvert, Karin. *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992. Rose, Clare. *Children's Clothes Since 1750*. New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1989.

reveal the degree to which the woman exerts energy to keep the children immobile throughout the exposure. In this case, the woman's hands embrace the baby in her lap, and while her fingers grasp the child's knee and waist, they seem slightly more relaxed than many of her counterparts'. Extending to her expression, her features seem fairly relaxed, her crystal clear eyes demonstrating her sustained stillness and that she successfully kept her eyes open throughout the exposure. Her clear skin glows, as she is lit from her right side. Like others, she dons the style of patterned headscarf seen elsewhere among the caregivers. Her high-necked garment is patterned with a motif that is at once botanical and graphic, and looks carefully tailored to fit her body. It buttons from her neck to her chest, the structure of the garment allowing for access to the breast, if she is, indeed a wet nurse for the baby on her lap, who appears to be about six months of age. Shrouded in a gauzy, white blanket, the baby wears a white garment as well and seems to hold something—perhaps a flower, though it is small and slightly obscured. The child sits comfortable on his caregiver's lap and gazes directly at the camera with eyebrows slightly raised, and eyes wide, perfectly still.

The little girl standing next to them, however, did not have the same degree of success keeping still. In fact, she has a phantom arm, as she must have moved her arm from straight to bent, from her side to cross her waist (or vice versa) during the exposure; it was at her side longer than across her waist, suggesting perhaps she forgot at some point to keep still and moved her right hand toward the object she holds in her left. Adorned with a shiny necklace and bracelet and ribbons in her hair, she confidently gazes at the camera. Though slightly blurred, it appears that from the necklace hangs a locket, an object quite like the cased daguerreotype itself, something that opens and closes to

keep safe a photograph, a memory. Her facial features are remarkably similar to the baby's, suggesting she is an older sibling. If the woman is a wet nurse to the baby, one might wonder if she nursed the older child as well, making them both siblings and milk siblings. Regardless of whether breastfeeding features in their relationship, the three seem quite comfortable with one another, suggesting they are quite used to each other's company.

#### **4. Portrait of a nanny with two children, mid-nineteenth century (fig. 3.12)**

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0504**

This photograph has been damaged, the surface covered in scratches, and seems to have been only a partial success to begin with, as the composition is imperfect and the smaller child is blurred by movement. The woman, however, is held in perfect focus and stares into the camera with clear eyes and the slightest hint of a smile, the corner of her lip very slightly upturned. She also dons a headscarf, tied at the back, and a garment with a lacy collar that buttons down the front, again allowing access to the breast, if that is a component of her labor. The child on her lap, around one year old, seems to have moved his/her head from side to side, though the lower part of the body is captured in stillness. With her right hand, the woman puts some pressure on the child's legs, and with her left, she grips the child's hands, their fingers intertwined in effort to keep this squirming child still. An older sibling, presumably a girl in this case, uncomfortably stands to the right, holding a flower arrangement in her left hand and leaning quite noticeably onto the caregiver with the other half of her body. Gazing purposefully beyond the camera, perhaps to a parent or other adult figure, her expression is determined but also concerned

and unamused. This particular photograph shows just how uncomfortable the process of having a portrait made could be for small children at this time. The responsibility of the caregiver to make the experience successful was also financial, as each portrait of this size cost around \$.50, before the cost of the case itself.<sup>233</sup> That is to say, the expense was both temporal and economic.

### **5. Portrait of a Nanny with a Baby, mid-nineteenth century (fig. 3.13)**

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0511**

While it was not conventional to smile for this type of portraiture, this young woman's expression is notably discontent, a profoundly palpable mixture of anger and sadness. Her clear eyes directly meet the viewer's gaze and her jaw is clenched. She is clearly being forced to sit for this portrait, to hold this baby. In this subgenre, this particular photograph exemplifies forced labor, the Black subjects' lack of agency, and an emotional response to the systems that brought this coupling together. Held together, various elements of this photograph suggest the family's wealth: the woman's fine dress, earrings, and hat; the detailed embroidery and ribbons of the baby's gown, the elaborate textile on which the baby rests; and the nature of the photograph and case. It is an excellent photograph, perfectly composed, taken, and printed. The lighting perfectly captures both sitters. And the case itself is beautifully made, with ornate detailing in the metal matte, the plush, red, velvet lining, and the embossed exterior. It is also hand tinted, with the baby's cheeks a light pink. The uniquely good condition of this particular object suggests that it had been carefully stored over time, even prior to entering the Loewentheil Collection, and then

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<sup>233</sup> Newhall, Beaumont. *The Daguerreotype in America*. [1st ed. New York]: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1961. 53.

coming to Cornell. The infant, appearing around three to six months of age, sleeps peacefully, draped across the woman's lap, unaware that a portrait is being made. The baby's comfort is acutely juxtaposed by the woman's obvious discomfort, visually conveying the crux of Black domestic labor for the sole benefit of white families.

This particular arrangement can be read against the Pietà, a classical subject of canonical, Christian material culture, in which Mary holds the deceased body of Christ across her lap, meant to allegorize compassion and symbolize the mother's adoration of her child and grief over his death. Physically and compositionally, the pose is nearly identical. Yet, this woman's expression subverts a sense of adoration of the child. And while the systems of slavery and resultant domestic service traditionally relied upon Black women's affective labor, or forced *care* of white children, in this particular woman's expression it is clear that this arrangement is against her will and unwelcome. In doing so, this portrait also subverts the trope of the mammy figure, reveling in her love for the white children in her care, codified by *Gone With the Wind* and permeating popular culture. The mammy figure, along with other stereotypes of enslaved people, was a strategy deployed to justify slavery, contemporaneously and post-Abolition, in public memory. Photographs like this directly nullify those strategies.

## **6. Portrait of a nanny with two children, mid-nineteenth century (fig. 3.14)**

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0515**

This photograph is similar to the previous one, in conveying a simmering anger in the expression of the sitter. She too stares directly at the camera, her eyes unflinching and jaw set. While the rosy cheeked little girls flanking her are oblivious to her emotion, it is

as if she is asking a contemporary viewer to really see this portrait for what it is, and to see her as an individual person, outside of the white home in which she works. While these two children rest upon her comfortably, where is her own family? She appears quite young, under twenty, of an age in which she should still be closely connected with her own parents and siblings. And if she now functions as a wet nurse for the baby on her lap, this means she is currently separated from her own child. This particular image uniquely reinforces the concept of familial separation at the core of these images. The subject of these portraits is not just the people included, but those excluded.

### **7. Portrait of a Nanny with a Child, mid-nineteenth century (fig. 3.15)**

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0514**

Several visual elements of this portrait are temporally bewildering. While the materiality of the photograph and its casing affirm that it was, indeed, produced in the mid-nineteenth century, read only visually, it could easily have been made a century later. The graphic print of the woman's garment, the way in which the white fabric is tied neatly around her neck, and the central crease in her skirt tricking the eye into thinking she is wearing pants, her hair pulled back in such a way that it looks as though it is cut in a short bob; held together, she looks as though she lives in the 1960s. The child's clothing is also evocative of the 1960s: white bobby socks with black shoes that look remarkably like Mary Janes, a pastel dress with a full skirt, hemmed at the knees. Her blond hair flips out slightly at the ears, and her light eyes, pouted lips, and round cheeks are evocative of midcentury advertising campaigns from the Gerber baby to Coppertone sunscreen. It could easily have been taken in 1960. As such, this portrait can serve as a critical

reminder that the systems of domestic labor established during slavery shaped racist domestic labor practices into the future. And while it was, in fact, during the 1960s that the civil rights movement worked to both change these practices and acknowledge how they had been systematized historically, it is important to note the ways in which they endure to this day.

This daguerreotype can be held in conversation with a compelling photograph taken by Gordon Parks in 1956, of three people waiting in the Atlanta Airport (fig. 3.16). While a white woman lounges in her seat, a Black woman sits two seats away, holding a white baby in her arms, presumably the child of the white woman. In 2015, writers of the New York Times photography blog Lens asked readers to help identify the individuals in the photo, calling it striking, and writing, “We at Lens keep returning to this intriguing photo, which raises questions about race, class and relationships between women in the Jim Crow South. And every time we look at this rare color image, we want to know much more about these women.”<sup>234</sup> Parks made the image as part of a series he called “Segregation,” that was discovered in 2012. He writes of this photograph, which he took candidly in the terminal in the Atlanta Airport, “shows the continuous matter of servitude which extends into the terminal around 2 a.m. Here, a white baby is held by a Negro maid while the baby’s mother checks on reservations, etc. Although the Negro woman serves as nurse-maid for the white woman’s baby, the two would not be allowed to sit and eat a meal together in any Atlanta restaurant.”<sup>235</sup>

Contacted for comment, Deborah Willis responded, ““When I first encountered

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<sup>234</sup> Estrin, James. “Help Unravel a Gordon Parks Southern Mystery.” The New York Times Lens: Photography, Video, and Visual Journalism. January 12, 2015. <https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/12/gordon-parks-a-jim-crow-mystery/>

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

the photo I saw intimacy and the love and respect of the nanny holding the child in a protective manner, and then the distance that the mother has from the nanny and child,” said Ms. Willis, who heads the photography department at New York University. “The nanny is being dutiful and loyal. We know there’s an intimacy there, and a sense of trust that is part of their work environment. Class is also evident in the way he photographed them, a very stylishly dressed Southern woman with her necklace and hat and the African-American woman dressed in a pristine white uniform.”

Holding these two images in conversation can be a fruitful exercise, creating a temporal link. Turning to the mid-century aesthetic of Parks’ image affirms the strangely anachronistic elements of the daguerreotype. More importantly, held together, they underscore the ways in which these hierarchical systems, deeply rooted in American conceptions of gender, race, and socio-economics, have endured over time.

### **Related Photographs**

Archivists have dated the following photographs in the late nineteenth century, and so, may fall post-Abolition of Slavery. For that reason, they fall slightly beyond the scope of this particular research. However, they are directly related in terms of subject matter, medium, and even style. Even if they were taken after 1865, they certainly demonstrate the ways in which these systems of caregiving extended beyond slavery, as well as this type of portraiture. These photographs are certainly worthy of more attention. Thanks to the inclusion of some brief identification on the final photograph, I have included an attempt to recuperate biographical information of the sitters.

**8. Portrait of Nanny with Baby, late-nineteenth century (fig. 3.17)**

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0522**

**9. Nanny with two young boys, late-nineteenth century (fig. 3.18)**

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0537**

**10. Woman sitting with two young children, late-nineteenth century (fig. 3.19)**

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0517**

**11. Portrait of woman and two babies, 1884 (fig. 3.20)**

**Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0246**

While this photograph falls temporally out of the purview of this chapter, it is remarkable two primary ways, that justify its inclusion here: 1) it is the only portrait I have encountered that includes both a white and a Black child, and 2) it included a very small amount of data that allowed me to generate a biography of the sitters. In these ways, it can be considered slightly recuperative, as it pertains to the images preceding it.

The archivist's description of this albumen print reads, "Portrait of African American woman with two babies on her lap. Back reads " Alvan R. Rirclu [sp] and nurse Francis." I think that this writing had been covered by oval matting, and guess that these are the notes made by the photographer, rather than the sitter or person who commissioned the photograph, because it seems they did not know the African American baby's name. The placement of these notes also makes me wonder if similar notes might appear under the oval matting of the cased daguerreotypes. Working in the archive, and

looking closely with a magnifying class, it seemed that Rirclu was not actually the last name, and the middle initial was suspicious as well. Further, I could not find Riclu anywhere as a surname. I photographed the name, increased the size and contrast, and looked closely again: Alvin B. Rische. Using genealogical software, I searched for an Alvin B. Rische who would have been about one year old in 1884, the date listed in the notes. Accordingly to Social Security records, Alvin Babcock Rische was born February 2, 1883, and died November 5, 1938.<sup>236</sup> According to the 1920 Census, he was born in Texas, the son of Grace Riche. His occupation in 1920, at the age of 37, is listed as Musician in the Theatrical Industry, and he lists his race as White.<sup>237</sup> His Draft Registration Card from 1917-18 lists his nearest relative as Ernest Rische, and his occupation as Musician, Employed by Al. G. Fields in Columbus, Ohio. Searching newspaper databases, I learned that Al G. Fields was known as the Dean of Minstrelsy. Early in his career he appeared in with road shows such as “Black Crook,” and went on to organize his own minstrel shows in Ohio.<sup>238</sup> Returning to the photograph, it seems that the white child featured in the right side of the image would go on to perform as a musician in minstrel shows. What brought this group of three together to have their portrait made in 1884?

The man Alvin lists as closest relative, Ernest Rische, was his father, who was also known as Ernst Rische, who worked in several capacities in a thriving German-American theater scene in San Antonio, Texas. Many of the most successful theaters in

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<sup>236</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.

<sup>237</sup> Year: 1920; Census Place: *San Antonio Ward 5, Bexar, Texas*; Roll: *T625\_1777*; Page: *3B*; Enumeration District: *67*

<sup>238</sup> “Minstrel man, Al G. Fields may not be a true Fields.” *Joplin Globe* (Joplin, Missouri), April 5, 1921, 2.

the city, such as the Casino Club and the Grand Opera House, built in 1886, were managed by Ernst Rische.<sup>239</sup> So at this time, the baby Alvin was growing up in a prominent theater family in San Antonio.

The only information about the other two people in the photo, the African American woman and child, is the phrasing “Francis and Baby \_\_\_\_.” Visually, I think it is likely that they are mother and child, and aged approximately twenty years old and one year old. Using census records in San Antonio, I searched for the following parameters: a woman whose race is listed as Black named Francis or Frances (mindful of the other spelling errors in the notes) born around 1864 (searching 1860-70), and having a child in 1884.

Francis Kelley was born 1864, and at age twenty, gave birth to a daughter named Ella Walker. The 1920 Federal Census lists her race as Black and her marital status as Widowed. It shows that she had an older son, Thomas Walker, when she was fourteen years of age.<sup>240</sup>

In 1920, Francis is age 56, and living at 117 Vera Cruz Street in San Antonio with her two children: Thomas, aged 42, and Ella, aged 36. This address is just over one mile from the Casino Club, which Ernst Rische managed. By 1930, Ella has become head of the household, having inherited the house at 117 Vera Cruz Street from her mother, Francis. The value of the home is listed as \$5,000. She is now 47 years old and her marital status is single, and the other people living in the house are listed as a cousin, a niece, and a nephew, so it appears that she has not had children of her own. She is self-

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<sup>239</sup> Speiser, Adel. “The Story of the Theater in San Antonio.” M. A. Thesis: St. Mary’s U., 1948.

<sup>240</sup> Year: 1920; Census Place: *San Antonio Ward 2, Bexar, Texas*; Roll: *T625\_1778*; Page: 25A; Enumeration District: 34

employed as a seamstress.<sup>241</sup>

Ella's death certificate shows that she died of pneumonia in 1953 at the age of 69, and is buried in City Cemetery #3. Her "Color or Race" is listed as "Colored," and her marital status as "Never Married." Her occupation is now "housework," and she had moved at some point to 1210 Rivas Street in San Antonio. Her father is listed as "Mr. Walker," and her mother as "Franc Kelley."

In none of these documents is there an occupation listed for Francis. Perhaps she looked after Alvin, while she cared for her own daughter, Ella. This scenario would exemplify a welcome departure from the portraits previously discussed in this chapter, in which the Black women are separated from their children; in that way, is this unusual portrait a visualization of the end of slavery in terms of keeping women and their children together?

Or did Francis come into contact with the Rische family through the theater in some way? Maybe she was involved, or perhaps the father of the child, Mr. Walker, was connected to the Rische family.

For whatever reason, the two children, Alvin and Ella, look quite comfortable together on the lap of Francis in this remarkable portrait. Ultimately, I hope that this exercise recuperates some lost information and can serve as an example of one approach to generating biographies for the people in these photographs, and recuperating some elements of this history.

### **Carrie Mae Weems's Reclamation of this Imagery**

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<sup>241</sup> Year: 1930; Census Place: *San Antonio, Bexar, Texas*; Page: 26B; Enumeration District: 0024; FHL microfilm: 2342026

Contemporary photographer Carrie Mae Weems addresses the ethical nature of the Zealey-Aggasiz photographs through a complicated process of integrating them into her own work, in deploying the camera as a traditional tool of “imperial spectacle” to identify and deconstruct these legacies, and in particular, through hegemonic ideations of wet nurses and their bodily markers. Weems has asserted that, “photography can still be used to champion activism [and] as a powerful weapon toward instituting political and cultural change.”<sup>242</sup> For decades, she has experimented with and challenged the medium of documentary photography to reach that end, through techniques of appropriation and subversion. In doing so, she “reconfigures its format to better express her subjects’ iconic, metaphoric, or symbolic value,” ultimately empowering these subjects and revising hegemonic notions of history. Indeed, she has articulated her goal as to “describe simply and directly those aspects of American culture in need of deeper illumination.” An unwavering dedication to revision has propelled her work since the early 1980s, maintaining a commitment to “radical social change.... Any form of human injustice moves me deeply... the battle against all forms of oppression keeps me going and keeps me focused.”<sup>243</sup>

Within her sweeping body of work is a series of photographs from 1995 titled, “From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried” (fig. 3.21), which Studio Museum in Harlem director and chief curator Thelma Golden positions as “one of the most important artworks of the decade... the project, then and now, provides an interesting place from

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<sup>242</sup> Piche, Thomas, and Thelma Golden. *Carrie Mae Weems: Recent Work, 1992-1998*. III edition. George Braziller, 1999, 10.

<sup>243</sup> Thomas Piche and Thelma Golden, *Carrie Mae Weems: Recent Work, 1992–1998*, 3rd ed. (New York: George Braziller, 1999), 9.

which to consider her work in general.”<sup>244</sup> Central to her technique is a mode of deconstruction, through which hegemonic interpretations of black subjectivity are challenged. According to bell hooks, Weems’ “photoworks create a cartography of experience wherein race, gender, and class identity converge, fuse, and mix so as to disrupt and deconstruct simple notions of subjectivity.”<sup>245</sup> She seeks out and addresses problematic moments in the histories that have been written of oppressed people, to reinvigorate neglected information, and to give voice to those who have been particularly neglected in the writing of history. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. articulates her technique of remembrance as a mode of resistance: “Because of the experience of the diaspora, the fragments that contain the traces of a coherent system of order must be reassembled.... To reassemble fragments, of course, is to engage in an act of speculation, to attempt to weave a fiction of origins and subgeneration. It is to render the implicit as explicit, and at times to imagine the whole from the part.”<sup>246</sup> Gates goes on to analyze her work, which often deploys text over image, within a tradition of African-American oral and written narratives, layered and nuanced with meaning. Through this layering she recalls what Gates calls “the speakerly text,” that is, “a text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition.” Golden concludes that in doing so her photographs “are double voiced, standing as visual images with multivalent meanings but functioning, as well, as semantic entities that give visual form to the rhetorical strategies found in the text. In this way, Weems creates a rich discursive alternative to Western modes of representation and a place to describe the voices that have been left out of dominant

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<sup>244</sup> Piche and Golden, 10.

<sup>245</sup> Piche and Golden, 13.

<sup>246</sup> Piche and Golden, 13.

cultural practice.” Through this technique, the “black subject is given a voice through this use of signifying text and photography and becomes a speaking subject imbued with authority.”<sup>247</sup>

“From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried” is a project that resulted from an opportunity to mine an archive. In this case the Getty Museum asked her to create a body of work that reacted to an exhibition of African American subjects of early photography, and she chose to work with some of the Zealey-Aggasiz photographs. Weems responded by appropriating some of the images, as well as some more recent photos, re-photographing and reframing, printing in red, mounting in circular mats, and inscribing them with text that, as described above, gave voice to these long-silenced subjects.<sup>248</sup>

Through this post-modernist practice, Weems gives the subjects a voice to rewrite and reassert, if not reclaim, the way in which they were originally photographed.

Additionally, the project implicates the process of photographing them as an action that participated in their subjugation, via ethnography and exploitation.

A prime example of her attention to the ethnographic subject is her appropriation of the photograph of the wet nurse, Drana (fig. 3.22<sup>249</sup>). The fourth in a series of similar images that are introduced with the phrase “You became....” Drana is overlaid with the phrase, “A photographic subject.” Inscribed as a subject, she faces the camera with a steady gaze, yet is clearly uncomfortable, her eyes troubled, mouth and forehead tensed. It is apparent she is in that space and photographed against her wishes. Weems brings up

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<sup>247</sup> Piche and Golden, 14–16.

<sup>248</sup> Piche and Golden, 20.

<sup>249</sup> For a number of reasons, I have chosen to remove these photographs from the dissertation. However, to clearly reference the correct image, I am including a figure number with identifying data from the archive.

the erasure of Drana's personal history as part of larger and continued systems of subjugation.

Weems' postmodern technique functions as a remedy for the harm the initial photographs caused. In that sense, hers is a process of healing.

## **Conclusion**

Viewing these images of enslaved wet nurses is laden with inherent responsibility: to acknowledge that milk was systematically produced and stolen to support white supremacy, and emblematic of the exploitation of Black women and children through slavery—that is at the very core of the foundation of the United States.

That few are familiar with Archy Granger, a baby compromised—if not sacrificed—by the Jefferson family, is a serious problem in need of revision. Further attention to lactation specifically, and the lives of women and children more generally, offers a unique means of accessing the history of American slavery, and ultimately reinforces that this institution is foundational to the United States, then and now.

While the archives enabled the re-creation of a linear history of the young white male in the photograph, all attempts to do the same for the enslaved Black woman led to a dead end. This speaks to the severed family history of African American people; this absence of information, of intergenerational connectivity, is a direct result of the institution of slavery. In turn, contemporary artists and writers attempt to recuperate these lost histories and give them a sense of dignity from the vantage of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These recuperative narratives also personalize what the institution meant to individual people. Within the broader scope of this project, the severed family

history speaks to a kind of loss, of mothers and of children, that permeates many of these texts and images.

## Chapter 4

### Replication, Networks, and Immigrant Labor in Industrialized Boston

At the age of 77, Alfred W. Bosworth reflected on developing Similac half a century earlier: “It’s my only real contribution to the world.” He had come to be, as *The Columbus Citizen* put it, a “once-renowned chemist living in obscurity,” with his contribution unknown to neighbors and colleagues.<sup>250</sup> How did a driven researcher, trained at Harvard and Yale, end up a high school chemistry teacher in small town Ohio? And while Similac is today a \$1.5 billion global brand synonymous with formula, why did Bosworth distance himself from his crowning achievement?

Early in his career, Bosworth studied the chemistry of milk and cheese, and in particular their chemical and bacterial makeup, at the New York Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, New York. According to *The Citizen*, Bosworth was “living in a house where two babies were experiencing intestinal trouble,” and were “fed modified cow’s milk.”<sup>251</sup> The papers of his son from many years later reveal that Bosworth married and had two children while in Geneva; the two children he “lived with” were likely his own. He noticed that the babies only experienced intestinal distress when fed cow’s milk; on human milk, they were quite healthy.

As a milk researcher, bacteriologist, and father of two small children, Bosworth was in a unique position to address infant feeding. He realized that the composition of cow’s milk was meant to support the growth of calves, and thus contained much more calcium than a human infant needed or could handle. In order to explore human ingestion

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<sup>250</sup> David Brown, “Once-Renowned Chemist Lives in Obscurity Near Circleville,” *Columbus Citizen*, October 14, 1956, 4B.

<sup>251</sup> Brown, 4B.

of milk further, he left Geneva to attend Harvard Medical School, where he received an M.A. in 1913, successfully eliminating components of cow's milk that made it difficult to digest for children, and later studied physiological chemistry at Yale. He returned briefly to Geneva, but he soon left his work on cheese, and his first family, permanently.

Histories of infant feeding are full of innovating male scientists; this is not one of them. I investigate Bosworth because ultimately, as I shall explain, he elects to extricate himself from the history of formula (as it came to be known) as his invention became corporatized. Although it resembled human milk in composition, the way in which it was commoditized to replace human milk, which he revered, was unthinkable to him. Further, Bosworth serves as a conduit to access little-known histories of maternal and affective labor: mothers who donated and sold their human milk, nurses who collected and administered it to infants, and women who served as wet nurses during a health crisis of staggeringly high infant mortality. Thus, through Bosworth, this is a story of maternal labor, which traditionally goes unacknowledged, unseen, and unpaid.

The type of visual materials included in this chapter are not often included in art historical scholarship. These are industrial and medical photographs, themselves reflecting developments in technology and industry, as they concurrently capture developments in science and medicine visually. Analyzing them with the tools of visual studies, enhances their meaning. This research was not done in the archives of museums or galleries, but rather, of hospitals and medical professionals.

Regarding this chapter's position in relation to the previous one, it should be noted that the industrialization of milk and formula can be directly tied to the abolishment

of slavery, which, coupled with the end of wet nursing practices, equated to a sudden cessation of access to free milk.

### **A Living Laboratory**

Endeavoring to render the chemical composition of cow's milk to be like that of human milk, Bosworth turned his attention to the Boston Floating Hospital (fig. 4.1), effectively creating a living laboratory for his research. A barge that traversed the Boston Harbor, the Floating Hospital enabled doctors and nurses to care for around 300 ailing young children and infants. It originated as a pleasure cruise for sick children, but as the children, removed from the heat and filth of the city, thrived in the unique atmosphere of sunshine, fresh air, progressive medicine, and compassionate care, it became first a hospital and then a teaching hospital specializing in pediatrics. The Floating Hospital responded to what was known as "Summer Complaint," infant mortality spiking during the summer months in Boston, attributed to heat, humidity, improper bottle feeding, and bacterial contamination of cow's milk, culminating in severe gastrointestinal distress and four times more infant mortality than in the other seasons. The medical community pushed for increased breastfeeding and clamored for safer alternatives to human milk; many innovations in these areas took place aboard the Floating Hospital.<sup>252</sup>

Milk was central to the hospital's mission. In observing the various illnesses on board, doctors, chemists, and bacteriologists had the opportunity to calibrate variations of milk to treat various sicknesses. By 1913, each infant was first "examined for the bacteriology of his or her digestive tract and many cases of intestinal infection without

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<sup>252</sup> Thomas E. Cone, *200 Years of Feeding Infants in America* (Columbus, OH: Ross Laboratories, 1976), 80.

symptoms were greatly benefited by early diagnosis and treatment,” as reported by resident physician Robert B. Hunt. During the early part of the twentieth century, the Floating Hospital amassed the “largest masses of data in existence on infant feeding and the medical results ... our success in the collection and use of human milk (is) a marked advance in the treatment of the digestive tract in children.”<sup>253</sup>

Bosworth rented a small laboratory nearby and experimented with breaking down the various components of milk. Eventually, he succeeded in separating the cream, evaporating its water content, and adding acid to the skim milk to isolate the casein; to preserve the whey, he added lime and milk sugar after the milk was strained, and added olive oil to increase the fat content. He then developed a machine he dubbed “The Iron Cow,” that applied pressure to the substance to break up the fats, mixing it twice to ensure heightened digestibility, and removed excess calcium quite accidentally by letting it rest overnight.<sup>254</sup> Finally, his reconstituted milk resembled human milk.

Under physicians’ supervision, Bosworth tested his formula on a selection of ailing infants and they showed marked improvement, generating significant enthusiasm. Two substantial onshore laboratories were dedicated to his new research, through which he furthered his study to develop a powdered version of his formula for increased shelf-life.<sup>255</sup> One of the lead physicians, Dr. Bowditch, expounded in the report, “Our laboratories have so far solved the milk problems which have been under study for some years as to put us in possession of the best substitute for human milk so all-important in infant feeding.” Not inconsequentially, it was cost effective at a mere fifteen cents per

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<sup>253</sup> Boston Floating Hospital, *Twentieth Annual Report, Season of 1913*, 7.

<sup>254</sup> Brown, “Once-Renowned Chemist,” 4B.

<sup>255</sup> Boston Floating Hospital, *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report, Season of 1919* (Boston: Boston Floating Hospital, n.d.), 7.

quart, in comparison to breast milk, which could be purchased in Boston for around \$32 a quart.<sup>256</sup>

But the enthusiasm was not to last, and in 1921, under hazy circumstances and heated correspondence with other chemists in Bosworth's labs, the Trustees no longer "felt justified to stretch the hospital's resources in support of Bosworth's work." In 1922 the patents were relinquished for the public good. Bosworth left for Kellogg, then Moores and Ross Milk and Ice Cream (later called R & M Laboratories), which invested \$300,000 to reinvigorate Bosworth's quest for a human milk substitute, and to produce it in large quantities. Bosworth updated the formula: "Fresh skim milk (casein modified) with added lactose, salts, milk fat and vegetable and cod liver oil." First called Franklin Infant Food, for the street on which it was manufactured in Columbus, it was later named Similac, as suggested by Dr. Morris Fishbein, to showcase its resemblance to human milk.<sup>257</sup> Fishbein served simultaneously as the president of the American Medical Association (AMA) and Similac's sales manager.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Boston Floating Hospital, *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report*, 8–9.

<sup>257</sup> While Fishbein's dual role as President of the AMA and sales manager for Similac should give pause, what is perhaps even more interesting is his profound, personal appreciation for breastfeeding, lauding his mother for giving birth to four children naturally, at home, and nursing them all. See Morris Fishbein, *Morris Fishbein, MD: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 6. Fishbein's legacy is what he termed the "War Against Quackery," with a particular interest in halting the sale of products that could harm the public. As President of the AMA he faced libel lawsuits filed by the makers of these various products, whom Fishbein considered "charlatans." (Fishbein, *Autobiography*, 49). Within this context, his devotion to Similac is all the more interesting, suggesting that it was the product's closeness to human milk that warranted his approval. There exists some concern today that Fishbein's war on quackery effectively eradicated traditional and herbal medicines in favor of those tightly regulated by the AMA.

<sup>258</sup> J. C. Runders, *The House That Similac Built* (Columbus, OH: Ross, 1968), 4–5.

## **Affective Labor**

Very few women's names appear in the records, yet these innovations were made possible by women: their bodies, human milk, and labor, and in organizing complex milk collection and distribution systems. In order to care for 300 infants aboard the Floating Hospital, Head Nurse Martha H. Stark implemented an intricate and vast network to collect human milk from women around Boston. According to a 1921 feature in *The Boston Sunday Advertiser*, she coordinated a "corps of nurses" to "call at chosen homes, rich and poor, of Greater Boston and collect a few quarts of human milk to save the lives of poor and sickly babies whose only hope for life rests in this extraordinary feat of charity. 'You would be surprised,' said G. Loring Briggs, manager of the hospital, 'how much a few ounces of mother's milk can do to enable a sick child to assimilate nourishment.'"<sup>259</sup>

Stark's system began with combing public birth records and contacting new mothers of healthy babies, asking them to express milk, screening the milk, and paying the mothers \$1 per quart—though some mothers insisted on donating their milk, in some cases to thank the hospital for rehabilitating infants. In any case, the act of expressing milk for other infants was heralded as a virtuous one. Nurses then administered the milk to the infants on the ship deck, noting the combination of human milk and fresh air helped the ailing infants to thrive.<sup>260</sup>

While the women have scant presence in the archive and textual history, these women do appear in the visual record, and some photographs of the ship deck

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<sup>259</sup> Marvin S. Bowman, "Mother's Milk Made by Machine," *Boston Sunday Advertiser*, March 20, 1921, 7–8.

<sup>260</sup> Bowman, 7–8.

particularly underscore the importance of their work and how they nursed the infants back to health. Theoretically, a visual investigation of affective, maternal labor relies upon foundational texts on domestic labor by Anne McClintock and infant feeding as labor in art history by Linda Nochlin. McClintock astutely defines domestic workers as women on the “imperial divide,” “boundary markers and mediators like nurses, nannies, governesses, prostitutes, and servants.”<sup>261</sup> I argue that wet nurses and milk donors powerfully embody the boundary marker as well.

This type of feminized labor can be described in terms of affective labor in how it is valued for its immaterial product, over a material good that enters the marketplace. Michael Hardt situates affective labor as a form of immaterial labor and argues, “Given the role of affective labor as one of the strongest links in the chain of capitalist postmodernization, its potential for subversion and autonomous constitution is all the greater.”<sup>262</sup> It is in that spirit that I invoke the idea of affective labor here, to activate the many women whose work supported infant feeding in a surprising variety of ways. To do so is to subvert the dominant perspective that privileges a patriarchal history of individual men helming scientific and corporate innovations. I situate these female laborers who worked to innovate, to care for, and to feed infants as affective, and also among what Robert Reich considers “symbolic-analytical services,” such as “problem-solving, problem-identifying, and strategic brokering activities.”<sup>263</sup> Reich recognizes symbolic-analytical services as the most valuable in a post-industrialized economy; certainly

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<sup>261</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 48.

<sup>262</sup> Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor,” *Boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 93.

<sup>263</sup> Robert B. Reich, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st-Century Capitalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 177.

women who care for babies have not been recognized within this framework, but I argue that they should be, particularly through the complex system of collecting, screening, and administering human milk.<sup>264</sup>

Hardt emphasizes affective labor as one of human contact and interaction, labor that connects people, citing health services as relying “centrally on caring and affective labor.”<sup>265</sup> “Affective labor,” he writes, “is better understood by beginning from what feminist analyses of ‘women’s work’ have called ‘labor in the bodily mode.’ Caring labor is certainly entirely immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. What affective labor produces are social networks, forms of community....”<sup>266</sup> Yet, the labor discussed here is not entirely immaterial; through their corporeal work, valued substances, and valuable commodities are produced: human milk and human milk alternatives. In collectively and individually producing these substances, they also create what Hardt denotes as biopower: “the power of the creation of life.”<sup>267</sup>

The female workers who fed and cared for infants, and in doing so made the development of human milk alternatives possible, are largely neglected in archival data, but they appear visually. Reading these early photographs of the women aboard the Floating Hospital ship deck as affective laborers, in concert with extant data, can nuance our understandings of their work and the vital roles they played. In a 1920 photograph (fig. 4.2), a young nurse holds two newborns, one in each arm. In her crisp, white

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<sup>264</sup> A history of these women can be situated among recent scholarship on women laborers who have been critical to important innovations but have long gone without recognition for their participation, such as the so-called “Tiffany Girls,” who designed and created Tiffany Glass, and NASA’s teams of female “computers,” responsible for the math that made the missions possible.

<sup>265</sup> Hardt, “Affective Labor,” 95.

<sup>266</sup> Hardt, 96.

<sup>267</sup> Hardt, 99.

uniform, she is seated against the wooden wall of the barge's infant ward. Her embrace is protective, as she gazes down upon her sleeping charge, swaddled in a white blanket. Her second charge looks past the photographer, perhaps toward the noises and light of the harbor outside. It is a peaceful scene in which this capable nurse has cared for and calmed the babies. An annual report for the hospital underscores the difficult work of the nurses: "Few realize the constant attention, the harassing character of the many small details, the infinite amount of patience that must be part of the nursing of very sick infants. Most of the nurses seriously felt the effect of our short season but harmony and efficiency has characterized the work of the nurses this year as heretofore."<sup>268</sup> An element of this affective labor, beyond caring for the infants, was to maintain an atmosphere of harmony and efficiency, as demonstrated visually in this image. In Western art, affective laborers like laundresses and prostitutes are rendered frequently in French Impressionism; Nochlin identifies their commoditized bodies and labor disguised as pleasure. Mothers, unpaid and their work understood as "a natural function" were excluded from this visual category of laborers, but were nonetheless also depicted undertaking their work with *pleasure*.<sup>269</sup> This inversion of feminine labor is evident too in the photograph of the nurse aboard the Floating Hospital.

By 1914, the Floating Hospital was a teaching hospital, training doctors and nurses in pediatrics, specializing in the care of premature and sick babies. Notes from one such nursing student, Celia Frances Bartey, reveal that maintaining a sense of calm, in all of the senses, was critical to the pedagogy. They held swaddled babies and prepared

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<sup>268</sup> Boston Floating Hospital, *Annual Report, Season of 1901* (Boston: Boston Floating Hospital, 1901), 7.

<sup>269</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Morisot's "Wet Nurse": The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting* 1988, 235.

temperature-controlled beds, shielding them from bright lights and loud noises. Recognizing human milk as critical for premature and ailing infants, if the mother could not breastfeed or was deceased, the staff worked to secure a wet nurse, first reaching out to family members. Nurses were trained to facilitate breastfeeding for mothers and wet nurses alike; they were trained to assist in expressing human milk and feeding it to infants through a variety of vessels. They were also trained to support mothers emotionally during a stressful time, again underscoring the component of affective labor that regulates emotions. Babies were meant to enjoy their time aboard the ship, encouraged to take in the sights and sounds of the harbor, to get fresh air and sunshine and play together,<sup>270</sup> as seen in the cheerful image from 1920 (fig. 4.3), in which nude toddlers pull up on a railing to take in the view.

A 1906 photograph (fig. 4.4) shows the interaction between mothers and nurses, as babies are checked in before coming onboard the barge. Two nurses, clearly identifiable in white, amiably await their charges, both smiling. A young mother in the background stands on deck, holding her baby and patiently waiting her turn to board and check in at the table, managed by a doctor and nurse. The ship is clean and orderly; the nurses are well groomed, confident, and compassionate. As the baby crosses the threshold, she transitions from one maternal caregiver to another, mother to nurse.<sup>271</sup> One such child peeks into the bottom-left corner of the image, already comfortable in the arms of a nurse, blurry from motion as she's swept aboard.

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<sup>270</sup> Lucie Prinz and Jacoba van Schaik, *The Boston Floating Hospital: How a Boston Harbor Barge Changed the Course of Pediatric Medicine* (Boston: Boston Floating Hospital, 2014), 56–58.

<sup>271</sup> It should be noted that while many pediatric hospitals largely banned parents from visiting, parents were welcome upon the Floating Hospital.

The nurses were trained to treat a wide variety of illnesses that impacted Boston children: measles, diphtheria, polio, scarlet fever, cleft palate, spina bifida, clubbed foot, syphilis, impetigo, and eczema, and to assist in many types of surgery, such as umbilical hernias, femoral hernias, and appendicitis. A cohort of 25–50 nurses was employed each season, working together on the ship during the day and living together in a boarding house, the Maverick House. This arrangement continued until 1931 when the hospital was effectively grounded and the institution moved to 20 Ash Street in Boston.

A 1906 photograph (fig. 4.5) of the Floating Hospital captures the nurses hard at work. A dozen or so cribs are arranged around the periphery of the room, with the head nurse seated in the center, devoted to her managerial duties. Freshly cut flowers decorate the desk. Two nurses, identifiable by their hats and crisp, long pinafores, tend to infants. In the foreground, a young nurse bends to view her charge, lifting mosquito netting to rearrange the blanket. Sunlight streams in the windows, and along with the sea breeze, is carefully controlled with curtains and windows. Uniform patient charts are attached to each crib, to record the care of each infant. The linens are clean and crisp, holding the infants tightly. All is ordered and calm, the picture of rehabilitation. As the barge gently moved throughout the harbor, the head nurse organized and implemented a system to collect milk from donors, ensuring these sick infants could get the human milk they needed to survive and thrive. In the onshore milk lab scientists studied the human milk, to which they gained unprecedented access.

### **A Dual Purpose**

The milk collection system provided Bosworth with samples critical to his endeavor to replicate human milk. Each day, as the fresh milk came from around Boston to the pier, he collected samples, while the rest went out to the babies on the Floating Hospital (fig. 4.6). Taking them to his onshore laboratory, he analyzed the human milk and worked toward rendering cow's milk more like it, explaining:

Cow's milk is different in character from human milk. The calf doubles its size in the first year of life; the child's growth is much slower. Cow's milk, therefore, has a large proportion of calcium to give the young calf bone and tissue rapidly. This, the baby cannot assimilate well in infancy. I am beginning to believe that 50 percent of bottle-fed baby trouble is due to the calcium in cow's milk. Now, by studying and analysing the food the child has eaten, we can determine what elements the infant's stomach absorbed as nourishment, and what elements it threw off as poison . . . by our analyses we hope to eliminate these harmful elements in cow's milk so that it will be proper food for all babies.<sup>272</sup>

During this time, Bosworth remarried and had two more children. Decades later, his son Orley remembered his father's persistent insistence, "Milk is nature's food. Cow's milk is for calves, human milk is for babies . . . any manmade substitute for human milk may never be a completely satisfactory substitute. Therefore, the makers of any substitute for human milk must be eternally vigilant with continued research. Where man plays with God's work, he must be very careful."<sup>273</sup> Bosworth clearly understood the weight of his project, and time and time again insisted that what he labored to create was not a substitute for human milk; rather, he attempted to render cow's milk to be as similar to human milk as possible. Indeed, what he first considered "reconstituted milk" was later called Similac, *simi* for similar and *lac* for milk. Bosworth never intended to replace human milk. It is clear that he held great reverence for the substance, especially as a

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<sup>272</sup> Bowman, "Made by Machine," 7–8.

<sup>273</sup> Orley Bosworth, Unpublished biography of Alfred Bosworth, n.d.

bacteriologist; he understood the power of bacteria in human milk to gut health. It could be said that in reconstituting the chemical composition of cow's milk, he endeavored to *create human milk*. It is no wonder, then, that he considered it “playing with God's work.” In his report to the Academy of Pediatrics, Bosworth wrote, “Breast milk, without question, is the best food for the infant and any artificial food used in its place must furnish, as nearly as possible, the same food constituents. In order to make comparisons, the following analyses of normal breast milks are given. These milks were collected and analyzed by the author and the samples were obtained by completely emptying both breasts. The mothers, in each case, were successfully nursing their children which were developing in a normal manner.”<sup>274</sup> Examining the fat and calorie content of human milk from mothers whose children thrived, he notes “Cow's milk is nature's food for the offspring of the cow and is not properly balanced as a food for infants. It must therefore undergo some form of modification before it can be used for infant feeding. The most common modifications consist of dilution with water and the addition of carbohydrates.” He goes on to discuss the specific adjustments that can be made to cow's milk to emulate human milk and concludes, “It seems strange that there is no published clinical data upon the subject to be found in American medical journals. The author hopes, however, to be able to accumulate such data for publication in a future paper.”<sup>275</sup> In Bosworth's meticulous and expansive archives, the report is followed by much enthusiastic correspondence from institutions throughout the US and Canada, hoping to learn more about his reconstituted milk.

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<sup>274</sup> Alfred Bosworth, “Report on Reconstituting Milk,” n.d., 5.

<sup>275</sup> Alfred Bosworth, 14.

## Fervor

The enthusiastic institutional and corporate response was matched by that of families in desperate need of milk substitute. Bosworth's archives are haunted by letters from mothers, fathers, and grandparents of infants who were unable to nurse, had lost their mothers in childbirth, or did not thrive on human milk. Most are written by advocates for the mothers, on behalf of them. As an art historian, I approach these letters not just for their textual content, but as visual objects that through their aesthetic elements underscore the desperation for a viable alternative to human milk. Doing so further accentuates Bosworth's drive to create something like human milk as the healthiest option for distressed babies; this alternative was not meant to be a replacement.

This visualized desperation is perhaps best exemplified by a long, handwritten letter from a grandmother frantic to obtain samples of the "reconstituted milk" she heard about for her daughter (fig. 4.8). With its sweeping cursive script tumbling and arcing to the bottom right corner of four pages, she asks for help with urgency, the long lines of script visually emulating the despair for her daughter and granddaughter, and the hope that this miraculous invention elicits in her. She details the problems, underlining important words and phrases such as *premature*, *explicit directions*, and *mother's milk*. A century has weathered the pages slightly, discoloring the edges, but the delicate sheets have been meticulously stored; Bosworth clearly understood the fervor for his reconstituted milk was important to document. It is a visual plea. And it is one of several such letters in the archive. It reads:

Berlin New Hampshire, March 28, 1921.

Dear Sir, I am much interested in the mother's milk manufactured or prepared by you and hope you will kindly write me how to obtain this milk for my daughter who lives in Mexico Maine, a country town near Rumsford Falls Maine. My daughter lost a

little baby daughter last December, it was one year old and had always been sickly as she was unable to nurse her baby as she is a woman of 40 had not given birth to a living child for 20 years when this little one came. She had a daughter nearly 21 years of age, and she done her best to keep this little one, but it was never strong seemed to grow tall and more and more spiritual looking ... she seemed to us all but when her teeth came she could not bear the pain and slight fever that comes with teething and in four days she was gone, having cut 9 teeth all at once it seemed and as this child was at first fed on Mellens food then cow's milk modified but given with a little lime water as usual and I have wondered after reading about your milk if that extra lime water added to the ... was perhaps the cause of her death. I am very anxious to learn all I can about your mother's milk which I know must be very near like the real mother's milk, and as my daughter has another little baby daughter now, is sick and nervous herself from caring for the first child that was so sickly and from grieving so about losing her, when she had reached an age that was so interesting, I am anxious to have her try your mother's milk as I fear when hot weather comes on she may lose this baby, and if she does I fear the poor mother will not live herself for her age (41 now) is a critical age for women anyway, and her heart seems set upon these little ones which she says will be the children of her old age meaning that they will brighten her life in old age she fondly hopes. Now I have written this long confidential letter to try to interest you in a mother who has lost several children by premature birth and who fairly worships children and whose husband is fond of children as his wife is, both were heartbroken over the loss of the little sickly baby, and when another came to them I knew it was a godsend to both, and now Mr. Bosworth I do hope you will send this milk to them with explicit directions so the mother can use this safe good milk instead of cow's milk which she wrote me she thought she must try soon for her baby as she has been advised not to feed condensed milk any longer, this baby girl is over 2 months old now seems strong and well is fat perhaps too fat for I believe condensed milk fattens babies more than any other artificial baby food and I would like to have this milk you prepare the mother's milk. If you will send it to my daughter, please let me know as soon as you receive this letter if you will send this milk to my daughter, if you will I will gladly pay you for all baby needs weekly as I suppose it must be sent fresh each week please write me if this child can have this milk regularly this coming summer and as my daughter is the wife of a poor man who is at present out of work on account of the closing down of the large paper mills at Rumford Falls Maine, I will gladly pay you for this milk myself rather than have this little one fed on cow's milk as the other was. I am a poor woman myself a working man's wife myself but as my own husband has employment I can assure you of reimbursement for this wonderful baby food, kindly write me at length about this milk and the juice as I hope it will save the life of a sweet little baby girls and perhaps her mother as well. From an anxious grandmother. Address. Mrs. Pete Anderson, 589 Burgess Street, Berlin, New Hampshire

This letter, like many others, positions human milk, and Bosworth's substitute, as not just nutritious or healthy, but as actively healing. The medicinal nature of human milk is

another primary way in which it can be posited against cow's milk in the letters of request. In March 1921, having read about Bosworth's milk in *The Boston Sunday Advertiser*, a Mr. Stephen V. Carroll of Fall River, Massachusetts, types a lengthy request for a sample. To preface his plea, he details his circumstances: in spite of his wife being a "large strong healthy woman," she unfortunately has a "small pelvis, and had to undergo a 'Caesarian operation' in order to bring my baby into this world alive." Because she underwent the arduous operation, she was unable to establish breastfeeding with her infant, and though they tried Horlick's Malted Milk, baby foods, and even water, the baby was unable to successfully digest any of it, resulting in stomach pain. "He gets crying spells frequently of every twenty of thirty minutes, even the water (warm) that he gets which is given to him between every feeding. If you could only see your way clear to send me some of your 'Mother's Milk' so I could try it on my baby, You would be doing me a great favor. For if it did so much for the others it ought to accomplish a great deal for my baby." In this case, Bosworth's reconstituted milk is aligned with, even conflated with, human milk as a medicinal cure for indigestion—and posited *against* cow's milk, in the form of Horlick's Malted Milk, which is made from evaporated cow's milk plus milled malted barley and wheat flour. This paradigm reinforces the idea that Bosworth's reconstituted milk was created as, and perceived to be similar to, human milk in its medicinal properties, which cow's milk lacked, for human infants.

The influx of letters at this time reflects the publicity Bosworth's reconstituted milk received, including *The Boston Sunday Advertiser* feature titled, "Mother's Milk Made By Machine: Problem of the Ages Solved by a Boston Chemist; Cow's Milk

‘Cracked’ and Put together without the Harmful Salts.’<sup>276</sup> The headline alone underscores the notion that Bosworth had created human milk, not a substitute for it. To do so, he fixed the problems of cow’s milk.

Indeed, the article elicited much hope for desperate families, like the Davis family of Willimantic, Connecticut:

*95 Crescent Street  
Willimantic, Conn.  
March – 23 – [19]21*

*Dear Sir,*

*I have read the article about the machine made milk which you claim is as good as mother’s milk. I do not expect to get any of that milk, but if I could I will be very glad to have it for my baby. He is four weeks old and is being fed on cow’s milk, for I am not able to nurse him. So there is nothing else to give him but cow’s milk and that isn’t any too good. And the baby does not gain hardly any weight at all since he was born, for he is not feeling well.*

*So if I can get any of your milk, I would be glad to have you write and let me know the cost and if I could get it regularly every week. So, hoping to get answers from you soon. I remain,*

*Yours truly,  
Mrs. Peter S. Davis*

*P.S. I do not know to whom I should write about this so am writing to you personally.*

Bosworth promptly responded:

*3/26/21*

*My dear Mrs. Davis:*

*Your letter of March 23<sup>rd</sup> is received and I have sent same to the Manager of the hospital who will give you further information about the milk.*

*Trusting that you may hear from him very soon, I am*

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<sup>276</sup> Bowman, “Made by Machine,” 7–8.

*Very truly yours,*

*AWB-M*

One year later, amid increasing fervor for his product, Bosworth dedicated the patent for reconstituted milk to public use.

### **Detractors and Competitors**

Not everyone was thrilled with Bosworth. The laboratory director of the Floating Hospital took issue with the process through which the reconstituted milk was created, and in particular, the claim that it was as good as human milk. Additionally, he felt he deserved more credit for its development, as the director of the lab. He wrote to the Board of Trustees,

*As a scientific investigator I cannot stand back of [behind] this reconstructed milk which I have invented [my emphasis] until I have more accurate data than has been collected in connection with the 129 cases so far studied. In this connection I might say that the data collected this year in connection with our studies of breast fed metabolism is to give the accurate scientific data necessary to supplement the purely clinical observations required to determine the value of this reconstructed milk as a food.*

He goes on to protest how the Trustees demanded it to be developed quickly and without regard for its nutrition.

Concurrently, a visiting physician at the Floating Hospital, Dr. Paul Emerson, positioned dehydrated and canned human milk from donors as superior to Bosworth's reconstructed milk. He was credited with perfecting the technique of "powdering" human milk, and in 1922 described the societal need for such a substance in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*:

*When we consider the high value of human milk in the feeding of infants, especially those who are losing weight steadily on artificial feeding, it is strange that there have not been more attempts to preserve it. In cases in which the mother's milk has failed, wet nurses can be employed by the well-to-do; but wet nurses are trouble makers, and perhaps it is just as well that the number is limited. In Boston either wet nurses or human milk are obtainable at the Directory for Wetnurses, and this institution is of the greatest value. Such drawn human milk must be necessarily used within a very few hours' time. This method, therefore, is open to the objection that, in addition to its being expensive, the supply is inelastic. Ordinarily, human milk, when needed, is obtained only with difficulty and after delay, and even then the supply is often maintained with much inconvenience. The source of supply seems always to be on the far side of the city, and any trifle, such as the state of the mother's feelings, may be enough to cause her to refuse quite suddenly to sell any more milk. At times, on the other hand, a mother has more than enough milk for her new baby and asks her physician whether he does not know of some baby who would be benefited by it. Frequently he can find no baby who needs it, for at that moment all his feeding cases are doing well.<sup>277</sup>*

In addition to the Directory of Wetnurses, The Massachusetts Infant Asylum (MIA), heralded for its very low infant mortality rate, served as a hospital for ailing infants and employed wet nurses to feed them. The MIA's methods were so successful that they were displayed at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. MIA staff visually chronicled the great strides infants gained through breastfeeding.

One such image in the 1912 MIA annual report (fig. 4.9) juxtaposes two photographs of the same baby, the first when he was admitted, clearly malnourished and ailing, and the second, a bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked boy after "Six weeks in Hospital and eight weeks at board." This technique of early industrial, medical photography was intended to provide visual proof of the Asylum's effective techniques, and are intentionally positioned together on one page of the report to create a jarring juxtaposition between sickness and health. The first image conveys the infant William's

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<sup>277</sup> Paul W. Emerson, "The Collection and Preservation of Human Milk: Preliminary Report," *JAMA* 79, no. 9 (March 1922): 641.

vulnerability through his position, the diminutiveness of his frame is demonstrated by the way in which he seems swallowed by the bed, its dressings, and the clothing that hangs off of his tiny frame. His eyes are sunken in and dull; it is not entirely clear whether his is a living body or a corpse. As a photograph, it closely emulates the concurrent and forbearing practice of memento mori photographs, through which the dead are captured in photographs so that they may be remembered by loved ones. It was common practice for families (who could afford to have photographs made) to commission portraits of infants who passed during childbirth, as well as those who were stillborn. William's first photograph looks remarkably like those haunting images, which renders the second photograph all the more surprising. A mere fourteen weeks later, he is the picture of health. He sits upright on his own, cheekily pulling off a sock, with bright eyes and healthily plump cheeks. He sports a smart haircut and tidy gown, indicating he is cared for in a number of ways. His form fills out the gown in a way that is hard to believe, considering how the fabric hung off his premature body in the previous image. The juxtaposition of these photographs efficiently demonstrates a successful rehabilitation.

Once infants had been nursed back to relative health, they were secured foster homes to complete their rehabilitation. The second photograph could certainly aid in the MIA's mission to find a robust and attractive baby a home. In that way, the photograph transitions from medical testimony to advertisement, one integral to William's future wellbeing.

In another image (fig. 4.10) from the annual report nurses and their charges enjoy the outdoor pavilion at MIA. Here, like at the Floating Hospital, a combination of human milk, sanitary spaces, and fresh air was prioritized. This indoor-outdoor room is designed

to rehabilitate foster rehabilitation and health. Screens provide fresh air and breeze, while protecting the infants from insects. Large plants rustle against the screens, providing fresh oxygen and a sedating aural experience; one can imagine the rustling interspersed with the chirping of birds. A roof provides shade and a regulated temperature, to maximize the time spent in this space.

In the background, two nurses tend to other babies, one standing above a bassinet and reaching tenderly into it, perhaps adjusting a blanket or soothing the occupant, as she looks down attentively. Just behind her, another nurse helps an older baby with curly pigtails to sit up. It appears that she will soon outgrow her bassinet.

In the foreground, a baby is nestled into an intricately woven wicker bassinet, dressed entirely in crisp white fabric, his little head covered in a cap. He gazes outside, taking in the sensations of the outdoors. On the right side of the image, a nurse kneels on the floor, and bending over a bassinet, she feeds an infant milk through a bottle. It is impossible to know exactly what this baby is being fed, but nursing reports from the time do indicate that milk provided by wet nurses was fed to babies through bottles, administered by medical nurses.

While wet nurses took on this role in order to support themselves and their families, it was often at the expense of their own infants, as these primarily young and unmarried women faced the unimaginable decision to abandon their own babies to nurse others. The system created a dynamic in which human milk went to those who could afford it. To remedy this situation that unjustly harmed less privileged infants, the MIA began to allow wet nurses to live there with their own babies, nursing both their own babies and their charges. Matron Reports reveal that when a mother came to the MIA

with a baby, it was determined whether or not she would make a suitable wet nurse. If so, she could stay with her baby and work as a wet nurse, and if not, she was sent away. Initially, when the wet nurses and their babies were given housing, their wages were halted (with the institution stating that the housing for mother and infant should be enough compensation); the wet nurses pushed for both accommodations and wages, and they were eventually granted.

The Matron Reports also reveal that increased infant survival relied upon a full staff of wet nurses. One report reads, “We have kept a full supply of wet nurses so that every baby who could be made to nurse has had that privilege of some kind . . . Two wet nurses have been discharged this month, each with her child, and two others have come in.”<sup>278</sup> The Matron Reports unemotionally recount adoptions, deaths, some interesting moments in a unique social space, such as: “One nurse ran away at night and left her baby, but while we were trying to decide what to do with the baby, she returned and took him away.”<sup>279</sup> In another case, a former wet nurse returned to the MIA quite ill, and although she was unable to work, was allowed to stay and recover.<sup>280</sup> Each report includes attendance data: the number of infants and wet nurses living there, and the number of children boarded out. Each report concludes with the following lists: Admitted, Discharged, Adopted, and Died. Although the children’s names are listed, the wet nurses go nameless: this type of labor remaining unacknowledged yet again.

Because the reports indicate that each month approximately three babies were admitted with their mothers who worked as wet nurses, and the majority of the admitted

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<sup>278</sup> “Massachusetts Infant Asylum, Matron’s Report for July 1873. UMass Boston Archives,” 1873.

<sup>279</sup> “Massachusetts Infant Asylum, Matron’s Report, December 1884,” 1874.

<sup>280</sup> “Massachusetts Infant Assylum, Matron’s Report, January 1885,” 1885.

children have Irish surnames (Sullivan, Costello, Corcoran, etc.), it is likely that the wet nurses were Irish as well. Given the timeframe, coinciding with massive Irish emigration to Boston in the wake of the Potato Famine (1845-49), it is poignant to consider the starving body employed to feed others, and that Irish nurses sold their milk to house themselves and their infants. Discrimination against Irish immigrants was rampant and extended to lactation industries, with red-haired wet nurses coded as dangerous, able to contaminate their charges with wildness. Newspaper advertisements in Boston at the time emphasize “Protestant” as a desirable characteristic, subtly marking non-Irish milk as more desirable and thus valuable.<sup>281</sup> Information about the wet nurses is hard to come by, beyond a general description of troublemakers in need of moral reformation. Because the MIA largely employed young, unwed mothers, a secondary goal emerged: the moral reformation of the mothers, characterized as “wild.”

In the visual record of Europe and America in the early twentieth century, the wet nurse is portrayed as a dangerous figure in need of vigorous supervision. McClintock positions wet nurses as boundary markers in that they were both closely regulated and highly suspect – the fear of contamination was very real in the case of wet nurses, and their diet and manner monitored so as only to pass on favorable characteristics to the vulnerable infants. Through these domestic workers, articulates a doubling of class within the domestic sphere, of the waged domestic worker and unwaged mother.<sup>282</sup> This mirroring is perhaps nowhere more palpably rendered than in Berthe Morisot’s 1879 painting *Wet Nurse and Julie* (fig. 4.11) which Nochlin hails as extraordinarily unique: “a

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<sup>281</sup> Janet Golden, “From Wet Nurse Directory to Milk Bank: The Delivery of Human Milk in Boston, 1909-1927,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 62, no. 4 (1988): 591.

<sup>282</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 96.

woman painting another woman nursing her baby.”<sup>283</sup> Two women face each other while engaging in labor and “a product is being created for a market, for profit.”<sup>284</sup> Morisot produces a painting, while the nurse produces milk, and further, it could be said that the nurse produces milk *so that* Morisot can produce the painting. It is thus also a painting about the limitations of late nineteenth century women, in that the roles of mothers and painters were understood to be mutually exclusive, and through the laboring body, Morisot transgresses these societal boundaries. It is also a painting about separation, in that wet nurses such as this one were necessarily separated from their own children in order to care for those of upper classes. This sense of separation and a stripping of maternal identity are underscored by the wet nurse going nameless and her face obscured, while the infant is named and fully articulated.

Nochlin positions this painting among other turn-of-the-century scenes of labor and, revolutionarily, the wet nurse as a worker. Within this genre, labor was most often rendered as the activity of rural men, reflecting the agricultural work and national identity of France at the time.<sup>285</sup> Nochlin notes that when women appear in these paintings of agricultural labor, they do not represent the productive labor of their male counterparts, but rather a mode of labor that assures survival and nurtures their young. Nochlin underscores the wet nurse as an anomaly, in that she sells her body (and a product of her body) for both profit and “the satisfaction of her client, but unlike a prostitute, she sells her body for a virtuous cause.”<sup>286</sup> She functions as both a mother figure and an employee, and performs what is understood as her body’s natural function, as her occupation. The

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<sup>283</sup> Nochlin, *Morisot’s “Wet Nurse,”* 231.

<sup>284</sup> Nochlin, 233.

<sup>285</sup> Nochlin, 233.

<sup>286</sup> Nochlin, 233.

wet nurse is a threshold figure; one that bridges and transgresses highly regulated spheres.

As wet nursing declined, scientists increasingly understood the value of human milk, and the challenge remained: how to get the substance to infants who needed it. Physician and bacteriologist Francis Parkman Denny held positions at both the MIA and the Boston Floating Hospital, and believed that the composition of human milk was so beneficial to infants that “even a small amount would benefit them greatly,” prescribing as little as a few ounces a day and recording notable improvements in health of previously ailing infants.<sup>287</sup> Recognizing the social troubles of wet nursing and the danger to infants, he developed a system of collecting human milk, later known as “the Denny Plan,” and was implemented through the Floating Hospital, led by Nurse Martha H. Stark.

Emerson describes the system of collecting milk via the Floating Hospital, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, in 1922:

For many years the Boston Floating Hospital, through its onshore nursing staff, headed by Miss Martha H. Stark, with the cooperation of the Lying-In Hospitals and obstetricians, has collected human milk daily in the mothers' homes. In the summer of 1915, in the eighty days in which the Floating Hospital accepted feeding cases, 368½ quarts (358.7 liters) of human milk were thus collected. A complete social and medical history of the mother is first obtained and a blood Wassermann test done (this was occasionally omitted at first if the mother's physical examination as done by a physician was negative and her baby obviously thriving, but since 1918 every case has had the Wassermann examination). The mother is instructed in the care of her breasts, and in the method of obtaining the milk in a cleanly fashion. She is provided with a breast-pump or taught the technique of manual expression as used by Sedgwick and each day sterile bottles are brought to her. As she fills a bottle it is placed on ice. When the mother does not possess an icebox she is shown how to construct one cheaply, large enough to hold several 8 ounce (236 cubic centimeter) nursing bottles. Much of this milk is contributed gratis by the mothers. Occasional instances of diluting the milk with

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<sup>287</sup> Golden, “Wet Nurse Directory,” 590.

water were found at first, and had to be summarily dealt with; but after twelve years of experience with the same nurse to supervise the collection, we have found this factor practically negligible. The nurse carries an ice-cap filled with ice in her bag in this way keeping the milk cool while taking it to a convenient drug store, where the clerk obligingly places it on ice while she goes out to collect more. When ready to return, she gathers her collection and carries it directly to the hospital, where all the milk is mixed, pasteurized, and placed in the refrigerator.<sup>288</sup>

Milk collection in Boston was inherently seasonal due to weather, stockpiling in the summer and dwindling through fall and winter. The treacherous conditions of harsh winters in the Northeast made milk collection difficult during the dead of winter. For that reason, Emerson endeavored to create a process to “powder” the human milk so that it could be used throughout the year, citing Bosworth’s success in drying human milk, and Emerson’s successful attempts to feed infants dried cow’s milk as well. The primary challenge, he noted, was “drying enough human milk so that its value as a food can be determined.”<sup>289</sup> Additionally, the process was slow, and milk compromised by contamination. Obtaining enough human milk to create a commercial operation was not surprisingly the primary barrier, yet Emerson forged ahead, exploring two options to preserve human milk:

... evaporating milk and adding sugar as a preservative thus making a human condensed milk, [which ultimately] was not considered practicable by Mr. Bosworth. The second method, of preserving the fat alone, and homogenizing it with cow’s skim milk, we were let to try after reading Finkelstein’s experiment. Mr. Bosworth prepared a 12 percent fat from human milk. By combining this with cow’s skim milk, and adding lactose, we obtained a milk which had the formula: fat 3 per cent; sugar 7 per cent; protein 1 per cent.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Emerson, “Collection and Preservation,” *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association* (American Medical Association, 1922), 642.

<sup>289</sup> Emerson, “Collection and Preservation,” 642.

<sup>290</sup> Emerson, 642.

This formula is tested with success on a seven-week-old baby, who gained weight and increased his overall health. Emerson concludes:

Human milk fat can be preserved at least a month. When combined with cow's skim milk and fed to a baby for a short period of time, we may expect a gain in weight equivalent to that obtained with whole breast milk, as shown by the case cited. Such milk might be used to advantage with babies who have intolerance for cow's milk fat, but the milk preserved in this way is expensive and difficult to prepare. Drying human milk, we feel, is more feasible and much less expensive.<sup>291</sup>

However, obtaining large quantities of human milk to process would ultimately render this option impossible. It was back to the drawing board.

The Boston Floating Hospital's method of collecting milk continued to thrive, as women were paid sixty cents a quart and were screened to make sure they could feed their own babies as well as pump to sell their milk. Their health was scrutinized, as well as their character, with nurses again, like at MIA, evaluating the morality of lactating women; milk was implicated, however minutely, as a conveyor of morality. Nurses made house calls and excluded candidates perceived as "dirty." While at MIA morality could be reformed, through the Floating Hospital system, unsavory women were summarily excluded.

The socioeconomic background of the two groups of milk providers varied greatly, as wet nursing provided impoverished mothers the opportunity to provide for themselves and their infants. Selling milk was a much more modest arrangement, appreciated as a virtuous act through which women, largely married and with homes and children, could earn additional money or repay the institution that helped their own

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<sup>291</sup> Emerson, 642.

children or others. While some insisted on donating their milk, those that were paid earned an average of \$4.20 per week, roughly \$56 today.

According to Janet Golden, the unique position of the Floating Hospital as both a charitable hospital and research facility through which human milk could be studied by Bosworth, Emerson, et. al, transformed a “domestic service into a medical commodity.”<sup>292</sup> In doing so, I argue that human milk serves as a symbol of corporeal, maternal labor, and further, acknowledging it as a valued commodity refutes affective labor as unpaid and unrecognized. While cow’s milk is accepted as a commodity, so much so that the “price of a gallon of milk” is regularly deployed as an indicator of a broader economy, recognizing human milk as a commodity is radical.

Increasingly recognizing human milk as a medical commodity, the staff saw the potential to improve its quality, nurses working to improve the health of milk sellers, and doctors evaluating them. Nurses streamlined the collection system to maintain the quality of the product. This system ultimately negated the cultural need for wet nurses, thus eliminating the social and medical problems associated with wet nursing. Through the joint laboratory and medical work, ultimately better understanding the preciousness of human milk and its capacity to save lives and improve health, the Floating Hospital system generated public interest in breastfeeding, and also further propelled Bosworth to create a human milk of his own.

### **An Agricultural and Economic Opportunity for the Nation**

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<sup>292</sup> Golden, “Wet Nurse Directory,” 598.

The doctors and nurses aboard the Floating Hospital were not alone in their acknowledgment of human milk and its new substitutes as valuable commodities. As milk substitutes like Similac took off, in 1930, the White House held a conference on child welfare and nutrition. In it, the massive economic potential of developing the formula industry in the United States was discussed at length. In response to American industrialization and urbanization, the conference culminated in a bill of rights for American children, called the Children's Charter, recognizing their needs and rights as inherently different from those of adults. Within the nineteen rights, health and well-being emerge as primary concerns, such as: "protection against labor that stunts growth, either physical or mental, that limits education, that deprives children of the right of comradeship, of play, and of joy." Health instruction and sanitary homes are guaranteed, as well as regular medical and dental exams, and "pure food, pure milk, and pure water." Infancy and maternal health are recognized as well: "For every child full preparation for his birth, his mother receiving prenatal, natal, and postnatal care; and the establishment of such protective measures as will make child-bearing safer."<sup>293</sup>

In this pursuit of better health for American children, the Conference created a committee to study milk as a primary source of nutrition for infants and children. Within the resulting, confidential document, breastfeeding is mentioned four times: (1) by the maternal and fetal health committee, suggesting vitamins for breastfeeding mothers; by the public health committee, (2) the recognition of the higher mortality rate of bottle-fed babies as a "life hazard," (3) the suggestion to further study colostrum in humans, as it was proven to contain helpful antibodies in cattle, but was not adequately studied in

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<sup>293</sup> *White House Conference on Child Health and Protection: Preliminary Committee Reports* (New York: Century, 1930). <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924097701290>.

human milk—furthering the popular notion of it as unhelpful and even harmful; and (4) suggesting that cow’s milk should be accessible to all American children, given that they weaned from human milk earlier than children in other cultures.<sup>294</sup> This final point seems a missed opportunity to recommend longer breastfeeding guidelines for American mothers and children, or further, a calculated move to replace human milk with cow’s milk to support the American economy via the dairy industry.

The report reveals that the governmental interest in cow milk (and dairy-based human milk substitutes) had much to do with developing the dairy industry and thus economic potential for the country. A thorough report on the various innovations in human milk substitutes is included here, with evaluations of each possibility, in a section on “important facts concerning pasteurized milk, condensed milk, evaporated milk, powdered and dried milks, and malted milk, from a nutritional standpoint.”<sup>295</sup> The public health service ultimately recommends that mothers’ nutrition be explored to ensure quality of human milk, and further study of colostrum. These recommendations are swiftly followed by a request to gain more information from pediatricians regarding which human milk alternatives are working best for their infant patients, and a call for “careful research on the economic aspects of replacement of liquid pasteurized milk or certified milk by milk powder, condensed, and evaporated milks is of importance.”<sup>296</sup>

Still within the Public Health Committee’s report, these requirements are immediately followed by a section titled “Economic Aspects of Milk.” Here, it could be

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<sup>294</sup> *White House Conference*, xlvii.

<sup>295</sup> *White House Conference*, xxxiv.

<sup>296</sup> *White House Conference*, xxxvii.

argued, the American nation is conflated with the child's body; and cow's milk is touted as nutritionally and economically beneficial. It reads:

Milk and the dairy industry are inseparably linked to the nation's health and the normal growth and development of its people. Scientific studies have shown that the food people eat, especially during the periods of rapid growth, in early childhood, has a lasting effect on the size of the entire race. President Hoover, when addressing The World's Dairy Congress in 1923 as Secretary of the Department of Commerce said: "The exhaustive researches of nutritional science during the last two decades have, by the demonstration of the imperative need of dairy products for the special growth and development of children, raised this industry to one of the deepest national and community concern, for, as I have said, it is not alone the well-being of our people, but it is the very growth and the virility of our race to which you contribute."<sup>297</sup>

The dairy industry thus supported the economic health of the nation. That the report on child health and welfare includes four mentions of human milk and an entire section on the economic potential of cow's milk speaks volumes about how human milk came to be so devalued in American culture in the twentieth century, as well as how formula, which is dairy-based, was privileged.

### **A Vision Co-opted**

Bosworth observed the economic fervor for a dairy-based human milk substitute with growing unease. He had created precisely what government and industry clamored for. In the mid-1920s, amid growing contention with his colleagues and discord with his competitors, Bosworth retreated to Ohio, where, from 1924–1929 he worked in the laboratory of M & R Dietetic Laboratories in Columbus. There, he put the finishing touches on Similac.

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<sup>297</sup> *White House Conference*, xxxvii–xxxviii.

It is not entirely clear why he left in 1929 to become a professor in Biochemical research at Ohio State. Although he extricated himself from the race for manmade human milk, Bosworth's archive reveals that he monitored it extremely closely. Among continued (oft-heated) correspondence with colleagues and reports is a dense collection of what his "reconstituted milk" became: the behemoth, global brand, Similac. He enrolled to receive information regularly from Similac, and dozens of advertisements for physicians were sent to him, meticulously stored in his archive.

Many of these clever items are advertisements posing as something else. For example, a long series of items mailed to Bosworth visually emulate doctors' notepads. In one (fig. 4.12), a square memo pad is attached to a longer, rectangular sheet of cardboard. On the memo pad, in cursive handwriting, it reads: "Dear Doctor: Under this pad is a suggestion for the convenient preparation of Similac feedings while travelling." The informal script signals the familiarity of one medical authority jotting down notes to another. The cardboard includes a saturated image of a Similac can superimposed on a black and white backdrop of luggage and golf clubs, a visual cue to take Similac along on that family vacation. Indeed, the script reads, "Vacation with the Baby," with the tagline: "Similac avoids gastro-intestinal upsets due to varying milk supply." Through this sophisticated advertisement, a formula corporation encourages physicians to in turn recommend that patients purchase their product to have an easier vacation. In doing so, it positions Similac as consistent in supply, and thus superior to human milk, which is implicated for varying in supply. It is implied that during leisure time, women can be freed from the physical and affective labor of breastfeeding, and instead can luxuriate,

presumably golfing, while not worrying about milk supply or their babies feeling hungry. A vacation can provide a break even from maternal labor.

In another faux-memo pad (fig. 4.13) the cardboard image includes “96 weight charts summarized” with Similac dominating the chart, and “Other foods” dwindling below. The handwritten note to the doctor reads, “Feeding Similac favors low initial loss and rapid return to birth weight. Reason? – Similac resembles human milk not only in composition, but also in its ready digestibility – its zero curd tension.” This phrasing implies that there is no need to breastfeed a newborn baby, that Similac can be administered from day one, and that in choosing this product over others, the infant will lose less weight initially and resume birth weight quickly. Human milk, unrepresented on the chart, is not an option. Further directions for using the product can be found by opening the memo pad. The image of the growth chart includes two male hands fingering the data, as if studying the lines; this is educated male data for educated men to consume. This particular ad directly references Bosworth’s initial vision, to create something that “resembles human milk not only in composition but also in its ready digestibility.” It is precisely Bosworth’s initial goal, to create something like human milk, that is recognized here for its medical value—but moreover, as an advertisement, its financial value.

In that regard, one of the most complicated and compelling items in this file of Similac ads is an advertisement visually posing as a letter from M & R Dietetic Laboratories, dated November 21, 1932 (fig. 4.14). It is personalized, reading, “Dear Dr. Bosworth, Such an unusual amount of interest has been shown by physicians in the similarity of the curd of Similac with that of human milk that we are taking the liberty of directing your attention to the subject matter on the enclosed circular. The similarity of

the curd of human milk and the curd of Similac as contrasted with the curd of cow's milk and powdered milk is illustrated therein. We know that results in actual practice mean more than any printed statement we could make. Therefore, we ask you to give consideration to the statements made and then avail yourself of the opportunity of seeing the results when Similac is fed in your own practice." It is signed by the Director of Sales, with a printed signature that looks very much like a real one.

This letter is part of a national advertising campaign through which doctors received these tricky materials in the mail, touting the benefits of Similac—in this case underscoring again that it is more like human milk than any other alternative. One can only imagine Bosworth's reaction to opening this letter, as he had endeavored for the previous decade to create something most like human milk—and then to receive an ad for it in the mail. It also references the White House Report on Child Welfare and Nutrition, in its call to gather information from physicians about the use of various milk substitutes. As a visual object, it is quite astounding, in its intention to sell a product, in how it was sent to the product's creator, in how he received and collected it, in how it seems not to have been opened in the 90 years since.

It is clear that the marketers of Similac paid substantial attention to the White House Conference because one advertisement poses visually as the official report. Sent to doctors just a few months after the conference, the front page mimics an official report on the conference and makes no mention of Similac (fig. 4.14). Flanked by a drawing of the White House, and under the heading "At the White House Conference on 'Child Health and Protection'" it reads, "The preliminary report of the committee on milk production and control of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection states that the

committee has directed its efforts toward collecting information on milk that would be of value to the Conference in promoting and protecting the health and welfare of the children.” It then describes four subcommittees that addressed milk: “the subcommittee on communicable diseases,” “the subcommittee on public health supervision,” “the subcommittee on nutritional aspects of milk [which] considered the nutritive properties of cow’s milk and milk products and the nutritive properties of human milk,” and “the subcommittee on economic aspects of milk [which] obtained information on the consumption of fluid milk and other milk products, the production, marketing, transportation, processing and delivery of milk and the economic importance of the sanitary quality of milk and cream.” The top page closes with the declaration, “Abstracts of the reports of the subcommittee on the nutritional aspects of milk are to be found on the inside pages of this letter.”

Turning the page (fig. 4.15), one is bombarded with visual and textual information. In the center of the two-page foldout is a visual emulation of the report itself, reading “United States Treasury Department Public Health Reports,” including “Report of the Committee on Milk Production and Control.” First, this cover visually emulates the actual report, but it is not; the actual report was kept confidential, and thus, while the first page of the advertisement emulates the actual report, the second page of the advertisement references more available materials: how this information was thus compiled by the US Treasury department, which obviously would have a vested interest in the economic potential of the dairy industry.

Behind the report, a bottle of Similac peeks out, as if to say, “Hello, this is actually an ad! Read on to learn more about the benefits of Similac for your baby and the

nation!” Around the report are excerpts regarding curd tension, unique to Similac among other alternatives, such as, “Human milk is well tolerated by infants, yet it contains fat globules of all sizes ranging from the smallest to the largest found in cow’s milk. This seem [sic] to argue against the validity of the fat globule size theory of the relation between the state of fat in a milk and its quality in infant feeding.” This issue can purportedly be resolved through use of Similac, as summarized in the text at right: “Studies on curd tension, which is a measure of the toughness of the curd formed by rennet coagulation, seem to have established a unique value of soft curd milks in infant feeding ... From these stated facts and the parenthetical abstracts, it readily can be understood that a milk which produces a soft curd is highly desirable in infant feeding. During the development stage of Similac, the years of research demonstrated that one of the disadvantages of feeding cow’s milk was the curd that was produced when this milk came in contact with the gastric enzymes.” This text is followed by a bibliography comprised entirely of thirteen studies by Bosworth.

The summary reads, in larger font: “One of the outstanding features of Similac is the production of an attenuated curd in gastric digestion,” positioning the product as superior to human milk which it denounced for variations in fat globule size, and other substitutes, in that Bosworth emphasized curd tension in his studies. And finally, a message to the doctor reading the faux-report: “How well this and other phases of the modification of cow’s milk is accomplished in the manufacture of Similac can be proved to you by prescribing Similac for your next feeding case.” Finally, the doctor is invited to try the product out on his own infant patients.

The message that Bosworth received in the mail was that Similac was superior to human milk, in fact should replace it, and doctors should experiment with it on their patients; this message is so vastly different than what he set out to accomplish, to make something like human milk to feed ailing infants who otherwise could not get it. As someone with great reverence for human milk as a substance, who believed deeply that cow's milk was for calves and human milk was for babies, the epiphany must have been shocking: a booming dairy industry would support this corporate endeavor: ultimately industrialized cow's milk would be the basis for his formula and was positioned to replace human milk. While the archive does not reveal whether he explicitly voiced his disdain for how his vision was co-opted, it is telling that he left the industry at that moment. He retreated first to academia and then to a small town to teach chemistry.

### **Obscurity**

Bosworth's drive to create something like human milk, and the nearly religious responsibility he felt to do so with caution, was co-opted to the degree that it resulted in a global brand synonymous with formula, and further, contributed to breastfeeding rates dipping to 26.5 percent by 1970.<sup>298</sup> Now owned by Abbott, a \$20 billion health care corporation, Similac is largely produced in Mexico in factory dairy farms.

Much like the ways in which Similac visually emulated medical and governmental materials, the corporation provides free samples and logo-embossed baby toys to families in maternity wards worldwide. In 2015, Mexico banned the practice of providing samples to families in hospitals, "because it is a commercial practice that may

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<sup>298</sup> "Ross Labs Breastfeeding Statistics" KellyMom, accessed April 25, 2016, <http://kellymom.com/fun/trivia/ross-data/>.

discourage breastfeeding,” in response to studies revealing one in seven women in Mexico breastfeed for six months.<sup>299</sup> The practice is widely considered predatory but pervasive nonetheless. Ultimately, today’s baby formula industry can be held in sharp contrast with Bosworth’s early vision. That it was his dream of a reconstituted milk that became Similac goes unnoticed, in histories of infant feeding and the corporation’s official history, which credits M&R Laboratories, ice cream company who hosted him during the development phases, with the innovation. He does not appear in the history of formula and his meticulous archives suggest that is exactly what he desired.

## **Conclusion**

Similac has, of course, gone on to thrive globally as a brand synonymous with formula, still presenting itself visually through sophisticated advertising as nutritious and medical. Today, Similac remains Abbott’s most profitable line of products, earning \$1.5 billion in 2014,<sup>300</sup> and ranks among the top three formula brands, with Gerber produced by Nestle, and Beingmate, a Chinese formula manufacturer. As formula feeding rates decrease in the United States, China is seen as a growing potential market, and in 2014 Abbott invested \$400 million to develop the brand there. In 2015, Abbott was the world’s fourth largest baby food manufacturer, and first in the United States.

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<sup>299</sup> Associated Press, “Mexico Bans Free Baby Formula in Bid to Boost Low Breastfeeding Rates,” *Guardian*, August 11, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/aug/12/mexico-bans-free-baby-formula-in-bid-to-boost-low-breast-feeding-rates>.

<sup>300</sup> “Mintel: Baby Food and Drink - US - May 2014: Brand Share – Baby Formula,” accessed September 26, 2016, <http://academic.mintel.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/display/704301/?highlight#hit1>.

In its 2016 business report on Abbott, Euromonitor International<sup>301</sup> identified the primary threat to the corporation: “Abbott’s future growth in milk formula in emerging markets could be hit by health campaigns to promote breastfeeding.” To buffer that loss, Euromonitor suggests, “Facing a potential decline in its customer base in developed markets, due to stable birth rates and a likely rise in breastfeeding rates, Abbott may seek to widen its customer base by focusing not only on toddler milk formula but also on products targeting children after they stop using baby food.”<sup>302</sup>

Indeed, new powdered milk-based products are currently being introduced to the market for a newly diversified audience including children and the elderly. At the time of this writing, I received a free sample of a new Similac product in the mail; I had been identified as a mother of small children. The brochure assures, “Toddlers can be particular,” and directs, “Make sure they’re getting the nutrients they need.” *Go and Grow Mix-Ins by Similac* are intended to be stirred into meals, “a secret weapon for adding nutrition to food.” Throughout the packaging, the most prominently showcased food is macaroni and cheese. The first ingredient of this new product is whey protein concentrate: processed, powdered cow milk. Through the pairing of text and image, Abbott suggests that to “balance your toddler’s diet,” one should stir a powdered dairy product into a processed dairy product. One can only wonder what Bosworth would think of what became of his reconstituted milk.

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<sup>301</sup> Euromonitor International is a highly regarded, privately owned market research firm. Passport is its database; each corporation report is created by industry experts who compile data from a number of sources. Passport is considered a reliable way to access economic data that is not otherwise disclosed.

<sup>302</sup> Raphael Moreau, “Passport Abbott Laboratories Inc In Packaged Food (World)” (Euromonitor International, February 2016).

It could be said that in spite of this industry, and because of his unwavering reverence for human milk, Bosworth succeeded in creating a substance that saves the lives and eases the distress of countless infants who are unable to nurse, or experience a variety of ailments. If he succeeded, he certainly did not do so alone. His project was made possible through the labor of scores of women who go unrecognized for their labor: milk donors and sellers, nurses, wet nurses, system managers, grandmothers of the sick and deceased, mothers who brought their ailing babies to the ship each day, and certainly many others who remain unknown. While they go largely neglected in the written history, in the visual record their contributions and affective labor can be seen.

## Chapter 5

### **Human Dairies and Sirens: Collaborating Toward Democratization, 1918-2018 New York**

**Second Author: Mathilde Cohen, University of Connecticut School of Law<sup>303</sup>**

In the summer of 2016, Julie Boucher-Horwitz (fig. 5.1) was stuck in traffic. Her thoughts turned, as they so often do, to human milk. In the throes of establishing the New York Milk Bank, she returned to the problem of how to get donated milk, the only means of sustaining some infants' lives and one with a very short shelf-life, where it needed to go: from the bank to the infants who most need it, those born premature or whose mothers did not survive childbirth or were otherwise unable to nurse them, in hospitals and homes around New York. With these infants' lives hanging in the balance, and immobilized by the vehicles surrounding her own, she suddenly saw a motorcyclist zip along the shoulder, passing effortlessly by. She remembered years ago hearing about postmen in Brazil delivering milk on mopeds and said to her husband, "That would be such a great idea to use a motorcyclist to get in and out of the city. It would be fabulous if we had a core of them." She took out her phone and looked up "women's motorcyclists

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<sup>303</sup> In this chapter, Mathilde Cohen, a prolific milk scholar and expert on legalities of lactation, served as second author. After inviting me to contribute to the volume she co-edited with Yoriko Otomo, I approached Dr. Cohen about collaborating on a project that would investigate the partnership between the Sirens Motorcycle Club and the New York Milk Bank, and together we worked to situate this collaboration within a history of milk banking and transport in New York. This fruitful collaboration became a piece of research and writing with unexpected depth and length, and so we decided to both submit it to a journal for publication, and to include it in my dissertation. A version will be published in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* in 2019. My sincere gratitude to Dr. Cohen, Jen Baquial, and Julie Boucher-Horwitz for their participation.

New York.” Up popped The Sirens Motorcycle Club. Julie called on the spot, and left a message expressing her interest.

Sirens President Jen Baquial returned the call immediately and Julie explained her idea. Jen responded enthusiastically, as the Sirens choose a philanthropic initiative each year focusing on women’s health and the LGBT community, and regularly volunteer as a group, from providing motorcycle safety escorts to shelving books for the Lesbian Herstory Archives, among many examples. The Sirens formed in the 1980s as a haven for women motorcyclists who had only been allowed to join clubs as the property of bikers, creating an inclusive community that accepts and supports its diverse members. They took a vote and selected The New York Milk Bank as their collaborative service project for 2017.

Soon, the Sirens were running milk around the city, zipping in and out of traffic through the boroughs, responding to texts at all hours of the day and night, in an unexpected, productive, and enjoyable synthesis, an amalgamation a bit like the milk itself, mixed from many different donors (fig. 5.2). As Julie says, “It’s working with another women’s organization, and [the NY Milk Bank is] a mostly female organization, and women are the ones [who are] pumping and donating milk. So it’s women helping women helping women helping babies. It’s a great circle that goes around.” In this photograph, founding member Cheryl Stewart and President Jen Baquial are seen picking up milk at the New York Milk Bank. Baquial carries a large, blue, insulated bag, full of frozen milk; she will secure the bag to her bike and deliver milk to families and facilities around New York.

Press coverage was immediate and a video went viral on social media, as viewers delighted in the tough-looking biker gang delivering breast milk to tiny, vulnerable babies. Certainly, the juxtaposition is compelling, but the innovation is as well. What a great solution to life-threatening problems: banking human milk and transporting it throughout the city. However, a goal of this chapter is to situate this network of women as part of a lineage that has done just that, in a variety of capacities, for a century—and to position this particular collaboration as a notable evolution toward intersectional inclusivity and equity.

Based on a combination of archival research and interviews, this chapter argues that as in the past, present-day milk banking relies on a form of embodied female labor that is both emancipatory and exploitative, and in that respect, can be connected to a long history of providing human milk for profit in the form of wet nursing. It also reflects on the challenges of transporting human milk. In that sense this chapter builds upon Greta Gaard’s “new intersectional field of feminist postcolonial milk studies, a perspective capable of interrogating the multiple complex cultural assumptions and material practices articulated through milk.”<sup>304</sup> This chapter also relies on foundational texts by Valerie Fildes and Janet Golden on wet nursing, and is in conversation Rima Apple’s technological histories of infant feeding, Narin of ’s critique of human milk markets, and Rhonda Shaw and Alison Bartlett’s body ethics of milk donation.<sup>305</sup> Building upon these

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<sup>304</sup> Greta Gaard, “Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies,” *American Quarterly* 65 (2013): 595–618, 599.

<sup>305</sup> Valerie A. Fildes, *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present*, Family, Sexuality, and Social Relations in Past Times (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Janet L. Golden, *A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle*, Cambridge History of Medicine (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Rima D. Apple, *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New

various strands of human milk scholarship, this chapter adopts a feminist perspective to offer a uniquely inter-historic and visual studies-based study human milk banking in New York. We selected case studies in the early twentieth century, mid-twentieth century, and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, each set in New York City, to foster an inter-historical dialogue. Connecting these three moments allows us to visualize similarities and differences in the ways in which milk circulates, and moreover, to disrupt a prevailing notion that milk movement (via donation, sale, banking, transport, etc.) is a recent or abnormal phenomenon. Rather, the exercise underscores that today's human milk transfers are part of a lineage of long established practices.

Theoretically, this chapter is rooted in liminality. In 1960 Anthropologist Arnold Van Gannep suggested that rites of passage are common to human experience (1960), and introduced three stages of rites of passage: separation, liminality, and incorporation, which he likened to travel: departure, traveling, and arriving; the traveling phase promoted internal change. In this case, liminality is the experience between two bodies, between being expressed by one and ingested by another, which makes it quite unique. *Limen* is Latin for threshold. I see this phrasing come up again and again in my research: for example, Anne McClintock considers domestic workers to be boundary markers and mediators on an imperial divide.<sup>306</sup> Midwives are traditionally both revered and feared for their responsibility as threshold figures, responsibility for life and death.

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Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Narin Hassan, "Milk Markets: Technology, the Lactating Body, and New Forms of Consumption," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (January 2010): 209–28; Rhonda Shaw and Alison Bartlett, eds., *Giving Breastmilk: Body Ethics and Contemporary Breastfeeding Practice* (Bedford: Demeter Press, 2010).

<sup>306</sup> McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*. New York: Routledge, 1995, 48.

Liminal spaces are unstable, positioned between two stable spaces; they are dangerous but rife with possibility. Because milk is both precious and volatile, its liminal zone is one subject to innovation and control, and it is guided through liminality by threshold figures, including Sirens on motorcycles.

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### **Manhattan Human Dairy**

The early history of human milk banking is the history of the medicalization and disciplining of a variable and volatile female fluid by (mostly) male doctors.<sup>307</sup> From the outset, the women who sold their milk to hospitals were regimented and controlled.<sup>308</sup> The men in charge shared the belief that the feminine domestic practice of breastfeeding could be transformed into a safer, disembodied, “product,” made and prescribed by male physicians.<sup>309</sup> In that sense, bottled human milk has long been the preferred medical medium to administer it, allowing precise measurement and analysis and erasing its female corporal origin. The doctors who pioneered milk banking resented women’s resistance to their normalizing control over lactation. In 1922 Paul Emerson thus complained that his milk providers were unreliable, writing: “any trifle, such as the state of the mother’s feelings, may be enough to cause her to refuse quite suddenly to sell any

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<sup>307</sup> In that sense, milk banking is one but a chapter in the Foucaultian story of discipline and punishment as it has been reclaimed and re-written by feminists. Angela King, “The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 5, no. 2 (2004): 29–39.

<sup>308</sup> Swanson, *Banking on the Body*.

<sup>309</sup> Kara W. Swanson, “Human Milk as Technology and Technologies of Human Milk: Medical Imaginings in the Early Twentieth-Century United States,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2009): 20–37.

more milk.”<sup>310</sup>

At that time, New York was at the forefront of human milk banking—or rather, “breast milk dairy[ing],” as one of the doctors involved liked to refer to it.<sup>311</sup> Milk banking began in the 1910s, to solve a familiar problem, and communities of women ensured infants’ survival through complex systems of producing, donating and selling, storing, and transporting milk. As early as 1914, physician Raymond Hoobler tried out the idea of collecting and distributing human milk at the Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan.<sup>312</sup> In 1921, the “Mothers’ Milk Bureau of the Children’s Welfare Federation of New York City” was inaugurated, soon expanding to add three stations in different sections of the city. The Bureau operated until the late 1940s, distributing well over two million ounces of human milk.<sup>313</sup> Despite this early start, milk banking disappeared from New York for over half a century due to a conjunction of factors, in particular financial difficulties—operating costs were high and public funding was lacking—and the increased use of commercial, cow’s milk based infant formula. During this long hiatus, families desperate for human milk for their premature or sick babies were left to procuring it from out-of-state banks or directly from donors “and bring[ing] it into the hospitals.”<sup>314</sup>

The motif of breastfeeding in art history is typified by a serene scene in which a woman nurses an infant, undisturbed by domestic or professional tasks. Photographs

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<sup>310</sup> Paul W. Emerson, “The Collection and Preservation of Human Milk: Preliminary Report,” *JAMA* 78 (1922): 641–42.

<sup>311</sup> Henry Dwight Chapin, “The Operation of a Breast Milk Dairy,” *JAMA* 81, no. 3 (July 1923): 200–202.

<sup>312</sup> Helen Leighty, “Operating a Mothers’ Milk Bureau,” *Public Health Nursing* 38 (May 1946): 218–23, 218.

<sup>313</sup> Leighty, 218.

<sup>314</sup> Julie Bouchet-Horwitz, interview with Mathilde Cohen, March 10, 2017.

documenting the Mother's Milk Bureau completely refute that construct in underscoring lactation as labor, and milk as saleable, valuable commodity. This 1938 photograph (fig. 5.3) reveals precisely why these facilities were dubbed "human dairies," as women, confined to stalls, hand express milk; the similarity to cows being milked in a dairy is as uncanny as it is unsettling. This photograph reveals a number of important components of milk banking at this time. Women are granted a modicum of privacy, from each other, but directly observed by the nurses who manage the activity. These nurses are tasked with maintaining a sterile and orderly environment: one pours milk carefully into a bucket, while the other monitors a milk seller as she washes her hands. The gazes of the women engaged in hand expression underscore their dedicated focus to the task at hand. They share the same position, hunched forward, and have been provided with stools to raise their knees upward, to hold vessels on their laps. They manipulate one bared breast, while the other remains modestly covered.

A second photograph taken in the Milk Bureau (fig. 5.4) documents the hand expression technique implemented to maximize output. Holding her right breast with her left hand, she uses her right hand to compress her thumb and fingers toward each other repeatedly in a rhythm that mimics suckling, and the milk is expressed into a vessel held between her knees. This photograph is unusual in its historical documentation of hand expression, and moreover, it serves as a visual argument for a conception of lactating, especially expressing milk, as true labor. These images underscore the degree to which this space and activity were controlled. The milk sellers' hair and faces are covered to prevent contamination, and their clothing covered by aprons; the nurses don masks and aprons as well. While the visual proximity to a dairy is unnerving, several elements of

this image transgress milk expression over time, and may feel familiar to women who have sought out spaces in which to pump—more likely in private, and without being surveilled. The scant data we have on these women indicates that they are primarily recent immigrants, ethnicities and nationalities that faced discrimination upon entry to the U.S. at that time. While the demographics of milk providers are hard to come by, a concurrent register from 1927 Boston lists forty milk sellers, the majority of whom are Irish, Armenian, and Assyrian. In eleven months, that cohort sold 158,000 ounces of milk.<sup>315</sup>

Today, women donating milk to the New York Milk Bank are not compensated. In fact, New York law positively precludes their payment.<sup>316</sup> By contrast, for-profit companies such as Prolacta and Medolac, which market sterile human milk to hospitals and families who can afford it, rely on donors paid as little as \$1 per ounce of milk—a meager salary especially considering the huge profits made from their milk.<sup>317</sup> The two companies are not forthcoming about the price of their products, which are not listed on their websites, but according to journalist reports from 2015, Medolact sold its sterilized donor milk for \$7 an ounce, and Prolacta sold its human-milk based fortifier for about \$180 an ounce.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Helene Walker, “Maternal Milk Collection,” *Public Health Nurse* 20 (1928): 23–24.

<sup>316</sup> New York Administrative Rules and Regulations, Tissue Banking and Nontransplant Anatomic Banks, Subpart 52-9.1 (b)) (“A donor shall not receive remuneration for the donation of milk.”)

<sup>317</sup> Kimberly Seals Allers, “Inviting African-American Mothers to Sell Their Breast Milk, and Profiting,” *New York Times*, December 3, 2014, <https://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/12/03/inviting-african-american-mothers-to-sell-their-breast-milk-and-profiting/>.

<sup>318</sup> Andrew Pollack, “Breast Milk Becomes a Commodity, With Mothers Caught Up in Debate,” *New York Times*, March 20, 2015, <http://nyti.ms/1H9uD9L>.

Among non-profit milk banks, the norm is one of donation.<sup>319</sup> This “giftification” of milk, as sociologist Marisa Pineau calls it,<sup>320</sup> is of relatively recent vintage. A feminist perspective of milk banking in the early days was the idea that women could legitimately profit from their reproductive labor by selling their milk. Historian Janet Golden writes that in the 1910s, “crews of milk sellers . . . earned approximately \$4.20 per week if they provided the one quart daily that was typical of women selling milk—a wage approximately half that received by live-in wet nurses but, nonetheless a significant contribution to the family economy.”<sup>321</sup> Some women were able to make an enviable income, even sufficient, in one case, to purchase a home.<sup>322</sup> In 1943, the Committee on Mothers’ Milk of the American Academy of Pediatrics stipulated in their standards of operation for milk bureaus that “[r]egular milk donors should receive compensation sufficient to insure good standards of living and relief from financial worry.”<sup>323</sup> In 1946, a milk bank director wrote, “[o]ne donor came to us originally in June 1939 and remained until June 1940, earning the sum of \$948.”<sup>324</sup> Based on inflation, her earnings would amount to \$16,348.40 in today’s dollars.

Why are present-day milk providers no longer compensated? According to Pineau, “[b]eginning in the 1970s, milk banks in America began operating on a donor-

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<sup>319</sup> Human Milk Banking Association of North America, “Human Milk Banking Association of North America Takes a Stand Against Paying for Donations,” press release, December 9, 2014, <https://www.hmbana.org/sites/default/files/images/december2014.pdf>.

<sup>320</sup> Marisa Gerstein Pineau, “Liquid Gold: Breast Milk Banking in the United States” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2012), 1.

<sup>321</sup> Golden, *Wet Nursing*, 195.

<sup>322</sup> Golden, 196.

<sup>323</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, “Recommended Standards for the Operation of Mothers’ Milk Bureaus,” *Journal of Pediatrics* 23 (1943): 112–28, 113.

<sup>324</sup> Leighty, “Mothers’ Milk Bureau,” 218.

based system in which women give their breast milk to the banks without remuneration.”<sup>325</sup> The “giftification” of milk makes economic sense given the banks’ high operating costs and women’s increased presence in the labor market. Non-profit milk banks charge an average processing fee of \$4.50 per ounce. Private paying customers purchasing a full day’s worth of milk supply for an infant 0-3 months old must thus disburse about \$135 daily. Should the banks internalize the costs of making milk by compensating providers and charging a higher price to recipients, their ability to survive and to serve a diverse clientele may be compromised. As for milk providers themselves, some have noted that they may have a decreased need for the extra income due to women’s massive entry into the workforce after World War Two.<sup>326</sup>

Yet this economic explanation fails to capture the gender ideologies at work in the giftification of milk. Women, especially mothers, are socially constructed as selfless, altruistic and maternal beings that lie beyond the realm of the productive, market economy. Historically, their domestic, reproductive, and emotional labor has remained invisible and unpaid when men were viewed as productive breadwinners. This dualism is reflected in the visual culture, which depicts men’s work as labor, while women’s is portrayed as leisure.<sup>327</sup> In art history, this is astutely defined by Griselda Pollack in “Vision and Difference,” and applied to lactation imagery by the late Linda Nochlin, in her essay on Berthe Morisot’s 1810 painting, *The Wet Nurse Feeding Julie* (fig. 5.5).

### **Spectacle and Surveillance**

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<sup>325</sup> Pineau, “Liquid Gold,” 18.

<sup>326</sup> Leighty, “Mothers’ Milk Bureau,” 222.

<sup>327</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 50–90.

Throughout the history of milk banking and gifting, human milk has been commoditized and thus often gone to families of more privilege, at the expense of those with less. Yet, time and time again in my archival research, I see systems of resistance, often through networks of women who have received little attention. Often, these women go unrecognized, and can be found working below an enterprising male scientist or doctor, celebrated for his accomplishments. On occasion, these men also resist exploitative practices in the socio-economic life of human milk, with varying degrees of success.

One particularly captivating case is that of Martin Couney and the Coney Island Baby Incubator Exhibit (fig. 5.6). Upon immigrating to the United States from Germany, Couney was shocked by the many ways in which American hospitals lagged behind European hospitals in caring for infants; in particular he was distressed by the American attitude toward premature infants, that they were weak and not meant to live. He had seen first-hand some successful techniques for treating premature babies and was determined to bring these practices to the United States, particularly the use of incubators. Eventually, Couney came to be known around the country as “The Incubator Doctor,” and identified himself as a physician; however, in researching his early life, researcher Claire Prentice recently discovered that Couney was not actually trained as a medical doctor. And while he claimed to have invented the incubator, Prentice determined that he was more likely an incubator technician.<sup>328</sup> While his early life and ethics remain hazy, what is well documented is his startling success rate: in forty-three years he treated 8,000

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<sup>328</sup> Claire Prentice, “The Man Who Ran a Carnival Attraction That Saved Thousands of Premature Babies Wasn’t a Doctor at All,” *Smithsonian*, August 19, 2016, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/man-who-pretended-be-doctor-ran-worlds-fair-attraction-saved-lives-thousands-premature-babies-180960200/>.

premature infants, and saved the lives of 6,500.

In this photograph (fig. 5.7), Couney lifts up a young boy, facilitating a better sight line into the Incubator. As Couney points and presumably explains the contraption, the boy gazes at the premature baby in wonder, a visual embodiment of the spectacle inherent to the Incubator Exhibit. Meanwhile, soberly facilitating this exchange is a crisply dressed nurse, in this case Couney's daughter and right hand. This too is emblematic of the operation; while Couney experimented with the ways in which spectacle could augment his neonatal aspirations, professionally trained women led the serious medical operations of the facility. At the focal point of this image is the premature infant, both the star of the show and the patient.

To this day, Couney is adored by the people he treated, known as "incubator babies," and who he dubbed his "graduates." Beth Allen, who was born in Brooklyn in 1941, weighing only 1 pound, 10 ounces, writes, "My parents knew about the incubator baby "sideshow" in Coney Island and were reluctant to send me there... Dr. Couney came to the hospital and spoke to my mother and she agreed to put me under his care." After three months of treatment, she weighed five pounds. Couney regularly held luncheons to celebrate his flourishing graduates, and give them presents.

This photograph (fig. 5.8) chronicles one of these luncheons, in which maternal caregivers hold healthy babies on their laps; the babies are one year old and have the chubby glow of nourishment and wellbeing, a particular accomplishment, given their early vulnerability as premature infants. A scene of abundance, the table is covered with food: eggs, ham, olives, bread, bottles of milk and cups of coffee. This particular luncheon took place during the 1939-1940 World's Fair in New York, to demonstrate the

success of his operation to the American Pediatrics Association. This image captures the frenetic task of holding children of this age still at a table; that the women succeed at this task and enjoy the luncheon to varying degrees is effective in humanizing the people Couney assisted during times of trauma and fear. And yet, this image reveals again that he was not solely altruistic, and that his endeavor was always entangled with spectacle: the luncheon and then the photograph, function as means to put his accomplishments on display once again. The gifts he selected for his graduates similarly had dual functions: upon leaving his care, each received a bracelet that both commemorated the experience and made them visibly identifiable as Couney's "incubator babies."

Two recently unearthed photographs from the luncheon give insight into the families Couney served. The first (fig. 5.9), captures a behind-the-scenes moment, a snapshot that the families do not appear aware of. As they cluster in small groups, seated and standing, it seems as if they have gathered in this space before the luncheon commences, or are waiting to greet Couney. The details in the background reveal that the gathering took place in the Incubator Exhibit in the 1939-40 World's Fair exhibition space; in this sense it is a merging of Couney's two operations, as Coney Island graduates visit the World's Fair. There is a familiarity among the individuals, suggesting they may have gotten to know one another as their infants were rehabilitated in the same space for up to six months. In the foreground, a father holds his sleeping baby's foot; both he and the mother gaze down upon the baby. The second photograph (fig. 5.10) visually conveys the gratitude that these families felt toward Couney, the joy and appreciation graduates speak of in interviews emanate from the image. Couney leans over to hold the hand of a baby, who stares at Couney's hand. This coupling of doctor and patient is surrounded by

joyous expression: on the left a young girl, perhaps the baby's older sister, smiles as the doctor and patient grasp hands. Behind them, the mother's gaze meets the camera; she holds her healthy baby on her lap and smiles broadly, with bright eyes. This image is particularly remarkable in capturing a candid moment of Couney's interaction with a family, and their profound gratitude toward him.

Couney repeatedly claimed that he took in babies from any racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic background. The NYPL archive includes correspondence through which he petitions for the patients' families' rights: to enter the World's Fair without paying admission, to visit whenever they liked. He also petitioned for living quarters for his staff, including wet nurses; this facility became the only one allowed to be open throughout the night. Couney successfully petitioned to have a garage and ambulance onsite, this mobility allowing him to transport infants easily.<sup>329</sup>

By 1941, Couney's project was well established. He owned three incubator baby exhibits, two on Coney Island and one in Atlantic City, and also ran exhibits at world's fairs and other expositions around the country.<sup>330</sup> While his letters show that he petitioned to be featured among science and technology exhibits, the incubator exhibit was placed in entertainment zones, among freak shows. This conflict is at the heart of his endeavor, which hovered for decades between innovative altruism and exploitative voyeurism,

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<sup>329</sup> This information comes from correspondence I found in the New York Public Library's 1939 and 1940 Records, between Couney, fair organizers, and the architecture firm he commissioned, Skidmore and Owings. New York Public Library The Brooke Russell Astor Reading Room for Rare Books and Manuscripts, New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated Records, MssCol 2233, boxes 547 and 1546, Documents Pertaining to the Fair.)

<sup>330</sup> Beth Allen, "Beth Allen Recounts Her Origins as an 'Incubator Baby' in Dr. Couney's Sideshow," interview by Elinoar Astrinsky, Coney Island History Project, Oral History Archive, June 28, 2007, <http://www.coneyislandhistory.org/oral-history-archive/beth-allen>.

meticulous medical ward and phantasmagoric sideshow. He was critiqued for selling tickets, 15 to 25 cents apiece, to see the infants in their incubators; this practice allowed him to provide these services to families for free.

While Couney's legacy is introducing incubator use for premature infants to American neonatology, and in such a controversial manner, he was focused not just on incubation, but also on the critical importance of high quality human milk for these infants. Beth Allen recorded in The Coney Island History Project, "I believe it was fifteen cents admission, and the money went to supply mother's milk for the babies. Dr. Couney had nursing mothers who lived with him so he could supervise their diets and make sure that the babies were being properly nourished."<sup>331</sup> He insisted that no families be charged; it was important to him that his treatment plan was available to all vulnerable infants, regardless of socio-economic status.<sup>332</sup> Prentice writes, "Couney insisted that all babies were welcome in his 'institution,' whether orphans or foundlings, whatever their race or social class. His policy was remarkably progressive at a time when no hospitals (other than charity hospitals, where survival rates for children were low) were open to people of all backgrounds...."<sup>333</sup> In that sense, Couney succeeded in democratizing access to human milk.

In retrospect, much of his success can be attributed to his dedication to human milk. Medical historian Lawrence Gartner told me, "I wouldn't dismiss Martin Couney at all. I've spoken to a number of older pediatricians who were practicing in New York in the 1920s and 1930s and who sent babies regularly to Couney... he was well-respected

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<sup>331</sup> Allen, "Incubator Baby."

<sup>332</sup> It is unclear the degree to which this transgressed racial lines, though records show family names from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds.

<sup>333</sup> Prentice, "Wasn't a Doctor," 445.

by the medical community at that time... He always used wet nurses, and this emphasis on human milk was one of the reasons he succeeded so well.”<sup>334</sup>

Couney was a firm believer in human milk. In a 1937 interview he said, “A baby’s stomach is all he has to worry him—and milk is about all he can cope with. They get only mother’s milk from healthy, well-fed wet nurses.” In the cases in which infants were born so early that they could not yet suckle, his team of nurses implemented a tubing technique that he and his head nurse, Louise Recht had learned while training in France with Pierre Budin,<sup>335</sup> an expert on the care of premature infants. He credited not just excellent medical care, but what today is considered affective labor as well, in phrasing he used repeatedly: “A baby is a mighty sensitive mechanism. Of course, they require the best that science can give. But while my nurses are efficient, I wouldn’t have a woman in the place who did not love children. That’s something that’s born in women—the mother heart—and I wouldn’t have the best specialist who didn’t really love babies. The babies respond to affection like flowers to the sun—they sense it somehow.”<sup>336</sup>

In 1939, *The New Yorker* ran a feature on Couney’s operation, anointing him “Patron of the Preemies,” noting, “five wet nurses, who provide milk for the babies, and fifteen trained nurses, who work in eight-hour shifts, live in the building...” The piece offers some rare details about the process:

An essential in saving prematures is a steady supply of mother’s milk of uniform quality. Dr. Couney engages four or five wet nurses at the beginning of each season. Each woman has a baby of her own, usually a full-term child, and they all

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<sup>334</sup> Prentice, 389.

<sup>335</sup> William Silverman, “Incubator-Baby Side Shows,” *Pediatrics* 64 (August 1979): 127–41.

<sup>336</sup> *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 4, 1928, 3, Newspapers.com (accessed July 27, 2017).

live at the concession from one end of the season to the other. Dr. Couney is very kind to them, doing his best to protect them from any experience which might make them nervous and thus affect their supply of milk. The wet nurses eat virtually all day -- good, milk producing food. If Dr. Couney catches one having a hot dog or an orange drink outside, he fires her. He wouldn't care to use milk which is available now at the mother's milk bureaus operating in most large cities, because, he says, the social workers who collect the milk have no control over the mothers' diet. Dr. Couney's wet nurses' surplus milk, expressed by hand, is boiled to get rid of excess butter fat. Before being fed to the babies, it is diluted according to a formula which differs for each patient. A preemie, if all goes well, should gain about twenty grams a day, or a pound every three weeks.<sup>337</sup>

Couney rejected milk from the Mother's Bureau precisely because he could not control the processes through which it was produced, stored, and transported. In each of these states, its quality could be compromised. Instead, he designed spaces and systems through which he could control each of these elements, hiring a cook, dictating the diet, housing the wet nurses on-site, and above all, closely monitoring them. Each month, he paid \$240 for human milk, and spent \$720 on food for the wet nurses.<sup>338</sup>

This is the peculiar, but very common, dynamic of wet nurses in American history: often well nourished but surveilled, and all to produce good milk. Couney was progressive, again, in allowing wet nurses to keep their own children with them, which was not always the case. As is typical of wet nurses in history, there is very little information recorded about them beyond what they ate and produced; there is nothing from their own perspective.

Nurses appear in the textual and visual record, but wet nurses are concealed. Couney did pick up on a curiosity to see the inner-workings of his "institution," and

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<sup>337</sup> A. J. Liebling, "Patron of the Preemies," *New Yorker*, June 3, 1939, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1939/06/03/patron-of-the-preemies>.

<sup>338</sup> Claire Prentice, *Miracle at Coney Island: How a Sideshow Doctor Saved Thousands of Babies and Transformed American Medicine*, n.d. (self-pub., 2016), 1196.

installed a plate glass window so that visitors had a view of the nurses changing and feeding the infants. In this photograph (fig. 5.11), Nurse Hildegard Couney holds a very small premature infant, carefully cradling his head in her hand. She gazes lovingly down on him, while his eyes remain closed. She feeds him with a bottle, administering the wet nurses' milk. This image conveys how carefully constructed the display spaces were: while the infant, the nurse, and the milk are intentionally exposed in a way that highlights the unusual size of the infant and the affective care of the nurse, the wet nurses themselves are hidden from the public's gaze. That they were not exhibited along with the entire spectacle is notable and their unrelenting absence underscores a lack of agency. Couney designed the building so that certain elements were visible to paying customers, while the labor occurred out of sight, in this case separate, attached quarters, where the wet nurses could be closely monitored yet concealed from the public eye. The absence of the laborer and visibility of the commodity, is of course, not unusual. If we consider a commodity to be a symbol of invisible labor, in this case the milk stands in for the women who labored to both produce and express it.

The wet nurses can only be found in deep archival searches. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 24, 1915: "Wanted, wet nurses for infant incubator, Luna Park, Coney Island; \$30 per month; no work; plenty to eat. Phone 1409 Coney Island." What can be said about a want ad, offering pay and a promise of no work? It certainly signals a complex perspective of lactation labor and the monetary value thereof that persists to this day.

### **Reclaiming Human Milk From Dairymen**

The milk banks established during the first decades of the twentieth century were

led by white medical men and male scientists. Alfred Bosworth, Francis Denny, Fritz Talbot, and Paul Emerson in Boston. Raymond Hoobler and Henry Chapin in New York. If women were involved in running the banks, initially, it was in subordinated roles, such as nurses or matrons. And for most of this century, exploitation was either at the center or periphery of these initiatives.

Breaking with this pattern, the New York Milk Bank, which opened in 2016 is a deliberately female organization. It was founded by Julie Bouchet-Horowitz, who also serves as its inaugural director, and currently only employs women. The bank's partnership with The Sirens Women's Motorcycle of New York, the oldest and largest women's motorcycle club in New York, is another testament to milk banking's embrace of women's empowerment. The use of volunteer drivers to ship milk around is not new in milk banking history,<sup>339</sup> but the idea of partnering with a female volunteer organization is.

The partnership of the New York Milk Bank and The Sirens Motorcycle club has been fruitful, an unexpected success. As Julie Bouchet-Horowitz describes it, one of the benefits of collaborating with the Sirens is "working with another women's organization, and we're a mostly female organization and women are the ones that are pumping and donating milk. So it's women helping women helping women helping babies. That's how I look at it. It's a great circle that goes around."<sup>340</sup> In this photograph (fig. 5.12), Bouchet-Horowitz, Baquial, and Vice President KT Ballantine celebrate the grand opening of the New York Milk Bank in 2016, at the very beginning of their collaboration.

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<sup>339</sup> Pineau, "Liquid Gold," 90.

<sup>340</sup> Pineau, 90.

In November of 2016, *The New York Post* published a story on the Sirens and The New York Milk Bank, with an accompanying video that went viral on social media. On Facebook alone, it was viewed over two million times (fig. 5.13). While it generated positive attention for milk donation and banking, it was imperfect in representing the Sirens. The headline alone was sensational and incorrect: “This badass lesbian motorcycle gang delivers human milk to babies,” as was the subheading: “To reach these babies in time, the Milk Bank is getting help from an unlikely source: a group of fun-loving lesbian bikers.” Members were quick to point out that they accept all women regardless of their sexual orientation, and trans women are welcome as well; in fact, that is foundational to the organization since it was established in 1986. The club initially formed because women could only join motorcycle clubs as the property of male riders. Moreover, the club is a safe space for women to feel comfortable presenting themselves in any way they choose, freed from outdated conceptions of gender as a binary. They come to the group with a variety of backgrounds and welcome members with identities that cross race, class, gender, sexuality, and professional and educational backgrounds.

Asked about the eruption of media attention that followed *The New York Post* article, founding member Cheryl Stewart, who is featured at the center of this photo (fig. 5.14) responded, “We’ve got all this attention at a moment in time that I can say for the first time in my life: it’s not legal to discriminate against me in any way for any reason in this state at this time. I am protected from discrimination. If we weren’t in this moment... all this attention would feel very threatening. To be very honest, all this attention would make us really nervous. And soon we’re going to go back to normal (without all the press) and that’s just fine by me. But to other people (the attention) might be either

intimidating or perhaps intoxicating.”<sup>341</sup> On delivering milk, she says, “we’re at an advantage to do service because of our vehicles, and it’s a lovely feeling.” It certainly was a request she had not expected. “We had no idea what this was... we said ‘sure.. what?! Really?! That’s a thing?! We really had no idea about it and none of us were experts, but we were happy to help.’”<sup>342</sup>

That the Sirens’ primary emblem (fig. 5.15) includes prominently bared breasts is both serendipitous coincidence and also speaks subtly to something shared between the motorcycle club and the Milk Bank. When the club formed, Stewart participated in early discussions about how the group wanted to create an identity that reflected their objectives. Motorcycle clubs carefully construct what is known as their “colors,” the emblems that identify members, usually large patches adhered to the backs of leather jackets upon initiation. Traditionally, colors are designed to invoke fear through malevolent creatures. The group of women settled on The Siren as their emblem and founding member Lori Taube, who was a motorcycle safety instructor and graphic artist and has since passed away, designed the group’s colors. Cheryl Stewart relays:

She created the image of a mythical feminine Siren holding a labrys, which is a double headed axe reputed to have been a weapon used by Amazon warriors, and which many lesbians wore as a symbol and a sisterhood signal back then. She added the less traditional wings because—why not? They served to augment the magical image and connect us to the many riders who equate the intense feeling of freedom we achieve while riding motorcycles with flying. The green coloring of the Sirens body was also a deliberate choice made to elevate the feminine image further into the realm of the fantastic.”<sup>343</sup>

Taube recognized The Sirens’ unique position as a women’s club in a male-dominated culture, in which the men chose to visually represent themselves as dangerous and

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<sup>341</sup> Cheryl Stewart, interview with Hannah Ryan April 18, 2017.

<sup>342</sup> Stewart.

<sup>343</sup> Stewart.

fearsome, prone to violence among themselves and against women. And these clubs did at times present a real threat to women motorcyclists, whereas the Sirens created a safe and enjoyable space for each other. As Stewart recalls, “I probably don’t need to tell you that mythical Sirens were believed to lure sailors to their deaths with their seductive songs. From our less hetero-centric perspective, Sirens would have been joyfully singing and cavorting with one another. No one can ever adequately explain why men foolishly throw themselves off perfectly good boats.”<sup>344</sup>

The group is compelling, indeed, and attention has yet to wane. The “Milk Riders,” as they have been dubbed, were featured on ABC World News Tonight in 2017 in honor of International Breastfeeding Week. In June 2017 they were featured on CNN’s Great Big Story, and the group felt this short film represented them well. When asked if the attention has been surprising, Baquial responds with a laugh, “Yes. Very much so. I blame *The New York Post*. We’re everywhere. We’re the “Mommies’ Crush in *Parents Magazine*. When *Parenting Magazine* emailed me ‘we want to do a little thing, the Mommies’ Crush Feature,’ I said, ‘Wait, so mommies are crushing on us now?’ Sounds weird.”<sup>345</sup> Baquial laughs again. Like most of the Sirens, she is surprised by the media attention, but very happy by the surprising ways in which it has allowed her group to connect with other women from all backgrounds. “I think it’s really beautiful because I would never in any sort of way have crossed paths socially or probably ever with Julie and those women in Westchester... really, now that we have crossed paths, we have this cool relationship and we have them coming to our [Sirens] holiday party, [and I warned them] ‘okay, you gotta be comfortable with some things! You know, we don’t hold back

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<sup>344</sup> Stewart.

<sup>345</sup> Jen Baquial, interview with Hannah Ryan, April 18, 2017.

‘cause we are who we are.’ Reciprocally, the partnership with the Sirens has opened up milk collection and distribution beyond its core group of white, straight, middle-class women. As Julie Bouchet-Horwitz points out,

“They’re [the milk riders] very different from us, you know. We’re straight, white women . . . and [they’re made up of different backgrounds, ethnicities, shapes and gender preferences]. You know we’re medically oriented, and being able to work with each other in a wonderful way to provide a service for the most vulnerable babies in New York. I mean with all that’s going on politically in our country, this was a shining light, that these two groups could merge and work together and push forward to help a vulnerable group of babies.”<sup>346</sup>

The Sirens’ highly publicized involvement in milk banking contributes to unraveling the oppressive hetero-normative and repro-normative dimensions of contemporary breastfeeding and milk banking cultures.<sup>347</sup> Breastfeeding is typically seen as the paradigmatic female activity, epitomizing women’s supposedly innate motherly and self-giving qualities. Milk banking, as noted above, relies upon these assumptions by endorsing the principle of unpaid donations. Yet when the Sirens transport milk around New York, they are representatives of a world where breastfeeding and lactation can be ungendered, be it because male identified parents breastfeed or because parents and caregivers of any gender or no gender participate in breastfeeding either by producing milk themselves or by using donor milk to feed children.

It is not only very different groups of women working together, but also a collaboration allowing the milk itself to circulate more readily and visibly among recipients of all walks of life. The Sirens connect women from extremely diverse backgrounds with one another. Baquial says, “The different types of women that we

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<sup>346</sup> Bouchet-Horwitz, interview.

<sup>347</sup> Mathilde Cohen, “The Lactating Man,” in *Making Milk: The Past, Present and Future of Our Primary Food*, ed. Mathilde Cohen and Yoriko Otomo (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 141–60.

deliver to... I took [a delivery] a couple of weeks ago to this huge apartment on 52<sup>nd</sup> Street in the middle of Manhattan, a huge thing. It was so nice. I don't know... she definitely didn't need us to deliver in any kind of way, but we did it. . . . two weeks prior to that, I took milk to a woman in the Bronx who clearly needed us to help her out to get it there and the milk bank was giving her this milk, without a fee. So, it's like, all right the milk bank is doing a lot just to help where they can."<sup>348</sup> Part of that is advocating for more equitable distribution, through both governmental and insurance policies.

Shot on Baquial's phone, this photo (Fig. 5.16) captures a connection made through this collaboration, as members of the Sirens deliver milk to a mother and baby. Over the course of several deliveries, they got to know each other, and here the Sirens invited the baby to pose for a photograph in a visual celebration. The baby sits atop the motorcycle, and again, the contradiction of vulnerability and strength is compelling. One would imagine a motorcycle to be a completely unsafe place for an baby to sit, but this one has the hands of five women holding her, like five lifeguards watching a child splash in a kiddie pool. It is, ironically, the safest place she could be; the composition of this group reinforces the mission at the heart of the collaboration: the wellbeing of vulnerable babies. It emanates with the joy of unexpected connections.

Baquial believes that the visibility of the collaboration may help milk banking to normalize milk banking nationally, and for her, the most important impact that could have is making "milk banking more normalized and affordable, so that all the women that need it can get it. I was shocked when I looked at the price!" Delivering a two-week supply recently, she noticed that the cost was \$2,500. "I had no idea that it could be that

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<sup>348</sup> Baquial, interview.

much money for just this product... it is outrageous! So, if it can become more affordable and the recent legislation that went through for Medicaid [to cover breast milk] is huge. If that can become a trend across the country, that would be awesome.”<sup>349</sup>

It is notable indeed that the collaboration between The New York Milk Bank and The Sirens Motorcycle Club marks the first moment in a century of milk banking and delivery in New York in which the entire operation is led and implemented by women. Both organizations are firmly devoted to increasing access to milk, racially and socio-economically.

For the Sirens, this goal is aligned with a long history of community service to support women’s and LGBTQ health. Baquial explains, “Because we are a small organization, we look for other small organizations that need help in a way that make some sort of contribution. I try to encourage the club to give their own suggestions.”<sup>350</sup> Over the years they have volunteered with an organization that provides legal representation to women in need, another that provides much needed medical care for the LGBTQ community, and as seen here, giving motorcycle rides to terminally ill girls at Camp Simcha (fig. 5.17). While it is certainly the most visible of their volunteer activities, delivering milk is but one service among many through which The Sirens have supported vulnerable women and children and the LGBTQ community of New York. They will continue to do so long after the public fascination and adoration of the Milk Riders fades, though it shows no sign of dimming.

Many of the women became Sirens precisely for this commitment to community service. Recent pledge Molly Moser says, “It’s actually funny the way I found the Sirens.

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<sup>349</sup> Baquial.

<sup>350</sup> Baquial.

I'd been riding for six months and didn't have anyone to ride with. It didn't even occur to me to look for a club or something, though strangely that seems obvious now, but I was actually looking to do some volunteer job with my free time... So I looked through the events calendar at the LGBT Center [in The Village, where The Sirens hold their meetings], and saw this Sirens Motorcycle meeting. So I went to the meeting and the vibe, the atmosphere, and the attitude of everyone was so positive and good, I just knew I would pledge right away."<sup>351</sup> It hadn't crossed Moser's mind that soon she would be delivering human milk throughout the city. On her first run, she was shocked to be given seventy-five containers of milk. "Luckily I brought some extra cargo because it barely fit on the back of my bike. I had like a centimeter to spare. I rode to an address in the Bronx and brought up to this lady's apartment and she was there with her infant on her shoulder. I'd never done anything like that before. She was very appreciative, her baby was super cute, and it felt good."<sup>352</sup> Of the benefits of using motorcycles to transport milk, Moser says, "Well, obviously being able to zip around, in and out of traffic, being able to move quickly, and also it is efficient; gas is not a financial concern for us. We don't have to waste time finding a spot to park. Someday, it would be amazing to have a fleet of thousands of motorcycles and a high-tech way to connect us and dispatch people all over the city... that's what I'd like to see."<sup>353</sup>

Judy Salgado, who received her colors and was initiated into the club on the day we interviewed her, says she was drawn to the Sirens for the philosophies of the

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<sup>351</sup> Molly Moser, interview with Hannah Ryan, April 18, 2017.

<sup>352</sup> Moser.

<sup>353</sup> Moser.

organization. “I’m going into my twentieth year at the Fire Department.”<sup>354</sup> She says with a laugh, “I have been there longer than the furniture.”<sup>355</sup> She was drawn to the policies requiring sobriety while riding (not the norm among motorcycle clubs!), and an overarching commitment to safety. Salgado also has a deep and long-standing commitment to volunteerism and community service. She enjoys delivering milk and says, “I live about fifteen minutes from The Milk Bank, so sometimes it’s easy to pick up a run.” With a career in the fire department, she is used to emergency transport situations, so for Salgado, “to me this was like taking an easy drive, but I still consider it urgent. You still have children in that hospital that need this milk and it’s not like they can wait another two days for FedEx to drop it off.” She also appreciates the sense of female empowerment, teaching one another how to maintain their bikes... “There’s a lot of empowerment going on, through the underlining encouragement and support that exists within the club itself. It’s very subtle, but it’s there. And sometimes it can help you get through the day. It’s a real community.”<sup>356</sup>

For Baquial, the community has been indispensable. This photograph (fig. 5.18) emanates with the sense of joy and camaraderie the members feel about their shared mission, as they pause in the sun before delivering the box of milk that Baquial leans on. “I was a solo motorcyclist before moving to New York and never had queer community around me. All I wanted to do was ride my motorcycle in the Pride Parade. Once I found the Sirens, I knew I had found my family. My involvement with the club has been my passion now for the last six years. These women are my sisters. New York City and the

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<sup>354</sup> Judy Salgado, interview with Hannah Ryan, April 18, 2017.

<sup>355</sup> Salgado.

<sup>356</sup> Salgado.

club are home to me.”<sup>357</sup> Connecting two distinct communities, the Milk Bank and the Sirens, has benefited the city of New York in impactful and inspiring ways.

## Conclusion

What has changed if anything in one hundred years of milk banking in New York? As institutions, today’s milk banks are remarkably similar to their predecessors: for the most part, they remain non-profit organizations under medical supervision. They rely on technologies such as refrigeration, freezing, pooling, bacterial testing, and pasteurization, which by and large have remained unchanged since the 1910s. But socio-culturally, milk banks have evolved a great deal, especially in terms of the female labor involved to produce milk and transport. The metaphor of “a breast milk dairy,”<sup>358</sup> which was probably accurate to describe the Mothers’ Bureau in 1923, no longer captures the labor conditions of milk providers. In some respects, the labor of present-day donors has become *more* invisible than that of their predecessors’—they express their milk in seclusion and are unpaid. Jill Lepore’s assertion about contemporary breastfeeding culture, “[b]ehind closed doors, the nation begins to look like a giant human dairy farm,”<sup>359</sup> is particularly fitting to describe the present moment in milk banking.

Yet, in a century of milk moving through New York City, there is suddenly a tremendous and unprecedented amount of visibility. How will all of this attention to The Sirens and The New York Milk Bank impact milk banking practices in the United States and abroad? And how will a collaboration between women-led organizations, each with a

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<sup>357</sup> Baquial, interview.

<sup>358</sup> Chapin, “Breast Milk Dairy,” 200-202.

<sup>359</sup> Jill Lepore, “Baby Food: If Breast Is Best, Why Are Women Bottling Their Milk?,” *New Yorker*, January 19, 2009, 35.

commitment to democratization, alter systems that for a century have been subject to exploitative interests? With increased visibility, will milk donation and banking, even breastfeeding itself, become normalized to the degree that our cultural perception of what is acceptable to view, evolve?

## Epilogue

### Visualizing the Past & Future

#### Hypocrisy

In August of 2017, British mother Kat Joyce was touring the Victoria and Albert Museum, when, in her words she, “Flashed a nanosecond of nipple while breastfeeding and was asked to cover up in V&A courtyard. Am perplexed...” She included a photo of herself (looking appropriately puzzled) holding her son next to the terracotta sculpture *Peasant Woman Nursing a Baby* (1873) by Aimé-Jules Dalou (fig. E.1). She went on to say the incident was the first time she had been asked to cover up while nursing and she was particularly bemused, considering the museum is quite literally full of bared breasts and otherwise nude bodies. She tweeted, “If people really want an eyeful of boob there are plenty to choose from, mostly far more exquisite than mine and unimpeded by a writhing toddler.” Embarking on a bared breast tour of the museum and posting the images to Twitter, Joyce’s revelation of this hypocrisy went viral (currently nearly 8,000 re-tweets and 15,000 likes) and caused a media sensation. That this occurred during International Breastfeeding Week only increased attention to her posts.

The museum’s director, Tristram Hunt, apologized via Twitter: @vaguechera V sorry. Our policy is clear: women may breastfeed wherever they like, wherever they feel comfortable & shld [sic] not be disturbed.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Tristram Hunt (@TristramHuntVA), “.@vaguechera V Sorry. Our policy is clear: women may breastfeed wherever they like, wherever they feel comfortable & shld not be disturbed,” Twitter, August 5, 2017, 8:11 a.m., <https://twitter.com/TristramHuntVA/status/893851956040650753>.

Experts were asked for comment, and Neena Modi, president of the Royal College remarked, “Regrettably the attitudes of a large part of society mean breastfeeding is not always encouraged; local support is patchy, advice is not always consistent and often overly dogmatic, support in the workplace not always conducive to continued breastfeeding... And perhaps, most worryingly, breastfeeding in public is still often stigmatized. It is no wonder that for many mothers, there are too many barriers.”<sup>361</sup>

Reflecting on her viral moment, Joyce said she thought it had gained cultural significance because, “Embarrassment about breastfeeding [is] still one of the most common reasons that women give up.”<sup>362</sup>

Of course, museums are not monoliths but made of many individual people with their own unique values, and policies crafted in the boardroom are not always enacted on the floor. As an anonymous staff member of a major American museum recently relayed to me:

My institution currently has had a lot of issues with gallery attendants asking breastfeeding women to move themselves to different parts of the museum. It’s of course not the official policy (as that would be illegal), but there has definitely been some disconnect or miscommunication with gallery attendants, and I’ve seen women complaining about it on local mom group pages. Attendants often attempt to move breastfeeding women to a less visible area (there’s a little kids room with toys and books and things on the first level), and it seems that many of them view this as a more acceptable place to breastfeed their babies. When reported, attendants are reprimanded, but I’ve heard it a lot from local moms, and seen it on online reviews of the museum.

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<sup>361</sup> Rachael Pells, “V&A Museum Forced to Apologise after Telling Breastfeeding Mother to ‘Cover Up,’” August 6, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/breastfeeding-mother-told-to-cover-up-victoria-albert-museum-kensington-london-a7879281.html>.

<sup>362</sup> Pells.

This woman works as both a museum professional and an adjunct art history instructor, and offered her perspective as a lactating mother working in these connected fields:

I was only lactating/working one semester, when I was an adjunct professor at [top-tier American university]. When they asked me to teach that semester I felt awkward about it, because as an adjunct I of course had no office to myself, only a shared office that adjuncts could use on their teaching days. I only felt comfortable telling the chair about my pumping needs because he was so kind, and also a father of 3, so I knew he'd get it. He immediately offered his office, which was really nice, but still felt awkward since that was his space (he would've been gone of course while I used it). Even with this offer it still was not possible for me to teach because my classes were back to back, so that left me only 15 minutes between, which is not enough time to wrap up a class, get to the office, set it all up, pump for 15-20 min, and then bring the bottles down to the refrigerator which was on a different floor and shared by the department, and then get back and set up for the next class. In the end it was untenable, and I ended up not teaching there that semester, which was disappointing. I'm sure if I'd asked the university they could've provided some sort of official lactation room, but who knows what building that would've been in. Plus, with a child in day care, time is money, and I couldn't afford to wait an entire class length in between just so that I could do the pump routine.

This testimony is not at all unique, as women struggle to work while lactating and institutions facilitate this endeavor with varying degrees of success. While culminating this years-long project, I find the hypocrisies most glaring in the spaces in which nude breasts are most visibly displayed—cultural institutions and universities—but actual, lactating breasts are met with anxiety and hidden from sight.

What is it about the sight of breastfeeding that people find so revolting? How is this hypocrisy possible in institutions that house thousands of bared breasts? How is it possible in societies in which breasts are bared in such copious amounts, to the degree that they are completely normal and acceptable on television, in advertising, and throughout visual culture? Is it the function? The substance? The act? That this body part

has been sexualized, perhaps to an inappropriate degree?<sup>363</sup> Or does a common reaction rooted in the grotesque signal something else? Perhaps, as Julia Kristeva suggests through her concept of the abject, outlined in *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, that viewing bodily secretions causes an adverse reaction because they remind human beings of their materiality.<sup>364</sup>

Like Joyce, I conclude that this exercise of revealing hypocrisy is important in combatting the shame and turmoil that women experience, especially when many are already anxious about revealing their own bodies in public spaces, are unused to doing so, and have no access to alternative private spaces. Ultimately, what I hope this project contributes to the field of art history is a means of radicalizing perception through normalization. The abundance of imagery confronts and subverts the oppression that nursing women and children have faced and endured, thereby providing alternative histories of America.

### **Artists**

Some contemporary artists are keenly aware of the tension of lactation imagery and deploy lactation as a means to make impactful social commentary. This commentary touches on maternity, and contextualizes it historically and mythologically, and also comments on cultural, racial, and gendered encounters of the past, some of which are discussed in this project.

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<sup>363</sup> See Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, as outlined in *The Powers of Horror: does viewing bodily fluids and excrement cause an adverse reaction because they remind human beings of their materiality?*

<sup>364</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Alison Saar references lactation frequently in her body of work, a great deal of which grapples with maternity in a number of ways: historically, spiritually, and personally. In a lecture at Cornell's Johnson Museum of Art in April of 2015, she spoke about her mixed media sculpture, *Mammy Machine*, (2012) (fig. E.2), saying the process of creating this piece was an attempt on her part to better understand national resurgences of bigotry and racism. Consisting of a vintage washbasin, and a tall copper pipe from which dangle nine glass bottles in the shape of breasts in various shades of brown, the piece is automated and interactive: viewers can squeeze a pump to make water stream out of the nipples and into the tub. Structurally, it emulates a still used in liquor production. The cluster of severed breasts collectively lactating is a jarring and complex evocation of lactation.

As Barbara Thompson writes in her essay "Still Defined," which is part of the exhibition catalogue, "The 'still' clearly references stereotypes of women of color as washerwomen, mammies, and wet nurses, who take care of other people's children while leaving their own behind." Saar herself says, "Society still perpetuates them... a person of color is often paid a fraction of the salary as a white nanny." Thompson concludes "Society values the mammy, her milk, and labor as commodities thus demeaning the person. This makes the milk, Saar asserts, 'like dirty dish water.'"<sup>365</sup>

Saar's 2012 solo-exhibition at the Otis College of Art and Design broadly considered the term "still," including not just this visual evocation of a rudimentary machine, but the stubborn continuation of oppression and degradation. In her 2015 lecture, she discussed *Mammy Machine* and its reference to the historical culture of

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<sup>365</sup> Alison Saar and Meg Linton, *Alison Saar: Still...* (Los Angeles: Otis College of Art and Design, Ben Maltz Gallery, 2012).

nannies, of women taking care of each other's children. She said that this work was inspired by Barack Obama being elected president, and the "hideous things coming to light, that the nation was not ready for an African American President." Through this work, Saar attempted to better understand bigotry and racism, saying, "Break the stills, break the systems, resolve the issues."<sup>366</sup>

An earlier work, *Suckle* (2006) (fig. E. 3) is a wall installation comprised of a constellation of bronze skillets shaped like breasts. Here, Saar refers to the Dogon custom of adorning granary doors with breasts to protect their contents. Saar's process makes meaning: in this case, she found used skillets, and mounded caked grease to each surface, to create a rounded breast that fills the skillet; in doing so she memorializes the women who cooked over them. The materiality—the durable iron skillet—further references women's resilience as providers, nurturers, and protectors. In her 2015 lecture, Saar reflected on this piece and the long-standing and cross-cultural responsibility of women bringing "nutrition" to their communities; in *Suckle* she brilliantly evokes this responsibility through an amalgamation of breast and skillet, nursing and cooking.

Like her mother, artist Betye Saar, Alison is also interested in mysticism and mythology. In several works, Alison considers the role of breast milk in myths. In *Via Lactea* (2013) (fig. E. 4), milk streams from the breasts of a female form suspended above the viewer. This piece visually references the Greek myth of the formation of the Milky Way (in Latin, *Via Lactea*), in which the Milky Way is created when Juno spills her milk when Zeus attempted to let Jupiter nurse at her breast while she sleeps. In Roman mythology, the Milky Way is also spilled milk, in this case the milk a mother

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<sup>366</sup> Alison Saar, "Artist Lecture" (Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, April 24, 2015).

spilled while attempting to save her baby from a murderous Saturn. Trying to trick Saturn, she replaced her baby with a stone, and when Saturn asked her to breastfeed, her milk spilled out, creating the Milky Way.

In “Sea of Nectar” (2008) (fig. E. 5), Saar harkens maternal mourning, through a moment in the saga of Demeter, the mother of Persephone, who was abducted by Hades and kidnapped to the underworld. Mourning the loss of her daughter, and yearning for her child, she wrests milk from her breast so that it can soak into the ground and reach Persephone. Saar’s life-size maternal form, with milk flowing abundantly into the ground, serves as a palpable symbol of motherly yearning and loss.

A related piece, “Equinox” (2008) (fig. E. 6) visually conveys the connectivity of Demeter and Persephone, and thus mother and daughter. As Demeter’s milk flows into the ground, Persephone holds two pomegranates, and in Saar’s words, “with their juice flowing upward to merge with the mother’s milk.” Two female forms are inverted, with feet touching, while torrents of milk fall from the top figure, and reach the juice flowing from the bottom form. The milk is white and the juice is the deep red of pomegranates, through which Saar references the original myth, in which Persephone was forced to stay in the underworld because she had eaten pomegranate seeds, and is only allowed to visit her mother for short amounts of time. *Equinox* builds upon *Sea of Nectar* to evoke not just maternal longing, but a mother and daughter’s shared longing for one another, when separated. These works are emblematic of Saar’s ability to convey ideas that are political, historical, mythological, and extremely personal through sophisticated techniques and an adept engagement of maternal and lactation imagery.

In 1994, Cuban-American artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons created a series of performance-based photographs, *When I Am Not Here/Estoy Allá*. In these large format Polaroids, she uses her own body as a subject through which to explore issues of identity, memory, and migration. In the first image in the series, the artist's nude torso fills the frame (fig. E.7). Situated against a deep blue background, her body is painted like the sea, covered in dark blue paint and white waves. In her hands, she holds a boat, carved from a piece of wood. Two baby bottles, full of milk, are hung around her neck and held in place just atop her breasts by a white cord. The rubber nipples of the bottles are placed very close to her own nipples, and very small and bright white drops of milk emerge from the bottles and her breasts. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that her breasts have in fact been leaking milk, as many dark streaks emanate from her nipples to the bottom of her breasts, smudging rivers through the blue paint. The milk from the bottles drops into the wooden boat, which is full of milk.

With this work, Campos-Pons positions her body as Cuba, an island surrounded by water, and thus as both mother and motherland. The simultaneity of her breasts and the bottles releasing milk can be interpreted as a metaphor for the coexistence of Cuban culture, represented by her breasts, overlaid by an unnatural apparatus signaling industrialization and thus modernization, via colonialism. The bottles are not just unnatural but superfluous to her flowing milk, unnecessary, and thus subverting the patriarchal notion of Cuba as “undeveloped” and in need of industrialization, post-decolonization. Thus, this photograph can be read as a decolonial image that deploys breastfeeding in its message making.

The photograph can also be interpreted as an embodiment of creolization via the transatlantic slave trade (represented by the boat), her body representing the Yoruba orisha Yemaya, a deity of the ocean who is also the essence of motherhood. Yemaya the deity came to the Caribbean and Americas via the slavery and has continued to be a prominent figure within Afro-American religions. In Cuba, Yemaya manifests within Santeria as the mother of all living things and owner of all of the seas and, as here, is represented by the colors blue and white.<sup>367</sup> Campos-Pons thus embodies and evokes a figure that exists *in spite of* colonization and slavery, and indeed, as a breastfeeding figure, can be read against the Madonna and Child, an icon of conversion and thus a tool of colonization of the Americas.

While Saar and Campos-Pons are not alone in deploying lactation imagery in their work, they do so in uniquely powerful ways, by thinking about motherhood, maternity, and intimacy as not separate from slavery and colonization, but inherently connected and strategically exploited by these systems. They also pointedly assert that these systems do not lie dormant in the distant past, but mutate and adapt to remain present in America, as Saar puts it, “still.”

## **Lessons**

Milk is social. Milk is kinetic. Milk is a food, like others, through which we can track pathways and thus cultural and social interaction.

Milk is reviled. Milk is feared. Milk elicits anxiety.

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<sup>367</sup> Rebecca Maksym, "Créolité and Cultural Cannibalism: Reconstructing Cuban Identity in the Work of Marta María Pérez Bravo and María Magdalena Campos-Pons" (PhD diss., University of Utah, 2012), 20–24.

Milk conveys meaning.

Throughout American history, milk and the women who produce it have been exploited in a number of troubling ways. Ultimately, I hope that this project allows the reader to see this exploitation via a variety of visual materials, and also to how women, particularly networks of women, have resisted these systems when possible:

While breastfeeding imagery was adopted by *casta* painters to enact a colonial regime of racial categorization, the codices reveal instead the vital role of midwives in supporting lactation. When important lactation and breast health-related knowledge was stolen, networks of women maintained and passed down data over the centuries.

When the midwives who supported women's health and lactation were disproportionately accused of witchcraft, and lactation was inappropriately taken up to accuse innocent women of witchcraft, these vulnerable women had very little agency to combat these systems of oppression and suffered immensely. Centuries later, the Second Wave Feminists spotlighted these histories, and now Intersectional Feminists have fully adopted the witch as an icon with which to combat patriarchal, racial, colonial, and especially, gendered violence. In doing so, witches are evoked in groups, and through these groups, wield significant agency, which was stripped from their forbearers. These groups are protective. Unsurprisingly, many of these evocations are rooted in anger, and this rage is funneled toward social change. As Lindy West so aptly put it in a New York Times op-ed on the #metoo movement, and sexist claims that it was nothing more than a "witch hunt" for powerful men like Harvey Weinstein and Woody Allen (President

Trump has a penchant for flagrant misuse of the term), “Yes, this is a witch hunt. I’m a witch and I’m hunting you.”<sup>368</sup>

When enslaved women were valued monetarily for their ability to reproduce and lactate, and were violently separated from their own children to do so, they implemented sophisticated methods of strategic breastfeeding in order to retain control of their fertility. Again, later women, like Toni Morrison, Alison Saar, and Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, endeavored to make this troubling history known through their literature and visual art.

When a confluence of corporate, agricultural, and government interests colluded to end breastfeeding, nurses created networks of milk donation and implementation for imperiled infants. Unmarried immigrants fought for the right to keep, rather than abandon, their own infants when seeking employment as wet nurses. And decades later, led by lactation consultants and midwives, women have pushed back against the systemic suppression of lactation through sharing knowledge, normalizing the sight of breastfeeding, and supporting one another in whatever way they choose to feed their children.

When realizing that preterm infants often needed donor breast milk to live, women formed milk banks, and innovative systems to move the milk. And while milk banking and transport received media attention as new phenomena, there exists a thriving but little-known century of milk donation, sale, and transport. Ultimately, today’s systems seem to thrive specifically because they are women-led and implemented, for the

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<sup>368</sup> Lindy West, “Yes, This Is a Witch Hunt. I’m a Witch and I’m Hunting You.,” *New York Times*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/17/opinion/columnists/weinstein-harassment-witchunt.html>.

first time. They point toward a bright future in the movement of milk, untethered by the patriarchal systems that have so stubbornly attempted to control and exploit milk for economic gain.

Held together, these divergent case studies align to address exploitation, resistance, networks, and how women today—artists, writers, mothers, feminists, intellectuals, even milk banks collaborating with motorcycle clubs—address historic forms of oppression. This is a process of addressing silence, or reacting to silencing. What is silence, as a verb, as its own system of oppression?

In 2017, American feminist essayist Rebecca Solnit published *The Mother of All Questions*, including an essay entitled “A Short History of Silence,” a meditation on silencing as a patriarchal technique to suppress women. In it, she quotes Ursula K. Le Guin, who wrote that women are like volcanoes, “new voices that are undersea volcanoes erupt in open water, and new islands are born... [in an] unmappable sea of unheard, unrecorded humanity.”<sup>369</sup>

Rooted in intersectional feminism, Solnit categorizes an evolving understanding of “woman” as “a long boulevard that intersects with many other avenues, including class, race, poverty and wealth.” She troubles the gender binary but acknowledges some ways in which the social construction of said binary have generated misinformation and distortions that can be revised. For example, she examines a 2000 UCLA study that problematized the original “fight or flight” stress response study, which was originally conducted solely by male scientists on male rats. When female subjects were included in the 2010 study, a third response was identified, which the scientists dubbed “tend and

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<sup>369</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *The Mother of All Questions* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 17–52.

befriend,” the tendency, when reacting to stressors, to come together to support and take care of one another. While the danger of this evocation is slippage into the gender binary and essentialism, Solnit’s evocation of this response is exceedingly illuminating when considering silence as a historic, patriarchal tool of oppression. In each of the case studies I present here, in response to significant stressors, women are clearly evidenced in this act of tending and befriending, both at the time of, and long after, the occurrence of trauma.

As I write these final lines, American culture is witnessing an eruption, much like the one Le Guin described: “new voices that are undersea volcanoes erupt in open water, and new islands are born [in an] unmappable sea of unheard, unrecorded humanity.” Silence as an oppressive force has become unbearable and it can no longer be tolerated. It never has been tolerable.

What does this mean for the visual life, the social life, and the kinetic life, of milk? I predict it will move more freely and become ever more visible and present. As will the people who produce and consume it.

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### Introduction

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Liquid Gold:  
Lactation as Labor and Human Milk as Commodity  
in Transatlantic Visual Culture

Hannah Ryan

Images

## Chapter 1

### *An Active Agent:* Lactation in Casta Paintings and Codices of Colonial Mexico



Fig. 1.1 Juan Rodriguez Juarez  
*Spaniard and Morisca Produce an Albino*  
1715-25



Fig. 1.2. Ignacio Maria Barreda  
*The Castas of New Spain*  
 1777



Fig. 1.3. Juan Rodriguez Juarez  
*Spaniard and Morisca Produce an  
Albino*  
1715-25



Fig. 1.4. Artist Unknown  
*Spaniard and Morisca Produce an Albino*  
1750



Fig. 1.5. Cihuacoatl / Midwife  
From Diego Duran  
*Historia de las Indias*  
pictorial manuscript  
1588

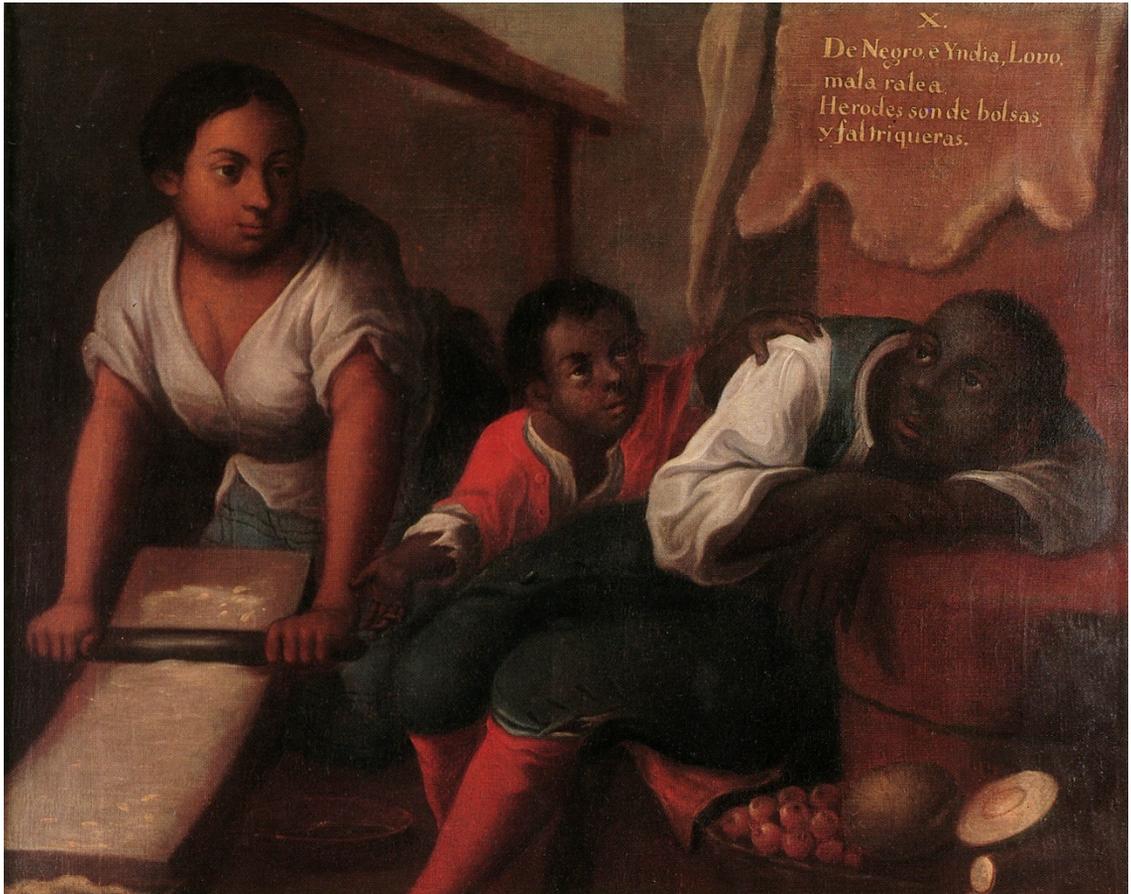


Fig. 1.6. Attributed to Jose Joaquin Magon  
*Panel 10: From Black father and Indian mother, the Lobo is bad blood:  
thieves and pickpockets*  
Date Unknown



Fig. 1.7. Attributed to Jose Joaquin Magon  
*Panel 11: From Lobo and Indian woman,*  
*the Cambujo is usually slow,*  
*lazy and cumbersome*  
Date Unknown



Fig. 1.8. Attributed to Jose Joaquin Magon  
*From Morisco and Spanish Woman, Albino*  
Date Unknown



Fig. 1.9. Attributed to Jose Joaquin Magon  
Panel 2: *A Mestizo father and Spanish mother  
give the Castizo early mastery of horsemanship*  
Date Unknown



Fig. 1.10. Attributed to Jose Joaquin Magon  
*Panel 3: The son of a Spaniard and Castizo woman  
takes entirely after his father*  
Date Unknown



Fig. 1.11. Andrés de Isla  
*From Spaniard and Mestizo Woman, Castizo*  
Date Unknown



Fig. 1.12. Artist Unknown  
*From Mestizo woman and Spaniard, Castizo*  
Date Unknown



Fig. 1.13. Juan Rodriguez Juarez,  
*Spaniard and Morisca Produce an Albino*,  
1715-25



Fig. 1.14. Unknown Artist,  
*Spaniard and Morisca Produce Albino*,  
1730-1750



Fig. 1.15. Unknown Artist,  
*From Spaniard and Morisca,*  
*Albino, 1780*



Fig. 1.16. Juan Patricio Morlete Ruiz,  
*Spaniard and Morisca, Albino*,  
1761



Fig. 1.17. Ignacio de Castro  
T) *From Spaniard and Mestiza, Castizo*  
B) *From Spaniard and Negra, Mulatta*  
1775-1800



Fig. 1.18. Unknown Artist  
T) *From Spaniard and Mestiza, Castizo*  
B) *From Spaniard and Negra, Mulatta*  
After Ignacio de Castro



Fig. 1.19. Ramon Torres  
*Panel 16: Indians*  
1770-80



Fig. 1.20 Juan Rodríguez Juárez  
*De español y negra produce mulato*,  
1725



Fig. 1.21. Codex Mendoza, Mexico City, c. 1542, folio 60r.



Fig. 1.22 Codex Mendoza,  
Folio 58

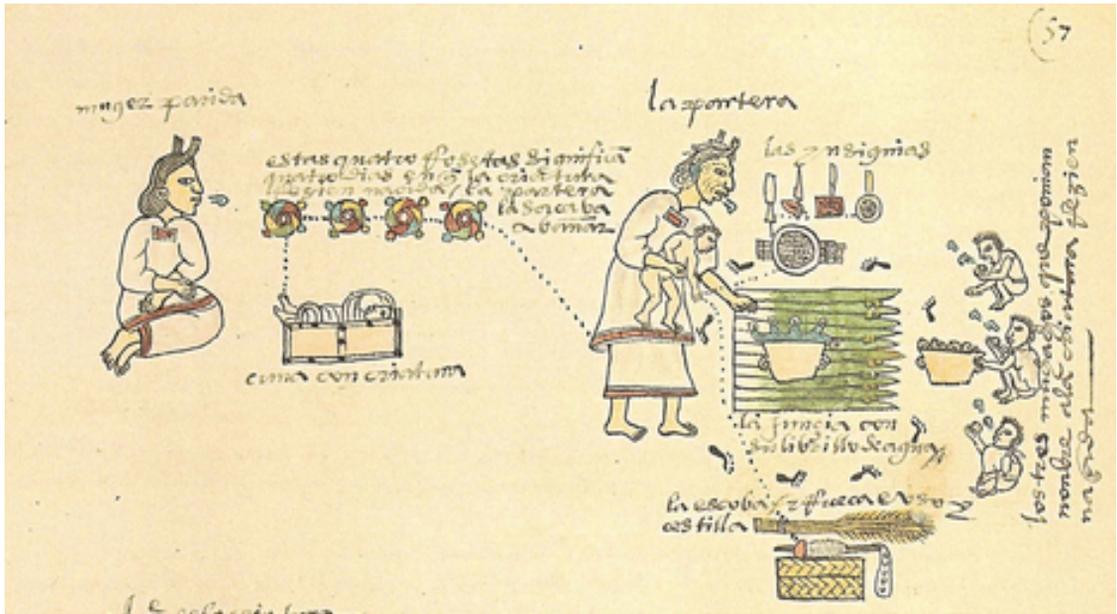


Fig. 1.23. Codex Mendoza,  
Naming Ceremony (Folio 57r)



Fig. 1.24. Codex de la Cruz-Badiano  
 Plate 111:  
 Medicine to produce lactation

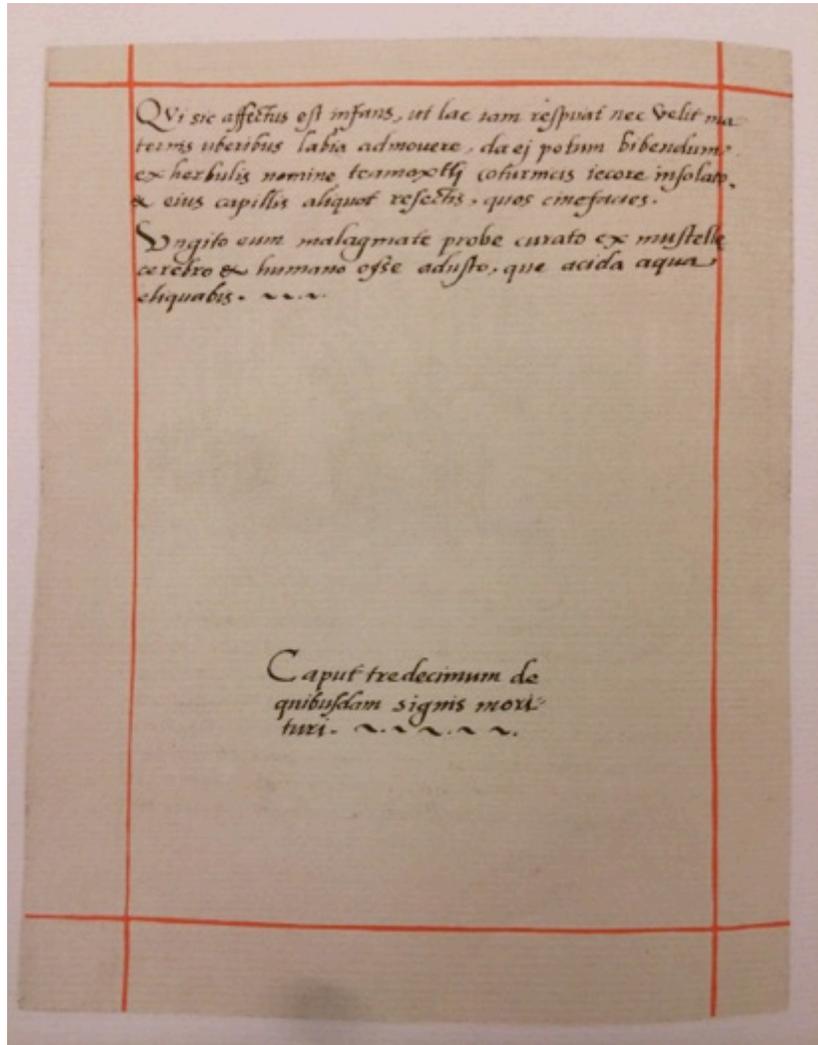


Fig. 1.25. Codex de la Cruz-Badiano  
Plate 114:  
When an infant is not willing to suck the breast  
because of some pain

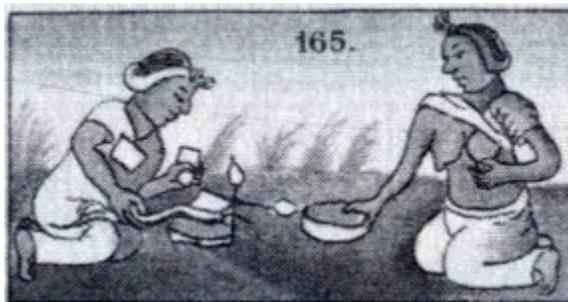


Fig. 1.26. Image 165 of the Florentine Codex, Book 10, Section 14: Instructions to aid lactation



Fig. 1.27 Florentine Codex:  
Ailments of the Body,  
Breastmilk as Remedy for Infant

## **Chapter 2**

### Lactation and the Midwife-Witch In Colonial New England



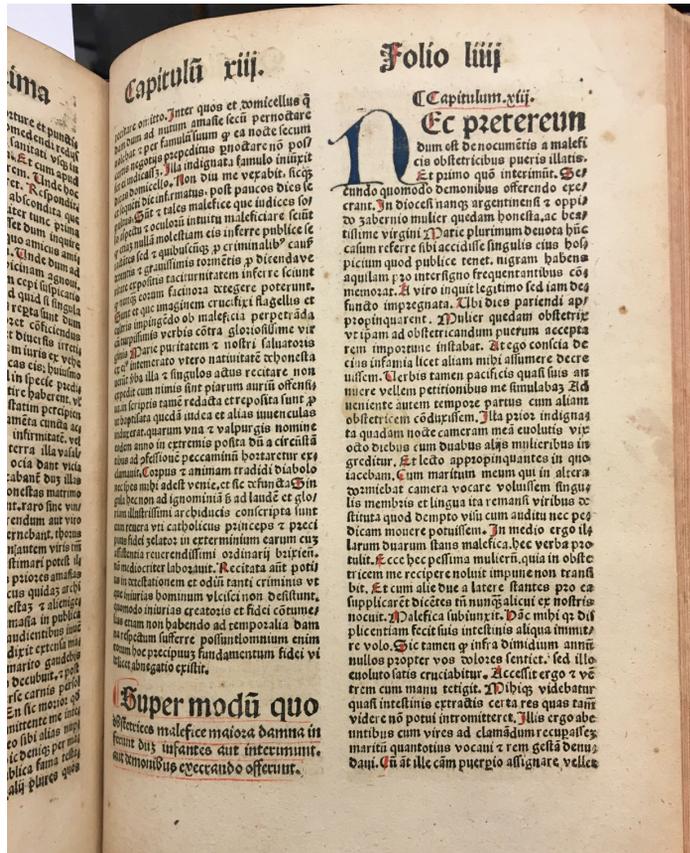


Fig. 2.2 Malleus Maleficarum  
1494, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition  
Cornell University  
Witchcraft Archive  
Folio 13, describing  
the midwife-witch



Fig. 2.3 Witches before a cauldron  
Woodcut, Molitor, De lamiis  
1489

Cornell University  
Witchcraft Archive



Fig. 2.4 Woman and devil embrace  
Woodcut, Molitor, De lamiis  
1489

Cornell University  
Witchcraft Archive



Fig. 2.5 Thompkins H. Matteson,  
"Examination of a Witch," 1853  
Peabody Essex Museum



Fig. 2.6 Cihuacoatl / Midwife  
From Diego Duran  
*Historia de las Indias*  
pictorial manuscript  
National Library of Spain



Fig. 2.7 Ehrenreich and English  
1973 pamphlet  
Feminist Press

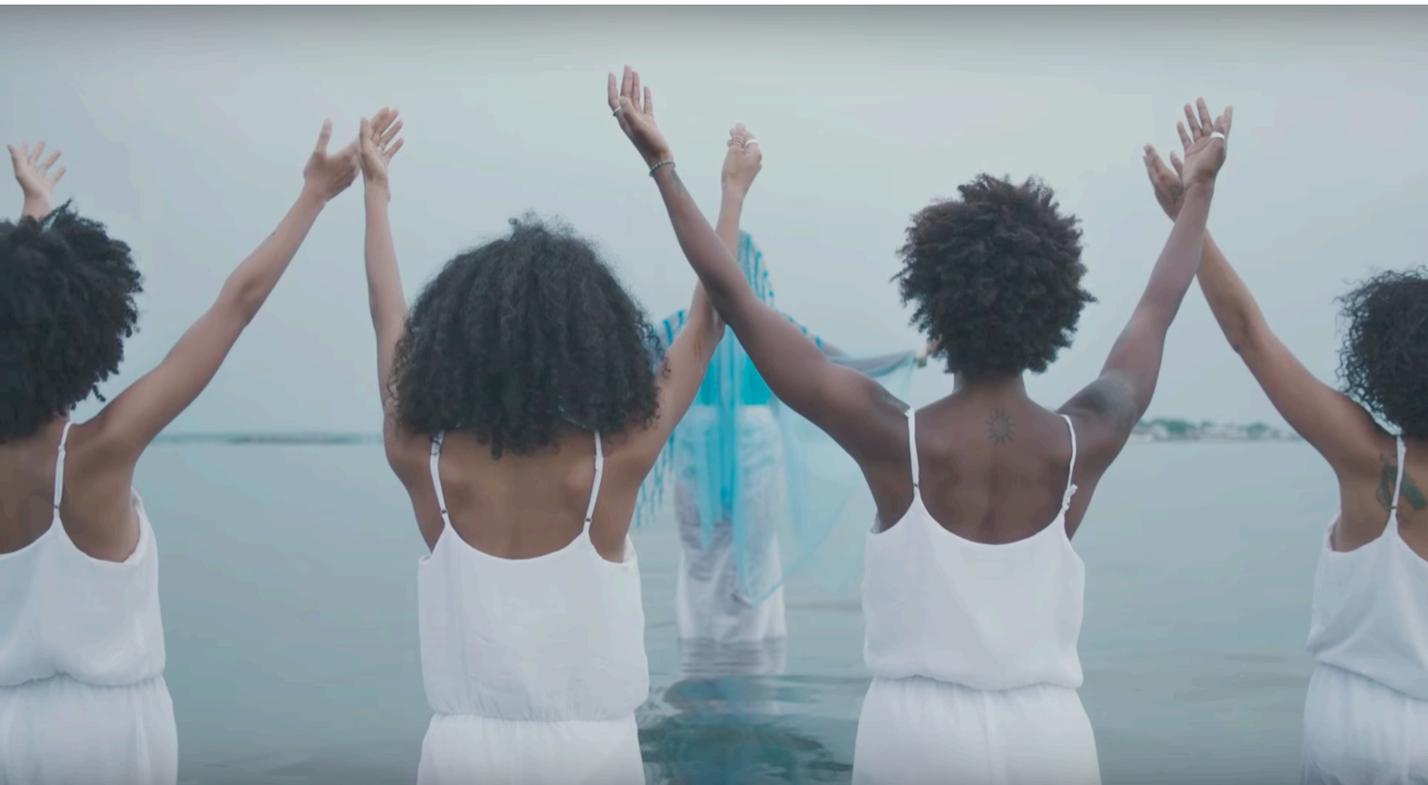


Fig. 2.8 Princess Nokia, *Brujas*, 2016



Fig. 2.9, Still from *The Craft*, 1996



Fig. 2.10 Princess Nokia, Brujas, 2016



Fig. 2.11 Still from Princess Nokia's "Young Girls," 2016



Fig. 2.12 Still from Princess Nokia's "Tom Boy," 2016



Fig. 2.13 Still from Princess Nokia's "Tom Boy," 2016

## **Chapter 3**

### Early Photographs of Enslaved Wet Nurses and Their Charges In the American South

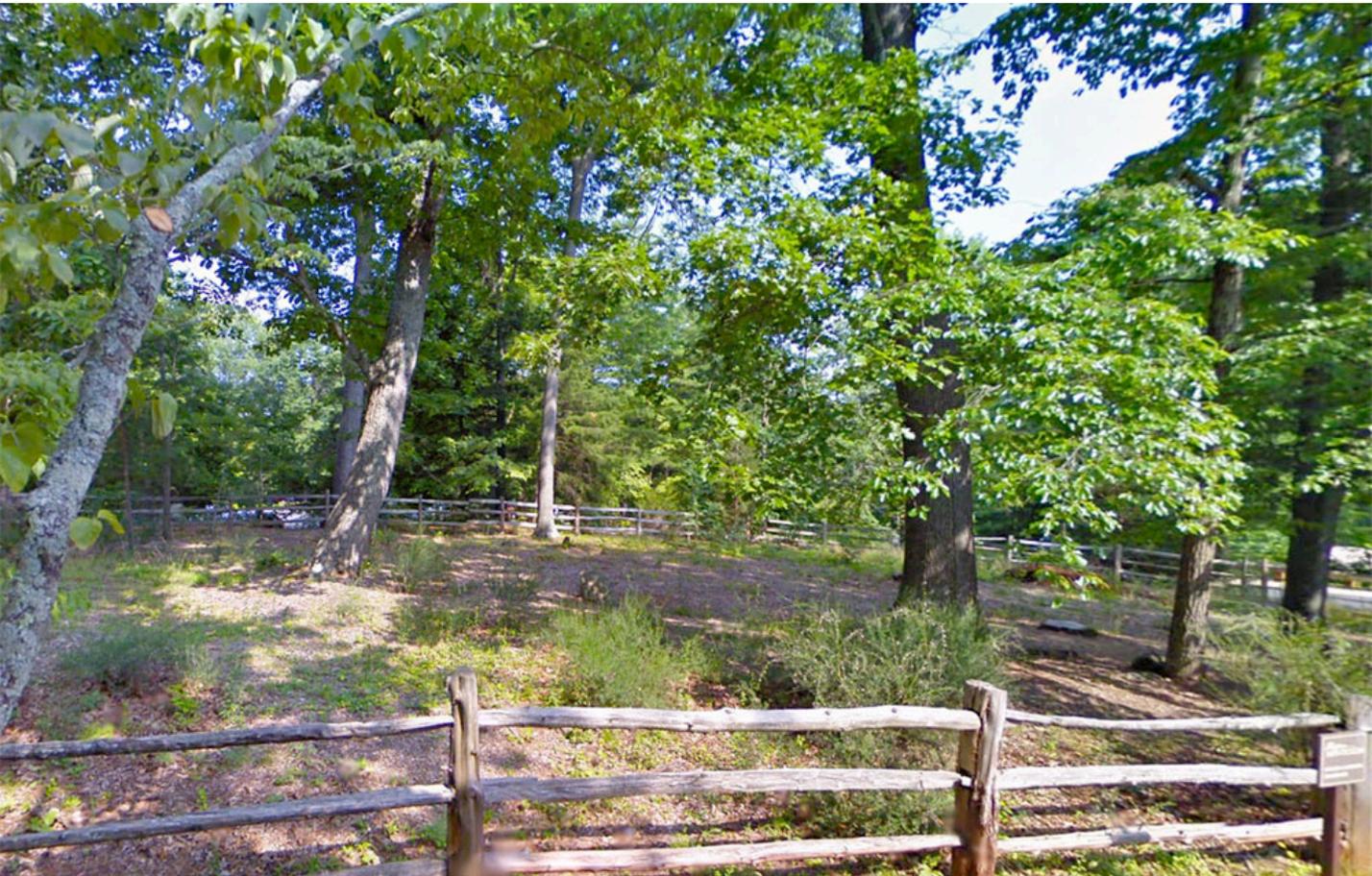


Fig. 3.1 The Burial Ground for Enslaved People at Monticello.  
Photo courtesy The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, n.d.



Fig. 3.2. *H.E. Hayward and Slave Nurse Louisa.*  
Ambrotype. 1858. Formerly in the Missouri  
History Museum, location currently unknown

STATE OF LOUISIANA, }  
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS. }

**Be it Known**, that this day, before me, *John G. Poindexter*  
a Notary Public, in and for the CITY and PARISH OF NEW ORLEANS, State of Louisiana, duly commis-  
sioned and sworn, and in presence of the witnesses hereinafter named and undersigned,

Personally came and appeared, *Josiah E. Isenhour* a  
member of the firm of *Horrell Gayle & Co.* of this city  
and herein representing said firm, who being agents  
of *Champ T. Stuart* of Powhatan in the State  
of Arkansas declared that in their said capac-  
ity they do for and in consideration of the  
price and sum of Nine hundred Dollars  
(\$900<sup>00/100</sup>) cash in ready current money at the  
execution of these presents to them in hand paid  
the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged and  
full acquittance and discharge granted thereof  
they do by these presents Grant, Bargain, Sell,  
Convey, Transfer & deliver with all legal eman-  
ciple unto *George A. Hayward* of this city here  
present accepting and purchasing for himself  
his heirs and assigns and acknowledging delivery  
and possession thereof the following described  
Share for life to wit *Louisa a dark Griffe*  
Eve man aged about twenty four years and  
fully guaranteed as to title and against the  
redemptory price, defects and vices whatsoever  
by the Laws of this State,  
*The purchase hereby*

Fig. 3.3. Part of Deed of sale signed by Josiah E. Isenhour, a member of the firm of Horrell Gayle & Co. of New Orleans, agents of Champ T. Stuart of Powhatan, Arkansas, April 30, 1858



Fig. 3.4. Portrait of D.L. Kernion with Slave and Nursemaid  
“Marguerite,” Louisiana State Museum Archives, 1850  
Item Location Number 08516.



Fig. 3.5 Portrait of D.L. Kernion with Slave and Nursemaid  
“Marguerite,” Louisiana State Museum Archives, 1850  
Item Location Number 08516



Fig. 3.6. Portrait of Nursemaid with Charge,  
Louisiana State Museum Archives, 1855-60  
Location Number 09818.5

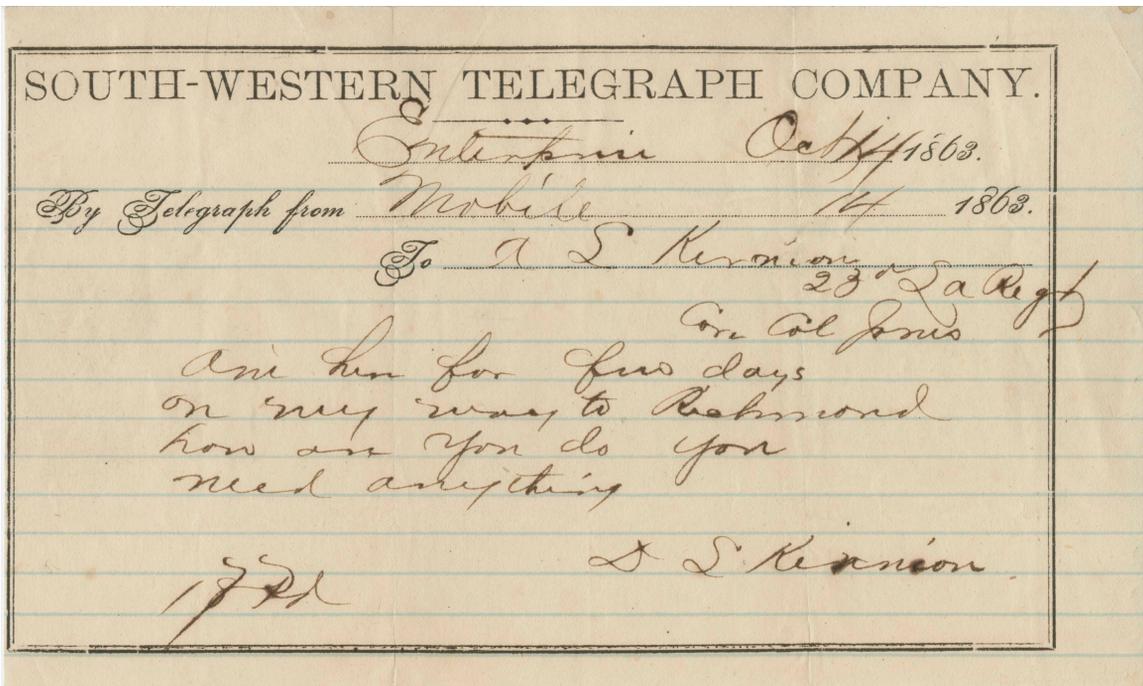


Fig. 3.7. “Telegram from D.L. Kernion, Mobile, [Alabama], to [Private?] A.L. [H.] Kernion, 23rd Louisiana Regiment, Enterprise, Mississippi (with Envelope) | Tulane University Digital Library.”



Fig. 3.8 Unknown maker (American)  
*Portrait of a Nurse and a Child*  
c. 1850 Daguerreotype, hand-colored  
1/6 plate, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Fig. 3.9 (Loew 1)

*Portraits of a nanny with a baby and two children*, mid-nineteenth century  
Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography  
Cornell University



Fig. 3.10 (Loew 2)  
Portrait of a nanny with a baby, mid-nineteenth century  
Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0505  
Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography  
Cornell University



Fig. 3.11 (Loew 3)

Portrait of a nanny with two children, mid-nineteenth century

Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0502

Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography

Cornell University

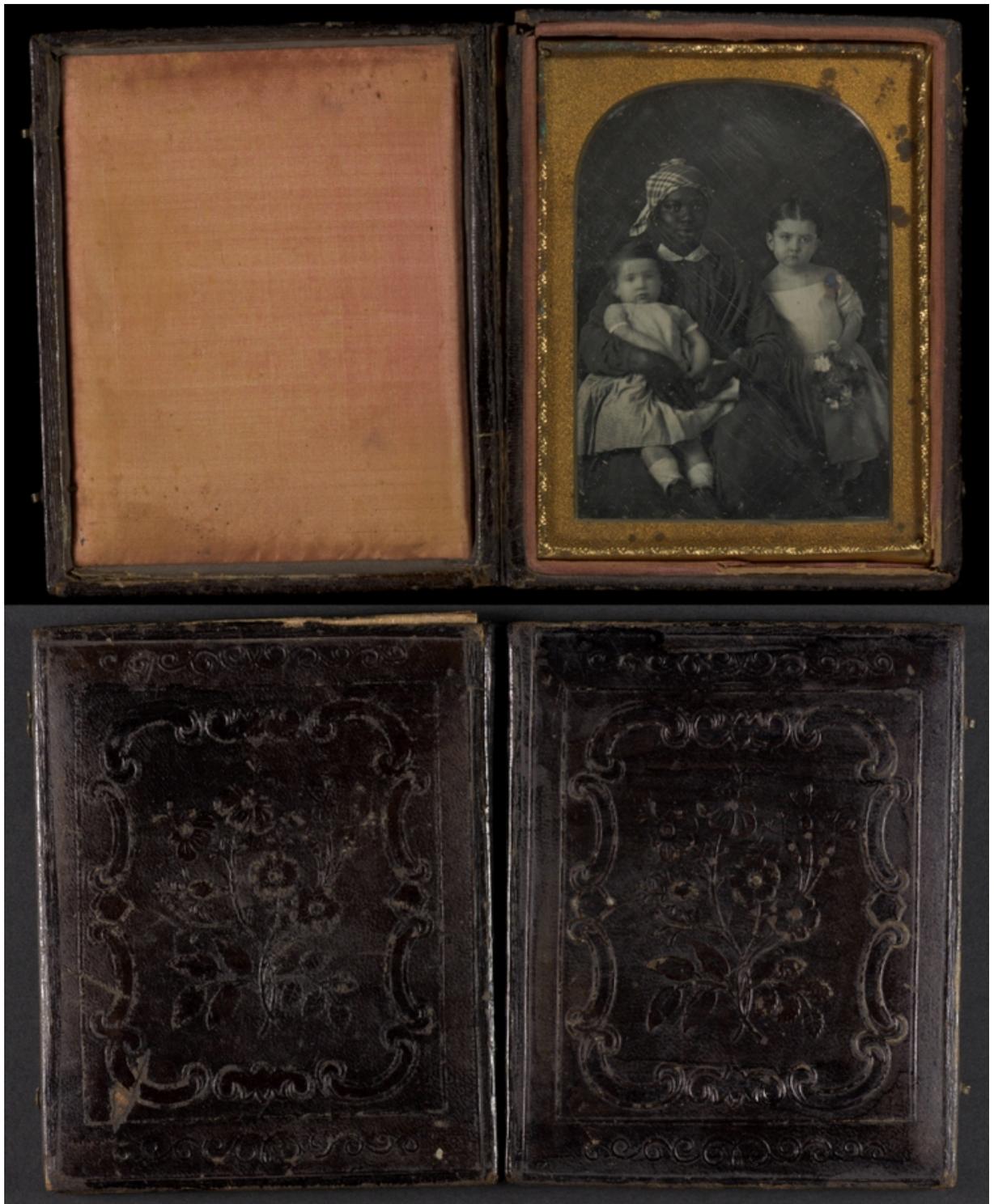


Fig. 3.12 (Loew 4)  
Portrait of a nanny with two children, mid-nineteenth century  
Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0504  
Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography  
Cornell University



Fig. 3.13 (Loew 5)  
Portrait of a Nanny with a Baby, mid-nineteenth century  
Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0511  
Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography  
Cornell University



Fig. 3.14 (Loew 6)  
Portrait of a nanny with two children, mid-nineteenth century  
Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0515  
Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography  
Cornell University



Fig. 3.15 (Loew 7)

Portrait of a Nanny with a Child, mid-nineteenth century

Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0514

Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography

Cornell University



Fig. 3.16 Gordon Parks,  
'American, 1912–2006 Airline Terminal,  
Atlanta, Georgia,' 1956.



Fig. 3.17 (Loew 8)

Portrait of Nanny with Baby, late-nineteenth century

Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0522

Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography

Cornell University



Fig. 3.18 (Loew 9)  
Nanny with two young boys, late-nineteenth century  
Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0537  
Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography  
Cornell University



Fig. 3.19 (Loew 10)

Woman sitting with two young children, late-nineteenth century

Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0517

Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography

Cornell University



Fig. 3.20 (Loew 11)

Portrait of woman and two babies, 1884

Identifier: SL\_AFAM\_0246

Loewentheil Collection of African American Photography  
Cornell University

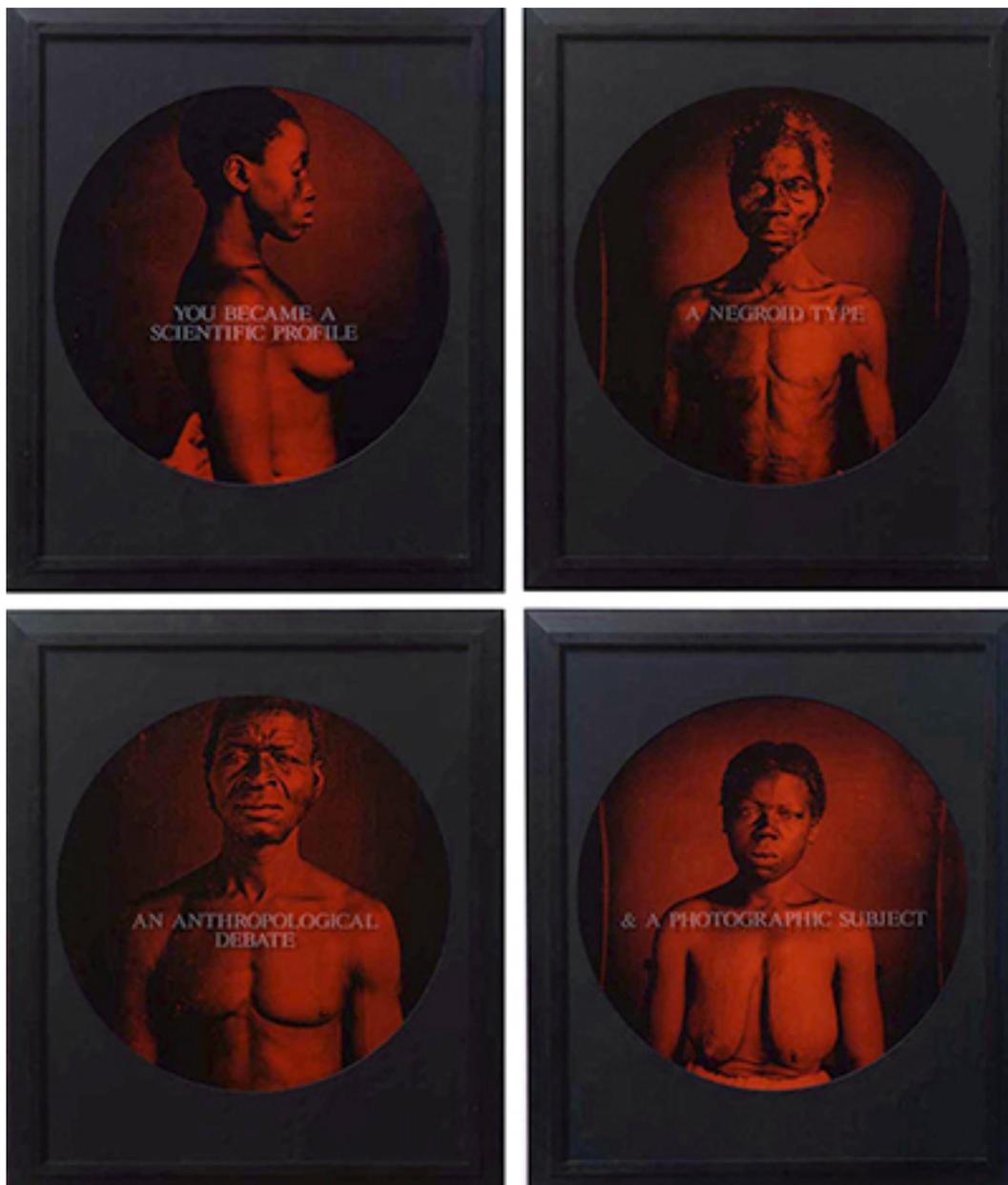


Fig. 3.21 Carrie Mae Weems,  
“From Here I Saw What Happened  
And I Cried,” 1995-96

[This image has been intentionally removed.]

Fig. 3.8. Daguerreotype, Drana, frontal. Mounted daguerreotype in case, mature black woman, nude to waist, front view.

Clothing gathered at waist as in 10/53039-40.

Photographer: J.T. Zealy. Paper label reads; "Drana, country born, daughter of Jack, Guinea. Plantation of B.F. Taylor." March 1850.

[This image has been intentionally removed.]

Fig. 3.9. Daguerreotype, Drana, frontal. Mounted daguerreotype in case, mature black woman, nude to waist, side view.

Clothing gathered at waist as in 10/53039-40.

Photographer: J.T. Zealy. Paper label reads; "Drana, country born, daughter of Jack, Guinea. Plantation of B.F. Taylor." March 1850.

## **Chapter 4:**

### Replication, Networks, and Immigrant Labor in Industrialized Boston



Fig. 4.1 The Boston Floating Hospital, n.d.,  
Digital Collections and  
Archives, Tufts University.



Fig. 4.2 Nurse holding two babies, T.E. Marr and Son, 1920, Digital Collections and Archives, Tufts University.

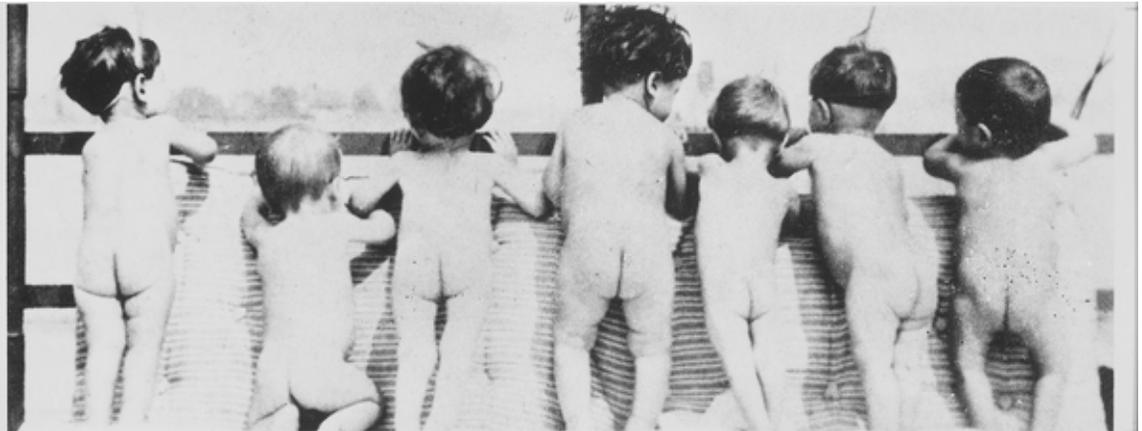


Fig. 4.3 Toddlers on the Boston Floating Hospital ship's sundeck, 1920, Digital Collections and Archives, Tufts University.



Fig. 4.4 Boston Floating Hospital ship:  
Check-in time for mothers and babies before coming on board,  
T.E. Marr & Son, 1906. Digital Collections and Archives,  
Tufts University



Fig. 4.5 Boston Floating Hospital ship: Nurses tending to babies, T.E. Marr and Son, 1906. Digital Collections and Archives, Tufts University



Fig. 4.6 Boston Floating Hospital ship: Bottling of mother's milk. T.E. Marr and Son, 1906. Digital Collections and Archives, Tufts University



Fig. 4.7 *The Boston Sunday Advertiser*, March 20, 1921.  
Alfred Bosworth Papers, #22-2-3998.  
Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections,  
Cornell University Library.

Berlin New Hampshire March 28  
1921

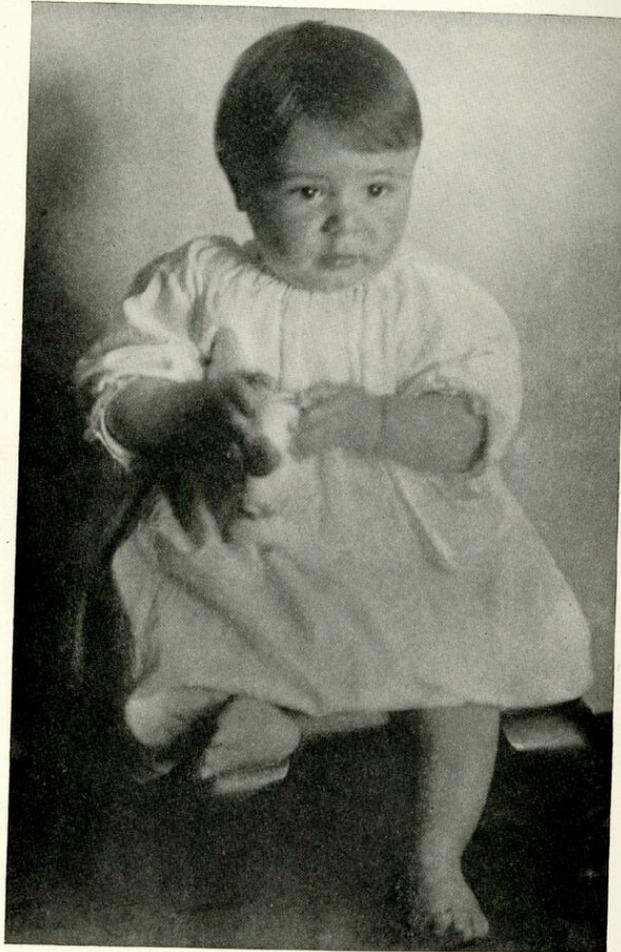
Mr Alfred W. Bosworth

Dear Sir I am much  
interested in the mother's Milk manufacture  
or prepared by you and hope you will kindly  
write me how to obtain this milk for my daughter  
who lives in Mexico Mame, a Country town  
near Rumford Falls Mame, my daughter last  
a little Baby daughter last Dec it was one year  
old and had always been sickly as she was  
unable to nurse her Baby as she is a woman  
of 40 and had not given birth to a living  
child for 20 years when this little one came  
she had a daughter nearly 2 years of age, though  
she done her best to keep this little one ~~but~~ <sup>and</sup>  
was never strong seemed to grow tall and ~~more~~  
and more spiritual looking a perfect little angel  
she seemed to us all but when her teeth came she  
could not bear the pain and slight fever that ~~came~~  
with teething, and in 4 days she was gone having  
cut 9 teeth all at once it seemed and as  
this child was at first fed on Mellin's food  
then cows Milk modified but given with a  
little lime water as usual, I have wondered  
after reading about your milk if that  
with a lime water added to the

Fig. 4.8 Letter to Alfred Bosworth from Mrs. Peter Anderson, Berlin, New Hampshire, March 28, 1921. Alfred Bosworth Papers, #22-2-3998. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library



WILLIAM B. WHEN ADMITTED



WILLIAM B. WHEN DISCHARGED  
Six weeks in Hospital and eight weeks at board

Fig. 4.9 Photographs from the 1912 MIA Annual Report:  
“William B. when admitted,” and “William B. When Discharged:  
Six weeks in Hospital and eight weeks at board,”  
UMass Boston Archives. Courtesy of the University Archives  
& Special Collections Department, Joseph P. Healey Library,  
University of Massachusetts Boston:  
Massachusetts Infant Asylum records, 1868–1916.



Fig. 4.10 MIA Annual Report 1909, the Outdoor Pavilion, nurses and charges. Archives of UMass Boston.

Courtesy of the University Archives & Special Collections Department, Joseph P. Healey Library, University of Massachusetts Boston: Massachusetts Infant Asylum records, 1868–1916

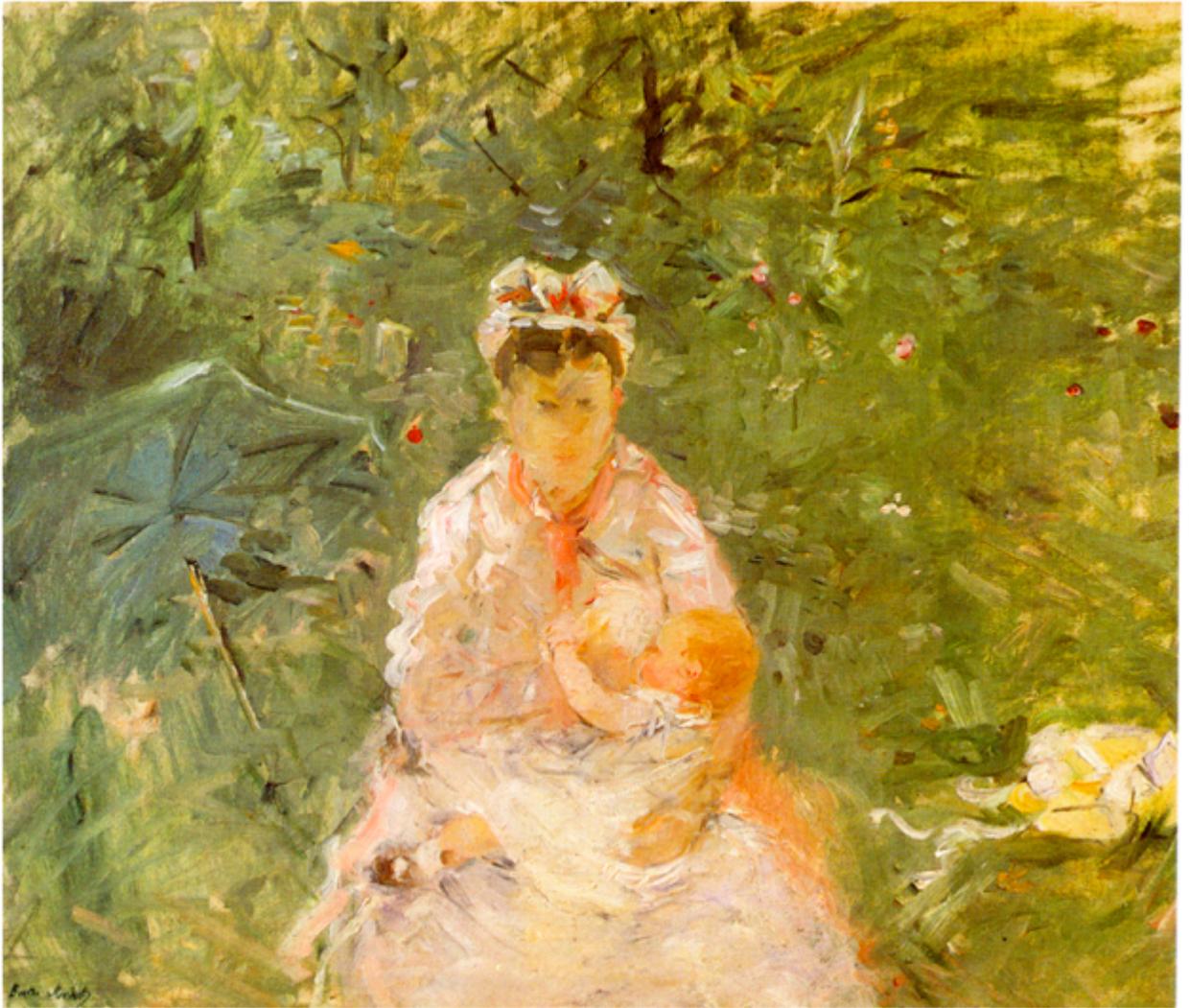


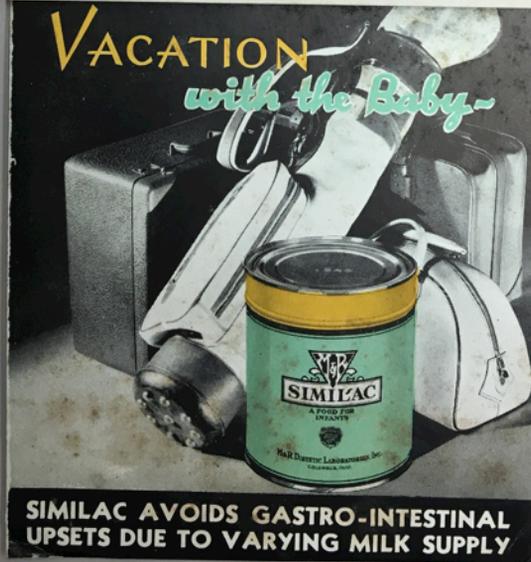
Fig. 4.11 Berthe Morisot  
*Wet Nurse and Julie*  
1879

MEMORANDUM

Dear Doctor:  
under this pad  
is a suggestion for  
the convenient pre-  
paration of Similac  
feedings while  
travelling.

Directions for Use of SIMILAC Under Pad

**VACATION**  
*with the Baby.*



**SIMILAC AVOIDS GASTRO-INTESTINAL UPSETS DUE TO VARYING MILK SUPPLY**

Fig. 4.12 Similac advertisement, date unknown.  
Alfred Bosworth Papers, #22-2-3998. Division of Rare and  
Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

MEMORANDUM PAD

Feeding  
Similac favors  
low initial loss and  
rapid return to birth weight.  
Reason? — Similac resembles  
breast milk not only in  
composition, but also in its  
ready digestibility —  
its zero curd  
tension. #

Directions for Use of SIMILAC Under Pad

96 weight charts  
summarized

Days	Similac (Pounds)	Other Foods (Pounds)
1	10.5	10.5
2	10.2	10.2
3	10.8	10.5
4	11.2	10.8
5	11.6	11.2
6	12.0	11.6
7	12.4	12.0
8	12.8	12.4
9	13.2	12.8
10	13.4	13.0
11	13.6	13.2
12	13.5	12.5

Fig. 4.13 Similac advertisement, date unknown. Alfred Bosworth Papers, #22-2-3998. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

M & R DIETETIC LABORATORIES, INC.  
Milk Products for Infant Diets  
COLUMBUS, OHIO



November 21, 1932

A. W. BOSWORTH,  
1466 Haines Ave.,  
Columbus, Ohio.

Dear Dr. Bosworth:

Such an unusual amount of interest has been shown by physicians in the similarity of the curd of Similac with that of breast milk that we are taking the liberty of directing your attention to the subject matter on the inclosed circular.

The similarity of the curd of breast milk and the curd of Similac as contrasted with the curd of cow's milk and powdered milk is illustrated therein.

We know that results in actual practice mean more than any printed statement we could make. Therefore, we ask you to give consideration to the statements made and then avail yourself of the opportunity of seeing the results when Similac is fed in your own practice.

Very truly yours,

M & R DIETETIC LABORATORIES, Inc.

*J. J. Ludwig*  
Director of Sales.

JJQ/HP



... Ill.  
... ever  
... in Pop-  
Calif.  
... used—  
... Maine.

Fig. 4.14 Letter from M&R Dietetic Laboratories to Alfred Bosworth, November 21, 1932. Alfred Bosworth Papers, #22-2-3998. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

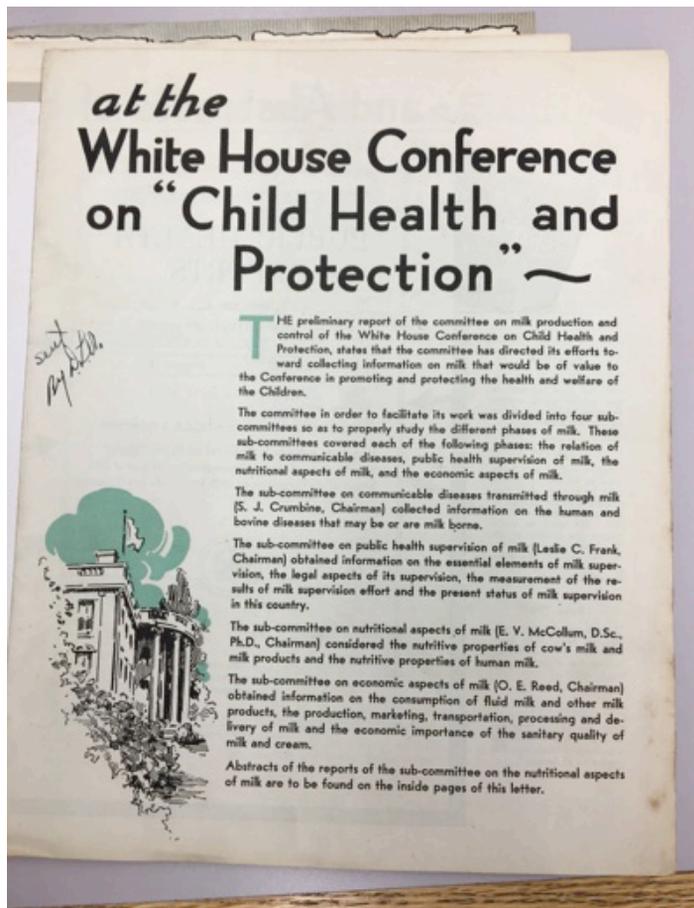


Fig. 4.14 Similac advertisement mimicking government report, 1931, cover. Alfred Bosworth Papers, #22-2-3998. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

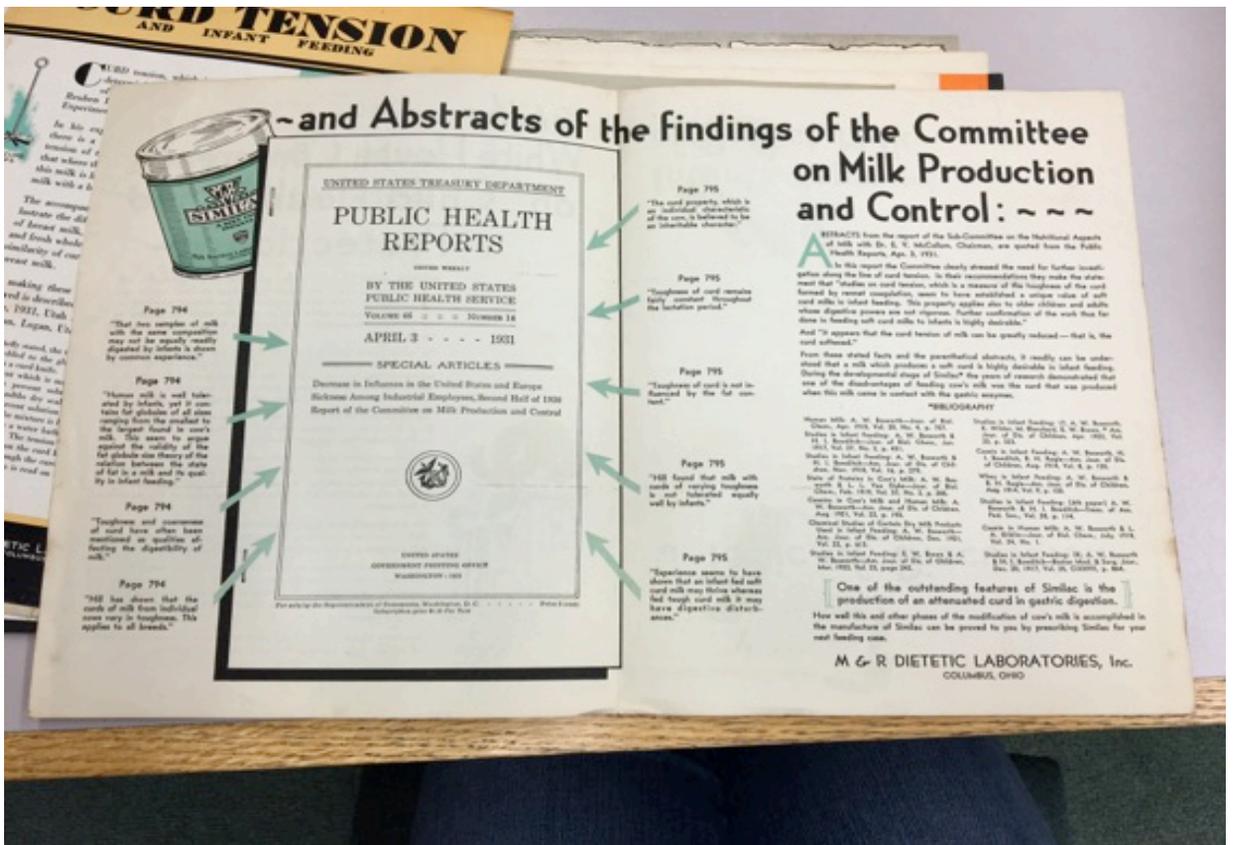


Fig. 4.15 Similac advertisement mimicking government report, 1931, interior. Alfred Bosworth Papers, #22-2-3998. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

## **Chapter 5:**

### Human Dairies and Sirens: The Visual Culture of Human Milk Banking and Transport in New York, 1918-2018



Fig. 5.1. Director Julie Boucher-Horwitz at the New York Milk Bank, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, 2017.



Fig. 5.2 Members of the Sirens Motorcycle Club picking up milk at the New York Milk Bank, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, 2017, photo by Justin Wayne Chauncey.



Fig. 5.3 The Milk Room, Mother's Milk Bureau, Children's Welfare Association, New York City, August 1938. Source: Carl H. Laws and Esther G. Skelley, "A Maternal Milk Laboratory," *The American Journal of Nursing* 38 (August 1938): 859-865, 864.



Fig. 5.4 Close-up of Hand Expression. The Milk Room, Mother's Milk Bureau, Children's Welfare Association, New York City, August 1938. Source: Carl H. Laws and Esther G. Skelley, "A Maternal Milk Laboratory," *The American Journal of Nursing* 38 (August 1938): 859-865, 864.

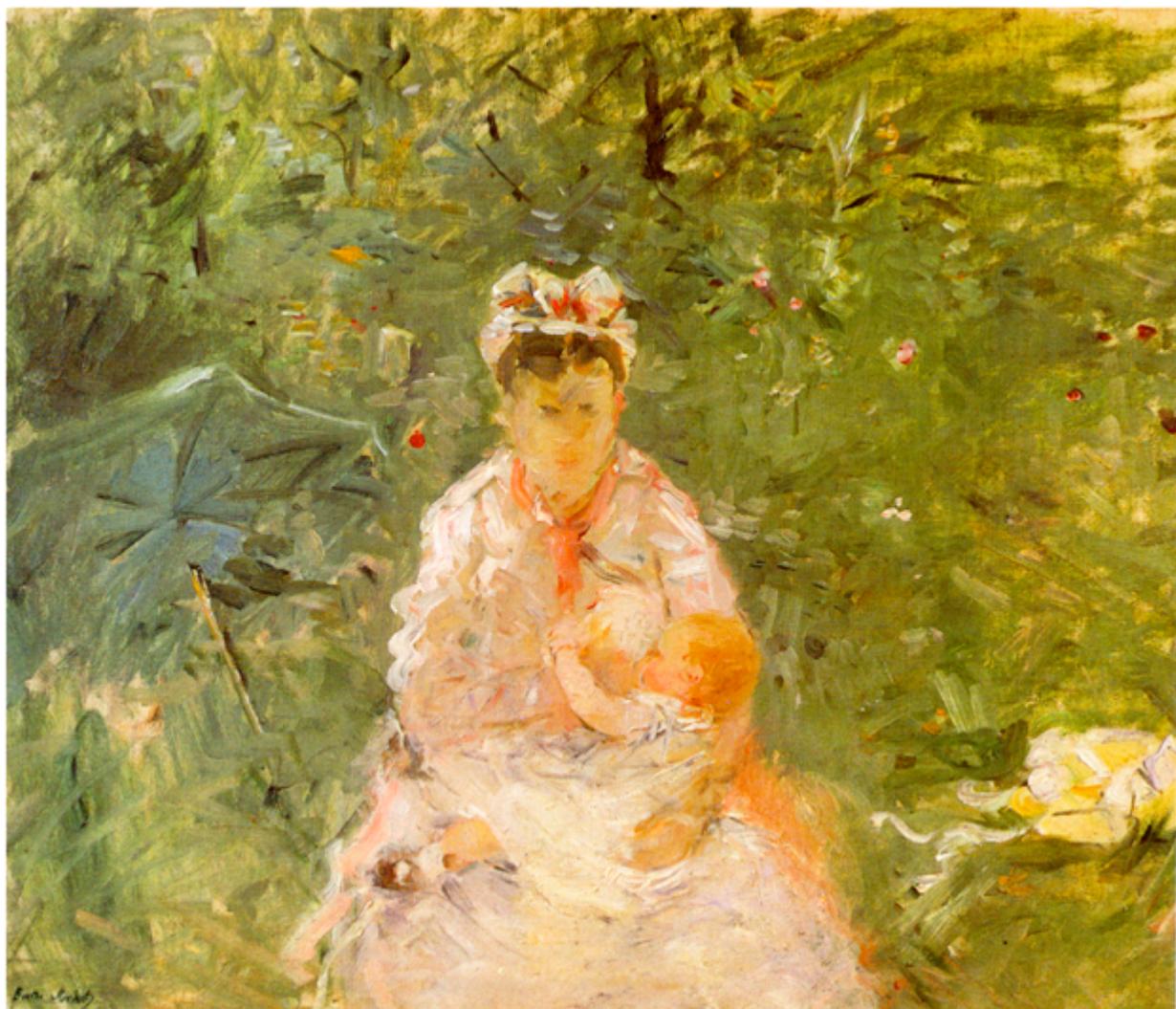


Fig. 5.5 Berthe Morisot  
*Wet Nurse and Julie*  
1879



Fig. 5.6 Coney's Incubator Exhibit  
at Luna Park,  
Coney Island  
NYPL Coney Island Archive



Fig. 5.7 Infant Incubator - Martin and Hildegard Couney with boy looking at baby in incubator, 1939-40, New York World's Fair, New York Public Library Digital Collection.



Fig. 5.8 Infant Incubator - A group of mothers with babies who were in incubators, 1939-40, New York World's Fair, New York Public Library Digital Collection.



Fig. 5.9 Behind the Scenes at the Incubator Baby Luncheon,  
1939-40 World's Fair, Columbia University Archives



Fig. 5.10 Martin Couney greets a graduate and his family,  
Columbia University Archives



Fig 5.11. Infant Incubator, Nurse Hildegard Coney feeding human milk to infant. New York Public Library



Fig. 5.12 Director of NYMB Julie Bouchet-Horwitz, Sirens President Jen Baquial, and Sirens Vice President Katie Ballantine at the grand opening of the New York Milk Bank, 2016



**This badass lesbian motorcycle gang delivers breastmilk to babies**



**New York Post**

about 4 months ago · 🌐

**Follow**

This badass lesbian motorcycle gang delivers breastmilk to babies  
<http://nyp.st/2Cq4V56>

👍❤️😄 622

195 Shares 2.1M Views

Fig. 5.12. Screenshot of The New York Post Story on Facebook



Fig. 5.14 Founding Siren Cheryl Stewart (center) on a milk run with other Sirens, photo by Justin Wayne Chauncey



Fig. 5.15 The Colors of the Sirens Motorcycle Club, designed by Founding member Lori Taube, worn at NYC Pride 2017



Fig. 5.16 Sirens Motorcycle Club Members deliver milk to an infant and her mother, New York, 2017



Fig. 5.17 Sirens at Camp Simcha, 2016



Fig. 5.18 The Sirens lined up, 2017

## Epilogue

Visualizing the Past & Future



Fig. E.1 Kat Joyce holding son next to Peasant Woman Nursing a Baby (1873) by Aimé-Jules Dalou At the Victorian and Albert Museum, August 1917, Image pulled from Twitter



Fig. E. 2  
Alison Saar  
*Mammy Machine*  
2012



Fig. E. 3  
Alison Saar  
*Suckle*  
2008



Fig. E. 4  
Alison Saar  
*Via Lactea*  
2013



Fig. E. 5  
Alison Saar  
*Sea of Nectar*  
2008



Fig. E. 6  
Alison Saar  
*Equinox*  
2008

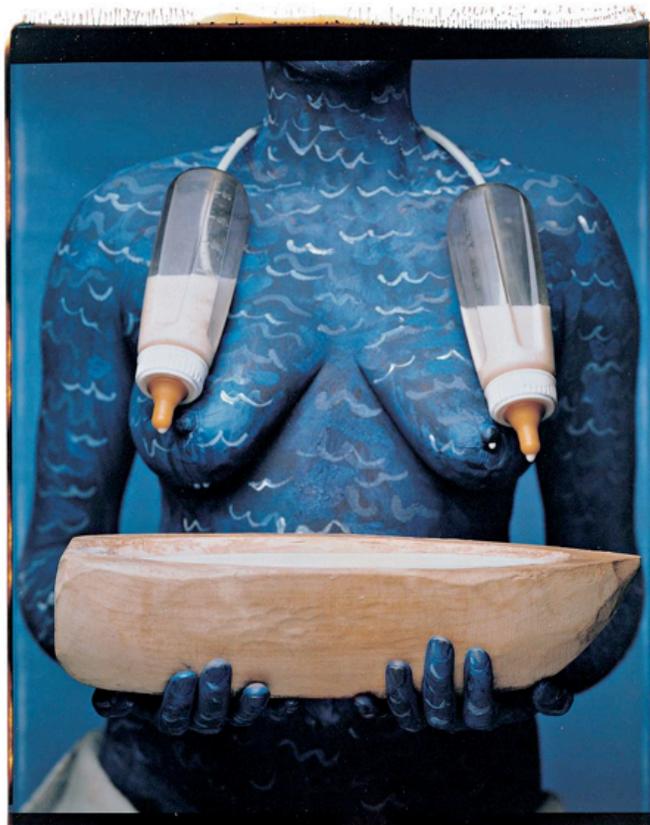


Fig. E. 7  
Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons  
*When I Am Not Here/Estoy Allá*  
1994