Milk and Honey

Women, Race, and Captive Gorillas in Colonial Africa

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Abstract
Early relationships between gorillas and white colonists in Africa were hyper-masculine in nature, characterized as man against silverback. Alongside attempts to kill gorillas as trophies, repeated attempts were made to capture young gorillas. Despite young gorillas proving difficult to keep alive in captivity, they continued to be captured through the colonial period. Involving women in gorilla care appeared to improve gorillas' outcomes, nurturing them within intimate interspecies relationships. Some African women were hired by white men to breastfeed unweaned gorilla infants. While some women took these gorillas into their homes, others were removed from their families to wet-nurse gorillas. White women became different kinds of foster mothers, treating gorillas as Europeanized children within the trappings of colonial domesticity. While women's roles in gorilla care reinforced gendered and racialized hierarchies in colonial Africa, the interspecies intimacies that flourished between women and gorillas changed the lives of both.

Keywords: gorilla, gender, colonialism, wet-nursing, Africa

Introduction

Encounters between white humans and gorillas have been gendered since their 'discovery' by Western science. Paul Du Chaillu's (c. 1831–1903) accounts of the first live gorillas to be seen by white people were loaded with gendered language, reducing an entire species to one sex; he consistently referred to gorillas as male unless specifically referring to a female individual,

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characterizing encounters with gorillas as battles or conquests.[1] Gorilla hunting by white people was an almost entirely male pursuit. Indeed, the inclusion of white women and a child in a gorilla-hunting expedition was used by Carl Akeley (1864–1926) to counter gorillas' fearsome reputation, built up by a history of hyper-masculinized and sensationalized accounts.[2]

Traditions of people with longer histories of living around gorillas, before the colonization of equatorial Africa, are also gendered. Du Chaillu reported that some Gabonese people believed a pregnant woman would give birth to a gorilla if she, or her husband, saw a gorilla.[3] Some Gabonese people refused to eat gorilla meat, due to their belief that a female ancestor had given birth to a gorilla.[4] Mary Hastings Bradley (1882–1976), one of the women who joined Carl Akeley's gorilla hunt, wrote that some Congolese people believed that any man who killed a 'man-ape' would have childless daughters, and their sons' wives would lose their sons.[5] Similarly, food taboos around gorilla meat were also gendered. For example, although the Mendjim Mey of Cameroon would hunt gorillas for their meat, women were forbidden to eat it.[6] Although dismissed by the white authors who recounted them, African stories of women abducted by (male) gorillas are remarkably persistent in colonial literature, and indeed Western culture.[7] Gendered links between gorillas and humans exist in modern storytelling, for example in the Central African Republic.[8]

Ever since white people became aware of gorillas' existence, attempts were made to capture their young, and to keep them alive long enough

1 E.g. '[…] the gorilla gives you no time to reload, and woe to him whom he attacks!', Paul B Du Chaillu, *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa: With Accounts of the Manners and Customs of the People*, (London: J. Murray, 1861), 58.

2 Carl Ethan Akeley, *In Brightest Africa*, (New York: Doubleday & Page, 1923), 226; Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908–1936," *Social Text* 11 (1984): 20–64.

3 Du Chaillu, *Explorations and Adventures*, 262, 305.

4 Ibid., 354.

5 Mary Hastings Bradley, *On the Gorilla Trail*, (Boston, MA: D. Appleton, 1922), 75.

6 Fred George Merfield and Harry Miller, *Gorillas Were My Neighbours*, (London: Companion Book Club, 1957), 76, 202.

7 Georgina M. Montgomery, *Primates in the Real World: Escaping Primate Folklore and Creating Primate Science* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015); Benjamin Burbridge, *Gorilla: Tracking and Capturing the Ape-Man of Africa* (New York: Century Company, 1928), 86; Henry Geddes, *Gorilla* (Cambridge: A. Melrose, 1955), 58. For more on the representation of gorilla attacks on women in Western culture, see: Ted Gott and Kathryn Weir, *Gorilla* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 14–17, 25–29.

8 Tamara Giles-Vernick and Stephanie Rupp, "Visions of Apes, Reflections on Change: Telling Tales of Great Apes in Equatorial Africa," *African Studies Review* 49, no.1 (2006): 51–73.

to export them overseas for exhibition or research in the metropole. The capture of gorillas was closely linked to colonial gorilla hunting, and almost always involved the slaughter of adults; as such, almost all gorilla captures in colonial Africa were undertaken by men, including sometimes hundreds of African staff.[9] The gendered stereotypes and hierarchies at play in gorilla hunting were also applied to early attempts at gorilla care, initially undertaken primarily by men.[10] White male owners of captive gorillas would endeavour to tame them, or train them to perform (Western) human behaviours, providing anecdotes and photographic opportunities for future publications. However, the majority of the daily work of gorilla care, including cleaning and feeding, was usually undertaken by Black men.[11]

Early attempts at keeping gorillas in captivity were almost universally unsuccessful, the majority of young gorillas dying soon after capture, on journeys from Africa to the metropole, or shortly after arriving in Europe or North America.[12] The difficulty of keeping gorillas alive in captivity was attributed by many to their apparent loneliness and despondency after their capture.[13] From the 1920s, white women became involved in gorilla captivity, perceived to be able to offer more tender care to younger and more vulnerable infants. Wives of white animal collectors, missionaries, and other colonial staff undertook stereotypically maternal domestic tasks such as clothing and bottle-feeding young gorillas, in some cases treating them as surrogate children. For example, a French woman who ran a sawmill with

9 Notable exceptions are Osa Johnson in 1930, and Lady Vera Broughton (1894–1968) in 1932. Eduard Paul Tratz, "Chronologie Der Erforschung Und Gefangenhaltung Des Gorillas," *Der Zoologische Garten*, 20 (1953): 163–70.

10 John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: University Press, 2017); Edward I Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters: A Social History of Hunting in Colonial Kenya* (London: James Currey, 2006); Edward I Steinhart, "The Imperial Hunt in Colonial Kenya, *c*. 1880–1909," in *Animals in Human Histories: The Mirror of Nature and Culture,* ed. Mary J Henninger-Voss (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 144–81.

11 Burbridge, *Gorilla*, 234, 245; Martin Johnson, *Congorilla: Adventures with Pygmies and Gorillas in Africa*, (New York: Brewer, Warren & Putman, 1931), 201, 223. White men played a more significant role in gorilla care in the metropole during the colonial era, outnumbering people of other races and genders in zoos, museums and scientific research, e.g. Violette Pouillard, *Gust* (*ca. 1952–1988*), *or A History from Below of the Changing Zoo* (Quebec: McGill-Queens University Press, 2019).

12 Gott and Weir, *Gorilla*; James L Newman, *Encountering Gorillas: A Chronicle of Discovery, Exploitation, Understanding, and Survival* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013); Violette Pouillard, "Life and Death of Captive Eastern Gorillas (*Gorilla beringei*) (1923–2012)," *Revue De Synthèse* 136, no. 3–4 (2015): 375–402.

13 Noah Cincinnati, "Too Sullen for Survival: Historicizing Gorilla Extinction, 1900–1930," in *The Historical Animal*, ed. Susan Nance (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 166–83.

her husband in Cameroon took on the care of a young gorilla captured by Austrian animal collector Ernst Zwilling (1904–1990); she dressed the gorilla in 'rompers', and the youngster slept in his own bed in her bedroom.[14] Some white men hired Black women as wet-nurses for their captive gorillas. These women performed a very different form of maternal care, in which their bodies were exploited to make money from the eventual sale of live gorillas.

Archival evidence and glorified published accounts of colonial gorilla hunts are relatively numerous, and the lives of captured gorillas, once exported to Europe and North America, were well documented in the press, scientific literature, zoo archives, and other sources.[15] In contrast, information about the lives of young gorillas in captivity in Africa is harder to find. However, thinly but widely spread snippets of evidence can be combined to piece together a picture of gorilla captivity in colonial Africa.[16] Sources including published accounts, personal archives and photography of animal collectors, missionaries, and colonial administrators, held in zoos, museums, and governmental archives, have been accessed to find traces of captive gorillas in colonial Africa. This material is a highly partial, being authored almost entirely by white men, and so must be interpreted with this in mind. The bodies of gorillas in museums have also provided important clues for this research, so their authorship is not completely lacking from the archive.[17] These sources can be combined to illustrate the experiences of gorillas in captivity in colonial Africa, and the gendering of their care. Although taking different forms along racial lines, the more caring aspects of keeping gorillas captive were regarded as women's work. The gendered nature of gorilla–human encounters has continued post-independence, and beyond Africa, and its effects are visible in the way gorillas, and the people working with them, are perceived today.

Milk: Black Women and Wet-Nursing

While instances of women breastfeeding gorillas are not common in the archive, within accounts of gorilla capture they are not exceptional. However, only Black women have been found to have wet-nursed gorillas, indicative

14 Ernst A Zwilling, *Jungle Fever* (London: Souvenir Press, 1956), 83.

15 William Beinart, "Empire, Hunting and Ecological Change in Southern and Central Africa," *Past & Present* 128, no. 1 (1990): 162–86.

16 Erica Fudge, "Milking Other Men's Beasts," *History and Theory* 52, no. 4 (2013), 13–28.

17 Sandra Swart, "'But Where's the Bloody Horse?'": Textuality and Corporeality in the 'Animal Turn'," *Journal of Literary Studies* 23, no. 3 (2007): 282–83, 288.

Figure 1. An unnamed woman wet-nursing a baby gorilla. Photograph by E. Reichenow.[18]

of the exploitative and racist nature of this phenomenon.[19] While African women did provide other aspects of care for captive gorillas, African men

18 Robert Mearns Yerkes Papers (MS 569), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. This image was reproduced by Yerkes in *The Great Apes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1929), 443.
19 The presence of captured gorillas in colonial homes would have added to the 'range of practices in which racisms were produced'. Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 13.

were more commonly employed to care for gorillas. Only women, however, were able to supply human milk, a close analogue to gorilla milk, required to sustain the youngest captive gorillas. The following examples of women who wet-nursed baby gorillas indicate that this practice occurred from the early twentieth century until after the Second World War, across different colonial powers. However, detailed information regarding the wet-nurses' lives could not be found in archival sources, and their names remain unknown.

In his account of collecting gorillas for taxidermy displays at the American Museum of Natural History, Akeley recounted that the German zoologist Eduard Reichenow (1883–1960) had captured a baby Western Gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla*) thought to be only a few days old. The gorilla was breastfed, and 'flourished beautifully at the breast of a Negro nurse'.[20] Akeley did not give further details of this interspecies wet-nursing, but as Reichenow collected most of his gorilla material in Akonolinga in the former Kamerun (German-controlled Cameroon, now part of the Republic of Cameroon) in 1905, it was likely to have occurred here early in the twentieth century.[21] Later correspondence between Reichenow and Robert Mearns Yerkes (1876–1956), a North American psychologist who studied great apes, also suggests that a photograph of the wet-nurse feeding the infant gorilla was taken in Cameroon.[22] The image (Fig. 1) shows the woman, described as the gorilla's foster nurse, sitting unclothed while breastfeeding the baby gorilla, the location given as simply 'Africa'.[23]

Unnamed Cameroonian woman, near N'Kulusung, Cameroon, 1929[24]

In December 1929, British animal collector and hunter Frederick G. Merfield (1889–1960), based in the former French Cameroon (or Cameroun, now part of the Republic of Cameroon), acquired a live baby Western Gorilla after hunters had killed its mother.[25] Making his living by trading live animals and dead remains, Merfield had already been involved in the capture of two

20 Akeley, *In Brightest Africa*, 245.

21 John E. Cooper and Gordon Hull, *Gorilla Pathology and Health: With a Catalogue of Preserved Materials*, (Cambridge: Academic Press, 2017), 421.

22 Yale University Library (YUL), Manuscripts and Archives, Robert Mearns Yerkes papers (Yerkes papers), MS 569, Series 1, Box 41, Folder 780, letter from Reichenow to Yerkes, September 14, 1928.

23 YUL, Yerkes papers, MS 569, Box 133, Folder 2255. Available in the Manuscripts and Archives Digital Library, PID digcoll:4357912: https://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:4357912. The photograph was apparently taken by Reichenow.

24 Powell-Cotton Museum (PCM) Archive, Merfield correspondence, 3.1.3/45, November 26, 1929. This was the most recent letter including an address, written from N'Kulusung.

25 PCM Archive, Merfield correspondence, December 3, 1929.

young gorillas earlier in the year, but both had died after a few months in captivity.[26] Fearing this younger gorilla would also perish, he employed a Cameroonian woman to breastfeed it, writing on December 3 that he had 'given it out to an obliging lady of the village'.[27] A few days later, he wrote 'the baby gorilla I am afraid will not live its [*sic*] too small still one never knows'.[28] However, the gorilla appears to have survived for at least three weeks under the wet-nurse's care, Merfield writing on December 24, 1929 that it was 'still alive and suckling away at an obliging native lady'.[29]

A Wife of Chief Bamboo, Oka, Republic of the Congo, 1944

The Belgian-American film-maker Armand Denis (1896–1971) visited the former French Congo (now the Republic of the Congo) in 1944, in a disastrous attempt to capture and export Western Gorillas to North America, to breed for medical research.[30] After acquiring a new-born gorilla near his base in Oka, the village chief offered one of his wives as the captive's wet-nurse. According to Denis's account, 'the girl had no objection to feeding this unlikely infant'.[31] A photograph shows the wet-nurse, a young woman, in a similar pose to the wet-nurse of Reichenow's gorilla; she is offering her breast to a tiny gorilla while sat, almost unclothed, on a wooden crate.[32] During the two months that Denis stayed in Oka, the gorilla appeared to thrive as a result of the young Congolese woman's care. All of the gorillas captured during Denis's expedition died before leaving Africa; the gorilla breastfed by the chief's wife was the last to die.[33]

Unnamed Equatorial Guinean women, near Bata, Equatorial Guinea, c. 1947

A Swiss animal collector, Peter Ryhiner (1920–1975), employed a series of wet-nurses as part of his gorilla capture and export racket in the former Spanish Guinea (now Equatorial Guinea), in the late 1940s.[34] When Ryhiner

26 PCM Archive, Percy Powell-Cotton Diaries, Diary 77, Book 2, 42–43.
27 PCM Archive, Merfield correspondence, 3.1.3/45, December 3, 1929.
28 PCM Archive, Merfield correspondence, 3.1.3/45, December 6, 1929.
29 PCM Archive, Merfield correspondence, 3.1.3/48, December 14, 1929.
30 Armand Denis, *On Safari: The Story of My Life*, (Glasgow: Collins, 1963), 168–218.
31 Ibid., 204.
32 Ibid., 177.
33 Ibid., 217.
34 Peter Ryhiner and Daniel Pratt Mannix, *The Wildest Game* (New York: Lippincott, 1958), 102–10.

had first arrived in Africa, he found that another employee of his boss, German animal trader Lothar Behrend, had hired women as wet-nurses for three gorillas. The gorillas had lived with the women in their huts, where, according to Ryhiner: 'both the women and their children were covered with lice, rotten with yaws and obviously suffering from half a dozen different diseases'.[35] Ryhiner's use of language to describe one of the women is revealing: 'I took the native foster mother out of her polluted hut, gave her a good bath, disinfected her thoroughly, and took her into the house which Fernandez and I were sharing'. A group of prospective wet-nurses were 'carefully sterilized and kept in quarantine under what was virtually armed guard', with Ryhiner selecting one of 'the healthiest and most intelligent' women to wet-nurse each captured gorilla infants.[36] These women were apparently treated as chattels, and were removed from their families in order to breastfeed the young gorillas. Ryhiner apparently regarded the women as simply tools to increase the chances of making money from the baby gorillas they cared for, much like the baby chimpanzees he had acquired as companions for each gorilla.[37]

It is unclear from these examples whether any of the African women were paid, or how their own unweaned babies, whose existence triggered the production of milk, were cared for. The power differential between the white men owning captured gorillas and the Black women used as wet-nurses means that such arrangements were likely to have been coercive and exploitative in nature, even if payment were received.[38] Wet-nursing the baby of another species would have made the women and their own babies vulnerable to infection from diseases shared by humans and gorillas, or indeed novel zoonoses, as well as disrupting the care and breastfeeding of their children. It seems, however, that it was possible for wet-nurses to nurture tender relationships with the gorillas they cared for. One of the women employed by Ryhiner as a wet-nurse waited with him at a telegraph station to hear news of Mponge, a young gorilla who had been exported for sale; Ryhiner wrote that the woman prayed for good news of the infant she had breastfed.[39]

35 Ibid., 95.

36 Ibid., 103.

37 Ibid., 104.

38 Cultural norms of wet-nursing are diverse across countries inhabited by gorillas. Barry S. Hewlett and Steve Winn, "Allomaternal Nursing in Humans", *Current Anthropology* 55, no.2 (2014): 200–29. African women were also employed to wet-nurse baby chimpanzees captured for the live animal trade, e.g. William A. Westley, *Chimp on My Shoulder* (Boston, MA: Dutton, 1950), 220–24.

39 Ryhiner and Mannix, *The Wildest Game*, 105.

Honey: White Wives and Gorilla Children

No archival evidence has been found indicating that white women wet-nursed infant gorillas in colonial Africa. However, although not involved in the intensely physical intimacy of wet-nursing, they provided other kinds of unpaid care for captive gorillas, particularly in domestic settings. As well as providing company to pet gorillas, white women adopted signifiers of the 'civilizing' mission of colonialism in their gorilla care, including dressing gorillas in European clothing, and teaching them to use cutlery.[40] Some gorillas in colonial homes were fed European human diets, including luxuries such as wine and chocolate, contrasting with the food available to African domestic staff.[41]

White women who found themselves caring for captive gorillas had more power over giving their own accounts of these experiences than Black women, or otherwise were able to influence their husbands' accounts, leaving a richer, although partial, source of archival evidence to learn from. Photographs of white women with young captive gorillas are likely to have been taken with their consent, so presenting a self-censored view of gorilla care, in contrast to photographs of Black wet-nurses where such agreement is in doubt. As with African wet-nurses, examples of white women caring for captive gorillas can be found across colonial boundaries. However, examples of white women caring for gorillas in colonial Africa do not occur until the 1920s, reflective of increasing numbers joining their husbands in the colonies as the twentieth century progressed.[42]

Osa Johnson and Okaro, near Alumbongo Mountains, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Nairobi, Kenya, 1930

In 1930, while filming *Congorilla* in the former Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), American film-makers Osa Johnson (1894–1953) and her husband Martin Johnson (1894–1937) were involved in the capture of two Eastern Gorillas (*Gorilla beringei*) called Congo, later renamed Mbongo (c. 1926–1942) and Ingagi, later renamed Ngagi (c. 1926–1944).[43]

40 Nancy Rose Hunt, "Colonial Fairy Tales and the Knife and Fork Doctrine in the Heart of Africa," in *African Encounters with Domesticity*, ed. Karen Tranberg Hansen (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 143–71.

41 Geddes, *Gorilla*, 70–72; Zwilling, *Jungle Fever*, 83.

42 Ann L. Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures," *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 638.

43 The Johnstons had been commissioned to capture a gorilla by the US National Zoo, and had obtained permission to capture and export only one gorilla. Johnson, *Congorilla*, 234.

Returning to their home in Nairobi, Kenya, they encountered a third young gorilla, who they named Okaro (c. 1928–1931).[44] In common with other white colonizers' accounts of the acquisition of young gorillas, the Johnsons couched their acquisition of Okaro as a rescue from African people characterized as cruel.[45] Seeing a group of Congolese people carrying a baby gorilla, Osa insisted they purchase it, saying: 'I'm not going to leave it here to die among these natives. I want to give it a chance to live'.[46]

Photographs of Okaro in the Johnsons' Nairobi home suggest he was kept in a more domestic environment than the older gorillas, sleeping in a Western bed, complete with pillows and sheets.[47] This photograph may have been staged, however, as Okaro was described elsewhere as being put in a box to sleep: after falling asleep on the sofa each evening, 'Osa would carry him out to his box and lay him gently down without waking him'.[48] The gorilla was taught (Western) human behaviours, and would sit at the table in his own chair to eat dinner with the Johnsons.[49] Okaro, Congo, and Ingagi were given large quantities of milk, and Western human food: 'three quarts of milk each were given them every day. Two loaves of bread each, as well as Saltine crackers, were included in their menu'. Although Osa presented herself as caring for the gorillas, an African man was employed to clean the older gorillas' outside enclosure, and to disinfect it daily. The gorillas were also fed bananas and sweet potatoes, supplied by neighbouring Kikuyu people.[50] When the Johnsons took Okaro, two chimpanzees, and a colobus monkey with them on a safari, they 'detailed a black boy to watch them', and protect them from predators. Martin Johnson described 'a droll domestic scene' made by the Johnsons and their animals, 'sitting there in the wilds as peacefully as parents and their children gathered round the hearth at home'.[51]

Hilda Merfield, Tarzan, and Jeeves, Arteck and Gadji, Cameroon, 1935

On March 13, 1935, Fred Merfield returned to Cameroon after a rare trip to England, accompanied by his new wife Hilda Merfield (née Baker)

44 Johnson, *Congorilla*, 193, 200. Okaro was also known as Snowball. Osa Johnson, "Snowball: A Black Baby Gorilla with a White Record," *Good Housekeeping* (1932): 166–68.

45 Brett L. Shadle, "Cruelty and Empathy, Animals and Race, in Colonial Kenya," *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 4 (2012): 1097–1116.

46 Johnson, *Congorilla*, 193.

47 Johnson, "Snowball," 80.

48 Johnson, *Congorilla*, 206.

49 Ibid., 203.

50 Ibid., 200–01.

51 Ibid., 223. The use of the word 'boy' is derogatory here, and refers to an adult employee.

(1901–1987).[52] Soon after their arrival, a hunter named Besalla brought a captured young Western Gorilla to their house.[53] Hilda 'felt sorry for the little thing for its mother had been killed when Besalla captured it', so Fred asked Hilda if she would like the gorilla as a pet.[54,55] The baby was named Tarzan, and became part of what Hilda considered to be the beginning of 'our family of pets'.[56,57] Tarzan was placed in a strong cage in the Merfields' garden, and soon 'the "baby" had lost its bad temper and would take bananas from our hands in a gentlemanly manner'.[58] The following week, another young gorilla, named Jeeves, joined the Merfield household. Fred 'handed [him] over to Hilda', saying that he was 'an addition to the family'.[59] As with the Johnsons, the Merfields characterized their acquisition of the two young gorillas as rescue from the supposed cruelty of Cameroonian people; Hilda wrote that 'the natives […] are always cruel to anything they catch[,] and tease and worry it'.[60]

The gorillas were apparently regarded as Hilda's pets, and she noted that their care, and that of the Merfields' other live animals, took up much of her time.[61] Tarzan and Jeeves appeared to have lived a relatively luxurious life as the Merfields' pet gorillas. They were housed in a cage in the Merfields' garden, but were tame enough to be let out of their cage, at least when supervised.[62] The gorillas would join the Merfields for breakfast, and were apparently taught table manners, Hilda writing that they '[came] in the house every morning to be fed with milk and bananas. They now sit down and drink very nicely from a tin and without spilling it'.[63] The young gorillas

52 On loan to PCM, Hilda Merfield correspondence to 'family and friends' (HM), March 25, 1935.

53 PCM, Merfield and Miller, 248; PCM, HM, March 25, 1935. A third source says the gorilla arrived on the Merfields' third day in Arteck: Hilda Merfield, "Shootman Woman," 67.

54 Merfield, "Shootman Woman," 68. It is likely that the baby gorilla was captured once his mother had been deliberately killed to provide Fred with her remains. Besalla and the other hunters in the area would have known that Fred would acquire dead gorillas, and live babies.

55 Hilda Merfield, "I Became a Jungle Wife," *Woman's Own* (1957): 45.

56 PCM, Merfield and Miller, 249.

57 Merfield, "Jungle Wife," 45.

58 PCM, Merfield, "Shootman Woman," 68.

59 PCM, Merfield and Miller, 249 and Merfield, "Jungle Wife," 45.

60 PCM, HM, April 5, 1935.

61 Merfield, "Jungle Wife," 45.

62 PCM, Merfield, "Shootman Woman," 68.

63 PCM, HM, June 23, 1935.

would each go to sit with the same human at breakfast time, with Tarzan going to Hilda, and Jeeves to Fred.[64]

The Merfields relocated from Arteck to Gadji upon learning that Hilda was pregnant, and brought Tarzan and Jeeves with them. Soon after the move, Hilda wrote that 'little Tarzan became ill and died. Jeeves fretted over him, and, within a few weeks, he died too'. Hilda had considered Tarzan and Jeeves her pets, and was saddened by the loss of the gorillas: 'I sat and cried over those two little pets – they had been our family'.[65]

Elisabeth Percy and Horatius, Lambaréné, Gabon, 1951–1953

Orphaned and injured animals were welcomed into the hospital community of Lambaréné, Gabon, run by the Alsatian medical missionary Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), including at least thirteen Western Gorillas.[66] A young gorilla named Horatius (c. 1950–1982) and his friend Néron (c. 1951–1981), lived at Lambaréné under the care of nurse Elisabeth Percy and her husband, Hungarian doctor Emeric Percy, in the early 1950s.[67] A rich photographic record of Horatius shows glimpses of how he was apparently doted on by his surrogate human parents.[68]

A seemingly posed photograph shows Elisabeth with Horatius at Lambaréné, Elisabeth watching over the young gorilla with apparent attention and care (Fig. 2).[69] Her pale clothing and crouched position add to her gentle appearance as she watches over Horatius. Other photographs suggest Horatius enjoyed relative freedom during his time at Lambaréné, as well as trappings of a domestic European childhood. He is shown bathing in a basin of water, asleep with fellow gorilla Néron in a cot complete with bedding, wearing clothes, and with a baby bottle.[70] While Horatius was described as 'a little gorilla that "*la doctoresse*" Percy jealously takes care of', he was

64 PCM, Merfield and Miller, 251.

65 Merfield, "Jungle Wife," 52. The remains of either Tarzan or Jeeves are now part of the collection at the Powell-Cotton Museum, accession number NH.MER.3.180.

66 Ann Cottrell Free, *Animals, Nature and Albert Schweitzer* (London: Flying Fox Press, 1988), 45–46.

67 Senneterre, "Avec Le Docteur Schweitzer Dans Sa Leproserie De Lambaréné," *France-Tireur* (1952). Mme Percy is referred to as 'la doctoresse' in this article, which suggests she was a doctor, but may also refer to being married to a doctor.

68 Archives Centrales, Albert Schweitzer Gunsbach (ACASG), photographic collection. ©Archives Centrales Albert Schweitzer Gunsbach.

69 ACASG, photographic collection, Horatius and Elisabeth Percy, image taken by Erica Anderson. ©Archives Centrales Albert Schweitzer Gunsbach.

70 ACASG, photographic collection, Animaux-III-19(1), Animaux-II-23(1)-(2), Animaux-I-49(2), FMS 23/3.

Figure 2. Horatius and Elisabeth Percy. Photograph by Erica Anderson.[72]

also apparently cared for by a Gabonese girl.[71] She is photographed holding Horatius in her arms, with the label on the back of the photograph stating: 'someone has to take care of the young gorillas, otherwise they would die from sadness'.[73]

As with the majority of young gorillas who survived captivity in colonial Africa, Horatius and Néron were eventually exported to the metropole. The young gorillas were taken to the zoo at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, accompanied by the Percys on their long journey from Gabon. The zoo's register states that Horatius was 26 months old, and Néron fourteen months old when they

71 Senneterre.

72 ACASG, photographic collection, Horatius and Elisabeth Percy, image taken by Erica Anderson. ©Archives Centrales Albert Schweitzer Gunsbach.

73 ACASG, photographic collection, P28.

arrived, on June 3, 1953, suggesting they had spent most of their lives with the Percys.[74] The gorillas found the change in their circumstances, and the parting from their human parents, difficult. Emeric wrote to Schweitzer saying: 'they cry whenever we go to visit them. We miss each other a lot'. Elisabeth added her feelings to the end of the letter: 'I go almost every day to visit the children – I'm so ashamed – but every time I burst into tears in front of their cage'.[75]

Discussion

The utilization and exploitation of women to care for captive gorillas in colonial Africa chimes with Western science's persistent misconception and misrepresentation of women being closer to (other) animals, more natural and less cultural, than men, as well as reinforcing the biologically deterministic roles of men as hunters and women as carers.[76,77] The roles of women in captive gorilla care also have echoes of the supposed predisposition of female scientists for primatology, in postcolonial Africa and elsewhere.[78] Since independence was gained by countries with wild gorilla populations, female scientists working with gorillas, both captive and free, have continued to be characterized in relation to their status as women, in a way that their male counterparts have rarely contended with.[79] The association of female primatologists with the care of young primates, including gorillas, is persistent.[80] For example, a photograph on the front

74 Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Bibliothèque centrale, Archives de la Ménagerie, ARCH Men 20, Registre d'entrée des mammifères et oiseaux, mai 15, 1914–décembre 28, 1958.

75 ACASG, letter from Emeric Percy to Schweitzer, June 7, 1953.

76 Londa L Schiebinger, "The Gendered Ape," in *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science,* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 75–114.

77 Linda Marie Fedigan, "The Changing Role of Women in Models of Human Evolution," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (1986): 25–66.

78 Donna Jeanne Haraway, "Women's Place Is in the Jungle," in *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (London: Psychology Press, 1989), 279–303.

79 Dian Fossey, "Wild Orphans Bound for Captivity: Coco and Pucker," in *Gorillas in the Mist,* (London: Phoenix, 1983), 106–24. Fossey described caring for two young female Eastern Gorillas, Coco (c. 1965–1978) and Pucker (c. 1963–1978), nursing them back to health before the Congolese government exported them to Cologne Zoo; John Fowler, *A Forest in the Clouds* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2018). Fowler described the care of a third gorilla by Fossey, himself, and other student researchers. Francine Patterson, *The Education of Koko* (London: Deutsch, 1982). Patterson cared for the gorillas she conducted her linguistic research with, including Michael (c. 1973–2000), who was taken from the wild as a baby.

80 Linda Marie Fedigan, "Science and the Successful Female: Why There Are So Many Women Primatologists," *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 3 (1994): 529–40.

page of *National Geographic* magazine of Dian Fossey caring for two illegally captured gorillas, who she regarded as an 'interruption' to her long-term research of wild Eastern Gorillas, boosted her international fame in a way that her previous years of fieldwork had not.[81]

Examples of women caring for captive gorillas in colonial Africa are just a small proportion of instances in which gorillas reinforced the racial and gendered hierarchies of colonial Africa. While the hunting and capture of gorillas placed African staff at risk of injury, captive young gorillas formed particularly potent examples of exotic animals used to illustrate the power of empire to dominate, acquire and subdue.[82] The gendering of gorilla care also intersected with, and reinforced, the racial hierarchisation imposed by colonizers. While white women added the clothing and coddling of baby gorillas to their work, only Black women were allocated the bodily work of breastfeeding babies of another species. It was apparently acceptable for the wives of white colonizers to treat baby gorillas as European children, but the intense, sometimes painful intimacy of wet-nursing was deemed only appropriate for Black women.

The involvement of women in the care of captive gorillas led to the building of intimate relationships and, in some cases, love between the two species.[83] Domestic intimacies, signified by the trappings of Western childhood, were formed between gorillas and white women in the colonial home, while bodily intimacies grew between gorillas and Black women through wet-nursing. Although the statuses of Black and white women in the hierarchies of colonial Africa were very different, women generally had less power than white men, whether their husbands or employers. While the care of captured gorillas was prioritized over the welfare of Black people in colonial hierarchies, white male owners of gorillas also had power over white and Black women's lives. The intimacies built between women and the gorillas they cared for grew in part from their shared experiences of being othered and dominated by white men, perhaps even a sense of allyship. Although in very different circumstances, captured gorillas, white colonial wives, and Black wet-nurses, all shared the experience of being taken from their families and homes at the behest of white men. Additionally, while

81 Dian Fossey, "Making Friends with Mountain Gorillas", *National Geographic* 137, no. 1 (1970): 48–67.

82 Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 205–07.

83 Radhika Govindrajan, *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Lisa Uddin, "A Gorilla Lover's Discourse," *Parallax* 12, no. 1 (2006): 110–19.

gorillas were regarded as subhuman commodities, Black women were treated as if livestock to feed the captive animals that were the whims of white men, while the presence of white women in the colonies was to some extent to care for or support their husbands.[84]

It is impossible to know what the fates of captive gorillas cared for by women in colonial Africa would have been without these nurturing interspecies relationships, although women who wet-nursed the youngest captive gorillas undoubtedly prolonged their lives. The intimacies that flourished between women and captive gorillas in colonial Africa were likely to have improved the quality of life of young gorillas, providing material and emotional comfort. The lives of some women were in turn enriched by the distracting presence and affection of gorillas in their lives, their interspecies relationships becoming transformative for humans and gorillas alike.[85]

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84 Ann L. Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 1 (1989): 134–61; idem, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010) 1.

85 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Dominance & Affection: The Making of Pets*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 144; Kathleen Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir: Petkeeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 55; Harriet Ritvo, "Animal Planet," *Environmental History* 9, no. 2 (2004): 204–20.

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