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“Exotic Savages”

Borderline Figures as a Symptom of Neoliberal Picture Politics?

In May/June 2006, an advertisement, published by Germany's large TV-magazine HÖRZU as part of its latest campaign caused vehement and widespread protest. It represented a white man in a business suit and a black woman wearing a silky dress and a lip-plate, combined with the campaign slogan saying “at some point one becomes choosey”. Opposing the protest, the Deutsche Werberat, an institution of voluntary self-control in advertising, insisted that the poster represented an emancipated relationship between two protagonists. This article discusses the controversial opinions regarding the sexist and racist nature of the advertisement. It argues that the black woman portrayed functions as a borderline figure challenging the precarious crossroads of neoliberal claims of visual normalization and the conditions of anti-sexist/anti-racist critique in the field of vision. Exploring the various images of femininity brought to mind by the image – the diverse representational modes and types *the black woman* simultaneously embodies: the female (black) beauty, the African tribe's woman and the monstrous female –, the article provides an analysis of the interaction between a Western/European/White collective image memory and the history of the mutual production of beauty norms and racisms.