

'The Royal Road to the Colonial Unconscious': Psychoanalysis, Cannibalism, and the Libidinal Economy of Colonialism

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Abstract

In this article, I explore the libidinal economy of colonialism from the perspective of cannibalism (as Western fantasy about the exotic, subhuman other). To do that, I closely follow references to the cannibal in the arsenal of anti-colonial, literary tropes and, in two poems by Oswald de Andrade and Aimé Césaire. Although the anti-colonial identification with the cannibal engenders the potential of a threatening reappropriation of that which has been colonially stolen, I show that something is left unacknowledged in this melancholic identification. I then turn to the work of Octave Mannoni who views the cannibal as a metaphor for the overwhelming dependency complex of the colonised. Analysing the colonial dyad from the perspective of personality complexes, Mannoni fixes the coloniser and the colonised in a power dynamic, which although addresses the psychological dimension of colonialism this is reduced to the level of an interpersonal conflict. Finally, I turn to the work of Frantz Fanon to show what a psychoanalytic reading of the colonial, libidinal economy can offer: emphasising the sexual connotations enclosed in the cannibalistic fantasy, Fanon exposes the viscerality of colonial racism as a wish to devour and annihilate the colonised. In Fanon's work, psychoanalysis emerges as a potent tool which exposes the unconscious dynamics of sexualised and racial fantasies and as such it appears to be an indispensable for decolonial thinking.

Keywords: Frantz Fanon, cannibalism, colonial libidinal economy, racism, homosexuality

Resumo

Neste artigo, exploro a economia libidinal do colonialismo sob a perspectiva do canibalismo (como fantasia ocidental sobre o outro exótico e subumano). Para isso, sigo de perto as referências ao canibal no arsenal de *tropos* literários anticoloniais e em dois poemas de Oswald de Andrade e Aimé Césaire. Embora a identificação anticolonial com o canibal engendre o potencial de uma reapropriação ameaçadora do que foi roubado colonialmente, mostro que algo deixa de ser reconhecido nessa identificação melancólica. Em seguida, volto-me para o trabalho de Octave Mannoni, que vê o canibal como uma metáfora para o esmagador complexo de dependência do colonizado. Analisando a díade colonial sob a ótica dos complexos de personalidade, Mannoni fixa o colonizador e o colonizado em uma dinâmica de poder e, embora aborde a dimensão psicológica do colonialismo, a reduz ao nível de um conflito interpessoal. Finalmente, volto-me para a obra de Frantz Fanon para mostrar o que uma leitura psicanalítica da economia colonial libidinal pode oferecer: enfatizando as conotações sexuais encerradas na fantasia canibalística, Fanon expõe a visceralidade do racismo colonial como um desejo de devorar e aniquilar o colonizado. Na obra de Fanon, a psicanálise surge como uma ferramenta potente que expõe a dinâmica inconsciente das fantasias sexuais e raciais e, como tal, parece ser indispensável para o pensamento decolonial.

Palavras-chave: Frantz Fanon, canibalismo, economia libidinal colonial, racismo, homossexualidade

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In this article, I explore the libidinal economy of colonialism from the perspective of cannibalism. The figure of the cannibal is a long-standing anthropological, cultural, and literary trope that condenses annihilation anxieties, fears of merging, excessive desires, inhumane practices, fantasies of incorporation, appropriation, and monstrous appetites. Its place in the colonial discourse has been one of objectifying the colonised and designating the limits of Western civilisation.² Although practices of anthropophagy have been debated amongst anthropologists — in some cases resulting in celebratory refutations of whether such practices actually took place and if they did, whether they acquired the meaning they now have in Western culture³ — here, I am drawing on cannibalism not as a description of human flesh eating, but as a colonial fantasy. In other words, I look at the cannibal as a figure that has not historically existed, but that has been culturally constructed and sustained because it fulfils a political as much as a psychic desire. The cannibal embodies the marker of racial difference, it is the West's radical other, and as such it is an apt entry point for investigating the libidinal economy of the colonial situation. By libidinal economy I mean a particular unconscious, symbolic structure that sustains certain roles, relationships, and attachments in place. Following Derek Hook, I regard the libidinal economy as entailing 'relations of passionate attachment and exclusion'; that affirm 'types of group identification and holds certain social formations in place.'⁴

I first explore how the cannibal entered the anti-colonial arsenal through poets and scholars who deployed the opportunity to fight — or even bite — back in a colonial situation when alienation becomes the overwhelming subjective experience. Exposing the limitations of this anti-colonial endeavour, I turn to the psychoanalytically informed thinkers Octave Mannoni and Frantz Fanon to explore cannibalism from a psychological perspective. While Mannoni and Fanon look at individual psychology, I argue that it is only through a psychoanalytic dissection of colonialism's libidinal economy — as opposed to interpersonal encounters — that the place of cannibalism in

² Katherine Biber, "Cannibals and Colonialism," *Sydney Law Review* 26, no. 4 (2005): 623–37; Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986); Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen, *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

³ Walter Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Gananath Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas* (U.S.A: University of California Press, 2005).

⁴ Derek Hook, "Fanon and Libidinal Economy," in *Re(Con)Figuring Psychoanalysis: Critical Juxtapositions of the Philosophical, the Sociohistorical and the Political*, ed. Aydan Gülerce (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 165.

colonial discourses can be understood as embodying a visceral wish to annihilate the subhuman other.

Melancholic Identifications: Andrade and Césaire

The cannibal occupies a central place in anti-colonial political and aesthetic discourses as it allows the reversal of the coloniser-colonised dynamic. In appropriating the figure of the cannibal, anti-colonial subjectivity eschews the position of passive subjugation and can actively reclaim a position which can avenge for the harm towards indigenous cultures. This is the position adopted by a group of avant-garde writers and artists in São Paulo, who in May 1928 founded a short-lived journal called *Revista de Anthropophagia* (*Review of Anthropophagy*), calling for aesthetic projects to reconstruct Brazilian identity by reclaiming the colonial myth of Brazilian cannibalism. Since the 1922 Week of Modern Art at São Paulo, one of the first avant-garde movements in Latin America, Brazilian artists had experimented with ideas of excavating and recovering histories of Brazil's earliest, pre-colonial inhabitants to tackle the advances of European reason and modernity. Although the movement dissolved during the 1929 financial crisis because of a wider political shift to the right, before its decline, it exposed important questions about cultural origins, authenticity and national identification. A pioneer member of the *anthropophagia* movement, Oswald de Andrade, in his famous *Manifesto Anthropófago* published in the first issue of the *Revista de Anthropophagia*, deployed the form of cannibalism as a synthesis of the colonial dialectic. Andrade's project was an invitation to 'ingest European influences insofar as they could be regurgitated in the form of something new and Brazilian for export.'⁵

Yet, the poem was also an embodiment of the ingestion of European influences, a literary exemplification of Brazilian cannibalism. Regurgitating the highest cultural advances of European culture, Andrade wonders: 'Tupi or not Tupi that is the question.'⁶ The Tupi was, of course, a short name for the Tupinambá, a tribe living near Rio de Janeiro allied to the French. In this Shakespearean paraphrase, Andrade addresses the pre-colonial tribes living in Brazilian ground, who became famous through a German explorer named Hans Staden who was captured by the Tupinambá. Ignoring the irony that Staden was released safe and sound, he produced a graphic

⁵ Sadlier, *Brazil Imagined: From 1500 to the Present*, 190.

⁶ Andrade, "Canibalist Manifesto," trans. Leslie Bary, *Latin American Literary Review* 19, no. 38 (1991), 38.

narrative — which had ‘the greatest impact of any of its time’⁷ — about how the Tupinambá consume their enemy prisoners, after dismembering them, populating the European imaginary with woodcuts and images of mutilations and anthropophagy.⁸ The Tupi consumed their prisoners just as Andrade consumed and spat out Hamlet’s existential wondering. At the same time, Andrade’s manifesto exposes that the Brazilian *anthropophagus* is the precondition for the emergence of the universality of European subjectivity — [W]ithout us, Europe wouldn’t even have its meagre declaration of the rights of man.⁹ Consumed, exploited, desperately needed Andrade uncovers something of the melancholic impossibility of returning to a Brazilian pre-colonial history. If the Tupi culture cannot be revived since Portuguese colonialists destroyed most of their cultural artefacts, and native informants are ‘tragically unavailable’¹⁰, Andrade proposes a metonymic appropriation of the (alleged) Tupi cannibalism. The only way to hold on to the memory of colonial destruction is through the melancholic identification with the lost heritage. This is what Ranjana Khanna calls the ‘critical work of melancholia’ which manifests through the spectral identification with that which is long gone.¹¹ The reclamation of cannibalism, thus, stands as a persistent holding on to the pre-colonial past as an ethical act and also, as the only way of resisting European colonialism. An alliance with the cannibals, even if only literary, allows the anti-colonial subject to take something back from the sweeping force of the European imaginary.

Andrade’s manifesto also suggests that departing from the ground of cannibalism might indicate a more ethical way of dealing with enmity. Andrade implies that against the objectification of the colonised other as a wild, savage, exotic, cannibal, ‘absorption of the sacred enemy’ may ‘transform him into a totem.’¹² Who is the sacred enemy for the anthropophagus? Is it Shakespeare and the way he metonymically represents the pinnacle of Western cultural advancements—which in being torn apart, bitten, chewed and digested and reappropriated by the anti-colonial avant-garde constitutes an affective enactment of colonial melancholia? Questioning the political currency of anthropophagy Roberto Schwartz alluded to the limitations of an analogy that reduces Brazilian culture into a ‘mirror culture,’ making no contribution

⁷ Sadlier, *Brazil Imagined: From 1500 to the Present*, 26.

⁸ Sadlier, 24.

⁹ Andrade, “Canibalist Manifesto,” 39.

¹⁰ Luís Madureira, *Cannibal Modernities: Postcoloniality and the Avant-Garde in Caribbean and Brazilian Literature* (U.S.A: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 13.

¹¹ Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 29.

¹² Andrade, “Canibalist Manifesto,” 39.

to the working through of Brazilian identity and therefore, reinventing something in the place of the colonial loss.¹³ Perhaps, though Andrade's manifesto can be read as an exemplification of the tenuous dynamics between the periphery and the centre — the hegemony of European, modern thought and culture from within its margins.¹⁴

While Andrade invokes the imagery of the colonised as being 'cannibalised' by the coloniser and advocates for its reversal, the Antillean poet, Aimé Césaire incorporates in this dynamic the question of racial difference. In doing so, Césaire exposes alternative aesthetic tools and tropes available. Whilst in Paris, Césaire composed his first poem titled *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, which became a key text for the movement of Negritude — a cultural, aesthetic, socio-political and transcontinental movement which voiced the intricacies of the experience of being colonised, alongside the political and personal complexities. In the poem, one of the startling observations Césaire makes, upon his return to the native land, is the alienated landscape of Martinique, the zombifying everyday life and the severed social bonds between the island's inhabitants. 'In this disowning town, this strange crowd which does not gather, does not mingle: this crowd that can so easily disengage itself, make off, slip away. This crowd which doesn't know how to crowd.'¹⁵

In his examination of Césaire's contributions to the politics and contradictions of decolonisation, Gary Wilder portrays Césaire as a figure with a 'pragmatic relationship to colonial emancipation and political freedom.'¹⁶ Wilder argues that we should think of Césaire's politics of decolonisation as humble and modest: neither as a set of utopian and romantic promises about what post-colonial freedom would carry along, nor as a means of doctrines and 'ready-made a priori certainties' that fetishized political means.¹⁷ Instead, Césaire requires us to think decolonisation through a set of realistic possibilities, which could be actualised and executed through a combination of means, within the present conditions.¹⁸ This non-utopian, non-conservative, and non-ideological approach to Antillean politics entailed also a perceptive and insightful gaze at what challenges and obstacles the colonial infrastructure enforced. Keeping this in mind, we examine his poetry alongside similar lines. This is not to suggest, however, that his poetry should be read through a crude realism or as a concrete, militant or

¹³ Roberto Schwarz, "Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination," trans. Linda Briggs, *New Left Review* I, no. 167 (1988): 82.

¹⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

¹⁵ Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, trans. Mireille Rosello and Annie Pritchard (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995), 75.

¹⁶ Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 21.

¹⁷ Wilder, 21.

¹⁸ Wilder, 21.

politicised form of art. Quite the contrary. It is a form of aesthetic pluralism, which according to Gregson Davis must be conceived as an undogmatic ‘drama of self-exploration in which the speaker typically *impersonates* differing versions of the self and holds them up to merciless scrutiny.’¹⁹ Césaire withdraws himself and allows his voice to be multiplied and interpolated by a plethora of racial selves, ‘masks of negritude’²⁰ — as Gregson puts it, implying the ways Césaire’s work anticipated Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*.²¹ Similar to Fanon, as we will shortly see, Césaire speaks from the position of racialised subjects that have historically functioned as ‘universal scapegoat[s]:’²² ‘as there are hyena men and panther-men, I would be a Jew-man/a Kaffir-man/ a Hindu-man-from Calcutta, /a Harlem-man-who-does-not-vote [...]’.²³ Césaire, Wilder cautions us, does not aim at multiplying the representation of black subjectivity, but in rehearsing different perspectives, to explore the boundaries and the ‘impossible dilemmas concerning colonial racism, alienation, and emancipation.’²⁴

While the movements of *Anthropofagia* and *Negritude* in their deployment of cannibalism expose their convergence in the wider project of ‘provincializing the west’ by attempting not only ‘to reveal, but more crucially, to undo’ the process of the native’s erasure,²⁵ a closer juxtaposition shows otherwise. For Andrade the appropriation of cannibalism is the key to social cohesion (‘cannibalism alone unites us’), whereas for Césaire the crowd that doesn’t know how to crowd remains as an unresolved, troubling question. At the same time, both Andrade and Césaire claim kinship with cannibalism as a militant appropriation in the sphere of language and imagination, key in the psychological arena of anti-colonial hatred: ‘Because we hate you, you and/your reason, we claim kinship with/dementia praecox with flaming madness/with tenacious cannibalism.’²⁶

Reclaiming cannibalism — and madness — is a form of resistance. However, Césaire’s poem makes a different contribution to the movement of negritude; departing

¹⁹ Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27.

²⁰ Davis, 27.

²¹ A very beautiful and indicative passage is the following: ‘My mouth will be the mouth of those griefs which have no mouth, my voice, the freedom of those that collapse in the dungeon of despair [...] And above all beware, my body and my soul too, beware of crossing your arms in the sterile attitude of the spectator, because life is not a spectacle, because a sea of sorrows is not a proscenium, because a man who screams is not a dancing bear.’ Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, 89.

²² Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 27.

²³ Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, 85.

²⁴ Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World*, 22.

²⁵ Madureira, *Cannibal Modernities: Postcoloniality and the Avant-Garde in Caribbean and Brazilian Literature*, 215.

²⁶ Césaire, *The Original 1939 Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, 93.

from the lived experience of immigration, exile and return, and through its unfinished form, the poem contemplates the fundamental openness and unfinished process of returning.²⁷ Perhaps this view is best echoed in Davis when he describes Césaire's homecoming as 'a recurrent event that is continually in the process of rehearsal,'²⁸ which effectively highlights the inherent plasticity of *Negritude*.

The difference between the way Andrade and Césaire use the cannibal trope lies in *that* for which no story can be written about, unless it is about how it haunts accounts of one's self. Andrade argues for the necessity to reclaim cannibalism as a form of colonial otherness to produce a new copy of peripheral primitivism. This is what Bhabha described as when 'the observer becomes observed' a process which 'the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined,'²⁹ which makes mimicry a disturbing and even threatening means in the anti-colonial arsenal. Mimicry here must be understood not as a process of simply imitating the colonizer's manners, habits and intellectual knowledge; but as an active reciprocation of the colonial gaze that places mimicry closer to mockery. More precisely, '[I]n order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.'³⁰ By copying the colonizer's capacity for representation, Andrade's manifesto can challenge its 'power to be a model';³¹ therefore, his suggestion for an anti-colonial aesthetic does not result in the consolidation of European epistemologies 'but rather in their displacement,'³² turning the discourse of savage exoticism on its face. This is because mimicry works as a 'metonymy of presence'; it reproduces the colonizer's ethos, values, aesthetics, or style and through this mimicking act the colonizing power is partially there, perhaps in the form of an optical illusion or a bad copy: '*almost the same, but not quite*.'³³ This is the radical excess produced by the replication of cannibalism that makes the latter an emancipatory and empowering solution. Yet, does this eschew the jeopardy of reproducing the same epistemic violence of colonialism, the movements sought to undo?³⁴ Andrade's proposition to reclaim savagery and cannibalism raised the question of *who* can legitimately speak about the subaltern as

²⁷ What better example of this repetition of Césaire's self-narrative than the 'four separate published versions of the poem,' which demonstrate, as Davis put it 'a long-term engagement in revision that testifies to his creative obsession.' Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 21.

²⁸ Davis, 22.

²⁹ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," 129.

³⁰ Bhabha, 126.

³¹ Bhabha, 128.

³² Madureira, *Cannibal Modernities: Postcoloniality and the Avant-Garde in Caribbean and Brazilian Literature*, 41.

³³ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," 126.

³⁴ Schwarz, "Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination."

anthropophagic, therefore challenging ‘the *authorization* of colonial representations;³⁵ namely, who has the right to produce cannibals and what kind of cannibals are these? To paraphrase Bhabha this is the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be able to be cannibalized (that is play the role imposed by the colonial gaze), is *emphatically* not to be a cannibal.³⁶

Césaire’s use of cannibalism, on the other hand, can only be used to explain, or diagnose the profound alienation he comes across whilst returning to his homeland. There is no place from where to counter what he calls ‘this ancient dream of my cannibal cruelties.’³⁷ For Césaire the essence of racism is that it completely shoehorns the black subject into a position of a deserved dispossession: ‘to be a good nigger he must believe honestly in his unworthiness.’³⁸ One is, of course, compelled to ask what the honest belief symbolises here — if not the unconscious incorporation of a belief (unworthiness) that cannot be — to an extent — disowned as a foreign body in the psyche. Perhaps then the difference between Andrade and Césaire lies in the possibility of imagining an uncontaminated psychic space from where to counter colonial alienation.

Devouring Dependence: Mannoni’s Cannibals

Writing about the ‘colonial situation’ the French psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni identifies the psychic effects of colonialism by introducing a third dimension in the coloniser-colonised dyad. Mannoni was a Lacanian psychoanalyst and ethnographer who lived in the French colony, Madagascar and published in 1950 one of the first works about the psychology of colonialism entitled *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonisation*.³⁹ Mannoni’s argument was that the ‘colonial situation’ is a thirdness, a separate register. This thirdness is realised as soon as a white man finds himself amongst an indigenous tribe, where ‘he is thought to be rich or powerful or merely immune to the local forces of magic.’⁴⁰ Mannoni argues that should the white man’s cultural register prevail, then he is regarded as ‘king’. The colonial situation is sustained through an unconscious dimension in the colonial power dynamics — added to the political and economic exploitation — which fixes the coloniser and the colonised

³⁵ Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” 131.

³⁶ The original phrase goes like this: ‘to be Anglicized, is *emphatically* not to be English.’ Bhabha, 128.

³⁷ Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, 70.

³⁸ Césaire, 87.

³⁹ Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela Powesland (London: Methuen & Co, Ltd, 1956).

⁴⁰ Mannoni, 18.

in specific positions, such as 'dependency and inferiority'. This dyad is not antithetical, but 'the one excludes the other.'⁴¹ In other words, Mannoni's psychological shortcut to the colonial situation involves an insecure, fragile figure, keen on dominating and imposing himself on others, and a dependent and submissive other, who requires guidance and governance. For Mannoni, it is the unconscious desire that grants consensus to the coloniser for the imposition of colonial power and oppression — otherwise this schema would collapse.

Mannoni bases his argument firstly in ethnographic observations from Madagascar, collection of dreams and myths, and secondly, in the literary duet of Prospero and Caliban — as appearing in Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest*. Khanna argues that Mannoni anticipated in the play condensed images and metaphors that would expose the unconscious of the cross-cultural encounter — akin to Freud's unravelling of the interpretation of dreams.⁴² Yet, ignoring the play's complexity, Mannoni frames the colonial situation through the 'native character' (dependency) and the 'colonizer type' (inferiority). Prospero and Caliban exemplify aspects of the personality of those who in being involved in the colonial situation find satisfaction and 'solace' in the fulfilment of their unconscious wish to occupy such roles. For the coloniser, on the one hand, Mannoni argues that the inferiority complex is necessary as it propels him to seek admiration and subjugation in a non-Western culture. For the Malagasy, on the other, seeking a ruling order to become attached to, Mannoni argues, stems from the absence of living, authoritative figures — rather, guidance is offered only by dead ancestors. This begs the question of what galvanises the mutually sustained transference, which psychologically explains the colonial situation? Mannoni's answer is simple: it is the immunity to magic, the white man's register of reason and contempt towards the indigenous culture that, in turns, leads the colonised (who becomes uncritically infantilised) to become enchanted by this new 'king'. 'The man-in-the-street will say instinctively and without experience', Mannoni writes in the introduction, 'that if the white man who goes among the negroes avoids being eaten, he will become King.'⁴³ The assumption can be read both literally and metaphorically, namely that he who survives the savage appetites of the 'Calibans' — or their devouring dependency — will be glorified.

The way Mannoni uses cannibalism to incorporate inhumane, savage appetites in the libidinal economy of colonialism can be observed in the famous

⁴¹ Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, 40.

⁴² Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, 158.

⁴³ Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, 18.

incident with his tennis instructor. The instructor fell sick with malaria and Mannoni ordered some quinine for him. Mannoni observes that until that point their relationship was a professional one — 'he had not been in the habit of seeking favours from' him.⁴⁴ Yet, the instructor's behaviour changed after he received the quinine: 'he shyly pointed out to me that his rubber shoes were worn out', or 'without any trace of embarrassment' he told Mannoni 'he was in need of cigarette papers.'⁴⁵ Mannoni views the instructor's inability to receive the gift as linked to the absence of feelings of gratitude, and thus an indication of his 'dependency complex'. Gratitude involves the holding of one's self in-between two contradictory feelings: 'on the one hand the feeling that one is very much indebted, and on the other the feeling that one is not indebted at all.'⁴⁶ It is a recognition of the other's good will and a feeling of indebtedness, without, however, a genuine dependence on the other for support. This is why Mannoni separates feelings of dependence (what he thinks the instructor is feeling) which are incompatible with gratitude, with an '*image* of dependence' which is expressed through gratitude (what he would be feeling had he not a dependency complex).⁴⁷ Dependency then, becomes 'degraded' to the point of 'mendicity,' and as such is experienced as draining and overwhelming, because it cannot be contained and satisfied.⁴⁸ The Malagasy who counts on his 'protector' 'fears no danger.'⁴⁹ Yet, although Mannoni is oblivious to the unconscious motivation of his 'objective and impersonal', 'simply [...] helpful gesture' of giving the instructor the medicine he needed, he does not miss the opportunity to reflect on the colonial situation as a pathological relation fostered by the coloniser, as much as the colonised.

Prospero's character formation embodies the disappointment experienced by the coloniser who is driven by a 'desire for reward' and a desire to dominate which motivates the coloniser to pursue a vocation intended to offer 'some inner solace'⁵⁰ and 'psychological satisfaction.'⁵¹ However, Prospero's desire is not reciprocated, and instead he is met with an ungrateful and draining dependence; the colonial situation can satisfy neither the inferiority of the European nor the dependency of the Malagasy; it is 'coming undone.'⁵² What is more, the colonised is implicated as complicit in an unfulfilling power dynamic that leaves both parties, symmetrically, equally,

⁴⁴ Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, 42.

⁴⁵ Mannoni, 42.

⁴⁶ Mannoni, 47.

⁴⁷ Mannoni, 47.

⁴⁸ Mannoni, 43.

⁴⁹ Mannoni, 43.

⁵⁰ Mannoni, 88.

⁵¹ Mannoni, 121.

⁵² Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, 165.

unconsciously entangled in a frustrating transference relationship that cannot easily be given up. For Mannoni the only way out is the recognition of the fictional character of the colonial situation. This is a point often ignored in Mannoni's argument — and one which Frantz Fanon misses as well — namely that such personality traits are not biologically inherited positions but the only conditions of possibility of colonial subjectivity.⁵³ As McCulloch put it 'there is no *constitutional* imperative governing the Malagasy's dependence complex. If a Malagasy were brought up in Europe, he would exhibit inferiority and not dependence.'⁵⁴

De-essentialising racial difference, or rather transposing it to the level of transference and projections, Mannoni reaches a quite radical conclusion about the power of language and signification in erecting barriers and foregrounding difference. After all, Mannoni concludes that 'the white man's image of the black man tells us nothing about his own inner self', instead the black man is like a container of 'that part of him which he has not been able to accept', the 'white man's fear of himself.'⁵⁵ In a similar vein, in a later paper entitled *The Decolonisation of Myself* published in 1966, he expands on the absence of biological difference based on 'race' with a clinical example of a Jewish patient who was anxious about his Jewishness. 'I remember having been tempted to say', writes Mannoni, 'that there were in reality no Jews, that it was nothing but a word, a label which other people's hands had stuck on his back.'⁵⁶ Although Mannoni scrutinises the colonial situation and describes it in terms of a transference exchange, what his analysis nonetheless misses is the embodied and unconscious impact of such exchange. While he views Prospero and Caliban in non-essentialist terms, as a performance that is galvanised in the colonial situation, triggered by anxiety and difference, the unconscious drives fuelling the two parties are not fully acknowledged. In other words, Mannoni's account is missing an important component which would allow for greater psychoanalytic depth in his analysis: the question of sexuality and the libidinal economy of colonialism.

⁵³ Christopher Lane, "Psychoanalysis and Colonialism Redux: Why Mannoni's "Prospero Complex" Still Haunts Us," *Journal of Modern Literature* 25, no. 3/4 (2002): 127–49.

⁵⁴ Jock McCulloch, *Black Soul White Artefact: Fanon's Clinical Psychology and Social Theory* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 23.

⁵⁵ Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, 191.

⁵⁶ Octave Mannoni, "The Decolonisation of Myself," *Race* VII, no. 4 (1966): 332.

‘Mama the nigger’s going to eat me up’: Psychoanalysis, Sexuality, Racism

In the previous section I showed that Mannoni fixes the stakeholders of the ‘colonial situation’ in positions constructed in a disembodied, desexualised way. In this section, I turn to the work of Frantz Fanon and his engagement with psychoanalysis for the interrogation of cannibalism as an indispensable component of the colonial, libidinal economy. Fanon’s emphasis on embodiment and epidermalisation need to be understood in the context of his experience in medical establishments in France, where he came across a series of cases of intense psychosomatic symptoms, with no profound medical explanation. In an essay written during the same time as *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon documented medical encounters between French doctors and Arab immigrants, in France and exposed the centrality of fear, dispossession and uncertainty that dominated the realities of some of his immigrant patients.⁵⁷ Titled *The North African Syndrome* the essay argues that this syndrome was an exegesis provided from doctors that erased the patient’s pathology and avoided questioning the limitations of a Western, positivistic medicine. Instead of questioning the treatment proposed, doctors dealing with Arab patients dismissed their symptoms and nullified them as individuals. ‘When you come down to it, the North African is a simulator, a liar, a malingerer, a sluggard a thief.’⁵⁸ Through these psychosomatic symptoms, Fanon identified the effects of racism emerging from social dispossession — ‘without a family, without love, without human relations, without communion with the group’ — and becoming transformed into a physical dispossession: ‘he will feel himself emptied, without life, in a bodily struggle with death [...] and what is more pathetic than this man with robust muscles who tells us in his truly broken voice, “Doctor, I’m going to die”?’⁵⁹

The black man is inescapably and unquestionably, Fanon’s thesis goes, an object of fear. Fanon regarded phobia as the key to understanding the white human’s unconscious, and therefore he proposed to unpack the motivations behind what he called ‘negrophobia;’ the fear of the black man. ‘What is phobia?’, asks Fanon.⁶⁰ Throughout *Black Skin, White Masks*, he traces two specific kinds of phobias: firstly, the fear of the black man as rapist, as commonly shared by white women. Secondly, the fear of the black man as a cannibal. Rape and cannibalism, sexuality, fusion and

⁵⁷ Frantz Fanon, “The ‘North African Syndrome,’” in *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 3.

⁵⁸ Fanon, 7.

⁵⁹ Fanon, 13.

⁶⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1986, 154.

orality comprise Fanon's analysis of racism, disclosing an inherent connection between anxiety, death, violence, and annihilation embedded in the white unconscious. It is in his discussion of the black body as phobogenic that Fanon's thesis becomes 'properly psychoanalytic' (Hook, 168). In his most famous work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) Fanon dissects racial difference and racism in a culture that has systematically constructed the black body as phobogenic — namely, as being the object of phobias. The book's most famous passage condenses a series of verbal, non-verbal and unconscious transmissions that capture the experience of being objectified and reduced through the gaze, which is at the centre of Fanon's analysis of race. Whilst a medical student in Lyon, Fanon becomes aware of being seen and not being seen, by a young white boy and his mother. This is the passage, and it is worth quoting at length:

“Look at the nigger!... Mama, a Negro!... Hell, he's getting mad... Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilised as we...” My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up.⁶¹

Fanon's psychological explanation of phobia is premised upon the view that the choice of the phobic object is a priori '*overdetermined*'. Following what he calls, a psychoanalytic 'complete orthodoxy' Fanon argued that the phobogenic object is invested with qualities that are excessive; they appeal to sexual anxieties and fantasies of destruction. 'The object is endowed with evil intentions and with all the attributes of a malefic power.'⁶² To unpack why the black body is placed at the centre of phobias, he explores the exaggerated black sexuality in the white imaginary and refers to the 'hallucinatory' sexual potency of the black man which is most clearly articulated in the female fantasy of rape: '*a Negro is raping me*.'⁶³ Fanon argues that this fantasy expresses a concealed desire: 'basically, does this fear of rape not itself cry out for rape?'⁶⁴ Following Marie Bonaparte and Helen Deutsch, Fanon takes the rape fantasy a step further, arguing that it is an unconscious aggression of a woman towards her mother's body; the white woman wants the black man's penis to rape herself, and

⁶¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 113–14.

⁶² Fanon, 155.

⁶³ Fanon, 178.

⁶⁴ Fanon, 156.

through that her mother too. Thus, Fanon pronounces the actual content of the fear of rape: 'I wish the Negro would rip me open as I would have ripped a woman open.'⁶⁵ However, this fantasy does not explain the cross-racial identification with the black man; why is the black man's penis required for this fantasy.

To explore this point Fanon turns to the female double Oedipus complex. Bonaparte argued that female masochism is a concealed sexual desire for the mother (homosexuality) since it is comprised of a phallic (clitoral) aggression that originally was directed towards the mother but is eventually returned towards the woman's self.⁶⁶ Additionally, Bonaparte saw female sexuality as progressing from the clitoral to the clitoral-vaginal and finally to formally vaginal sexuality.⁶⁷ What one must assume, Fanon says, when thinking about the maturity of female sexuality is that, in the 'Negrophobic' women, there must be some remains of the early, clitoral sexual phase that carries forward a phallic aggression towards the mother: 'in her as in the little boy there will be impulses directed at the mother; she too would like to disembowel the mother.'⁶⁸ The reason why the white woman identifies with the black man is because 'the Negro is the genital.'⁶⁹ Using the black man's excessive sexual potency, the white woman attacks the mother, in fantasy. At the same time, she also repudiates herself, satisfying her own guilt for her aggressiveness towards the mother — by allowing herself to be raped.

In her reading of Fanon's account of rape fantasy, Jean Walton observes that technically Fanon displaces the aggression projected on the black body onto the maternal body.⁷⁰ It is her mother that the white woman wants to attack, and for this purpose, uses the black man as an object, an objectified, excessive penis which can help her fulfil the fantasy. Walton critiques Fanon for replicating the view that female sexuality is structured on 'masochism.'⁷¹ The displacement of masochism from the black man to the white woman exposes that it is a normative, heterosexual masculinity that corroborates processes of sexual and racial othering within psychoanalysis—a point which neither Fanon nor Mannoni managed to articulate.⁷² Nonetheless, Vicky Lebeau fleshed out the intricacies of Fanon's argument towards a slightly different direction. She argued that if we look beyond Fanon's problematic displacement, what

⁶⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 179.

⁶⁶ Marie Bonaparte, *Female Sexuality*, trans. John Rodker (New York: Grove Press, 1953).

⁶⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1986, 178.

⁶⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 179.

⁶⁹ Fanon, 180.

⁷⁰ Jean Walton, *Fair Sex, Savage Dreams: Race, Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 27.

⁷¹ Walton, 29.

⁷² Walton, 29.

he seems to be arguing is that there is an implicit *structural* aetiology within the psychoanalysis of white femininity that entwines female sexuality with 'Negrophobia.' This is why, according to Lebeau, Fanon finds 'such an acknowledgment — a projection of thought, of painful thought, on to the white woman —[...] remarkable not least because it begins to draw attention to the overdetermination of the interpretation of sexuality and phobia,' but because for him, it signals a 'liberation from thinking.'⁷³

Carefully examining Fanon's argument around 'Negrophobia' and female sexuality, Lebeau argues that what Fanon discovers in the unconscious of the white woman is that her transition to vaginal female sexuality implies that the woman must stop oscillating between clitoral and vaginal sexuality. She must therefore abandon the possibility of satisfying her aggression towards the maternal body in fantasy — which in turns becomes internalised in the form of female masochism. Psychoanalysis, therefore, relies on the cultural presupposition of the black man as an object, a '*predestined depositary* of a young girl's aggression.'⁷⁴ The psychoanalytic account of female subjectivity is necessarily compatible with the black man rape-fantasy; Negrophobia is 'a form of sacrifice.'⁷⁵ What is being sacrificed is the black man's humanness at the expense of female aggression. In sustaining the cultural stereotype of the black rapist, says Fanon — and I am echoing Lebeau's reading here — what comes to the fore is 'the collective representation of the infant's fantasy of disembowelling the mother [which] sustains its fusion of passivity and aggression; the cultural stereotype—the 'Negro myth', the black imago — 'displaces *and* re-enacts the drama of self-other violation that Fanon discovers in the white girl's unconscious.'⁷⁶ In other words, what the rape fantasy unveils is that the black man's body is the necessary excess; an excess that is articulated through Fanon's epidermal schema that is added on the corporeal one. The black skin is a surface vital for the psychoanalytic formation of female sexuality.

While following the sexual anxiety embedded in 'Negrophobia,' which leads us into the deconstruction of a stereotype at the cost of the establishment of the other (the black man who rapes — the white woman who is a sexual masochist), I now wish to explore how Fanon scrutinises the cannibal trope and the kind of unconscious desire that is exposed behind it. In other words, what kind of imagos and fantasms are embedded in the psychoanalytic white unconscious, once we access it, as Fanon did,

⁷³ Lebeau, "Children of Violence," 135.

⁷⁴ Lebeau, 134.

⁷⁵ Lebeau, 134.

⁷⁶ Lebeau, 134.

from the point of view of a cannibalistic fantasy? In the aforementioned example, both the boy and the black man are involved in a gradual culmination of tension, the black man is 'shivering' the boy is 'trembling,' and cannibalism and engulfment in the body of the other is the climaxing moment in this staging of the psychic effects of the racialising gaze. Gibson made a stimulating comment about how the scene and its subsequent reciting in several sources, thereafter, exposes the voyeuristic, European gaze which indulges in the divestment of the black man's humanity; 'little more than a footnote to scopophilia' was his exact phrase.⁷⁷ Indeed, the 1950s white audience must have been confronted with a scene that is as familiar as it is uncanny. But there is a latent content in this encounter too, which is that of the white boy's/man's repressed homosexuality, as another approach to 'Negrophobia.' 'The Negrophobic woman is in fact nothing but a putative sexual partner — just as the Negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual.'⁷⁸

I argue that it is in the context of white male homosexuality that Fanon situates fears of being eaten, which supplies a significant counterpart to the psychoanalytic commonplace of the devouring woman and pays an implicit tribute to Freud. Fanon departs from — although he does not openly acknowledge this — the sadistic component of white masculinity. Fanon explains that the cannibalistic fantasy dominates colonial representations, since the white man who develops such fears holds the exemplary kind of the masculinity who like 'the white little boy, becomes an explorer, an adventurer, a missionary "who faces the danger of being eaten by wicked Negroes".'⁷⁹ In these magazines that are put together by white men for 'little white men' 'the 'Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, the Savage are always symbolised by Negroes or Indians.'⁸⁰ For in his account, the white man who openly shares the fantasy of the black man as 'sensual', or 'prolific' or having a 'prodigious vitality,' as the Jewish physician, Michel Salomon does, is a racist and also a repressed homosexual: 'in addition, M. Salomon, I have a confession to make to you: I have never been able, without revulsion, to hear a *man* say of another man: "he is so sensual!" I do not know what the sensuality of a man is.'⁸¹

Not coincidentally, Fanon proclaims the revulsion that homosexuality confers and while it seems to be part of colonial imagery, it is negated as a possibility of homosexuality in Martinique:

⁷⁷ Nigel Gibson, "Thoughts about Doing Fanonism in the 1990s," *College Literature* 26, no. 2 (1999): 100.

⁷⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 156.

⁷⁹ Fanon, 146.

⁸⁰ Fanon, 146.

⁸¹ Fanon, 201.

let me observe at once that I had no opportunity to establish the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique. This must be viewed as the result of the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles. The schema of homosexuality is well enough known. We should not overlook, however, the existence of what are called there 'men dressed like women' or 'godmothers'. Generally, they wear shirts and skirts. *But I am convinced* that they lead normal sex lives. They can take a punch like any 'he-man' and they are not impervious to the allures of women-ish and vegetable merchants. In Europe, on the other hand, I have known several Martinicans who became homosexuals, always passive. But this was by no means a neurotic homosexuality. For them it was a means to a livelihood, as pimping is for others.⁸²

Fanon echoes Freud's outline of the Oedipus complex, where the cannibalistic drive towards the father signals male potency and phallic power. Fanon, more emphatically than Freud, sees in the phobia of the black man's cannibalism a repressed, homosexual desire. 'What an idea, to eat one's father! Simple enough, one has only not to be a nigger.'⁸³

What Fanon seems to imply is that colonial racism as exemplified through *Negrophobia* is premised upon homosexual fantasies, which concern male aggression towards the Oedipal father that are being projected externally onto the phobic object of sexual excess and transgression. The black man becomes not only for the white girl but for the white boy too (as in the 'Look mama' passage), a 'depository' of sexual anxieties, representing everything that cannot be acknowledged in the narrow boundaries of the normativity of white sexuality. Unlike the female rape fantasy, in the cannibal trope we find another layer of repression — namely that sexual desire is not expressed as such but through the place of the mouth or the orifice. De Lauretis observed that Fanon's rhetoric about homosexuality is symptomatic of homophobia as well: 'negation (there are no homosexuals in Martinique) and disavowal (there are men dressed like women, but I am convinced they lead normal lives).'⁸⁴ The point is not to dismiss Fanon's argument, but to stress the structural difference in the sexual fantasy surrounding the black body: while the 'Negrophobic' woman wishes to 'rip the mother open' the 'Negrophobic' man wishes to be engulfed by the father. Hence Fanon's articulation of the racist's unconscious designates the other as the embodied reminder of the repressed homosexual desire towards the (white) father. The wish to be engulfed (cannibalism) is projected on the black body — which is in turn fixed in the position of being seen *only* as the embodiment of excessive sexuality and appetite.

⁸² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 180.

⁸³ Fanon, 115.

⁸⁴ Lauretis, "Difference Embodied: Reflections on Black Skin, White Masks," 63.

Derek Hook's analysis of Fanon's affective economy stresses the colonial situation as imbued with sexual anxiety.⁸⁵ The colonial domain, Hook argues, needs to be understood not as a dialectic relationship between the social and the individual but as permeated through a 'structure of colonial feeling',⁸⁶ a 'force-field of affects'⁸⁷ where only specific expressions of attachment and identification are permissible. Fanon's intricate analysis of the flows of affect operating in colonial racism explains why the libidinal economy of colonialism is much more tenuous than Mannoni allows. Following Fanon, we can witness that racism is not merely hatred for the other, just like cannibalism is not just an irrational smear nor an ideological mechanism for oppression. If racism galvanises an unconscious structure of feeling and affect, then cannibalism — as a long-standing fantasy of what the black other will do to the body of the coloniser — gives access to these 'extra-discursive' factors that solidify the colonial libidinal economy.

The Royal Road to the Colonial Unconscious: Reflections on the Place of Anthropophagy Today

While aesthetic tropes drawing on the affective economy of colonialism propose the identification with the cannibalistic other, Fanon's psychoanalytic exposition unveils a grammar through which whiteness gets rid of sexual anxieties by libidinising racial difference. Achille Mbembe picks up this point from Fanon to show how race dovetails with sexuality and the body through his exposition of the viscosity of racism. Mbembe is attentive to the 'constant effort to separate' witnessed in the colonial situation as 'partly a consequence of an anxiety of annihilation felt by the colonizers themselves.'⁸⁸ As such, colonialists reduced natives into 'various kinds of physical objects', 'evil' or 'disturbing' which since they represent parts of the unconscious of whiteness can never satisfactorily be annihilated, leaving the colonial situation undone. Not having a 'disturbing object' or an 'enemy' equals deprivation, equals staying with those destructive feelings one feels ashamed of and persecuted from. Fanon exposes how deeply and suffocatingly pain, grief, and suffering are felt on the body, as well as what kind of 'gut' responses they elicit. Haunted by 'gut' responses, the visceral subject carries the unconscious memory (and perhaps, rage) of racialisation, objectification,

⁸⁵ Hook, "Fanon and Libidinal Economy."

⁸⁶ Hook, 167.

⁸⁷ Derek Hook, *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid* (London and New York: Psychology Press, 2012), 165.

⁸⁸ Achille Mbembe, "The Society of Enmity," *Radical Philosophy*, 1, no. 200 (2016): 25.

and cannibalisation as a 'molecularised' memory, dispersed through the body, from the internal organs, to the skin and the mouth. If, therefore, the fear of annihilation wittingly or unwittingly is revived in the presence of racial difference — 'Negroes, Arabs, Muslims, and, never far away, Jews too'⁸⁹ — isn't the social, as Mbembe puts it, 'a struggle to the death against unconditional enemies?'⁹⁰ In other words, unless some kind of recognition or reconciliation is achieved, the colonial libidinal economy of colonialism is doomed to become reawakened every time the racist equilibrium is shaken.

Is this then a commentary on the future of anthropophagy? And if so, is this a hopeful or a pessimistic one? Although there is an urgency of doing away with cannibalism (just as there is an urgency to forget colonialism) — it is an archaic practice, a fantasy, a racist smear, or an irrational fear that has no place in the contemporary, postcolonial imaginary — the wish to eradicate this concept depends on the wrong reasons. Having shown that cannibalism is more than a 'smear', but a fundamental component structuring and sustaining the colonial libidinal economy, we might conclude that as long as the remains of the colonial past linger unmourned, cannibalism will have a place in the decolonial, scholarly agenda. Risking a Freudian paraphrase, perhaps the interpretation of cannibalism is, after all, the royal road to the colonial unconscious.

In this article, I have shown that apprehending the role of cannibalism in the anti-colonial arsenal enables us to seek for a vocabulary that addresses attractions, fantasies, affects, antipathies, and aversions that cannot be analysed either through purely political or aesthetic means. Secondly, situating the cannibal in a psychological, colonial pairing (Mannoni) is equally insufficient in addressing the working of racialised hatred as it reiterates the reductionist, colonial trope of separating and isolating psychic and social phenomena into an interpersonal conflict. The way Fanon disentangled colonial projections and reconnected these to the white, colonial unconscious demonstrated that only a visceral and bloody lament can shake the colonial equilibrium to its core. Last but not least, it is psychoanalytic thinking, the vocabulary of sexuality, and of libidinal economy that helps us to sidestep the dyadic nature of colonial conflicts and expose that colonialism depends on the sustenance of particular roles, positions, attachments. Against criticisms that separate psychoanalysis from the decolonial project, I hope to have shown that its focus on sexuality and libido is pivotal if we are to

⁸⁹ Mbembe, "The Society of Enmity," 32.

⁹⁰ Mbembe, 35.

understand the tenacity of the circulation of certain affects amongst bodies, the wish to annihilate via incorporation being a prominent enterprise of the colonial unconscious.

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