Chapter 6

Freud and the cannibal
Vignettes from psychoanalysis' colonial history

Marita Vyrgioti

> *What is a cannibal who has eaten his father and mother?*
> *An orphan.*
> *And if he has eaten all his other relations as well?*
> *The sole heir.*
> S. Freud*, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*
> (Freud, 1960, p. 153)

> *A rabbi and a parson agree to found a new common religion and set about*
> *listing the changes the other will have to make. The parson wishes to change*
> *the Sabbath service to Sunday, wants its language to be Latin instead of*
> *Hebrew, and he goes on to enumerate other concessions concerning Jewish*
> *ritual and religious observances. The rabbi agrees to them all, as though they*
> *were inessential, and has only one demand in return: Get rid of Jesus Christ.*
>
> Reik' s account of a joke told by Freud at the 1913 Psychoanalytic Congress in Munich
>
> (Reik, 1954, p. 19)

In his 1977 work, *Violence and the Sacred*, Rene Girard wrote that 'we are perhaps more distracted by incest than by cannibalism, but only because cannibalism has not yet found its Freud and been promoted to the status of a major contemporary myth' (Girard, 1977, p. 277). Girard's comment prepared the ground for contemporary anthropological texts that, emerging one after the other in the late 1970s, proposed that cannibalism has in fact been a myth of the hegemonic, colonising European arsenal that promoted the dehumanisation and primitivisation of aboriginal cultures to justify their extinction (Arens, 1979; Sahlins, 1979; Harris, 1977). Girard associates Freud's failure to explain cannibalism with the systematic misunderstanding of anthropologists who, distracted by the sensationalism of the ritual missed its structural value. Instead, Girard claims that had cannibalism found its Freud,[1] namely had it become incorporated in the psychic make-up of human subjectivity, the recognition of cannibalism's banality would make anthropological mythologies, sustained throughout colonialism, collapse. In this

essay, I argue that Freud had in fact found cannibalism. Yet having uncovered what was, for his contemporaries, an uncomfortable proximity between cannibalism and Christian imperial subjectivity, I suggest, his argument was necessarily silenced.

This essay identifies the moments where Freud drew on the imagery of cannibalism and, by contextualising them, it explores how behind this imagery lay an ideology of racial difference that informed and was informed by psychoanalysis. My argument is that Freud found in the colonial imagery of the cannibal trope an entry point to critique the hegemonic, Christian colonial subjectivity by identifying the ritualistic repetition of cannibalism in the Eucharist. However, the colonial vocabulary of cannibalism in Freud's psychoanalytic theory emerges sporadically, in footnotes, in emotionally invested texts, and through a writing of significant obscurity. Many of Freud's remarks about the cannibal trope remain inconclusive, arrested at the level of observation and description, delivered to the reader for interrogation. Therefore, I argue, the way in which Freud promoted the association of Christianity with the cannibal lexicon marks a postcolonial method of critique as a particular way of writing about the other.

The barbarity of European civility: cannibalism and racial representation

The relationship between psychoanalysis and anthropology has always been tense. In her work *The Subject of Anthropology*, Henrietta Moore frames this tension as a question of commitment to cultural variation (from the perspective of anthropology) and to psychic universality (from the point of view of psychoanalysis) (Moore, 2007). Moore proposes that one way of engaging with the interdisciplinary space between psychoanalysis and anthropology is, instead of engaging with the problem of universalism versus variation per se, to reflect on the 'more general dilemma of how to handle history—that is, how to explain the development of the individual in the context of an ongoing social/cultural system which itself changes over time and is subject to the workings of power' (Moore, 2007, p. 5). To explore how psychoanalysis—and Freud in particular—has engaged with anthropology and toyed with the racist smear of cannibalism, it is crucial to maintain an awareness of its historical context and transformations. Reading psychoanalysis from a postcolonial perspective entails an awareness of its historical, colonial baggage, part of which emerges out of Freud's theoretical engagement with colonial anthropology.

In his anthology on the history of Victorian anthropology, George Stocking shows that anthropological knowledge production supported and was supported by the structures of colonial settlement (Stocking, 1987). Providing a thorough analysis of the assumptions and doctrines of anthropology, Stocking outlines the paradox that although evolutionism theoretically implied that all cultures would naturally progress, unassisted, towards the top of the evolutionary ladder—moving away from their so-called state of savagery to a state of civilisation

allegedly exemplified by European culture—in fact, this process was systematically hampered by British science and racial ideology. The anthropological comparative method 'required that [the so-called savages] should not have [progressed]; the evidence of ethnography and history showed that they had not; ethnocentric assumption suggested that they could not; and European expansion made it clear that they would not' (Stocking, 1987, p. 177). On a similar note, Ann Stoler argued that the racialisation of colonised peoples actively contributed to the making of the British self, by structuring the boundaries of respectability, gentlemanliness and the bourgeoisie to 'secure the tenuous distinctions of bourgeois rule' (Stoler, 2000, p. 97). The British self, then, was made in radical opposition to the aboriginal other, whose qualities were systematically constructed as incompatible with the civilised, white imperial subject (Stoler, 2000).

One aspect of nineteenth-century anthropological texts, often omitted from critiques that examine the impact of colonial anthropology in psychoanalysis by tracing tropes of racialisation (Brickman, 2003; Khanna, 2003), is the association of so-called aboriginal cultures with cannibalism.[2] For example, Edward Tylor, the founder of British cultural anthropology, believed that cannibalism was a practice of empowerment that put the cannibal in the position of a racialised other, not so much dangerous as innocent and naïve. In an anecdotal story about an English Merchant in Shanghai, Tylor wrote that 'he [the merchant] met his Chinese servant carrying home a heart and asked him what he had got there. He said it was the heart of a rebel, and that he was going to take it home and eat it to make him brave' (Tylor, 1920, p. 131). Similarly, another pioneer in the anthropological study of non-European cultures, John Lubbock, tied cannibalism to destitution, wretchedness and misery, thus implicitly elevating British life as a paradigm of freedom, nobility and sustenance:

the true savage is neither free nor noble; he is a slave to his own wants, his own passions, imperfectly protected from the weather, he suffers from the cold by night and the heat of the sun by the day […] hunger always stares him in the face, and often drives him to the dreadful alternative of cannibalism or death.

(Lubbock, 1913, p. 586)

These should not be read as singular accounts or extreme exceptions embedded in works exploring the so-called 'primitive' cultures, but as a pervasive imagery shaping representations of the non-white body in the Western scientific discourse.

Traces of the racialised representation of the non-European are echoed when for instance, Freud, in opening his work *Totem and Taboo*, outlines his expectation of studying Australian aboriginals: 'we should certainly not expect that the sexual life of these poor naked cannibals would be moral in

our sense', only to add that it appears that aboriginal cultures have taken
great pains to institute their own methods for regulating incest, sexuality and
kinship structures (Freud, 1955a, p. 2). Precisely because *Totem and Taboo*
borrows its understanding of aboriginal cultures from colonial anthropology,
Celia Brickman argued, it is a text that both problematically reiterates colo-
nialist assumptions and 'sabotages the presumption of the superiority of the
western mind held by the first generation of anthropologists' (Brickman,
2003, p. 52). Both Brickman and Khanna have traced the implications of
Freud's use of colonial anthropology as inserting a racialised subtext in the
model of human development: a distancing from qualities associated with
'darker races' and a progression towards a mature subjectivity 'whose unsta-
ted colour was white, just as its unstated gender was male' (Ibid., p. 72).
Nevertheless, while the racial undertones of the psychoanalytic model of
psychosexual development have been frequently exposed, the question of why
Freud turned to the cannibal—or better, the question of what he does with
this figure—requires some further investigation. If we follow Jacqueline Rose's
reading of *Totem and Taboo* and ask what was at stake in Freud's engage-
ment with the 'Australian exile', we find ourselves in the domain of a perso-
nal, as much as a theoretical, dispute between Freud and his disciple Carl
Jung. For Rose, this dispute is a 'barely concealed conflict between the Aryan
and the Jew' (Rose, 1999, p. 52). It is worth thinking then, to what extent this
racialised conflict enters Freud's discussion of cannibalism and prehistoric
origins in *Totem and Taboo*.

'When the saviour didn't come': *Totem and Taboo*'s cannibalism as a critique of Christianity

The relation between psychoanalysis and Jewishness has had a profound
impact on the institutional politics of psychoanalysis, as well as the psycho-
analytic theorisation of race. In *Hate and the Jewish Science* Stephen Frosh
showed that Freud's negotiation of his Jewish identity was a lifelong process
worked out through his writings; it informed the psychoanalytic subject, it
inspired a theory of anti-Semitic racial hatred, and in cases like *Totem and
Taboo*, it took the form of an intervention, shaped as a critical account of
religion (Frosh, 2009, pp. 41–42). Anti-Semitism was a concrete and racialised
form of hostility in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, which, alongside other prejudices,
fostered the suspicious reception of psychoanalysis—even within psycho-
analytic circles (Frosh, 2009). Freud's emphasis on sexuality, for instance,
became a thorny issue for his Swiss, Christian colleagues: as George Makari
notes, 'whispers had it that [Alfonse] Maeder', a psychoanalyst and close
collaborator of Carl Jung, 'would dignify the claim that the Jews in Vienna
were overly concerned with sex' (Makari, 2008, p. 276). According to Sander
Gilman, the idea that Jewish sexuality was castrated and damaged was part of
a chain of associations that constructed the male Jewish body as a hysteric,

feminised other against which Christian masculinity was erected (Gilman, 1993, p. 152).[3] Nevertheless, Freud firmly rejected attempts to label psychoanalysis in racial terms (Frosh, 2009). The same did not hold true for Jung, who in his 1933 notorious editorial note at the *Zentralblatt fur Psychotherapie* wrote:

> The 'Aryan' unconscious has a higher potential than the Jewish; that is both the advantage and disadvantage of a youthfulness not yet fully weaned from barbarism. In my opinion it has been a grave error in medical psychology up till now to apply Jewish categories—which are not even binding on all Jews—indiscriminately to Germanic and Slavic Christendom. Because of this the most precious secret of the Germanic peoples—their creative and intuitive depth of soul—has been explained by a morass of banal infantilism, while my own warning voice has for decades been suspected of anti-Semitism.
>
> (Jung, 1970, p. 165)

In a letter to his Hungarian colleague Sandor Ferenczi in 1911, Freud wrote: 'there will surely be different world views […] here and there. But there should be no distinct Aryan or Jewish science' (Gay, 2006, p. 239). Nevertheless, to safeguard the scientific and institutional consolidation of psychoanalysis, Freud appointed Jung as the first President of the International Psycho-analytic Association (IPA), founded in 1910. Despite the irritation of some of his colleagues on the grounds of Jung's anti-Semitism, Freud attempted to assure them that 'this Swiss will save us—will save me and will save you as well' (Freud quoted in Frosh, 2009, p. 43).

Nevertheless, Jung's of *Symbols of Transformation* originally published as *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* in 1912 began to shake Freud's hopes, foreshadowing the imminent rupture of the two men. Jung openly challenged fundamental Freudian ideas and advocated for the need to expand psychoanalysis beyond the study of the individual to the realm of myths and symbols (Jung, 1986). Jung aspired to explain how symbols were responsible for the formation of a 'collective spirit', a uniform collective human uncon-scious. Myths, he opined, would also offer access to the finite arsenal of unconscious 'primordial images', a term which in 1918 was substituted by the concept of the 'archetype' (Shamdasani, 2003, p. 297). Towards the end of *Transformations*, Jung argued that the model for understanding the image of the psychoanalytic self is Jesus Christ: 'from the point of view of psychology and comparative religion', Jung wrote, 'Christ […] is a typical manifestation of the self' (Jung, 1986, p. 392). '[T]he self,' Jung argued, 'is an *imago Dei*'—it is made in accordance with God's image and 'cannot be distinguished from it empirically' (Jung, 1986, p. 392). Having read the manuscript twice and in the caring tone that characterised their relationship at that point, Freud respon-ded: 'One of the nicest works I have read (again) is of a well-known author on the *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* and added that 'sometimes I

have a feeling that his horizon has been too narrowed by Christianity' (Freud, 1974, p. 459). Remarkably, the letter ended with a spirited condemnation of a father who becomes drawn—if not seduced—by the playfulness of his son: 'why in God's name did I allow myself to follow you into this field?' (Freud, 1974, p. 459). Jung's *Transformations* posed a provocation to Freud to follow a form of '"wild" psycho-analysis'. Unlike Jung, however, he did not pursue a comparative psychoanalytic study in myths and religion but turned instead to anthropological evidence about non-European cultures. If we read *Totem and Taboo* from the point of view of Freud's critique of Jung, an interesting twist appears. Freud's deployment of cannibalism can be seen as a specific strategy of exposing an aspect of Christian colonisation: namely, that the Christian subject proposed by Jung as a model of the psychoanalytic subject, was nothing more than a repetition of Christianity's unresolved relation with humanity's prehistoric, cannibalistic past.

According to Freud, cannibalism is a part of an unconscious memory shared by all humans. Cannibalism, in Freud's thinking, stands at the roots of the emergence of subjectivity and the social: in Freud's account of human prehistory, a horde of sons, motivated by incestuous wishes for their mother, murder their father and consume his body in act of primordial cannibalism: 'Cannibal savages as they were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him' (Freud, 1955a, p. 142). The elimination of the father satisfied their hatred, but instead of giving them pleasure, it allowed the affection for the father to emerge along with feelings of guilt. Guilt from this act, therefore, became the 'beginning of so many things—of social organisation, of moral restrictions and of religion'(Ibid.). Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe build up on this basis the claim that this primal Father who is murdered and devoured is the visualisation of an 'absolute figure', which signifies the law and prohibition (Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989, p. 201–202). Tracing the evolutionary schema of religion, Freud argues that the law of the primal father institutes early totemic religions around two prohibitions that structure and hold communities together: one must not kill and one must not eat the sacred animal (Freud, 1955a, p. 104).

In Freud's account, the sacred animal replaced the primal father, and is a concrete symbolisation of the prohibition of the law and of the taboo on incest (Freud, 1955a). God, says Freud, is an idea emerging from this sacred totem, which imposes the law and, through religious structures, ensures its observance. Christianity, however, proposed a method of 'allaying guilt': Christ, who in sacrificing himself, 'redeemed the company of brothers from original sin' (Ibid., p. 154). For Freud, 'the ancient totem meal was revived in the form of communion' and the 'Christian communion […] is essentially a fresh elimination of the father, a repetition of the guilty deed' (Ibid., pp.154–155). In drawing attention to the resemblance between the Christian ritual and a prehistoric myth, Freud challenges the colonial dichotomy between the Christian self and the savage one by pointing to a shared unresolved guilt that needs to be ritualistically purged.

Although Freud's perceptive account of Christianity was strategically produced 'to neatly eliminate anything Aryan-religious', as he wrote to his colleague and friend Karl Abraham, this does not mean that this disparaging critique occurred unambivalently (Freud, 2002, p. 183). An important source for Freud's critique was the early twentieth-century Christian anthropologist James Frazer who had castigated Christianity for its 'notional significance', arguing that in the last analysis it holds no universal truth for the genesis of the world. Frazer saw Christianity not as an unchallengeable and truthful religious doctrine but as just another system of thinking, an explanation of the world's origins, comparable to magical or scientific accounts (Lienhardt, 1993, p. 6). It is to Frazer that Freud turns in order to proclaim the proximity between Christianity and totemism when he writes: 'we can see the full justice of Frazer's pronouncement that "the Christian Communion has absorbed within itself a sacrament which is doubtless far older than Christianity"'(Freud, 1955a, p. 155). Freud repudiates the ownership of his reading of Christianity and adds in a footnote that: 'No one familiar with the literature of the subject will imagine that the derivation of Christian communion from the totem meal is an idea originating from the author of the present essay' (Ibid.). Overall, this implicit, anxious engagement with the critique of Christianity must be read alongside the fact that *Totem* became a troubling work for Freud—its completion came after the severance of his relationship with Jung and was followed by a period of depression, in which Freud 'began to feel uncertain of his case, a sure sign of his deep emotional engagement' (Gay, 2006, p. 326). The question that arises from this is, for a figure as austere and inquisitive as Freud: what was it that made the proximity between Christianity, totemism and cannibalism so uncomfortable?

The racialising logic of identification

Turning to Freudian psychoanalysis from a post-colonial perspective, one stumbles upon a plethora of colonial tropes employed to discuss non-Western cultures, which perpetuate a racialising logic that is yet to be fully explored. Significant contributions in this direction have emphasised the notion of 'primitivity' as imbuing the primary stages of individual development with a racialised subtext—as if development entails a growing out of savagery (Brickman, 2003). And additionally, the designation of female sexuality as a 'dark continent', adding a racialised dimension to femininity and sexual difference (Khanna, 2003). The cannibal trope and its place in psychoanalytic theory still remains unexplored, however. Freud pursued the implications of paternal cannibalism—as a practice which at once gave rise to, and was repudiated by, the social—by embroidering it into his metapsychology, silencing the provocative critique of Christianity and advancing the assumption that cannibalistic wishes are part of the human psyche: 'the instinctual wishes that […] are born afresh with every child […] are those of incest, cannibalism and lust for killing' (Freud, 1961b, p. 10). In the 1915 revision of the *Three*

Essays on the Theory of Sexuality Freud added a section asserting that the
earliest stage of sexual development was the 'oral cannibalistic stage' that is
informed by a 'relic of cannibalistic desires' (Freud, 1953, p. 159). In parti-
cular here, Freud asserts that what is expressed through the mouth, love and
aggression, the pleasure derived from nutrition as well as sexual pleasure, are
part of a phylogenetic heritage tied to the human condition. Oral cannibalism
becomes the 'prototype' (Ibid., p. 198), Freud argued, for the mechanism of
identification—a psychical process modelled on physical incorporation which
is 'visualised'—to use Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's phrasing (Nancy and
Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989, pp. 201–202)—as taking someone in, digesting and
being physically as well as psychically formed by them. The cannibal trope is
associated in Freud's writing with identification, with the fundamental process
of acquiring one's self. The psychoanalytic subject is, therefore, constructed
on the grounds of the universalisation of a racial, colonial trope.

This racialising logic appears strikingly in Freud's 1917 essay on 'Mourning
and Melancholia', a text that uses melancholia—a self-destructive and self-
consuming psychological condition—as a lens to explore processes of identi-
fication. In this essay, Freud offers insights on the structure of melancholia, a
state of excessive asociality,

> painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the
> capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-
> regarding feelings to the degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and
> self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.
>
> (Freud, 1957, p. 244)

In comparing mourning and melancholia, Freud points to two fundamental
differences. Both mourning and melancholia are mechanisms of dealing with
loss: in the former the individual is aware of the loss of a loved object, but in the
case of melancholia, the loss is unconscious—'one cannot see clearly what it is
that has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient
cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either' (Ibid., p. 245). As a result,
while in ordinary mourning it is 'the world [that] becomes empty' without the
loved object, melancholia is an experience of a profound feeling of emptiness
and impoverishment of the self (Ibid., p. 246). If the loss of the object entails a
loss in the ego, melancholia exposes that an identification with the lost object
must have taken place. What, then, is the nature of this identification?

For Freud the psychological development of the individual involves the
transition from a primary narcissistic identification (where the ego wants to
be like the object), into an object relation (where the ego wants to have the
object). Melancholic identification is, therefore, a regression from an object-
choice to a narcissistic identification and sheds light onto the nature of the
process of primary identification and its fundamental ambivalence: melanch-
olia 'is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to

make itself effective and come into the open' (Ibid., p. 251). What melancholic identification exposes is the desire to cannibalise the object—to take it in and destroy it: 'the ego wants to incorporate this object into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it' (Ibid., p. 241). The ego turns against itself narcissistically and self-destructs, as Diana Fuss put it: 'turning identification's violent impulses completely inward, the ego consumes itself in an act of autocannibalism' (Fuss, 1995, p. 37).

By arguing that in melancholia the cannibalistic wishes of the primary narcissistic identification resurface and consume the ego, Freud theorises this psychological condition in racial terms. Equipped with cannibalistic wishes—alongside incestuous ones—the Freudian psychoanalytic subject is formulated on the assumption of a historical psychological continuity from the prehistoric primal crime to the 1920s Viennese unconscious. The ambivalent wishes against the primal father, Freud argues, have become repressed in the unconscious of humanity and affirm their existence in the intense self-consumption of the melancholic. In regressing to a cannibalistic stage of development, the melancholic re-enacts this prehistoric wish, to eliminate and become the father, but because of the taboo on cannibalism, the libido originally directed towards this object becomes distorted and is turned back against the melancholic herself. Abraham says Freud links the psychological inhibition with the loss of appetite, as a symbolic withdrawal from any form of nurturing incorporation (Freud, 1957, p. 241). Therefore, one might argue that the figure of the melancholic, linked as she is in Freud's thinking with a process of identification modelled on cannibalistic incorporation, unconsciously carries a form of guilt concerning this process of cannibalistic identity-formation that has been repressed from the social.

Nevertheless, in seeing melancholia as a 'pathology' which he opposes to the normal process of mourning, Freud reiterates a racial dichotomy between those individuals who are capable of recovering from loss through mourning, and those who in having cannibalised an object are confined to an asocial state, immersed in guilt and expecting punishment, just like the 'cannibal-savage' sons (Ibid). Thus, Freud's theory of melancholia is shot through with the colonial implications of the cannibal trope, reiterating a dichotomy in the European imaginary between mourning as a normative process of whiteness and melancholia as a pathology that makes the individual regress to a prehistoric, pre-social savagery and, implicitly, blackness.

Freud's theory of identification as an ambivalent relation to a lost object is informed, across his writings, by the colonial myth of humanity's prehistoric origins. Despite the exclusion of cannibalism from the social through the cultural institution of the taboo, cannibalistic wishes return and manifest their presence in the unconscious of the melancholic, colonial subject. Nevertheless, there is another layer embedded in Freud's theory of identification as a racialised psychological mechanism. For Freud, identification is an ambivalent desire to acquire another person's qualities. He therefore identifies 'an interesting parallel'

in the belief of primitive peoples, and in the prohibitions based upon it, that
the attributes of animals which are incorporated as nourishment persist as
part of the character of those who eat them. As is well known, this belief is
one of the roots of cannibalism and its effects have continued through the
series of usages of the totem meal down to Holy Communion.

(Freud, 1961a, p. 29)

The Christian ritual of communion affirms Freud's hypothesis about the exis-
tence of an unconscious guilt emanating from the wish to collectively repeat a
guilty deed—to consume the god's body in order to purge the guilt of having
eaten him in the first place. Moreover, Freud offers an implicit political critique
of an anti-Semitic aspect of Christianity, by decentring its claims of racial
superiority through the recognition of a psychological resemblance with prac-
tices of religions that in the European Christian imaginary represented savagery
and backwardness. Despite the ambiguous legacy of colonial thought, Freud's
theory of identification insisted that Christian subjectivity, like all other forms of
human subjectivity, is rooted in a history of cannibalistic identification.

In Freud's account of group psychology, the group—in this case the
Christian church—revives the ambivalence felt by the prehistoric sons
towards the primal father, but due to its incapacity to 'murder and devour'
the leader, as the sons once did, the group projects outwards any aggres-
sion originally felt for the leader. Indeed, the group, like the worshippers
of the Catholic church, is sustained by a symbolic consumption of the
leader's body—an identification between the member's ego-ideal and the
leader. Freud is also sketching the psychological mechanism of totalitarian
groups: while the group is structured among the love of its members and
the equal love of the leader for the members, the fundamental ambivalence
of identification cannot be expressed within the group and is projected
outwards. Hence Freud reminds his readers that the cannibal—the proto-
typical figure of identification—had 'a devouring affection for his enemies
and only devours people of whom he is fond' (Freud, 1955b, p. 105). In
this paradoxical phrasing, Freud explains that by making cannibalism a
taboo, the group disowns precisely such a 'devouring fondness'. In other
words, the group forgoes an aggressive wish to possess the other and
refuse their psychic and physical separateness. What follows from Freud's
theorisation is that groups such as the Catholic church depend on rituals
that allow them to forgo these inner wishes, as they cannot be worked
through otherwise. Above all, Freud laid out a psychological mechanism
of identification, which although fragmented and unsystematic, nonetheless
arose from an obscure and ambiguous use of the cannibal trope that held
the association between possessing the other and a racialised violence
which, at the same time, did not refrain from embodying a concealed, yet
provocative, critique of hegemonic subjectivity.

Who is Freud's cannibal: obscure writing and postcolonial ethics

During the 1920s Freud channelled part of his intellectual activity in amalgamating many of his theoretical insights into a structural model of the self, in which the cannibal trope held an apparently marginal yet crucial role. The cannibal trope appears in these writings as an uncomfortable reminder of the racialised context amidst and against which psychoanalysis emerged. Soon afterwards, during the 1930s and the rapidly growing Nazi domination in Europe, Freud's early critical intervention about anti-Semitism and the role of Christianity would become both more urgently needed and more necessarily obscure (Frosh, 2009, p. 47). In a nod to the need to analyse and explain the emerging racial hatred against Jews, as well as to explore the tensions embedded in his own Jewish identity, Freud's characteristically pessimistic publications deconstructing religion emerged one after the other: *The Future of an Illusion* (1961b) with its association of religious belief and infantile feelings of helplessness, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1961c) and finally, *Moses and Monotheism* (1964), a text in which the themes of totemism, cannibalism and Christianity return. In the second preface to *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud argued that the book discloses a truth about religion that cannot be said unless it is disguised: 'Not that I should have anything to say that would be new or that I did not say clearly a quarter of century ago', in *Totem and Taboo*, but 'it has been forgotten in the meantime and it could not be without effect if I repeated it to-day' (Freud, 1964, p. 55). In exploring the history of Moses as an Egyptian outsider who founded the Jewish religion, Freud showed that religion is structured upon the repression of the foreignness of origins.

Moses and Monotheism can undoubtedly be regarded as a traumatic text, documenting Freud's personal experience of anti-Semitism and his reflections on Jewish identity (Yerushalmi, 1991; Frosh, 2009). It is also a record of how collective identity comes into being through religion, culture and tradition, and thus, as Edward Said claims, it deals with the inherent tensions in identity that prevent it from becoming consolidated into 'one Identity' (Said, 2003, p. 54). Moses, thus, as an Egyptian prince instead of a Hebrew orphan in Freud's reconstruction of the Biblical story, becomes the paradigmatic figure of how identity is fundamentally disrupted. Moses' status as an outsider embodies the explanation of why the Jewish tradition has—despite systematic oppression—eventually survived and why, although his murder was an act of savagery, the collectively held guilt has led Jews to refrain from subsequent acts of 'barbarism', and from the profound violence of 1930s nationalism (Freud, 1964, p. 55). On the other hand, the so-called progressive Christian religion, which came after Judaism and re-instituted the son, in the place of a father-religion, is a thinly veiled effort to absolve the collective guilt that weighed down on the Jews for years, which prevented them from violence. In affirming that it was the Jews who killed

Jesus, Paul exposed that in the anti-Semitic imagery Christian guilt was
displaced and projected onto the figure of the Jew—who was therefore the
guilty figure: 'You [Jews] killed our god!' (Ibid., p. 90). Moreover, Freud
argues that what this negation did to the history of the Judeo-Christian
religions was to replace 'the blissful sense of being chosen' to carry the guilt
of the primal crime with the 'liberating sense of redemption' (Ibid., p.
135)—a sense of redemption that also freed the Christians from the guilt of
their violent, cannibalistic and murderous instincts. But the flight from guilt
necessitates the reliance on the sacrificial ritual of communion and the
reiteration of a repressed act of prehistoric cannibalism (Ibid., p. 101). In
drawing attention to the cannibalistic resemblance of the communion, Freud
showed that anti-Semitism retains the prehistoric memory of cannibalism
repressed, exposing the hypocrisy of Christian anti-Semitism. He also
demonstrated why anti-Semitism as a racialised and religious hatred was a
psychically less sophisticated response than the tolerance of the discomfort
Christians experienced in their relations and interactions with Jews.

Overall, Freud's implicit critique of Christianity is informed by themes
that boil down to questions of ethics: the ethics of Judaism's critique of
Christianity, the ethics of Freud as a Jew towards his (former) Christian
colleagues, and above all, the ethics of psychoanalysis as a form of writing
about the self and of otherness. To challenge the foreclosure of the cate-
gory of race, Freud employed *Moses* as an 'application of psychoanalysis'
(Ibid, p. 10) that emphasised that there is a foreignness in every origin, as
Moses' Egyptian identity proved. Linked to this notion was Freud's own
racial foreignness as a Jew in an anti-Semitic world: this granted psycho-
analysis its fundamental marginal status, as Said suggested (Said, 2003).
Likewise, operating within this marginal space, Freud's reading of the
history of religions revealed Christianity's obliviousness to its own repeti-
tion of 'primitive' cannibalistic rituals. The past, writes Freud survives in
'excellent replicas' (Freud, 1964, p. 84). In this way, Freud was pointing at
something critical about the Christian unconscious without fully formulat-
ing it. His account of the proximity between Christian identity and can-
nibalism remained fragmented and arrested at the level of demonstration,
overshadowed by a more powerful interrogation of Judaism's origins. We
can assume that this obscurity was necessary due to socio-political reasons
related to the obliterating violence of Nazism that was to come. Yet, I
would like to propose that ultimately, the cannibal trope as a critique of
Christianity should also be read as a postcolonial method of writing about
the other. Freud's obscure use of the cannibal trope appears as a way of
conveying psychoanalytic knowledge by indicating the precariousness of
colonial dichotomies without reiterating the assumption that Christian
subjecthood—like non-European subjecthood—is ever entirely transparent.
This obscure writing from the margins is a postcolonial space in which to
rethink psychoanalysis.

Conclusion

This essay began by challenging the view that Freud did not discuss the taboo
on cannibalism, and showed that Freud's interest in the figure of the cannibal
can in fact be situated alongside a psychoanalytic critique of race and racism.
Freud draws on cannibalism as a colonial representation of racial difference
to argue that social life depends on the repression of cannibalistic wishes. On
the other hand, in modelling the process of identification upon cannibalistic
wishes, Freud challenges the dichotomy between the hegemonic, white civi-
lised subject and the racialised, cannibalistic other. Finally, contextualising
Freud's references to the cannibal trope alongside vignettes from his own
experience of anti-Semitism and his clash with Jung, I have argued that Freud
turned to a racialised trope as a response to Christian anti-Semitism and has
bequeathed us with an ethical, psychoanalytic writing of the racialised self
and other, crucial for postcolonial thought.

Notes

1 While Freud is arguably the first psychoanalytic theorist to engage with the problem
  of prehistoric cannibalism, the theme was inherited and creatively incorporated in
  Melanie Klein's theory, coating processes of incorporation and introjection, with a
  colonial twist.
2 It was only after the mid-1970s that anthropological works began to systematically
  review the evidence provided for cannibalistic practices and rituals in the non-Eur-
  opean cultures, revealing that cannibalism was strategically used to justify colonial
  exploitation.
3 The implication here is that in the popular early twentieth century imaginary
  circumcision equated castration (Gilman, 1993).

Bibliography

Arens, W. (1979) *The man-eating myth*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
Bahun, S. (2014) *Modernism and melancholia: writing as countermourning*. Oxford:
    Oxford University Press.
Borch-Jacobsen, M. (1988) *The Freudian subject*. California: Stanford University Press.
Brickman, C. (2003) *Aboriginal populations in the mind*. New York: Columbia University
    Press.
Cheng, A. (2000) *The melancholy of race: psychoanalysis, assimilation, and hidden
    grief*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
Freud, S. (1953) 'Three essays on the theory of sexuality'. In *The standard edition of
    the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey; trans. J. Stra-
    chey and A. Freud, with A. Strachey and A. Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press
    and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 24 vols., vol. VII.
Freud, S. (1955a) 'Totem and taboo'. In *The standard edition of the complete psycho-
    logical works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey; trans. J. Strachey and A. Freud,
    with A. Strachey and A. Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of
    Psychoanalysis, 24 vols., vol. XIII.

Freud, S. (1955b) Group psychology and the analysis of the ego. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey; trans. J. Strachey and A. Freud, with A. Strachey and A. Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 24 vols., vol. XVIII.

Freud, S. (1957) 'Mourning and melancholia'. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey; trans. J. Strachey and A. Freud, with A. Strachey and A. Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 24 vols., vol. XIV.

Freud, S. (1960) Jokes and their relation to the unconscious. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey; trans. J. Strachey and A. Freud, with A. Strachey and A. Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 24 vols., vol. VIII.

Freud, S. (1961a) The ego and the id. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey; trans. J. Strachey and A. Freud, with A. Strachey and A. Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 24 vols., vol. XIX.

Freud, S. (1961b) The future of an illusion. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey; trans. J. Strachey and A. Freud, with A. Strachey and A. Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 24 vols., vol XXI.

Freud, S. (1961c) Civilization and its Discontents. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey; trans. J. Strachey and A. Freud, with A. Strachey and A. Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 24 vols., vol XXI.

Freud, S. (1964) 'Moses and monotheism'. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey; trans. J. Strachey and A. Freud, with A. Strachey and A. Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 24 vols., vol. XXIII.

Freud, S. (1974) *The Freud/Jung letters: the correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung*, ed. W. McGuire; trans. R. Manheim and R. F. C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Freud, S. (2002) *The complete correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham 1907–1925*, ed. and trans. E. Falzeder. London: Karnac.

Frosh, S. (2009) *Hate and the Jewish science: anti-semitism, Nazism and psychoanalysis*. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fuss, D. (1995) *Identification papers: readings on psychoanalysis, sexuality, and culture*. 1st ed. London and New York: Routledge.

Gay, P. (2006) *Freud: a life for our time*. Revised. New York and London: Norton.

Gilman, S. L. (1993) *Freud, race and gender*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Girard, R. (1977) *Violence and the sacred*, trans. P. Gregory. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Harris, M. (1977) *Cannibals and kings: the origins of culture*. New York: Random House.

Jung, C. (1970) 'The state of psychotherapy today'. In *Civilisation in transition: collected works*, 2nd ed. Vol. 10. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C (1986) *Symbols of transformation: an analysis of the prelude to a case of schizophrenia*, trans. R. F. C. Hull. 4th ed. London: Routledge.

Khanna, R. (2003) *Dark continents: psychoanalysis and colonialism*. Durham and
London: Duke University Press.

Lienhardt, G. (1993) 'Frazer's anthropology: science and sensibility', *Journal of
Anthopological Society of Oxford*, 24 (1), 1–12.

Lubbock, J. (1913) *Prehistoric times as illustrated by ancient remains and the manners
and customs of modern savages.* 7th ed. London: Williams and Norgate.

Makari, G. (2008) *Revolution in mind: the creation of psychoanalysis.* London:
Duckworth.

Moore, H. L. (2007) *The subject of anthropology: gender, symbolism and psycho-
analysis.* Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.

Nancy, J. L., and P. Lacoue-Labarthe. (1989) 'The unconscious is destructed like an
affect', *Stanford Literature Review* 6 (2), 191–209.

Reik, T. (1954) 'Freud and Jewish wit', *Psychoanalysis* 2, 12–20.

Rose, J. (1999) 'Freud in the "tropics"', *History Workshop Journal* 47, 49–67.

Sahlins, M. (1979) 'Cannibalism: an exchange', *New York Review of Books* 26 (4),
46–47.

Said, E. (2003) *Freud and the non-European*. London: Verso.

Seshadri-Crooks, K. (1994) 'The primitive as analyst: postcolonial feminism's access to
psychoanalysis', *Cultural Critique* 28, 175–218.

Shamdasani, S. (2003) *Jung and the making of modern psychology: the dream of a sci-
ence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stocking, G W. (1987) *Victorian anthropology.* New York and London: The Free Press,
A Division of Macmillan, Inc.

Stoler, A. L. (2000) 'Cultivating bourgeois bodies and racial selves'. In C. Hall (ed.)
*Cultures of empire: colonizers in Britain and the empire in the nineteenth and twen-
tieth centuries.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Tylor, E. B. (1920) *Primitive culture: researches into the development of mythology,
philosophy, religion, language, art and custom*. 6th ed. Vol. 1. 2 vols. London: John
Murray, Albemarle Street.

Yerushalmi, Y. H. (1991) *Freud's Moses: Judaism terminable and interminable.* New
York and London: Yale University Press.