
Migrant Necropolitics at the Table: "Civilized Cannibalism" in Mahi Binebine's *Cannibales*

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Volume 21 Issue 6 (September 2019) Article 5**Taïeb Berrada,****"Migrant Necropolitics at the Table: 'Civilized Cannibalism' in Mahi Binebine's *Cannibales*"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol21/iss6/5>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 21.6 (2019)**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol21/iss6/>>

Abstract: In *Cannibales*, the Maghrebi Francophone author Mahi Binebine revisits the encounter between the so-called "cannibals" and the European colonizer in the context of illegal immigration where bodies become commodities exchangeable for social improvements creating a different form of cannibalism. It is no longer the usual dichotomy between the civilized and the savage that is at work but rather a "civilized" European imperialist who feeds himself on a migrant's flesh. This article argues that this representation works as a "colonial fragment" from the past but contextualized in today's globalization. Binebine's morbid depiction of an ambivalent postcolonial cannibalistic encounter translates as a representation of migrants in terms of cannibalistic necropolitics. The illegal migrant has no choice but to be swallowed by a narcissistic exocannibalism which seeks to incorporate what it feeds on to a total unity suggesting a bleak future not only for illegal migrants but for globalization as possibly devouring itself.

Taïeb BERRADA

Migrant Necropolitics at the Table: "Civilized Cannibalism" in Mahi Binebine's *Cannibales*

It is surprising how the representation of the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean relies on imagery, more specifically, and as extreme examples, what Jacques Rancière called "intolerable images."¹ These images represent shocking experiences of horror, pain and suffering and the way they are brought into the viewer's perception from the intolerable *in* the image to the intolerable *of* the image. These images force us to witness the most horrific visions and demand an appreciation of the way in which the intolerable can be turned into a recognition of humanity. As we witness images and reality, we are brought into the realm of the sensible through certain images while others become clichés that do not affect us or affect us only for a short period of time.

After images of a slave market released by CNN in a November 2017 clip showing an auction of Sub-Saharan African slaves in Libya, the world seemed to express its deepest outrage and realize that slavery is alive and well. When images refer to the infamous representations of the atrocities of our past, such as the intolerable image of a slave market that they provoke the most shocking effects on the viewers. However, it becomes difficult to accept such unanimous indignation while the undocumented migrant population has been experiencing harsh European immigration policies for decades resulting in a condemnation of France and Europe by the Citizen Tribunal on Migrants for crimes against humanity.² The migrant disaster, one of the worst humanitarian crises of our times, has been consistently mishandled for decades now as France and Europe seem to be preoccupied more with biopolitics, border surveillance and transnational migration control over a large population of displaced bodies living in precarious conditions and vulnerable to all sorts of trafficking. While supporting a universal claim to human rights, including the right to mobility, France and the European Union helped perpetuate in practical terms the migrant genocide by denying the basic human right to move freely for some and not for others.³ It is a state of exception where bilateral agreements with countries like Morocco, Senegal and more recently Libya supersede international laws, where transnational border management through agencies such as Frontex with the help of new technologies paradoxically have contributed to more insecurity⁴ resulting in a dangerous management of bodies as disposable commodities echoing Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics as well as Bertrand Ogilvie's notion of "disposable man"⁵ and initially of course, Foucault's biopower exemplified by a European imperial sovereignty that decides who gets "to live and whom it lets die."⁶ Furthermore, undocumented migrants have long been represented in the media and by politicians as an anonymous mass of intruders of color trying to invade a prosperous and civilized Fortress Europe which seems "defenseless" against "barbarian hordes". Thus, for more than two decades, a significant amount of journalistic, sociological, anthropological and fictional works has been published in France about illegal immigrants but has gained little attention from the French public, amid rampant fears of terrorism and African/Arab/Muslim illegal immigration, resulting in the creation of a ministry of Immigration and National identity in 2007. Charlie Hebdo's terrorist attacks of January 2015 also exacerbated anti-Muslim sentiment in France resulting from a spiritual and religious crisis among those Emmanuel Todd called the "Zombie Catholics" in his book *Who is Charlie?* His argument was that the Euro, a single currency has replaced the one and only God, and the Muslim has become the new scapegoat replacing the Jew in traditionally anti-Semitic regions. While allowing the right to

¹ See Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator* (trans. by Gregory Elliott), London: Verso, 2009.

² On January 7th, after more than 40 French and European associations among them Emmaüs International, Attac, CIMADE and Migreurop referred the case on exiles' rights to the PPT (People's Permanent Tribunal) the tribunal issued a unanimous condemnation of European policies as they relate to undocumented migration. In his opening statement, the TPP's Secretary General, Gianni Tognoni emphasized the necropolitical aspect of undocumented migration by saying that "the impunity is assured. When there are too many deaths, too many displaced people, it is as if there were nobody responsible: the TPP attempts to find who is." Furthermore, Brid Brennan of the Transnational Institute, in his introduction, qualified European migration policies in terms of "necropolitics that have generated the biggest human cemetery in the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea".
http://www.liberation.fr/france/2018/01/07/tribunal-citoyen-sur-les-migrants-la-france-et-l-ue-condamnees-pour-complicite-de-crimes-contre-l-hu_1620847

³ See Etienne Balibar, *La crainte des masses: politique et philosophie avant et après Marx*, Paris, Galilée: 1997.

⁴ See Didier Bigo, "Globalized (In)Security: The field and the Ban-Opticon. in D Bigo & A Tsoukala (eds), *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty. Illiberal practices of liberal regimes after 9/11*. Routledge, Abingdon, pp. 10 - 48.

⁵ See Bertrand Ogilvie, *L'Homme jetable. Essai sur l'exterminisme et la violence extrême*, Paris, Éditions Amsterdam, 2012.

⁶ See Foucault, Michel. "Society must be defended": lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76. New York: Picador, 2003.

blasphemy, Todd also supports the right to criticize and refute blasphemy without being accused of supporting terrorism⁷.

In literature, stories about undocumented migrants or *harraga*⁸ have appeared since the nineties, forming a significant body of work that can be qualified as constituting a literary genre. These are novels by both renowned Francophone writers from the Maghreb such as the Moroccan Tahar Ben Jelloun (author of *Partir*), the Algerian Boualem Sansal (author of *Harragas*) and by lesser-known authors of the new generation such as the Moroccan novelist Youssef Amine Elalamy and the writer and painter Mahi Binebine. Binebine's novel *Cannibales*, published in 1999, is one of the first fictional Francophone works to deal specifically with the story of *harraga* trying to cross the strait of Gibraltar on a small boat to reach Europe. The novelty of Binebine's novel resides in the improbable and intriguing connection that he makes between the notion of cannibalism and illegal migration.

In *Cannibales*, the Francophone author revisits this scene of the encounter between the so-called "cannibals" and the European colonizer in the context of illegal immigration in an economically globalized world where bodies become commodities exchangeable for materialistic and social improvements creating a different form of cannibalism. It is no longer the usual dichotomy between the civilized and the savage that is at work but rather a "civilized" European imperialist and capitalist who feeds himself on a migrant's flesh. In a dream, this cannibal trades, out of lust and greed, in the only exchangeable commodity that the "savage" illegal immigrant has left: his body. This "free market" exchange illustrates a world where anything can be traded as a commodity even human body parts. As in any trading experience, the eater, acting as a marketer, has only to convince the soon-to-be-eaten "savage" that it is for his own good, offering him material well-being in exchange for parts of his body until only his head (his no-longer needed body part) is left to be disposed of, flung out in a garbage truck. To understand what Binebine makes of this particular scene, it is crucial to go back to the notion of cannibalism itself, its historical meaning and representation.

A substantial body of research on literary and cultural cannibalism has shown that the term "cannibal" comes from a displacement of meaning that the word *cariba* or *caniba* used by the Arawak people whom Christopher Columbus encountered during his first landing in the Caribbean islands has undergone. Seemingly, the Arawak used to designate a neighboring tribe by either of those words. According to what was understood at that time by the westerners and from the translation (or certainly lack thereof) of what the Arawak said, these neighbors seemed to eat the human flesh of their enemies. The term is still used today to define the "man-eating savage" and serves as a dichotomy between colonizers and colonized originating from encounters between Europeans and the so-called primitive people. I argue that the scene of this encounter functions as what I call a "colonial fragment", a representation that originates in the colonial enterprise and is still at work in today's western collective consciousness as an "intolerable image" whether to define otherness or to justify the new version of a contemporary imperialism where anything is for sale. As many scholars have noted, the fragment refers to the violence of disintegration, dispersion and loss. The fragment functions as a metonymy, from the part to the whole foregrounding an eminently critical, expostulatory and dissident nature. The contradiction between the fragment and its originating whole showcases the particular ideological weight that it carries.⁹ Cannibals are no exception as the word itself carries beyond the simple meaning of a man-eating-human-flesh a heavy ideological past.

According to Peter Hulme, author of *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797*, the word "cannibal" differs from its older synonym "anthropophagus" by virtue of the fact that it recalls above all an image, one of a ferocious consumption of human flesh: "what is at issue is not just an idea of eating the human flesh but rather a particular manner of eating human flesh – ferociously – that is denoted in the European languages by the specific term "Cannibalism." This is the meaning the word has always had." Resulting from this encounter between Europeans and indigenous tribes, the "cannibal" had become at the time used to justify colonial expansion and the extermination of numerous "savage" peoples. Hulme even argues that:

⁷ See Todd, Emmanuel. *Who is Charlie? Xenophobia and the Middle Class*, Polity: Cambridge, 2015.

⁸ The word *harraga* is a pluralized form of *harrag*, which comes from the Maghrebi dialects and means an illegal migrant who burns their documents in order not to be deported if caught. The word has acquired extended figurative meanings in Francophone Maghrebi Literatures. For example, in Boualam Sansal's *Harraga*, the term encompasses a state of being: "burning" in one's own country, living in unbearable conditions of leaving with no future in sight.

⁹ See, for example, Pierre Garrigues, *Poétiques du fragment*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1995 and Françoise Susini-Anastopoulos, *L'écriture fragmentaire : Définitions et Enjeux*, Paris: PUF, 1997.

Cannibalism is a term that has no application outside the discourse of European colonialism: it is never available as a 'neutral' word" and that "the image of ferocious consumption of human flesh is frequently used to mark the boundary between our community and its others, a term that has gained its entire meaning from within the discourse of European colonialism (Hulme 86).

This imperialist aspect is also echoed in Maggie Kilgour's seminal work *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation*: "the definition of the other as cannibal justifies its oppression, extermination, and cultural cannibalism (otherwise known as imperialism) by the rule 'eat or be eaten'" (148). Kilgour argues that cannibalism is a process of incorporation:

In order to maintain a situation of centripetal control, what is outside must be subsumed and drawn into the center until there is no category of alien outsiders left to threaten the inner stability. This process often appears in the form of an attempt to invert actual relations by projecting a desire for assimilation from a center to periphery, a tactic that has been shown to be at work in psychic defenses, misogyny, racism, and imperialism. (Kilgour 5)

If imperialism in the colonial era worked by way of incorporating, colonizing and hence cannibalizing alien bodies and minds into the desire for a total unity, oneness and complete power, one has to wonder how it functions in today's postcolonial era, particularly when this "colonial fragment" can be found in the context of postcolonial francophone literature dealing with encounters between ex-colonizers and ex-colonized. To what extent is the notion of cannibalism at work differently today than in the colonial past in the collective consciousness of a postcolonial globalized free market world? How does cannibalism operate as a metaphor of incorporation in the context of Maghrebi francophone postcolonial literature about clandestine migration from Africa to Europe, when faced with a centuries-old encounter with the "civilized" European?

Cannibales (translated in English as *Welcome to Paradise*) tells the story of several would-be undocumented migrants trying to cross the strait of Gibraltar from ---Tangiers in the nineties. They all share a longing to escape and dream of reaching Europe, only a few kilometers away. All *harraga* are fed with stories and dreams about Europe to escape their harsh conditions of living. Aziz, the young narrator of the novel says it explicitly on the very first page: "We'd believe anything as long as it meant we could get away – as far away as possible, and for good" (15). They are ready for anything as long as it guarantees that they leave Morocco, torn as they are between two choices "to be rid, once and for all, of the grinding worry, the hardship, the blood-sucking local authorities, to make a clean break, like waving a magic wand, bringing a curtain down on our misery," (36) or "to die little by little from hard wear and grief" (36). The story takes place mostly in Tangiers, on a beach nearby where several *harraga* are waiting with their smuggler to cross the sea. The reader will soon learn their stories of misery, humiliation, violence and grief.

Although the title of the book in French, *Cannibales*, suggests that illegal migrants "hungry" for dreams of Europe are cannibals or barbarians ferociously attempting to reach the European coast, there is no literal mention of cannibalism anywhere in the novel with the exception of the title and one recurrent dream. This dream - or as the novel characterizes it, this nightmare - is haunting the nights of Momo, one of the characters in the novel. The nightmare has been "eating" away at him for a long time. Momo has become a smuggler of potential candidates for illegal migration in Tangiers after having himself crossed the sea and been three times caught and deported from France. Momo's job is to make potential candidates for clandestine migration believe in his made-up stories about Europe as a potential paradise. "Feeding" them with idealized dreams of a promised land allows Momo to financially exploit them. The novel presents a dehumanized world where anything is for sale and anything goes. As long as he gets paid, the smuggler does not care if the migrants make it to Europe or not. And everyone seems to be dreaming of Europe although in Momo's case it is a very bad and recurrent dream. The nightmare that obsesses him begins to tell his own story, that of an undocumented dishwasher in a Parisian restaurant called Chez Albert whose manager, Monsieur José hired him illegally. Monsieur José is a rich, worldly educated and very curious man who has made it in life and who particularly enjoys gourmet food. He has travelled widely and done it all except one thing: taste human flesh. This character who appears only in Momo's dream during one chapter seems to illustrate the image of someone obsessed with cannibalism as much as "the colonial era traveler" who, as Geoffrey Sanborn argues in his book *The Sign of the Cannibal*, "unconsciously projected their ""cannibalistic"" desires onto the people they encountered, thereby concealing and justifying their own avarice" (17). Nevertheless, in this precise case, things seem to be somewhat different. Similarly to the famous character Hannibal Lector, Monsieur José is a cannibal "with manners." Nowadays, there is also no need to travel. He only needs

for the harrag to come to him and work for him and then convince him that he can eat him for his own good.

Starting with the post-war era and until 1973 when immigration recruitment of new workers halted with the first oil shock, North African labor was brought massively to French soil to work at rebuilding the country. Despite drastic measures to prevent any migration, North Africans began to leave legally and illegally the ex-colonies for Europe in search of a better future in the now-postcolonial metropole. They seek to "incorporate" Europe and as Maggie Kilgour mentions, using one of her metaphors of incorporation: "the need for food exposes the vulnerability of individual identity enacted at a wider social level in the need for exchanges, communion, and commerce with others, through which the individual is absorbed into a larger corporate body" (6). Given the increasingly restrictive policies adopted by most of the European Union on illegal immigration and the fear of terrorism and migrants in general, it has become extremely difficult for those seeking a better life in Europe to incorporate themselves within it or to be absorbed by it. For over two decades, *harraga* such as Momo have been subjected to a range of hardships from cruel travelling conditions generated by local smugglers to inhuman exploitation in a network of border camps (even when they manage to reach a European country), to mistreatment by European employers eager to exploit cheap labor. This is what has happened to Momo, "the European Deportee," three times expelled from Europe back to Morocco. He came back with a nightmare that he cannot forget in which Monsieur José, his previous employer, is portrayed as a cannibal of a different kind, a self-made, civilized man:

A gourmet (and greedy with it), this big fat fellow had quite a likable, chubby-cheeked face with a moustache tapering into a carefully groomed little goatee beard that framed a pair of thick, wet lips. When he ate, he wolfed down his food, his gaping mouth revealing a chasm of crimson flesh. His enormous appetite gave everyone the creeps. Monsieur José liked to have his meal in the kitchen with the rest of the staff. It was his way of reminding everyone that although he'd risen to the position of manager by the sweat of his brow, that didn't make it abundantly clear that anyone willing to put their back into it could end up like him. (Binebine 96)

The depiction of Monsieur José is an ambivalent one: he is likable but greedy, carefully groomed but "his enormous appetite gave the creeps to everyone". He is also selling the ideal of entrepreneurship and capitalism because he was able to make it. Even though, Momo knows that making it in life is hard, contrary to Monsieur José, his situation does not allow him to be part of this capitalist dream or ideal:

Momo understood that. He himself had gone from bogus tourist guide in Marrakesh, dodging shady policemen who'd fined him wherever they could, to illegal dishwasher in the heart of the French capital, hunted by the courageous riot police, proud protectors of the nation. He'd certainly come a long way! From there to become owner of a restaurant, well, that might be pushing it a bit. No, he had no such ambition. At the very most if, by some miracle, he managed to obtain a residence permit – with savings he couldn't possibly make – he'd like to be a street vendor... (Binebine 96)

The myth of the self-made man appears to be far out of reach for a subaltern such as Momo, opening the way to a criticism of the attainability of this goal as well as the fraudulent claim that anyone can make it with hard work and good will in a "savage" capitalist world. Some like Momo will remain marginal or will simply be "cannibalized" for whatever capital they have left even if this capital means their own bodies. This is what Momo will be doing in his nightmare, giving away his body parts for social and material well-being which would allow him to live the life he dreamt of. But for Momo, the nightmare reflects an anxiety. As Kristen Guest suggests: "Cannibalism is an anxiety generated by the expansion of the domestic economy to the worldly economy and represents the fear of being consumed" (7). Momo's recurrent nightmare is obsessing him, always coming back to "the same scene, same location, same images, same helplessness, same characters, same bloodlust, give or take a mouthful" (97). If Freud has showed that dreams are mostly interpreted as the fulfillment of a wish, we know from Gilles Deleuze that to wish and desire is much more than that: "desire is a machine, a synthesis of machines, a machinic arrangement – desiring-machines. The order of desire is the order of production; all production is at once desiring-production and social production" (296). It is a pleasurable force of appropriation of what is outside oneself, incorporating into oneself what is other than oneself which characterizes the essential process of all life. In his dream or nightmare, Momo's desire translates not only a lack as Freud would suggest it but also a desire to incorporate the social well-being of Monsieur José by dreaming that he is being eaten by him. Furthermore, Momo's character is a smuggler, which is also a business that he runs and that suggests his own contribution to the unscrupulous capital-driven world market flooded with migrants ready to be "consumed."

In the nightmare, Momo and Monsieur José are driving in a red convertible and arrive at an empty café where they sit on the terrace. As is the case for Momo who in his conscious reality tries to feed the potential *harraga* with his made-up stories about Europe, Monsieur José does the same with him. He wants to convince his "client" in a civilized way. He "talks and talks" while Momo "can't hear him, all he can see is his outsized, open mouth where, instead of teeth, there is an infinite number of forks" (97). This detail of teeth replaced by forks implies that the cannibal is using western civilized utensils and fine speech, which echoes the European hypocritical discourse on migration: nice words about human rights and freedom alongside repressive policies. Monsieur José tries to convince his potential buyer by feeding him with captivating words just like any politician or technocrat would do when trying to close a deal: "The glittering, grinding stainless steel trashes out a cascade of muddled words whose vague echo Momo begins to catch, just about; the voice is metallic yet soft, harsh and bewitching, irresistible" (97). While Momo begins to fall into his trap, "Momo lets himself be swept along, opens his heart, swallows the words, absorbs their sense, and, inevitably, agrees with him." (97) The cannibalistic nature of Monsieur José can finally be clearly revealed:

He's had the chance to try everything up until now, in his life, everything but human flesh. And the thing is, he craves it, this flesh, he craves it deeply, avidly, desperately, he's been dreaming about it for years. If Momo would give up even just one of his toes – with so many, what does it matter? – Mr José would be eternally grateful to him. He is prepared to make any sacrifice to appease this raging desire that's tormented him for so long. One yes, just one little whispered yes, and Momo would find himself the beneficiary of endless favors and incalculable privileges: he could work in the dining room, for instance [...] or he could have a new place to live. Mr. José owns a fine two-room apartment on the third floor that could be his. Or perhaps a substantial raise in salary, or even – but in that case he'd have to part with at least a thigh – a residence permit. [...] Nothing's impossible when you show you are willing, when you are generous. Anyway, a finger, what's that? (Binebine 97-98)

If clandestine migrants could be portrayed in a postcolonial era as "barbarians" and therefore "cannibals" trying to infiltrate Europe, Monsieur José fits the perfect example of today's imperialist civilized man who considers, as Guest suggests in her analysis of cultural cannibalism, that "human beings are envisioned as objects of consumption" (111) and that "the real 'other' may in fact be the capitalist down the street" (111). Like the cannibal character in the television series *Hannibal*, Monsieur José is a refined man but also the most terrifying figure, which belongs to what Julia M. Wright rightly calls the inversion of "the dominant imperial paradigm" (94) where European colonizers/civilizers become the barbarians by way of exploitation and excess of consumption. This terrorizing figure of the worst kind, which leads Momo into his anxiety by way of nightmares, is also due to the fact that, as Sanborn puts it, "lustful cannibalism is that it is 'too monstrous' to be believed." (36)

After multiple negotiations, Momo agrees to give his toe and "to his great surprise, Momo found he could easily survive the loss of a toe from each foot. It barely affected his sense of balance, as he'd originally feared. In return, he was assigned the position he so coveted" (98-99). This, however, was only the beginning. As time goes by and Monsieur José becomes more and more eager to eat different parts of Momo's body, Momo consents to give away, in his nightmare, other parts in exchange for an apartment and a managerial position in the restaurant: "Having acquired a taste for Momo's flesh, Monsieur José would ask for more each day and grown used to luxury, Momo would comply" (101). What is striking in his dream is that Momo is unconsciously revealing that being eaten gives him pleasure:

Curiously, the fact of being eaten wasn't as horrible as he might have imagined. It even gave him an erotic thrill he didn't dare to admit to himself; it was almost orgasmic. So he'd traded one arm for a major pay rise, the other for the promise of a residency permit, then both legs when it arrived. In this way he'd gradually used almost the whole of his body; all he had left was his head with its frizzy hair, his dark eyes and his mouth, which, despite everything, went on smiling. (Binebine 101)

The dream creates anxiety for Momo when he is awake because of its ambivalence: he gives away his body parts but seems to enjoy it. I argue that this almost orgasmic thrill can be interpreted as Momo's desire to incorporate Monsieur José's body, to be him and to "incorporate" him. Monsieur José's conditions of living, his position in French society are the dream Momo is so eager to live that giving his body seems to be justified. But once Monsieur José used what he wanted, things went differently. Eventually, Mr José came to him and leaning over Momo's head, murmured in his ear "I don't like heads", "yours disgusts me", "you're no use here anymore", to which Momo replied "Eat me, Mr. José. For the love of God, eat me. I'm so tired" (103). Then, "seizing Momo's head after yelling at someone

through the window "dirty nigger!, dirty Arab!, dirty anything foreign that came into his head. Seizing Momo's head by the hair, he flung it out with all his strength" (103).

Mahi Binebine revisits the scene of the encounter between the cannibal and the civilized while redefining it in a postcolonial context of illegal immigration towards Europe. Hence the supposedly civilized European Monsieur José becomes the *exocannibal* (consumption of outsiders) who eats the body of the illegal immigrant not furiously or savagely but in a civilized and capitalist manner, convincing him just like any good seller or marketer would do, around a table, using forks and knives. Momo's cannibalized body becomes a simple commodity that can be exchanged for material and social well-being. This seems to be the cost that *harraga* have to pay to incorporate a new society but also a new world economy in which their bodies are the only currency that they can exchange. For Binebine, it is a way not only to reveal their exploitation but also, as Guest suggests, to give voice to *harraga*: "the discourse of cannibalism persistently gives voices to the diverse marginal groups it is supposed to silence and questions the dominant ideologies it is evoked to support" (2). The fascination for Europe seems to take roots unconsciously in a historical fragment representing an encounter between Europeans and indigenous people: a shining fragment that, should you get too close, attracts and burns at the same time. As Gramsci suggested it in his famous *Prison Notebooks*, "the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic" (54). What Binebine's text exposes is a diachronic aspect of the migrant stories but also a synchronicity of the fragmentation of modern borders in a globalized context enhanced by new technologies where almost everything can be dealt with from a distance and at the same time. The history and fictional stories of migrants become representational fragments of an old past that are still at work but have the potential to question dominant ideologies through fiction. Momo's dream of Europe is a nightmare and reveals instances of postcolonial anxiety that are linked to practices of postcolonial exploitation and modern slavery. Momo's story is a world in which the undocumented migrant has become a consumable being but also, in the end, as Ogilvie puts it "a disposable being" that can be thrown in the garbage in today's economic world order. This is in the scope of what Achille Mbembe famously called "necropolitics". In his essay, Mbembe argues that slavery "could be considered one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation" and that "in many respects, the very structure of the plantation system and its aftermath manifests the emblematic and paradoxical figure of the state of exception" (21). I will argue that illegal migration in the context of the Mediterranean not only represents a state of exception, or more precisely using Sidi Mohammed Barkat's notion of "bodies of exception"¹⁰ which he uses to refer to the status of Algerians during colonization, but also the very condition of modern slavery. In his essay, Mbembe addresses the condition of slavery as the result of a triple loss:

Loss of a "home," loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status. This triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether). To be sure, as a political-juridical structure, the plantation is a space where the slave belongs to a master. It is not a community if only because by definition, a community implies the exercise of the power of speech and thought. (Mbembe 21)

This passage offers us a perfect analogy to the condition of undocumented migrants who also lose their home, their bodies and who are, of course, denied any political representation. They are also expelled from humanity by being treated "biopolitically" and "necropolitically" as disposable bodies. In a global world of intensified movement, the right to circulation of the so-called *harraga* belongs to others. It belongs to technologically advanced masters who control their whereabouts and therefore control their bodies and their minds. Furthermore, slaves do not necessarily have to be confined to one space or camp or territory to be subjected to Mbembe's "triple loss." The so-called globalized world has generated new ways of creating "mobile slaves": this is a mobility controlled by others which enslaves undocumented migrants. They are nothing more than numbers in anonymous crowds. If undocumented migrants still manage to circulate within the confines of border networks, they end up in camps, forests,¹¹ in the desert or even in European capitals where they can be subjected to a slavery-like exploitation, with no rights or political representation. This is modern-day migrant slavery. As long as they have a "luxury" passport, migrants of the world can circulate freely while others with "bad" citizenships will be subjected to a circulation confined to a vast transnational network of borders. Etienne Balibar who worked extensively on the subject of borders,¹² emphasized the "gigantic inequality with

¹⁰ See Barkat, Sidi Mohammed, *Le corps d'exception*. Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2005.

¹¹ One of the most notorious ones, Gourougou is located near Melilla in Morocco. Melilla and Ceuta are the two remaining Spanish enclaves in Morocco.

¹² See *Droit de cité. Culture et politique en démocratie* (Rights of citizenship. Culture and politics in democracy), La

regard to the right of circulation and the mobility of persons" (218). The more transnational circulation whether in terms of humans or capital intensifies, the more a transnational political and economic space controlled by the powerful (States and transnational agencies) becomes a space of inequality. The use of modern technologies in border control serves the purpose of population-selection. Balibar notes that «it would seem that in the globalized world where migrations have become both massive and permanent no more room exists for the normal figure of the stranger as simple foreigner, distinguished from commodity and an enemy" (218). Mahi Binebine managed to show us that the figure of the cannibal is ambivalent and creates anxieties when it comes to creating boundaries between the civilized and the savage. As Guest suggests, "the cannibal may be productively read as a symbol of the permeability, or instability of such boundaries (between 'civilized' us and 'savage' them)" (2). Binebine goes further by not only giving voice to the subaltern but also underlining the ongoing anxiety lived by so many. As is the case in many works on *harraga*, authors often use what I would call "*necroesthetics*"¹³ to tell their stories as a counter-discourse which unravels the unconsciousness of necropolitics or a sort of a "psychic life" of biopower to use Judith Butler's findings on Foucault's work:

If we understand power "as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are [...]" "Subjection" signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject. (Butler 2)

Butler builds her reading from Hegel's approach to freedom in *Phenomenology of Spirit* where "the master, who at first appears to be "external" to the slave, reemerges as the slave's own conscience" (3). Here subject-formation could be interpreted as being a metaphor of incorporation to total unity and at the source of a cannibalization of the subject in subordination. The illegal migrant is subordinated to the master at first and thus become convinced in his conscience that his body only signifies "food", a commodity begging to be eaten: "Eat me, Monsieur José. For the love of God, eat me. I am so tired!" (103). Momo seems to have lost any free will as his mind has been cannibalized to serve his body as food to his master. Since his master's conscience is in him, he can be sensitized to and even find pleasure in being eaten. After all, anything can be exchanged in a free market world. If this is the clear depiction of the world today, what's next? Monsieur José as the civilized cannibal eats Momo's body and becomes him through incorporation for power and total unity.

In his book, *La société autophage: capitalisme, démesure et autodestruction* (The Autophagous Society: Capitalism, Excess and Self-Destruction¹⁴), Anselm Jappe convincingly establishes a close link between narcissism and globalized capitalism. He argues that for some time capitalist society has been taking a suicidal turn that nobody wants but that everybody contributes to. He claims that, "in a society dominated by mercantile fetishism, there cannot be a true human subject: it is the value and its different metamorphoses (merchandise, money) that constitute the real subject of capitalist societies." (24). Here, Kilgour's metaphor of incorporation of others for complete unity and power can also be interpreted as a narcissistic move from the capitalist subject who can only see the world as a projection of himself. Jappe argues that the capitalist narcissistic subject "has never accepted on a deep level any separation between himself and the world. [...] He has a similar relation to his objects: he is not interested in them because of their difference from him. He does not want to know them but only to use them, to manipulate them and dominate them" (121-122). The flow of new technologies denies the multiplicity of the world, reducing it to an anonymous crowd that serves the purpose of being available to the capitalist subject and bringing him a sense of power. Therefore, the perfect capitalist subject regresses and behaves like a child, who wants it all in a limitless world where experiences lived by others are virtualized and where subalterns, when non-profitable, become, to use Arendt's expression, "superfluous beings." This is how the civilized society becomes barbarous. And this is also what Jappe identifies as the main issue with capitalism: only participation in the free market gives the right to be a subject. "Capital is in no need of humanity and ends up eating itself. This situation constitutes a favorable ground for emancipation but also for barbarity. Instead of a North-South dichotomy, the world today is faced

crainte des masses (Fear of masses) but also « Toward a Diasporic Citizen? From Internationalism to Cosmopolitics », Françoise Lionnet et Shu-mei Shih (dir.), *The Creolization of Theory*. Duke UP, 2014.

¹³ See for example Amine Youssef Elalamy's *Clandestins* (The clandestines). The author describes in his novel, bodies of dead *harraga* on a beach in such detail and from such a photographic perspective using *ekphrasis* that they become esthetic forms that escape the official discourse found in newspapers. On the analysis of Elalamy's novel see Taïeb Berrada. *La figure de l'intrus* (The figure of the intruder).

¹⁴ All translations of Anselm Jappe are mine.

with a global apartheid, with borders surrounding islands of wealth in every country and in every town" (234). This depressing assumption about this globalized barbarity leads us also to consider what Julia Kristeva identified in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* as "melancholy cannibalism". She establishes a close link between the cannibal and the depressed, cannibalism and melancholia, which itself holds the structure of a narcissistic self and fetishizing of projected object. She argues that:

Melancholy cannibalism, [...] appears in many dreams and fantasies of depressed persons, accounts for this passion for holding within the mouth [...] the intolerable other that I crave to destroy so as to better possess it alive. Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested... than lost. The melancholy cannibalistic imagination is a repudiation of the loss's reality and of death as well. It manifests the anguish of losing the other through the survival of self, surely a deserted self but not separated from what still and ever nourishes it and becomes transformed into the self – which also resuscitates – through such devouring. (Kristeva 12)

If Monsieur José represents the capitalist narcissistic depressed subject, after eating Momo's and other migrants' flesh, will he find nothing else to eat but himself? But can he ever satisfy himself by cannibalizing, incorporating the bodies that nourish him? Monsieur José exemplifies the narcissistic depressed person who has been deprived of eating human flesh. He was depressed before his negotiations with Momo: "he craves it, this flesh, he craves it deeply, avidly, desperately, he's been dreaming about it for years." (92) As Kristeva argues "Ever since that archaic attachment the depressed person has the impression of having been deprived of unnamable, supreme good, of something unrepresentable, that perhaps only devouring might represent, or an invocation might point out, but no word could signify (13). This brings us back to the realm of the unrepresentable and the intolerable images of cannibalism.

Binebine's fragmented new vision of an encounter between civilized and cannibals is not only turned upside down where the civilized is the *exocannibal* and the so called *harrag* is the one being eaten, but it also sets the limits of a dichotomy. It implies an epistemological shift of this Western binary opposition, which establishes a local knowledge but projects it to the world as universal. Binebine manages to decolonize this Western epistemology by complicating it but also by suggesting the self-eating implications of a limitless capitalist free market as well as a particular articulation of the subject relation by way of eating or being eaten, thus, blurring any defining line between civilized and cannibals. But we are also left with a great deal of pessimism as to finding any alternatives to a narcissistic capitalism which consumes everyone but the powerful and where any maneuvering outside of the market system seems to be for the most part hopeless. Thus, we are somehow back to the age of the primary law, the law of the jungle where the strongest is the fittest to survive, after centuries of "western civilization". With *Cannibales*, we are left with the sense that, in the absence of alternatives, being eaten by capitalism seems to be inevitable and even suggests in an intolerable way that the process could become pleasurable.

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