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Eco-Cosmopolitanism as Trauma Cure

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The fourth chapter of Frantz Fanon's classic work *Black Skin, White Masks,* titled "The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized," is a powerful critique of Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1956). Born in France of Corsican parents, Dominique-Octave Mannoni had come to know the African colonial condition primarily through his ethnological work in Madagascar, where he spent twenty years. The argument of *Prospero and Caliban* is that colonial "situations" are the product of "misunderstanding, of mutual incomprehension."[1] The situation, Mannoni observes in the introduction, is created the very moment a white man appears in the midst of a tribe, and he goes on to elaborate on its distinctive and varied features: dominance of a majority by a minority, economic exploitation, the seemingly benign paternalism of the civilizing mission, and racism. The colonizer's "grave lack of sociability combined with a pathological urge to dominate" gives him a "Prospero complex"[2] while the colonized Malagasy, forced out of their own history, genealogy, and tradition and victimized by a failed European interpellation, develop a corresponding "dependence complex."[3] Neither inferiority nor superiority, "dependence," Mannoni claims, is Caliban's reliance on colonizers fostered by a sense of abandonment.

"We propose to show that Monsieur Mannoni, although he has devoted 225 pages to the study of the colonial situation, has not grasped the true coordinates," states Fanon at the outset.[4] Intellectually honest and insightful on colonial psychopathology though he may be, and the research sincere, Mannoni's "objectivity" becomes increasingly suspect when he claims that the germ of the inferiority complex in the Malagasy was latent in them.

> Here we see the mechanism at work in psychiatry, which explains there are latent forms of psychosis that become evident following a traumatic experience. And in surgery, varicose veins in a patient are caused not by having to stand for ten hours, but rather by the constitutional weakness of the vein walls; the work mode merely deteriorates the condition further, and the employer's responsibility is assessed to be very limited.[5]

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1 Dominique-Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1990), 31.
2 Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban*, 102.
3 Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban*, 41.
4 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 65.
5 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 66.

Fanon delineates the colonial industrial complex whose moral justification is derived from an opportunistic confusion of the psyche and soma of the oppressed, the denigrated body standing not for the causative brutalization of colonization but the racist ideology animating the same. Monsieur Mannoni "has not endeavoured to see from the inside the despair of the black man confronted with the white man," writes Fanon.[6] From the inside, objectivity is not possible, states Fanon, nor is it possible to differentiate between colonial and other forms of racism. Fanon excoriates Mannoni's argument that the depredations of colonial rule are traceable to petty officials, small traders, and colonials, not the mind of Europe. He states defiantly that "European civilization and its agents of the highest caliber are responsible for colonial racism … every citizen of a nation is responsible for the acts perpetrated in the name of the nation."[7]

Turning to the so-called "dependence complex," and the relative lack of an inferiority complex among the colonized, Fanon is equally scathing. In South Africa, there are 2 million whites to 13 million blacks, yet it has never occurred to a single black person to consider themselves superior to a member of the white community. They, in fact, feel inferior, an "inferiorization" that is a "correlative to the European's feeling of superiority."[8] Mannoni's pernicious misunderstanding is that he gives the native no choice between dependence and inferiority. In fact, caught up as he is in the contest of meanings between schools of ethnographers, Mannoni fails to consider that "Malagasy" itself is a concept metaphor that exists only in relation to the European. Moreover, Mannoni's interpretation that it is the demand for equality which makes the "dependent" Malagasy positionally "inferior" (because the demand itself becomes unslakeable and no measure of equality can suffice) is based on deeply flawed assumptions:

> A Malagasy is a Malagasy; or rather, he is *not* a Malagasy, but he lives his "Malagasyhood." If he is a Malagasy it is because of the white man; and if, at a certain point in his history, he has been made to ask the question whether he is a man, it is because his reality as a man has been challenged … I start suffering from not being a white man insofar as the white man discriminates against me; turns me into a colonized subject; robs me of any value or originality; tells me I am a parasite in the world… . So I will try quite simply to make myself white; in other words, I will force the white man to acknowledge my humanity. But, Monsieur Mannoni will tell us, you can't, because deep down inside you there is a dependency complex.[9]

I quote Fanon at length here because it encapsulates three recurrent themes in literary representations of the nervous condition of the colonized: the discursive construction of paradigms of identity, health, and pathology; the physical and psychic violence that determines the identity, health, and pathology of what Fanon calls the "colonized subject"; and, finally, the impasse in which the racist neuroanthropology puts the

6 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 67
7 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 70, 72.
8 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 73.
9 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 78.

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colonized subject, unable to move backward or forward. If Mannoni had, in his analyses of seven Malagasy dreams, highlighted the dominant theme of terror, in particular the existential terror of the immobilized as well as the fugitive victim of violence, Fanon provides a practical, historically relevant interpretation instead: the black bull, in the Malagasy dream, is not the phallus but the feared Senegalese in the criminal investigation department. "Freud's discoveries are of no use to us whatsoever," Fanon cautions:

> We must put the dream *in its time*, and this time is the period during which 80,000 natives were killed, i.e., one inhabitant out of fifty; and *in its place*, and the place is an island with a population of 4 million among whom no real relationship can be established, where clashes break out on all sides, where lies and demagoguery are the sole masters.[10]

In *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the Western Mind*, Ethan Watters accuses the pervasiveness of diagnostic categories emanating from American psychiatry of "flattening the landscape of the human psyche itself."[11] Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* (2010), similarly, is scathing in its critique that Western theories of trauma and trauma cure are not self-reflexive enough about their particularity as well as their foreign provenance and elaboration in relation to the specific and local histories, geographies, traditions, and conceptions of self to which they are indiscriminately applied. In this novelization of the brutalizing effects of the civil war (1991–2002) in Sierra Leone, we find Adrian Lockheart, a British psychologist, trying to come to terms with paradigms of normalcy and pathology after a decade-long armed civil war. His connection to Sierra Leone or Africa is accidental: at a professional crossroads, mindful that the momentum of his career may have dissipated, he had seen an advertisement by an international agency "for a government-sponsored psychologist to work overseas."[12] Adrian's application had failed and he would not have embarked on the six-week project in Freetown in 2001 had the successful applicant not taken ill. Although it is eventually revealed that Adrian's connection to Sierra Leone is not as tenuous as it had seemed—his mother had "nearly" been born there—the fact that he "knew a little more about it than most, at the very least he knew its correct location"[13] is more an indictment of his savior complex than a justification of it.

"If you were an ambitious researcher in psychology or psychiatry in the 1990s, PTSD was where the action was; by 2004, more than twenty thousand articles, books, and reports had been indexed in the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder's database," observes Watters.[14] The Ghanaian psychiatrist Attila Asare, whose character finds its full flowering in *Happiness*, makes his first entrance in *The Memory of Love.* He tells Adrian about a visiting medical research team who had pronounced, after a mere six weeks of study, that 99 percent of the Sierra Leonean population was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. "You call it a disorder, my friend. We call it *life*,"[15] he says memorably. Adrian obsesses on the diagnosis of a local woman called

10 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 84. Fanon here cites testimonies given at a trial in Tananarive.
11 Ethan Watters, *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the Western Mind* (London: Hachette UK, 2011), 1.
12 Aminatta Forna, *The Memory of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 66.
13 Forna, *The Memory of Love*, 67.
14 Watters, *Crazy Like Us*, 72.
15 Aminatta Forna, *Happiness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 319.

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Agnes—an "enigma" whose "dissociative" episodes of unconscious wandering pique Adrian's curiosity. Agnes wanders away from home for weeks and months, returning as inexplicably as she had left and with no memory of the places across the country she had traveled in the interim. Adrian ascribes to Agnes the illness identity of a complex and rarely diagnosed dissociative listed in the *DSM*s as "fugue," characterized by unexpected travel away from home, often coupled with amnesia. The 1994 *DSM* identified "fugue," which was first appeared in European registers in the nineteenth century, as a "dissociative disorder," with the chair of the dissociative disorders committee for the DSM IV claiming that it was related to trauma. The locals, Adama's companion and the nurse Salia, claim that Agnes is "crossed":

> If a spirit possesses you, you become another person, it is a bad thing… . But sometimes a person may be able to cross back and forth between this world and the spirit world… . And when they are in between the worlds, in neither world, then we say they are crossed.[16]

Kai Mansaray, the Sierra Leonean surgeon, does not dismiss the fugue diagnosis offhand but, as Fanon had done with the Malagasy dream, he reads the symptom in the context of the patient's contingent history. Agnes, he discovers, was leaving home compulsively to flee the unbearable condition of cohabiting with the murderer of her husband, whom her daughter had unknowingly married. Adrian comes closer to a breakthrough when, unlearning his therapeutic training, he starts to treat Agnes's silences not as dissociative absences, but alternative loci of narrative.

The main narrative of *Happiness* begins with a collision on Waterloo bridge. "A man so tall he appeared to be wading through the crowd was crossing the bridge in the opposite direction to the fox."[17] It is Attila Asare, the Ghanaian psychiatrist specializing in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder in noncombatant populations, as is revealed (a pleasant surprise for the reader of Forna's *The Memory of Love*). Attila is in London to deliver the keynote at a very large (eight hundred delegates and counting) conference on PTSD. His self-situation as a native informant and international trauma specialist is not without its contradictions and limitations, and Forna subtly points out that his world-weariness is a badge of privilege:

> [H]e described his work in Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Afghanistan, the Turkish/Syrian border and all the other places he had travelled in the last decade, where he stepped off planes to be driven through streets of shelled buildings, devoid of people and colour, it might be thirty degrees centigrade or minus fifteen, the air clouded with dust or with snow, the landscape flat or mountainous, from his perspective conflict looked very much the same in one place as in another.[18]

The woman, all in black, with hair of a "rather remarkable pale silver,"[19] in hot pursuit of a fox, who runs into him, is Jean Turane, a wildlife biologist fighting to keep London

16 Forna, *Happiness*, 129.
17 Forna, *Happiness*, 10.
18 Forna, *Happiness*, 24.
19 Forna, *Happiness*, 11.

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foxes safe from the rapacity of urbanization and its eugenicist biological imagination. She falls foul of the twitteratti for suggesting that a rare incident of a child being bitten by a fox is insufficient grounds for the extirpation of the species. Trauma is a recurrent theme in Forna's fiction, as, I will argue, is her eco-cosmopolitanism (Ursula Heise's term), an ecologically urgent imperative that we see ourselves and our social groups as "imagined communities." Referring to Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an imagined community, Heise proposes a planetary model, a cosmopolis of species "of both human and non-human kinds."[20] This collision of two people moving across wide geographic distances is not simply symptomatic of the global flow of goods, commodities, and ideas, but demonstrates transnational connections and planetary identifications that may transcend what Franco Moretti calls the "subdivided reality of the modern world."[21] The dissimilar but overlapping paths of two foreigners to the metropolis bring to light the affiliative affective networks that may arise where filiation has failed. Finally, in a novel that is framed with the dispassionate and professional killing, in Greenhampton, Massachusetts, in April 1814, of the last wolf in the United States, signaling that the birth of post-industrial modernity is tainted by the death of nature, the absent referent of a fleeting fox, jolting together the worlds of Attila and Jean, provides a corrective association with the natural world instead.

Later in the novel, Attila is brought in as expert witness to validate a PTSD diagnosis, which would absolve defendant Adama Sheriff of the crime of arson (thereby preventing her punitive deportation). The West-African Adama, a non-naturalized resident in the United Kingdom, is the wife of a man who was once kidnapped in Iraq and is supposedly suffering from the belated shock of the prior event and the more recent one of the death of her spouse. She sets fire to a pile of sewing (Adama is a seamstress), and Attila quickly realizes that it is not a response to the racism of her neighbors, but an explosive expression of the grief and rage the widow feels at being isolated and shunned by happy families. Instead of the incapacitated victim of PTSD, staving off "intrusive recollections," Attila finds a woman who is "sad and angry."[22] Refuting the diagnosis of trauma and complicated grief arrived at by Dr. Greyforth, the specialist appointed by Adama's solicitor, his rejoinder is a hollow echo of the words he had uttered to Adrian Lockheart: "'You call them symptoms, I call them emotions.'"[23] Fighting the stereotyping diagnosis, as he and Kai had done with PTSD verdicts in the Freetown of *The Memory of Love*, and the damning pathologization of raced bodies or disenfranchised minorities, Attila asserts that Adama needed neither diagnosis nor treatment. The medico-legal establishment wouldn't have come after her had her despair been implosive, not explosive. He challenges again the nascent orthodoxies and prevalent misconceptions around trauma, especially when they readily attach to raced bodies already breached by colonial knowledge technologies. As Michel Foucault argues in the *Abnormal* lectures, the most insidious form of power is not negative, repressive, or superstructural: it is positive, productive, and inventive,

20 Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p. 61.
21 Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), 5.
22 Forna, *Happiness*, 258.
23 Forna, *Happiness*, 259.

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legitimizing its exercise by the creation of polemical and political concepts that multiply its effects through regimes of normalization.[24]

> How to construe normality was not a new argument, but it remained the fact that preventing practitioners in places like this from defaulting to the values of the West was to wage an unending campaign. Attila suspected that Greyforth was the kind of person who when he said "people" meant "white people."[25]

As he prepares to address members of his profession in the conference in London, Attila speculates whether the traumatized can be imagined in theoretical debates as well as clinical practice as active, not passive, resilient and capable, not the "compliant mad": "suffering and damage are not the same,"[26] he insists to an incredulous group of colleagues. It is true that a perpetual war is raging in the space-time crimped globe, and no one can sleep these days, Attila notes. However, he forcefully protests the ubiquity of Western vocabularies of mental health, drawn from the combat trauma of the Great War down to the Vietnam war, and continues to valorize endurance, resilience, and flexibility. He has never known an African who asked "Why me?" he tells Kathleen Branagan: "The script of life for most of us is, dare I say, a great deal more fluid."[27] If Attila's is an African way of seeing, it is not made explicit. In fact, Forna avoids the reverse essentialism of such a stance by suggesting that trauma, to quote Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, is "a commonplace of the contemporary world, a shared truth."[28] Not a universal but a shared truth, which can connect dissimilar social systems. The work Attila consults last minute for his lecture is Robert Graves's First World War memoir, *Goodbye to All That*. His Senegalese mentor, Dr Toure, had introduced him to the book. Reading again about the tyranny of the medical industrial complex behind the Great War that saw Siegfried Sassoon's pacifism as insanity, and to placate whose wrath Graves had argued that his friend was shell-shocked, Attila writes out new key words: "Hope. Humour. Survival. Adaptability. Expectations. Impermanence (acceptance of)."[29]

In *Happiness*, survivalism and psychic recuperation are associated with embracing the eco-cosmopolitanism of urban living. Earlier in the novel, Attila Asare had collided with Jean Turane. This is not coincidental, they both agree, but a statistical possibility given their unrelated yet intersecting trajectories. The heterogeneous team of road sweepers, traffic wardens, street performers, and security guards (migrants to the city, all) that is mobilized to find Tano, Attila's great nephew and a boy who has gone missing after his mother and he had immigration problems, is the very body of urban vigilantes Jean has created to spot and track migrant foxes. Jean has named the foxes she is studying: Jeremiah and Babe, Finn and Black Aggie, and her favorite, Light Bright. In this environmental imaginary, the eviction of parakeets from a graveyard sycamore, the

24 Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the College dè France, 1974–75* (New York: Picador, 2007).
25 Forna, *Happiness*, 258–59.
26 Forna, *Happiness*, 251, 228.
27 Forna, *Happiness*, 216.
28 Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
29 Forna, *Happiness*, 291.

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culling of pests and feral animals, and the hounding of illegal immigrants are manifestations of the same phobia of alien invasion that structures ownership and entitlement in the global city. Happiness here is Jean's patient knowledge that the parakeets taking off from the branches of the dead tree at the end of the parking lot will return from their peregrinations come dusk, just as her lover, "his tall figure moving through a landscape of rock and dust"[30] in Raqqa, Fallujah, and Mosul, will come back to her momentarily.

30 Forna, *Happiness*, 308.

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