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A detailed illustration of a turkey with its tail feathers fanned out. The turkey's head is replaced by a human face with a prominent red eye. The turkey is holding a pocket watch in its beak. The background is a textured, patterned surface with green leaves and vines.

Madness, Psychiatry, and Empire in Postcolonial Literature

Chienyn Chi

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Chienyn Chi

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Chienyn Chi
Bethany College
Lindsborg, Kansas, USA

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To my loved ones and all those who made this book possible.

FOREWORD

Albert Camus once famously quipped “Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth.” This is the moving force behind Chienyin Chi’s project: attending to literary scenework and character building, Chi traces the links between empire, psychiatric practice, and colonialism, proposing that the limits of empiricism become apparent in the psychiatric practice’s Westernized conceptualization. In short, it is argued here that the psychoanalyst has long been the colonizer’s henchman, and that psychiatry has been the Empire’s most influential, if subtle, apologist.

The project addresses empiricism’s shortcomings and the explicit links between empire and empirical analytical practices in the twentieth century. In doing so, Chi doesn’t mince words: it was what is called here the “arm-chair empiricism” of psychoanalysts and psychiatrists that created and reinforced the “fantastical binary” between city and colony, leading to the myth-making around the Empire and everyone else, and between westerners and savages. Literary and cultural periphery are here used as critical tools: little-discussed works such as Aimé Césaire’s *Insensé Réveil* and Lu Xun’s 狂 (madness) are paired with Woolf’s and Dangarembga’s canonical fiction, as well as criticism of Freudian notions to suggest new avenues for decolonization. As Chi acknowledges, a lot has been written on decolonization; what this book offers is a focused narration of how psychiatry and psychoanalysis are always already an apparatus of the Empire, as well how an articulation of madness can function as an instrument of dissent and decolonization.

Treating the Empire as a Derridean specter (“that immortal ghost whispering in our ears”), more alive in its death than ever before, the author

reads postcolonialism as a never-ending tendency and not as an accomplishment, or a box to be ticked. The postcolonial moment is not a moment at all, but rather a long, painstaking restoration of “oral histories, religions, literatures, and civilizations of pre-colonial times.” Refreshingly, Chi suggests that this restoration is to take place through language, and follows that same method in the present study. Placing Aimé Césaire’s writings and Octave Mannoni’s most influential work *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950) in dialogue, Chi quickly arrives at the conclusion that classical psychoanalytic texts frame race without attending to the unseen causes and consequences of colonialism: in Chi’s words, the “non-physical realm, which hides itself in spirituality, economy, aesthetics, governance, and culture.” In an original vein, the book draws a global map of literary madness in order to rewrite the colonial history of psychiatry and attend to its aporias. The book is a reminder that any kind of nation-building is reliant on “empire(ical)” discourse, and that science and medicine are always the silent but strong supporters of the nation.

The method of the book, namely, “crossings,” aptly describes the work that decolonization necessitates: as Chi shows, the many layers of colonization can be uncovered by crossing the threshold of disciplines, canonical writings, continents, and fiction. Importantly, Chi shows that one does not have to cross the threshold of the city into the colony to witness colonial practices: the same colonial practices, such as decivilization and proletarianization, are the ruling forces of the city. As a methodology, crossings also requires a fine balance between critical distance and close attention, provided here by a smooth interweaving of psychoanalytic theory, critical race theory, and literary close-reading. This seemingly antithetical work also reveals the paradoxes of colonization and the voices that have criticized the Empire; it is uncertain, Chi writes, to what extent Woolf’s *flâneuse* in *Mrs Dalloway* undermines or supports the Empire’s methods, especially as, one may add, Clarissa Dalloway’s *flânerie*, and the whole novel in fact, are the sum of “empir(e)ical” knowledge. In other words, what Chi reads in the fiction at hand are the novel’s heteroglossic (per Mikhail Bakhtin) tendencies. Every character, Chi notices, often speaks both the language of the colonizer and the language of the colonized, insofar as the Empire operates on a micro as well as a macro level. Decolonization is an act of witnessing the heteroglossia inherent in language and every other cultural practice. As Chi writes, in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, it is only after Tambu’s decolonization of the mind

that “she begins to understand the psychological disturbances, madneses, and strange actions in herself, the women she loves, and the men who alienate her through the perspective of this history.” Tambu, much like Woolf’s Septimus, realizes that, in Chi’s summary, “imperial forms of psychiatry/psychoanalysis equate mental and physical health with the needs of capitalist empires.”

This is why the language of madness is crucial for decolonization. Considering that, as Chi argues in reading Césaire, “regardless of the author’s blind intentions, the language of complexes, academia, and empiricism has sought to devour and warp the language that seeks to witness the oppression in history,” a linguistic space that is both within and outside of the dominant system may work as a different kind of tool with which to take down the Empire’s house. Such a space finds its correlative in Lu Xun’s Marxist concept *hengzhan*, which Chi translates as “horizontal stand.” The neither/nor stance explored by a madman in Xun’s story “A Madman’s Diary” is similar to the marginal expression “I’d rather not” articulated by Bartleby the scrivener in the famous 1853 short story by Herman Melville; importantly, Chi resituates Xun’s story within the Chinese context, pointing out the power structures that the madman’s diary lays bare. As with the other stories explored in the present study, the official and authoritative nature of medical and psychiatric discourse is revealed as the language of objectification and colonialism, whereas Xun’s ironic “mad” fictional language favors witnessing instead of diagnosing.

In the liminal space that (fictional) madness creates, decolonization can start taking place; is it possible, as the author suggests, to crack open the empire of empiricism by understanding poetry and fiction? One would like to think it is.

Athens, Greece

Iro Filippaki

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I remember ... every time the dead lifted me ... with their truth. And now I'm dead. And I yearn to lift you... There is a wound that won't heal at the center of the galaxy. There is a darkness reaching like rust into everything around us. We let it grow, and now it's here. It's here, and it's not visiting anymore. It wants to stay. The Empire is a disease that thrives in darkness, it is never more alive than when we sleep. It's easy for the dead to tell you to fight, and maybe it's true, maybe fighting is useless. Perhaps it's too late. But I'll tell you this ... If I could do it again, I'd wake up early and be fighting these bastards from the start. Fight the Empire!—Andor, Episode 12.

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CHAPTER 1

Aimé Césaire's *Insensé Réveil*

If you point out to M. Mannoni that the Madagascans have nevertheless revolted several times since the French occupation and again recently in 1947, M. Mannoni, faithful to his premises, will explain to you that that is purely neurotic behavior, a collective madness, a running amok; that, moreover, in this case it was not a question of the Madagascans' setting out to conquer real objectives but an "imaginary security," which obviously implies that the oppression of which they complain is an imaginary oppression. So clearly, so insanely imaginary, that one might even speak of monstrous ingratitude, according to the classic example of the Fijian who burns the drying-shed of the captain who has cured him of his wounds.

—Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

AIMÉ CÉSAIRE'S PROBLEM WITH THE PSYCHOANALYSIS OF OCTAVE MANNONI

The epigraph comes from Aimé Césaire's famous 1959 essay *Discours sur le colonialisme* (*Discourse on Colonialism*). As the French title of the essay states, the seminal text is a debate on colonialism during a time period where many colonies around the world were wrestling with their status under empires. Fast forward eighty years later, we are now reading this

text in a time period some uncritically termed the “postcolonial” as many former colonies of the West have now gained national independence. Despite the decades that have passed and the new emerging nation-states, some arguably no better than the control they suffered under colonization, the saliency of this discursive analysis has not diminished one bit today. In fact, the problem of colonialism is still a contested space of debate as many still argue that its benefits outweigh its cost.

There are many reasons why *Discours* is still haunting us right now. For starters, contrary to the misreading of the word, “postcolonial,” colonialism and Empire have not passed away and are alive and well. Firstly, one finds in the current world-order, new expanding nationalisms remap power dynamics and re-enshrine Empire as they hide their *true* nature as Empire. Secondly, in the study of world and national literatures, history, historiography, and literary theory, one sees that centuries of imperial power dynamics have shaped writers, national canons, genres, aesthetics, philosophies, political movements, narrative structures, shifting subject matters, archival research, and historical methodology, etc. Thirdly, because of the evolution of Empire and our ever-changing understanding of Empire, there are always new unconventional “postcolonial” texts being found. The “postcolonial” searches for a language to describe Empire in the most unexpected places. Just as Edward Said (1978) did in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*; just as Lisa Lowe (2015) did in C. L. R James’ love of *Vanity Fair*; and just as Aimé Césaire (1959/2001) did in the rediscovered long poem *Chants de Maldoror* written in 1865 Uruguay. Rather than being siloed or made passé, the “postcolonial” as a theory is historically present; it argues that empires, colonialism, systems of oppressions, and the politics of the Other have impacted culture, literature, theory in ways that we still don’t understand and are still researching today.

One may assume that the “postcolonial,” represented both by an ever-changing incongruous body of works, theories, and methods, is predominantly preoccupied with the time period during European expansion and colonialism, the independence movements of the colonies, and the Cold War nationalisms that came afterwards. However, the “postcolonial” also looks back. The postcolonial is just as much invested in pre-colonial times as it is with modern times. The “postcolonial” dismantles pernicious presentism—the invasion of current ideas in the analysis of the past. Sadly, this sort of discursive colonization can oftentimes be done in the name of “postcolonialism,” through romanticization, exoticism, and a general sloppy ahistoricism. This book asserts that the “postcolonial” should,

instead, restore oral histories, religions, literatures, and civilizations of pre-colonial times while being attuned to these presentist conquests within the postcolonial field. To free the past from either a Western, modern, colonialist, essentialized, or nationalist lens is a continual and never-ending process that is part of the postcolonial endeavor. As such, the book uses and defines the capitalized term “Empire” as a system of oppression, existing since Antiquity and transforming throughout the epochs to our current “Empire.” This means the term Empire includes the modern period of Western imperialism and colonization, but also what came before, the Greco-Roman world, the Chinese imperial dynasties, the Mali, the Mughal, the Aztec, the Sumerian, and the Egyptian civilizations, etc. Furthermore, the term Empire describes not only a physical nation but also the Empire one finds in the non-physical realm, which hides itself in spirituality, economy, aesthetics, governance, and culture. While the underscored “empire,” distinguished from the capitalized form, connotes the material, tangible, and historical “nations” that expanded and colonized the world in the modern and contemporary time periods. I argue the “postcolonial” seeks not only to further historicize and concretize the “empires” of modern world history but also to identify and dismantle the unseen Empire that resides in our minds, our hearts, our spirits, and in the discursive. And this book proposes that our remembrance of the past, our understandings of our present, and our imaginations of the future are already tainted by Empire and must be carefully rewired. Therefore, “postcolonial literature” also supposes that in the twenty-first century, Empire will continue to influence our readings and re-readings of past literatures, histories, and cultures, as well as our production of contemporary literature and research on history and culture. That is why the postcolonial perspective is far from dead and *Discours* is still that immortal ghost whispering in our ears.

Like a specter, *Discours* has had many reincarnations as many scholars have produced a myriad of interpretations of the text. *Madness, Psychiatry, and Empire in Postcolonial Literature* sets out to breathe another new life into *Discours*. What are the many interpretations of *Discours*? *Discours* has been read as a Marxist manifesto of the Third World; a surrealist polemic on art and culture; an international call for the proletariat to fight against Empire; a proclamation on Pan-Africanism; and a revolutionary roadmap to decolonization, human rights, and nationalism for the colonized. *Discours* is very much all of that; yet, I will unearth another layer to it; a layer which has been completely ignored since its insemination—the critique of psychiatry/psychology/psychoanalysis.