



## **Decolonizing Literature: The Absence of Afro-Brazilians in the Anthropophagic Movement**

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes how the *Movimento Antropofágico* (*Anthropophagic Movement*), an avant-garde cultural manifestation was conceived by São Paulo's ruling elite and aimed to create a national identity. Inspired by the Indigenous anthropophagic ritual, in which the flesh of the enemy was consumed to acquire their skills, the movement proposed the incorporation and transformation of foreign European culture into national culture. This study is based on the analysis of the *Manifesto Antropofágico* (the Anthropophagic Manifesto) and the texts published later in the *Revista de Antropofagia* between May 1928 and February 1929. To theoretically support this work, I use the concepts of postcolonial authors such as Frantz Fanon and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. The objective of the study is to question how the absence of Afro-Brazilians happened and to deconstruct the myth of the attempt to build a Brazilian national culture.

**Keywords:** *Revista de Antropofagia*, decolonizing Brazilian literature, Afro-Brazilians, sociology of absences, postcolonial studies, tropics

## Introduction: Who Defines Culture in Brazil?

The European avant-garde movements of the early 20th century were crucial to the creation of Brazilian modernism, and it was precisely in this moment of cultural renewal that the Anthropophagic Movement or *Movimento Antropofágico* emerged, led by Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954). Its starting point was the creation of the painting *Abaporu* (1928) by Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973), and its main goal was to create a Brazilian national culture, incorporating, or rather, devouring other cultures. To understand how this period unfolded, it is necessary to first highlight the role of enslaved individuals and their trajectory in Brazilian society, as well as the role of Indigenous peoples and their anthropophagic ritual, chosen as a tool for the construction of a new cultural identity.

This article is based on the master's thesis *La omisión de los afrobrasileños en el movimiento antropofágico: una crítica poscolonial* (2020) defended at the University of Freiburg. In the course of this work, I sought to understand how Afro-Brazilians were (not) presented as an integral part of this "new culture". To do so, emphasis was placed on the first phase of Brazilian modernism (1922-1930), or the heroic phase, which includes the *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928) and the first issue of the *Revistas de Antropofagia*, published between May 1928 and February 1929.

Initially, I would like to highlight that this movement emerged more than 40 years after the abolition of slavery in Brazil, so it is necessary to contextualize the post-abolition period, passing through the process of European labor immigration and ending with the racial theories that permeated Brazilian society and cultural expressions. I then present the *Movimento Antropofágico* created by the São Paulo elite, who defined what Brazilian culture would be by grouping together the characteristics that seemed interesting to them. They chose the supposed Indigenous element as one of the cultural parameters, the same element that had been nearly decimated by diseases, wars, enslavement, or forced conversion to Christianity since the arrival of the colonizers in the 16th century.

To make this work possible, it was necessary to reread the *Movimento Antropofágico* from a postcolonial perspective. For this purpose, the works of Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) were considered for his concept of alienation involving both blacks and whites, and the articles by Santos, 'Modernidade, identidade e a cultura de fronteira' (1993) and 'Para uma sociologia das ausências e uma sociologia das emergências' (2002), for the concepts of border culture and the sociology of absences. In this paper, I furthermore seek to address the field of decolonial contemporary critical theory that highlights the immaterial processes and knowledge, present both in social inequality and in the alternatives for overcoming social inequality, due to the "colonial" imposition of Western thought in the tropics.

## **The Nineteenth Century in Brazil: A Brief Contextualization**

Brazil in the 19th century was marked by several social, economic and political transformations. In the context of the abolition of slavery in 1888, the country underwent significant changes in its social and economic structure, with the replacement of slave labor by free wage labor. Furthermore, European immigration was encouraged by the Brazilian government to supply the labor force after the abolition, and as a way to "whiten" the Brazilian population. This whitening policy was directly linked to the racial theories circulating in Europe and the Americas at the time, which preached the superiority of the white race over other races. These theories had a significant impact on Brazilian society and influenced the construction of the country's national identity.

### ***Abolition of Slavery***

The abolition of slavery in Brazil was not achieved through the struggle of the enslaved population, as happened in Haiti (1793), the first Afro-descendant republic in history, which originated through a revolt of the enslaved, or as in the case of the United States (1863), in which the differences between the industrialized states of the North and the agricultural states of the South would culminate in a civil war, which would soon transform into a war for the abolition of slavery. The abolition of slavery in Brazil was the inevitable result of the Industrial Revolution, which brought changes not only in the forms of production but also in the need to expand consumer markets. This period saw significant changes in both Brazil's political and economic systems.

Since the beginning of the 19th century, the country had been moving towards this outcome through a series of laws coupled with pressure from abolitionists and other countries, particularly England. The British economy was rapidly industrializing during the 19th century, and the demand for raw materials and consumer markets was increasing. By ending slavery in Brazil and other countries, England hoped to promote economic development in these nations and, in doing so, create trade opportunities for British products and services. The first of the pre-abolition laws, the Feijó Law (1831), declared that Africans arriving in Brazil would be free, but the law was not properly enforced, and this was largely due to profits from the slave trade for the empire.

Just two decades later, the Euzébio de Queiroz Law (1850) definitively prohibited the entry of enslaved Africans into Brazil. In 1870, the republican movement began, which was one of the first signs of the imperial crisis, carried out by those who believed that slavery was one of the reasons for Brazil's economic backwardness in relation to European countries. The Free Womb Law (1871), which declared free all children born in the country to enslaved women, was the impetus to intensify the abolitionist struggle. Finally, just before the abolition, came the Sexagenarian Law, or Saraiva-Cotegibe

(1885), which declared slaves over 60 years old free. However, this law clearly benefited the farmers, because, due to the subhuman conditions in which most slaves lived, they hardly reached the age of 60. This law was a legal instrument for members of the slaveholding elite to free themselves of unproductive slaves, less valued on the market, or even to preserve them in captivity, since the freed would only receive the "benefit" by paying compensation to their "former owners." The passage of the law came after an intense struggle among congressmen, and it was already foreseen that abolition was almost a reality. These laws were palliative measures and, in practice, did not change the situation of their "beneficiaries" at all. Slavery was declared extinct in Brazil on May 13, 1888, and approximately 750,000 people were granted the right to freedom, putting an end to one of the worst periods in the country's history. After more than 300 years of slavery, the formerly enslaved had no compensation after years of daily humiliation, torture, forced labor, and mistreatment. They were simply expelled without rights within the same society that previously did not accept or recognize them as equals.

### ***European Immigration and "Whitening"***

At the same time, the country was experiencing a Brazilian "whitening" project, initiated with the arrival of the Portuguese Prince Regent D. João, who landed with his entourage in the port of Rio de Janeiro in 1808 to escape the continental blockade imposed by Napoleon Bonaparte. He issued a series of decrees and laws that encouraged immigration to Brazil. The documents were issued in such a way that the population of the country was taken over by white Europeans.

The imperial government encouraged the occupation of land by European immigrants since the beginning of the 19th century. However, with the advent of laws that gradually signaled the total abolition of Slavery, this same government and coffee producers directed the immigration project in search of qualified labor, composed largely of Italians, to expand coffee production and replace the work of the enslaved.

The rapid growth of the coffee plantations made labor the most pressing problem. How could the farmers satisfy their labor needs after the interruption of the slave trade? The internal traffic offered a temporary solution, but the self-reproduction of slaves could not satisfy the immediate demand. The farmers in the expanding areas had found an answer in immigration. (Costa, 2007, p. 366)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Original: *O rápido crescimento das plantações de café fez do trabalho o problema mais urgente. Como podiam os fazendeiros satisfazer suas necessidades de trabalho após a interrupção do tráfico de escravos? O tráfico interno ofereceu uma solução temporária, mas a auto-reprodução dos escravos não podia satisfazer a demanda imediata. Os fazendeiros das áreas em expansão haviam encontrado resposta na imigração.* All translations into English are my own.

A milestone in Brazilian migration policy was the "Land Law" (1850). The law was promulgated in the same year as the Euzébio de Queiroz Law and at the height of the coffee economy in the Paraíba Valley. The law decreed that the only way to acquire land in Brazil, whether by purchase or sale, would be through the intermediation of the imperial government. The province of São Paulo had a series of favorable elements for its occupation: a mild climate, the expansion of coffee plantations, and large extensions of land to be explored. So much so that, in 1895, the province of São Paulo decreed its own land law, an act that was paramount to the occupation of São Paulo's interior. The project of gradually replacing slave labor with immigrant labor was successful in the province of São Paulo, and in the year of abolition, the immigrant workers were responsible for harvesting without damage. Fausto (2009) summarizes clearly what happened during this period.

In the last years of the Empire, immigration to São Paulo, from all origins, jumped from 6500 people in 1885 to almost 92,000 in 1888. In the latter year, Italians made up almost 90% of the total. Significantly, the coffee harvest of 1888, which followed the abolition of slavery in May of that year, could be done without problems of available labor. (2009, p.115)<sup>2</sup>

### ***Racial Theories***

Several factors contributed to the attempted genocide of the Afro-Brazilian element of Brazilian society. Abolition coincided with the rise of European immigration and racial theories in the country. The ruling elite believed that only through the "Europeanization" of the tropical lands could the country acquire the status of a civilized people. Abdias Nascimento, economist and exponent of the human rights of Afro-Brazilian people, is categorical when affirming that the immigration policy was aimed at national whitening.

The predominantly racist orientation of immigration policy was another basic instrument in this process of whitening the country. The prevailing assumption, inspiring our immigration laws, considered the Brazilian population as ugly and genetically inferior because of the presence of African blood. (2016, p.90)<sup>3</sup>

The laws that followed abolition were designed to further contain the growth of the country's Afro-Brazilian and mixed-race populations. For years, racist and

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<sup>2</sup> Original: *Nos últimos anos do Império, a imigração para São Paulo, de qualquer procedência, saltou de 6500 pessoas em 1885 para quase 92 mil em 1888. Neste último ano, os italianos constituíam quase 90% do total. Significativamente, a colheita do café de 1888, que se seguiu a abolição da escravidão, em maio daquele ano, pôde ser feita sem problemas de mão-de-obra disponível.*

<sup>3</sup> Original: *A orientação predominantemente racista da política imigratória foi outro instrumento básico nesse processo de embranquecer o país. A assunção prevalecente, inspirando nossas leis de imigração, considerava a população brasileira como feia e geneticamente inferior por causa da presença do sangue africano.*

segregationist theories continued to be the guidelines for national identity. The result of this "whitening" policy was the isolation of African culture for decades in a nation composed largely of African descendants.

Although racial theories were already widespread in Europe, they only became a matter of concern in Brazil with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in the early 19th century. The concept of race and the notion of the inferiority of African descendants began to spread with the propagation of racist theories, which reached levels that are still present in Brazilian society today. One of the main representatives of this period was Joseph Arthur de Gobineau. The French diplomat published *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1855), in which he stated that the interbreeding of races would cause physical and intellectual harm to the descendants of this union, and that only the white race would develop an indispensable role for humanity. For him, the mestizo was a degenerate being who tended to disappear in competition with the stronger ones, in this case, the whites. In this passage from his essay, Gobineau (1884) summarizes his ideals of superiority.

...from the moment that the European cannot hope to civilize the negro, and that he succeeds in transmitting to the mulatto only a fragment of his aptitudes; that this mulatto, in turn, united with the blood of the whites, will not yet create individuals perfectly capable of understanding anything better than a mixed culture of a degree more advanced toward the ideas of the white race, I am authorized to establish the inequality of intelligences among the different races. (Gobineau, 1884, p. 184)<sup>4</sup>

The "confirmation" of the incapacity of Afro-Brazilians came through the Brazilian scholars themselves, among them Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, a forensic physician who, at the end of the 19th century, developed a series of works that legitimized racial theories in Brazil. In *Mestiçagem, Degenerescência e Crime* (1899), the main theme was degeneration and the propensity of Afro-Brazilians and mestizos to commit crimes. Her book *Os Africanos no Brasil*, written between 1890 and 1905, likewise guided by a racist view, was one of the first works to address elements of Afro-Brazilian culture in the country. Rosely Gomes Costa (2009) affirms that:

For Nina Rodrigues, a nation of mestizos could not be stable because the mestizos are anarchy in blood, in ideas, in feelings, harboring within themselves contrary tendencies that are in constant struggle

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<sup>4</sup> Original: ...du moment que l'Européen ne peut pas espérer de civiliser le nègre, et qu'il ne réussit à transmettre au mulâtre qu'un fragment de ses aptitudes ; que ce mulâtre, à son tour, uni au sang des blancs, ne créera pas encore des individus parfaitement aptes à comprendre quelque chose de mieux qu'une culture métisse d'un degré plus avancé vers les idées de la race blanche, je suis autorisé à établir l'inégalité des intelligences chez les différentes races.

and, with a tendency, in this struggle, that the characteristics of the inferior and primitive race win. (Costa, 2009, p. 95)<sup>5</sup>

Nina Rodrigues' racist view further reinforced the thinking already spread by Gobineau among the Brazilian elite. However, there was another important factor that was not taken into account in the analysis of the Brazilian social context: the perception that within this same elite there were people of Afro-Brazilian or Indigenous descent. Thus, how could such a peculiar theory be contested?

The lawyer and literary critic Silvio Romero plays a significant role, but no less racist, in proposing another aspect of miscegenation. He accepted miscegenation as a fundamental element in the formation of Brazilian society. At certain points, he even agreed with the aforementioned scholarly authors regarding the inequality between the races and the superiority of the "white" race. Silvio Romero did not agree that miscegenation was a reason for the degeneration of the population because it was an obvious socio-historical characteristic of Brazil and there was no way to change it. The "innovation" of his theory would come from how this miscegenation would be "beneficial" to Brazil. Thus, while "accepting" all the races that make up Brazil, Silvio Romero indicated that the white element should be introduced both culturally and phenotypically into Brazilian society. Costa (2009) summarizes the national ideal proposed by the author.

Silvio Romero considered that from the fusion and integration of races and cultures would emerge the mulatto, a characteristically national type. But the racial and cultural predominance would be of the white race and culture, due to the extinction of the slave trade, the decimation of the Indians, and the white/European immigration. Thus, miscegenation would serve, above all, the whitening of the population and the predominance of the white in the characteristically national type. (Costa, p.95, 2009)<sup>6</sup>

By understanding how the post-abolition period developed, we can see how ingrained the ideas of inferiority and incapacity of the Afro-Brazilian people were. The continuity of racial theories that would continue into the 20th century leads us to believe that there was clearly a project of extermination of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous cultures within Brazilian society. If we consider the state of São Paulo, the birthplace of the Anthropophagic Movement, we have clear indications that point to both cultural and

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<sup>5</sup> Original: Para Nina Rodrigues, uma nação de mestiços não poderia ser estável porque os mestiços são uma anarquia no sangue, nas idéias, nos sentimentos, abrigando dentro de si tendências contrárias que estão em luta constante e, com tendência, nesta luta, de que as características da raça inferior e primitiva vençam.

<sup>6</sup>Original: Já Silvio Romero considerava que da fusão e integração das raças e culturas surgiria o mulato, tipo caracteristicamente nacional. Mas o domínio racial e cultural seria da raça e da cultura brancas, devido à extinção do tráfico negreiro, à dizimação dos índios, e à imigração branca/européia. Assim, a miscigenação serviria, antes de tudo, ao branqueamento da população e ao domínio do branco no tipo caracteristicamente nacional.

social whitening. It would even be surprising that 40 years after this "liberation", the situation has changed dramatically to the point where there is a peaceful coexistence between Indigenous, Afro-Brazilian, and "white" people as molders of the Brazilian national identity.

## Decolonizing Literature

The current Brazilian situation allows us to rescue the history of the Anthropophagic Movement through a rereading. In the 21st century in Brazil, we are dealing with the repression of the manifestations of Afro-Brazilian culture in a similar way to what happened at the beginning of the 20th century, when attempts were made to make invisible everything that had its origin in the slave system. The confrontation of post-colonial Brazilian society is extremely important to understand and clarify how the omission of Afro-Brazilians occurred in a period when there was no sense of unity. The "myth" of racial democracy initiated by Gilberto Freyre in *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933), in which tolerant masters and enslaved people were content with "harmony", gave continuity to a narrative in race relations preserved for years in Brazilian society, there was no interest in questioning the absurdities of slavery.

The Negro was exposed to a social world that was organized for the privileged segments of the dominant race. He was not inert to that world. On the other hand, this world was not immune to the Negro either. Everyone who has read Gilberto Freyre knows the double interaction that took place in both directions. However, at no time did these reciprocal influences change the direction of the social process. The Negro always remained condemned to a world that did not organize itself to treat him as a human being and as an 'equal' (Fernandes, 1972, p.15)<sup>7</sup>

To understand how the omission of Afro-Brazilians came about, it is necessary to take a fresh look at what was considered the first attempt to unify Brazilian culture. By retelling this part of history from a post-colonial point of view, we confront the racism and colonialist thought that prevented this manifestation from being a turning point in the Brazilian and world cultural scenario. The *Movimento Antropofágico* had the well-known objective of promoting the incorporation or deglutition of foreign culture, obviously European culture built over the centuries, into a new culture. This was to be done in such a way that its creators and participants could find within hegemonic culture elements that would become a Brazilian national identity. In order to analyze

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<sup>7</sup> Original: *O negro foi exposto a um mundo social que se organizou para os segmentos privilegiados da raça dominante. Ele não foi inerte a esse mundo. Doutro lado, esse mundo também não ficou imune ao negro. Todos os que leram Gilberto Freyre sabem qual foi a dupla interação, que se estabeleceu nas duas direções. Todavia, em nenhum momento essas influências recíprocas mudaram o sentido do processo social. O negro permaneceu sempre condenado a um mundo que não se organizou para tratá-lo como ser humano e como "igual".*



this movement, this paper dialogues with the discussions proposed by Frantz Fanon and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, theorists who contributed to a new interpretation of colonization and to the valorization of non-dominant knowledge from regions considered peripheral.

### ***Return to Fanon***

Returning to Fanonian writings is essential to lead to a dialogue in Brazilian society about how racism is still one of the main elements in the preservation of colonial thinking. According to Fanon, alienation would be an earlier phase of both slavery and colonialism, one of the crucial ways to maintain economic exploitation and responsible for the sense of insecurity caused by colonial domination. Alienation is subordinated to race relations and would reproduce a hierarchy between "blacks" and "whites", which would function as an oppressive system in which the direct effect of racism is evident in the African descendant.

In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, rejected for opposing European dominant thought, Fanon analyzed the internalization of racism in his patients and how the "black" man should be liberated from himself, but gradually. For this to happen effectively, two categories must be overcome: the "white" and the "black" (Fanon, 1986). This opposition would not occur simply because of skin tone but much more because of the opposition between the colonizer and the colonized, in which they would have to assert themselves by denying the dominance of the colonizers. I am interested in Fanon's contribution regarding the process of alienation between the "black" and the "white".

Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. (Fanon, 1986, p.18)

The scope of the work falls within the relationship of the "black" West Indian, but the author himself ends up considering "any colonized man". Although Brazilian society claims to be "free" from prejudice, due to years of building an ideal of racial democracy, we can insert the dominant white elite assuming the role of cultural colonizers and Afro-Brazilians exercising their role as cultural alienators. This whole process of omission of Afro-Brazilians continues to occur violently; for years they have been dehumanized, oppressed, and denied the exercise of their cultural manifestations so that they recognize in the culture of their oppressors a model of sovereignty to be followed.

The violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life and of thought of the native mean that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him. In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values. (Fanon, 1963, p.43)

It is not only the African descendants who are alienated in this system proposed by Fanon; the white oppressors and holders of economic and cultural power strive to impose themselves and define what values will be practiced within the society around them. This also applies to Indigenous peoples, and there are no equal spaces between colonizers and colonized.

It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values. It is not enough for the colonist to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better never existed in, the colonial world. The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. (Fanon, 1963, p.41)

Brazilian modernists in a racist and segregationist society took on the role of cultural leaders rather than slave masters. In doing so, they could dictate all the rules to be followed. History repeated itself, in which the ruling class never ceased to occupy a privileged position. The Indigenous peoples would again be exploited in the position of objects of their artistic productions, while the Afro-Brazilians remained isolated. However, to point only to phenotypic racism as a definition of the situation of a considerable part of the Brazilian population would make the dialogue weak; we know that this is one of the pillars supporting the absence of Afro-Brazilians, but not the only one. We must also consider that for centuries, the image of the enslaved and then of Afro-Brazilians was associated with stereotypes that characterized them negatively within Brazilian society. According to Homi K. Bhabha (1994), stereotyping is not a simplification of reality but a form of negation of the other. In his words:

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the

representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations. (1994, p. 75)

### ***Border Culture and Sociology of Absences***

The theory developed in this article argues that the creators of the Anthropophagic Movement were responsible for the absence of Afro-Brazilians in the context of the *Revista de Antropofagia*, making them invisible, even in texts that supposedly constructed a national identity. Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos provides relevant postcolonial contributions to understanding this absence. Through the concepts of border culture and the sociology of absence, Sousa helps us understand the canons of the past. Santos (1993) argues in *Modernidade, identidade e a cultura de fronteira* that Portugal was characterized by a border culture due to the fact that the country was at a midpoint in its situation as a metropolis with European cultures and seen by them as similar to its Brazilian and African colonies.

In symbolic terms, Portugal was too close to its colonies to be fully European, and before them, it was too far from Europe to be a consequential colonizer. As European culture, Portuguese culture was a periphery that, as such, assumed badly the role of center in the non-European peripheries of Europe. (Santos, 1993, p. 48)<sup>8</sup>

In this peculiar form of culture, the concept of "border or border zone" emerged, which would make it difficult to differentiate and identify oneself culturally. According to Sousa the concept can also be applied in part to the Brazilian and African case.

The border zone is a hybrid, babelic zone, where contacts are pulverized and organized according to micro-hierarchies that are not very susceptible to globalization. In such a zone, the possibilities for identification and cultural creation are immense, all equally superficial and equally subvertible: the anthropophagy that Oswald de Andrade attributed to Brazilian culture and that I think also characterizes Portuguese culture in its entirety. (Santos, 1993, p. 49)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Original: *Em termos simbólicos, Portugal estava demasiado próximo das suas colônias para ser plenamente europeu e, perante estas, estava demasiado longe da Europa para poder ser um colonizador conseqüente. Enquanto cultura européia, a cultura portuguesa foi uma periferia que, como tal, assumiu mal o papel de centro nas periferias não-européias da Europa.*

<sup>9</sup> *A zona fronteira é uma zona híbrida, babélica, onde os contatos se pulverizam e se ordenam segundo micro-hierarquias pouco suscetíveis de globalização. Em tal zona, são imensas as possibilidades de identificação e de criação cultural, todas igualmente superficiais e igualmente subvertíveis: a antropofagia que Oswald de Andrade atribuiu à cultura brasileira e que eu penso caracterizar igualmente e por inteiro a cultura portuguesa.*

In the case of the Anthropophagic Movement, this border zone gave "great freedom and even arbitrariness to cultural creation by the elites" (Santos, 1993, p. 49), but not without social incoherence, as it allowed the parties excluded from this process to create their own culture without the control of the ruling class. The truth is that there was no truly hegemonic culture; there was a predominance of ideas that came from Europe to create a national identity, hence the need to appropriate everything that was necessary from Indigenous and European culture, however, the movement made the mistake of not looking at the cultural heterogeneity within the country and omitting the Afro-Brazilians.

In *Para uma sociologia das ausências e uma sociologia das emergências* (2002), Santos criticizes the positivist paradigm still active in the modern sciences, noting that the diversity of non-dominant knowledge is invisible and does not exist. What happens is the reproduction of hegemonic Western knowledge as the only true knowledge, called by the author Indolent Reason. This concept is further divided into two concepts. The first is metonymic reason, which is recognized as the only valid form of rationality and, when there is a need to discover forms of rationality, ends up turning them into objects in which the part is taken for the whole. The second concept is that of propitious reason, which refers to the idea that knowledge of the future is based on a linear perspective, in which it is believed that there will be automatic and continuous progress over time. In this context, the present is seen as something that shrinks, making room for the future to constantly expand and develop. It is in this contraction of the present that the loss and waste of experience occurs.

Indolent Reason produces "non-existence" through five logics, of which I use only two: the logic of the monoculture of knowledge and the rigor of knowledge, and the logic of social classification. The logic of the monoculture of knowledge and the rigor of knowledge is considered the most influential in the production of absences because it is characterized by the transformation of modern science and high culture into unique methods of truth and aesthetic quality; that is, what is not recognized by both canons is considered non-existent. According to Santos:

It consists in the transformation of modern science and high culture into unique criteria of truth and aesthetic quality, respectively. The complicity that unites the "two cultures" lies in the fact that both claim to be, each in its own field, exclusive canons of knowledge production or artistic creation. Everything that the canon does not legitimize or recognize is declared non-existent. Non-existence here takes the form of ignorance or unculture. (Santos, 2002, p. 247)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Original: *Consiste na transformação da ciência moderna e da alta cultura em critérios únicos de verdade e de qualidade estética, respectivamente. A cumplicidade que une as "duas culturas" reside no fato de ambas se arrogarem ser, cada uma no seu campo, cânones exclusivos de produção de conhecimento ou de criação artística.*

The logic of social classification and ranking understands that the production of non-existence occurs in the form of natural inferiority, populations are divided so that hierarchies become naturalized, meaning that elements considered inferior cannot be an option for those considered superior. This occurs in such a way that the apparent hierarchy was not designed intentionally.

### **Only Anthropophagy Unites Us?**

Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century was modernizing not only economically, but also culturally. São Paulo's industrialization and urbanization was largely due to the cultivation and export of coffee and a large foreign labor force, encouraged by the immigration policy of the previous century, but this same policy did not welcome Afro-Brazilians who were also in the same situation: free people in an unknown land. Both groups chose the large urban centers for the better life opportunities they offered, but only one group visibly benefited.

The *Semana de Arte Moderna* (1922) was sponsored by the coffee oligarchy,<sup>11</sup> and created to inaugurate the beginning of modernism in Brazil, where a new concept of art based on the European avant-garde would be exhibited. This historic event highlighted the importance of valuing and incorporating elements of tropical and native culture in Brazilian artistic and literary production. The event brought together some of the best-known names in São Paulo art, such as Anita Malfatti, Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, and Menotti Del Picchia, as well as artists from other states, such as the conductor Heitor Villa-Lobos and painter Di Cavalcanti. These artists sought inspiration from the cultural diversity, fauna, flora, and popular traditions of Brazil to create original and authentic works. The main stage of the São Paulo Municipal Theater hosted the event, conceived to take place on the centennial of Brazil's Independence.

However, the reception from critics and the public was devastating, and even before the event, some magazines circulating at the time refused to cover it. In its February 15, 1922, issue, the magazine *A Cigarra* presented a voracious critique of the Week of Modern Art and its participants. The article entitled *The Futurist Week* classified that "the success, seen from the futurist point of view, which is absolutely contrary to everyone's point of view, was complete, that is, it was a failure."

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*Tudo o que o cânone não legitima ou reconhece é declarado inexistente. A não-inexistência aqui assume a forma de ignorância ou de incultura.*

<sup>11</sup> The event was supported by Washington Luís, governor of the state of São Paulo, and by the then coffee grower Eduardo Prado, who sponsored the project.

After the *Semana de Arte Moderna*, in which cultural disputes arose to define who would be the creator of a movement that would finally value Brazilian culture, we have the Pau-Brasil Poetry Manifesto (1924) created by Oswald de Andrade, and the Green-Yellow Movement (1927) which believed in valuing national elements based on a return to the early days of Brazil, especially without European interference. The year 1928 was marked by the resurgence of Indigenous culture and ritual. Not only did the modernists rediscover anthropophagy,<sup>12</sup> but in the same year, the Swiss anthropologist Alfred Métraux published *La Religion des Tupinamba*, the first detailed study to understand the war and rituals of the Tupinambá people. The book would be the first to critically address the anthropophagic ritual as a perpetual revenge ritual within the war between enemy tribes. However, it was Tarsila do Amaral, with her painting *Abaporu* (1928), that started the process of the *Movimento Antropofágico*. Moved by Tarsila's strange painting, which means in the Tupi language "the man who eats", Oswald de Andrade wrote the *Manifesto Antropófago* or *Antropofágico* (1928) and thus proposed the "devouring" of foreign cultural influences and the assimilation of tropical and Indigenous elements into Brazilian culture.

Figure 1. *Abaporu* (1928) by Tarsila do Amaral



<sup>12</sup> On cannibalism, see Jauregui (2000). *Canibalia: canibalismo, calibanismo, antropofagia cultural y consumo en América Latina*.

The modernists rescued the Indigenous origin of the term anthropophagy, in its most grotesque root, in the sense of eating a stronger warrior and absorbing from him all possible characteristics to become even stronger. They turned it into absorbing European culture and transforming it into an authentic Brazilian culture. The initiative was considered innovative, but it was clear that one of the essential elements of this new identity was missing: the Afro-Brazilian.

### **The Journal of Anthropophagy and the Afro-Brazilians**

The *Revista de Antropofagia* was an instrument for the dissemination of anthropophagic works. Specifically, I look at the production of its first phase, which began without interruption between May 1928 and February 1929 with a total of ten magazines, divided into poems, prose, and book extracts. Of the 124 texts analyzed, only 14 make mention of Afro-Brazilians, revealing a curious ambivalence that brings us back to Sousa's idea of the sociology of absences. From this perspective, the presence of blacks is produced through absence; that is, they are made invisible by the way they are portrayed within the dominant society. This invisibility reinforces the idea of the inferiority of African descendants and perpetuates the social, political, and economic inequalities faced by this population throughout history. I have chosen a few examples to illustrate this absence. The few representations of Afro-Brazilians present in the *Revistas de Antropofagia* perpetuated stereotypes in a negative, sexualized, or discriminatory way. Bhabha (1994) emphasizes that stereotypes are “a continuous and repetitive chain of other stereotypes” (1994, p.77).

The authors who contributed to the magazine demonstrated that they were no longer interested in copying foreign culture; its creators believed that Brazil was ready to create its own culture. The exaltation of an Indigenous culture, already almost extinct, and its anthropophagic ritual were absorbed in their essence to create a movement. Instead of bodies and blood, foreign cultures were now to be assimilated and transformed into a national culture. Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropofágico* was published in its first edition and already expressed all the primitivism sought by the European avant-garde.

Only anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically.

The world's one and only law. Masked expression of all individualisms, of all collectivism. Of all religions. Of all peace treaties. Tupi, or not Tupi that is the question. Against all catechizations. And against the

mother of the Gracchi. I am only interested in what is not mine. Law of man. Law of the anthropophagus. (Andrade, 1928, p.3)<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the text, we see an interaction between words and elements of Indigenous culture interrelated with references to European culture. Tupi, Freud, Caribs, Montaigne, Rousseau, *Catiti Cati*, and *Imara Notiá*. Thus begins the first anthropophagic attempt. The text would have been interesting if Brazil had been built only by Indians and Europeans, but this is not the reality. The absence of references to Afro-Brazilian culture is visible throughout the publications, while discourses of prejudice and racism were incorporated into the published texts. Of these, I took as examples those that seem more explicit and that, in the post-colonial view, would not be at all innovative or aggregated in the formation of the idealized Brazilian culture.

Figure 2. First page of the *Revista de Antropofagia*, May 1928



**“Ali vem a nossa comida pulando”**

(V. Hans Staden - Cap. 28)

What I observed was the permanence of a slavocratic discourse, loaded with racist references or directly linked to slavery. The Afro-Brazilian is presented in a degrading way with the use of a pejorative term and without any deglutition of its essence. The

<sup>13</sup> Original: *Só a antropofagia nos une. Socialmente. Economicamente. Filosoficamente. Única lei do mundo. Expressão mascarada de todos os individualismos, de todos os coletivismos. De todas as religiões. De todos os tratados de paz. Tupi, or not tupi that is the question. Contra todas as catequeses. E contra a mãe dos Gracos. Só me interessa o que não é meu. Lei do homem. Lei do antropófago.*



predominance of stereotypes introduced into Brazilian society by racial theories is confirmed in the first pages.

In the text *Concurso de Lactantes*,<sup>14</sup> published in magazine number seven, we find a mocking criticism of Afro-Brazilians by the editor Antônio de Almeida Machado himself. He opposed the supposed homage to the "black mothers," the enslaved mistresses, a slave trade in which nannies breastfed the children of the ruling class and sometimes even substituted the mother figure. For them to receive a tribute, it would be necessary that the others "marbled or tanned, the black, as mulattas and as whites also receive it," otherwise there would be a supposed competition between races and origins.

They are trying to put up I don't know where (but always here in Brazil) a monument to the black mother. The determined people who are working for this confessly want to pay a tribute of gratitude to the wet and dry nannies, but above all wet nannies of the beautiful color of vultures. And through them the slave race. (*Revista de Antropofagia*, Anno I, Número 7, p.1, 1928)<sup>15</sup>

The magazine's editor also compares the skin tone of nannies to that of the vulture, an animal despised for not having pretty feathers and for its habit of devouring rotting animal carcasses. Finally, he says that even Dutch cow breeders would also demand decorations for their cows. The author ends the text by saying that he was not offending but preventing possible conflicts. Forty years after the "freedom" of the slaves, some behaviors were still unbreakable.

In the texts written by Yan de Almeida Prado, the son of a traditional Paulista family, the contempt for Afro-Brazilians is evident. The author published excerpts from his book *Os três sargentos* (The Three Sergeants) in eight issues of the magazine. His first entry in the July 1928 issue, states:

...even the black women employed in bourgeois houses, who came there after work to find love. Other black women passed by talking loudly, showing men their faces covered with rice dust. (*Revista de Antropofagia*, Anno I, Número 3, 1928, p. 7)

In the January 1929 magazine, it is also possible to identify in Yan de Almeida Prado's text how racial theories were applied. Afro-Brazilians are associated with a degeneration of their own race that makes them inferior to whites.

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<sup>14</sup> Breastfeeding Contest. References to wet-nurses during slavery.

<sup>15</sup> Original: Estão tratando de erguer não sei onde (mas sempre aqui no Brasil) um monumento à mãe preta. Os denodados que para isso trabalham querem confessadamente prestar uma homenagem de gratidão as amas molhadas e secas mas sobretudo molhadas da linda cor de urubu. E atravez delas a raça escrava.

Today we are amazed to see them degenerate with incredible speed in a very short period of time. Now the opposite is happening: the best of the troops are white. The cause of this fulminating degeneration is the extreme inferiority of the black race in the cities. Although they are a minority in the urban agglomerations, 80% of the personnel of the working-class brothels are black and mulatto women. (*Revista de Antropofagia*, Anno I, Número 9, 1929, p.7)

## Final Considerations

The contradictory character that exists among the creators of the *Movimento Antropofágico* is evident. We can categorically affirm that the conception of the *Movimento Antropofágico* occurred based on absences; its founders created an artistic movement within a society that was openly excluding and did not recognize all its citizens as integral parts of the country; the constitution worked only in theory; in practice, as already demonstrated, the reality was different. The great majority of Afro-Brazilians, who did not even have opportunities, rights, or perspectives, were prevented from participating in this process of cultural formation. In his sociology of absences, Santos (2002) points to the fact that the "non-existent" was created to remain invisible; this would happen through unfair social relations. This absence is conscious, as it allows the naturalization of inequality between individuals considered qualified and unqualified.

A movement led by members of the ruling elite took it upon itself to make decisions, apparently without any knowledge of the cultural manifestations present in Brazil. The formation of a national identity is structured by the clash of one or more cultures; in the case of Brazilians, there are three distinct cultures: the Indigenous, the European, and the African. Although I focus specifically on the absence of Afro-Brazilians, it can also be observed that the absence was not only of Afro-Brazilians but also in the reproduction of stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, and thus I affirm that the Indigenous were also invisible in the elaboration of the concept of "culture" proposed by the Brazilian modernists.

In *Revista da Antropofagia*, Afro-Brazilians were not even considered as elements to be incorporated, the invisibility was produced not only by the suppression of Afro-Brazilians but also by the (un)conscious devaluation of their cultural manifestations within the texts and in society. Apparently, the same occurs in the case of the *Movimento Antropofágico*. There is a kind of consensus in the academic world that the criticism directed at what is seen as a pioneering attempt at cultural unification is carried out in a subtle way, without a rupture with the already established canon.



To understand the unequal structures that characterize Brazil, we must re-interpret the past through an optic that favors the marginalized people and not their oppressors. What we see is that both social and cultural protagonism never left the hands of the dominant class, not even with the supposed inclusion of the Indigenous element. The approaches to this cultural movement, until today, have had a tendency in the academic environment to favor its idealizers. However, it is clear from a decolonial-postcolonial re-reading that a plural country such as Brazil did not have only one protagonist in its national culture but several, which have been systematically neglected over the years.

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