



PREDATORY PERVERSIONS: HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE EROTICS OF BRAZILIAN HISTORY IN ADOLFO CAMINHA'S *BOM-CRIOULO*

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Abstract: Through an examination of period medical literature, this article examines Adolfo Caminha's decidedly tragic and homophobic construction of homosexuality as a synthesis of the medical, historical, and the political. Homosexuality is not merely theorized as a sexual practice or identity, but rather the embodiment of two foundational historical institutions that shaped Brazil's past and present: Portuguese colonialism and slavery. For Caminha, homosexuality as an embodiment of these two institutions, is what I am terming a "predatory perversion," depraved, destructive, and above all, non-generative forces that would only result in Brazil's demise.

Key Words: Homosexuality, Medicine, Slavery, Colonialism

Resumo: Através de uma análise crítica de literatura médica do fim do século dezenove, este ensaio examina a construção decididamente trágica e homofóbica da homossexualidade como uma síntese de ideologias médicas, históricas, e políticas. Teorizo a homossexualidade no romance não apenas como uma prática sexual ou faceta identitária, mas também como a encenação de duas instituições fundamentais que geraram o presente e o passado do Brasil: o colonialismo português e a escravidão. Para Caminha, a homossexualidade como encarnação simbólica, constitui o que denomino "perversão predatória" – composta por forças depravadas, destrutivas, e, sobretudo, não-generativas que só resultariam na destruição do Brasil.

Palavras Chaves: Homossexualismo, Medicina, Escravidão, Colonialismo

In 1895 at the age of twenty-seven, Brazilian writer Adolfo Caminha debuted his third and what would become his most incendiary novel, *Bom-Crioulo*. It not only was the first Latin American novel that openly addressed homosexuality, but its protagonist was a black man who seduces a white boy. Upon its publication Caminha was bombarded with attacks by readers and critics alike. Valentim Magalhães, a founder of the Brazilian Academy of Letters and one of the foremost literary critics of the time, wrote in the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *A Notícia* that Caminha's *Bom-Crioulo* "exceeds everything that one can imagine in the way of gross filth" and that moreover, the novel could be described as a "branch of pornography which has so far been unpublished because it was unmentionable, against nature and ignoble" (1). Other critics were equally appalled and went so far as to call Caminha feckless and a pervert and to suggest that he had engaged in any number of the perversities that he detailed at length throughout the novel. Although Caminha would refer to the pugnacious public outcry against the novel as "inquisitional" and "perhaps the greatest scandal of the year," he was no stranger to breaking social taboos in his personal life or his literary works, spending a great deal of his short life embroiled in scandal. His previous novel, *A Normalista* [The Normalist] published two years prior to *Bom-Crioulo* in 1893, recounting the story of an innocent young girl who is sent away from home to be raised by her godfather who later impregnates her, was met with equally harsh criticism.

Adolfo Caminha was born in the northeastern state of Ceará in 1867. Orphaned at a young age, he was soon enrolled in the naval academy in Rio de Janeiro, where he would spend most of his childhood. In the navy Caminha was a midshipman who traveled throughout the Caribbean and the United States. In 1887 he returned to settle in his home state of Ceará, where he became a prominent fixture in the state's intellectual and political life. In addition to his activities with the state's intelligentsia, it was also during this time that his own personal scandals started when he became involved in a fervid affair with the wife of an army officer. The affair was soon discovered and Caminha was forced to resign from the navy. In 1892 he and his lover escaped Ceará and settled permanently in Rio de Janeiro, where he produced most of his major works. Five years later, on New Year's day of 1897, he died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-nine.

In his short twenty-nine years Caminha left behind what to this day is deemed one of the most provocative novels produced during the Brazilian naturalist movement. But what exactly about *Bom-Crioulo* incited such harsh reactions in period readers? Caminha wrote *Bom-Crioulo* in a time of tremendous social change, merely seven years after the abolition of slavery in 1888, six years after military leaders overthrew the monarchy and established a republican government, and at the height of a rash of medical studies on homosexuality and sexual perversions in Brazil, which will be discussed below.

Bom-Crioulo recounts the story of a runaway slave named Amaro who escapes from a plantation and enlists in the Brazilian navy, where for his rigorous work ethic he receives the paradoxical nickname of “Bom-Crioulo.” While aboard his ship he becomes deeply infatuated with a fifteen-year-old white cabin boy named Aleixo. Bom-Crioulo takes the boy under his wing, serving as a father figure and mentor as a ploy to gain his trust and later seduce him. The ruse is successful and Aleixo is manipulated into a sexual relationship with Bom-Crioulo to express gratitude. When the ship arrives in Rio de Janeiro Bom-Crioulo rents a room for the two of them in a boarding house owned by his longtime friend Dona Carolina, a Portuguese washerwoman and prostitute. There in the secluded boarding house he hopes that he and his new lover Aleixo can explore their physical relationship in private. But their relationship soon comes to a halt when Bom-Crioulo is transferred to another ship and cannot receive leave to visit Aleixo. Left alone in the boarding house, Aleixo grows increasingly resentful of having sex with Bom-Crioulo. Carolina, who has had her eye on him from his arrival, uses this to seduce him and make her lover. Aleixo ceases to communicate with Bom-Crioulo. Bom-Crioulo soon learns of the betrayal of his two best friends and sets out to find Aleixo. Deeply chagrined, Bom-Crioulo encounters Aleixo in a crowded street, where he violently confronts him about the affair and murders him in cold blood.

Caminha’s depiction of homosexuality (even though it is never referred to as such in the novel) is greatly indebted to period medical studies. In fact, in Caminha’s retort to the negative criticism he received for *Bom-Crioulo*, entitled “Um Livro Condenado” [A Condemned Book], he readily admitted that he “studied and condemned” homosexuality throughout the novel (2). Caminha’s

novelistic treatise of homosexuality was a staple of the Brazilian naturalist movement and period medical studies attempting to make sense of and theorize sexual deviance as well as to elaborate their own unique interpretations of same-sex desire.

Brazilian naturalist literature often mirrored period medical discourse very closely. Like period doctors, the naturalists took a particular interest in the men and women of the demimonde. As Caminha confirmed, Brazilian naturalists were just as much interested in studying and identifying the roots of human perversion as doctors, with both having the ultimate goal of exposing and curing them. Both authors and doctors depicted homosexuals and lesbians as degenerate, with complicated and immoral lives that ultimately led to their tragic demise. Though the homosexuality of characters in *Bom-Crioulo* and other naturalist novels are alluded to by their sexual practices or indiscretions, no character overtly claims at any moment to be a homosexual. Instead, homosexual desire is merely recognized by characters and narrators as an unnamed form of deviation, an irrepressible and dangerous desire that they can neither understand nor control.

Critic David William Foster has incorporated *Bom-Crioulo* in the canon of gay literature, hailing it as “Brazil’s and the modern Western world’s first gay romance” (23). Although most criticism of *Bom-Crioulo* has tended to focus mainly on the novel’s overt depiction of homosexuality, a more critical inquiry might consider why Caminha wrote a novel about homosexuality between, specifically, an ex-slave, a fifteen-year-old white boy, and a middle-aged Portuguese prostitute with “hermaphroditic tendencies.” What are the deeper meanings behind Caminha’s “study and condemnation” of homosexuality? Moreover, as César Braga-Pinto, in his Lombrosian reading of the novel has cautioned, many gay appropriations of *Bom-Crioulo* by not fully acknowledging its “scientific intentions” risk “dissociating the theme of homosexuality from race, and therefore separating scientific racism from homophobia.” (151)

Like period medical doctors, Caminha saw homosexuality as not merely one isolated form of sexual perversion but the manifestation of a depraved nature that was capable of a myriad of perversities and, more dangerously, of inducing those

perversions in others. Caminha's depiction of homosexuality is decidedly tragic and homophobic. The homophobia of period medical doctors and naturalists was greatly influenced by centuries of religious persecution against male and female sodomy and all same-sex sexual acts. Sex between persons of the same gender was viewed as inherently sinful, immoral, and crimes against God and the Church. In the second half of the 19th century homosexuality was instituted as an identity that was intrinsic to the individual. Period medical professionals viewed homosexuality as an innate form of perversion that imperiled both national morality and public health. Homosexuality, in many respects, was described pathologically, much like STD's, as a sickness that could be transmitted from one individual to another, and if not immediately "cured," could be lethal for the individual and for those around them. Ultimately, the rampant homophobia in the novel should be understood as both fear of the "new sexual identity," but more importantly, a fear of the impact it would have on the nation.

At the end of the nineteenth century writers, doctors, and politicians alike were debating the pernicious impacts of colonialism and slavery on the nation, national identity, and morality, and particularly how they had perverted the national body politic. Abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco described the impact of slavery and colonialism as "synonymous with contagion" (194). Caminha's *Bom-Crioulo* uses (homo)sexuality as a framework by which to depict the danger, perversion, and ultimate tragic impact of slavery and Portuguese colonialism on the Brazilian nation. Brazil had not only been formed by these two institutions politically, they had also, through miscegenation, created the Brazilian people. Sex, as many Brazilian intellectuals and politicians argued, had both a profound impact on the destiny of Brazil's past, but also an equally important impact on its future. The vacillation between hetero and homosexuality in the novel is symbolic for a nation attempting to define itself internally and on the world-stage. The two older characters, Bom Crioulo, who represents slavery, and Carolina, who represents Portuguese colonialism, are both homosexual characters who attempt to pervert the innocent Aleixo, who represents Brazil, a new nation trying to define itself while still held captive by the colonial institutions that brought it into being. For Caminha, homosexuality as an embodiment of these two institutions, is what I am

terming a “predatory perversion,” depraved, destructive, and above all, non-generative forces that were severe impediments to Brazil’s future. Brazil, according to Caminha and other period critics, was at risk of being consumed and destroyed by its past before it could grow and reproduce.

Homosexuality, Medicine, and the Search for a Cure

The first Brazilian studies of homosexuality were produced between 1869 and 1906. These studies emerged out of a syphilis epidemic that plagued the nation. They identified homosexuality as a subset of prostitution arising out of physiological disorders. Doctors such Ferraz de Macedo, who wrote one of the earliest studies on homosexuality in 1875, found that homosexuality could also be caused by a lack of heterosexual outlets. Homosexuality was viewed as a pathological illness that was dangerous and contagious for both the individual and society at large. This “illness” was in some cases treatable, doctors argued, and many studies went to great lengths to detail the kinds of treatments and procedures that could cure the disease.

Period medical doctors and naturalist writers argued that homosexuality was not natural, but rather, in many instances, the result of environmental circumstances. Medical and naturalist literature viewed blacks and the poor as particularly predisposed to homosexuality along with a host of other ills that doctors were trying to cure, such as mental illness, crime, and prostitution. Blacks and the poor were particularly dangerous because they had no control over their animal instincts and could and would harm others. Yet doctors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries argued against the criminalization of homosexuals, as many held the belief that imprisoning them would only worsen their condition. Instead, doctors devised an array of treatments and remedies that they believed could restore the homosexual to normalcy. Brazilian medical and legal discourse saw these sick individuals as a threat to national progress and a severe social problem to be actively suppressed, combated, and ultimately cured as part of a national process of cleansing.

Though not an easy feat, doctors such as Rio de Janeiro native José Ricardo Pires de Almeida believed that both male and female homosexuals could be cured of

their depraved condition. In order for them to “return to normality,” Pires de Almeida prescribed several methods, including “magnetism and counseling,” and recommended drawing their attention to the “beauty of female forms, of the female body.” He suggested “forcing them to read romance novels in which depictions of the female body would awaken in them tumultuous passion.” If these methods did not prove successful, more drastic measures were called for, such as “making them sleep with women dressed in men’s clothing or even forcing them to spend the night with naked women, even if they don’t enjoy it” (Almeida 254–255).

Bahian Doctor and writer Afrânio Peixoto also advocated against the criminalization of homosexuals and pederasts and argued that society and national officials needed to understand their behavior in order to offer them the medical treatment they so direly needed. “Attempting to understand them is not to justify their behavior,” he wrote (112). Indeed, Peixoto was hopeful, given the surge of medical studies, that doctors and hygienists would find a cure for homosexuality:

I believe in the near future there will be hygienic preventive remedies for these disorders. . . . Instead of cursing them, let us treat them and instead of pouring hot brimstone and sulfur over the Sodom and Gomorrah of unnatural vices, let us place them in [organ therapy] clinics. . . . Instead of moral damnation of their [special customs], let us create analytical laboratories and diagnostic clinics . . . that will seek to correct their nature. In this way order will reign supremely with perfection and correction. What we must do, both humanely and morally, is to treat their deficient nature as we would treat a crippled person, the mentally ill, or the disabled. (150)

Toward the end of the nineteenth century Brazilian doctors began experimenting with even more drastic and bizarre techniques than hypnosis or forcing homosexual men to sleep with women dressed in men’s clothing. Instead they turned to a branch of therapeutic treatment called organotherapy, the treatment of diseases with extracts from animal organs. Organotherapy was founded by Mauritian doctor Charles Édouard Brown-Séquard, a professor at the Collège de France who in 1889 at the age of seventy-two reported that he had “rejuvenated” himself, successfully reversing his aging with liquid extracts from the testicles of freshly killed dogs and guinea pigs. His claim stimulated the development of modern organotherapy and the study of sex hormones. His findings found an eager audience among Brazilian doctors who considered that these animal extracts could

be a cure for homosexuality. They believed that injecting homosexual men with animal organ fluids could correct what they perceived as a glandular malfunction. They recommended that these treatments be applied shortly after puberty, when they would be most effective, before the condition worsened.

Though medical officials believed that placing homosexuals in prison was not the answer, they also argued, as doctor Viriato Fernando Nunes explained, “Homosexuals, pederasts, are not normal men. As they are abnormal they need adequate treatment. . . . To allow these pernicious beings to roam freely is dangerous and prejudicial to society.” The solution to the problem of the century was an asylum for pederasts, where their “removal would guarantee the safety of society” (34–35). Legist Also Sinisgalli firmly advocated for “a legal device authorizing that pederasts who are dangers to society be committed to this asylum. In this manner both society and the inverts will benefit. By this means we will resolve this social problem scientifically and humanely. . . In so doing I am sure that we will bring glory to our nation and our people!” (283).

São Paulo doctor Francisco José Viveiros de Castro agreed and argued against imprisoning homosexuals, as time in prison only made their condition worse. Brazil needed to immediately create facilities where these ill men could receive adequate treatment and where they would no longer be a menace to society and themselves. In these facilities they would be cured and reformed into useful citizens. He wrote:

Being condemned as criminal, the degenerate has to serve a sentence, spends years in a prison cell under a debilitating and exhaustive regime, without any kind of treatment, without hygienic treatments. Prison time does not regenerate them. On the contrary, their sickness worsens and they leave prison more degenerated and even more dangerous. Placing them away in an asylum, society is safe . . . and the sick person will receive appropriate treatment, the application of hydrotherapy, shock therapy, hypnosis, all of the methods that psychiatric therapy has available. If it is true that some mental disturbances are in fact incurable, it is no less true that others disappear or are stabilized through rigorous treatment. In this way the degenerate recovers and instead of being a dangerous and noxious individual he can turn himself into a citizen who is useful to society. (298–299)

Although doctors generally agreed that homosexuals and pederasts should not be criminalized or placed in prison, they made certain exceptions to this rule.

Doctor Fernando Nunes wrote, “When the scientific methods that we have available to us today fail us, society will hold these delinquents in isolation in a judicial asylum” (37). Viveiros de Castro and Sinisgalli believed that the most severe of legal punishments should be applied to homosexuals who were too debauched and corrupted to be treated, especially if they attempted to corrupt a minor. Sinisgalli wrote that the homosexual who “seeks to seduce minors undermines public decency, and infringes upon individual and social rights.” Yet there were some who Sinisgalli referred to as “honest” homosexuals and pederasts who gained a bit of his sympathy. Honest homosexuals he defined as those who “attempted to control their abnormal instinct and satisfy their abnormal desires discreetly” (292). To punish them, he believed, would be an injustice as they were not responsible for their sickness, and in fact it should be the duty of the State to “force these individuals into a suitable form of treatment” (300). Viveiros de Castro however asserted that in the case of an “individual afflicted by congenital or psychic inversion,” punishment should be “truly cruel, because they cannot escape these inclinations, which are integral elements of their personality” (220).

Black Male Homosexual Desire and the White Male Body

Our initial introduction to Bom-Crioulo is physical. Through the surrounding commotion, the narrator draws the reader into a violent erotized spectacle in which Bom-Crioulo is the center of attraction. In this scene, Bom-Crioulo undergoes corporal punishment at the hands of sadistic navy captain Agostinho for having brutally beaten another sailor. Imbricated with dissident meanings, Bom-Crioulo’s torture becomes the point at which conflicting yet interlocking motivations and desires are disclosed:

O motivo, porém, de sua prisão agora, no alto mar, a borda da corveta, era outro, muito outro: Bom-Crioulo esmurrara desapiadadamente um segunda classe, porque este ousara, “sem o seu consentimento”, maltratar o grumete Aleixo, um belo marinheirito de olhos azuis, muito querido por todos e de quem diziam-se “cousas”. Metido em ferros no porão, Bom-Crioulo não deu palavra. Admiravelmente manso, quando se achava em seu estado normal, longe de qualquer influência alcoólica, submeteu-se à vontade superior, esperando resignado o castigo. – Reconhecia que fizera mal, que devia ser punido, que era tão bom quanto os outros, mas, que diabo! estava satisfeito: mostrara ainda uma vez que era

homem... Depois estimava o grumete e tinha certeza de o conquistar inteiramente, como se conquista uma mulher formosa, uma terra virgem, um país de ouro... Estava satisfeítíssimo. A chibata não lhe fazia mossa; tinha costas de ferro para resistir como um Hércules ao pulso do guardião Agostinho. Já nem se lembrava do número das vezes que apanhara de chibata... Bom-Crioulo tinha despido a camisa de algodão, e, nu da cintura para cima, numa riquíssima exibição de músculos, os seios muito salientes, as espáduas negras reluzentes, um sulco profundo e liso d'alto a baixo no dorso, nem sequer gemia, como se estivesse a receber o mais leve dos castigos. Entretanto, já iam cinqüenta chibatadas! . . . De repente, porém, Bom-Crioulo teve um estremecimento e soergueu um braço: a chibata vibrara em cheio sobre os rins, empolgando o baixo-ventre. Fora um golpe medonho, arremessado com uma força extraordinária.(20)

Fettered and chained, Bom-Crioulo is first introduced to the reader through his captivity. His body does not stand in isolation, but rather through the gaze of the narrator becomes the synthesis of divergent erotic and racial signification. The narrator both fetishizes and (homo) sexualizes Bom-Crioulo's torture, with several descriptions of the flogging's simulation of the sexual act and eroticized descriptions of Bom-Crioulo's naked, muscular body that quickly converge with the stroke of Agostinho's cane. As the cane stands as a phallic object, the scene abruptly climaxes in a defeating blow to Bom-Crioulo, with Agostinho trembling in pleasure.

Each individual involved in this scene—Bom-Crioulo, Agostinho, the spectators, and the narrator—maintains a particular erotic and racial investment in the spectacle and each uses it to derive a form of pleasure. The narrative gaze captures the homoerotization of violence and the pornographic gaze of the spectator. The narration vacillates between homosocial and homoerotic desires. This ostensibly homosocial enactment of corporal punishment concomitantly presents an instantiation of male bonding around Bom-Crioulo's torture and converges with the initial disclosure of Bom-Crioulo's homosexual desire for Aleixo. These interlocking narratives frame the racial and homoerotic surplus that permeates this scene.

Throughout the scene Bom-Crioulo is aware that his torture is being made into a spectacle, and more importantly, that there are multiple forms of meaning being projected onto his torture. This is achieved through Caminha's usage of interiority and exteriority. The exterior meaning of the scene purposefully contradicts the interior interpretation and individual significance for each person engaged. Agostinho, through the infliction of pain, uses the spectacle to showcase

his strength, authority, and racial position; and the spectator, like the narrator, derives a certain pornographic pleasure from watching. But through this knowledge of his signification and spectacularization, Bom-Crioulo uses the viewer's investment in watching as a means of affirming his sexuality and masculinity and, as the text intimates, as erotic fodder to seduce Aleixo. Here Bom-Crioulo uses the homoerotic as a space of resistance.

Placing theorists Audre Lorde and Georges Bataille in conversation, Bom-Crioulo's homoerotic resistance is what Bataille in his theorizations of eroticism describes as consciously "calling one's self into question" (31), that is, interrogating one's subjectivity in relation to the object of desire. Through this conscious calling of himself into question Bom-Crioulo is made aware of his desire in relation and in disjuncture to the signifying gaze of the spectator. It is in and through this awareness of himself and his desire that his torture embodies Lorde's notion of the erotic as a consummate self-affirmation (54). Both internally and externally, Bom-Crioulo subverts the abjection, pain, and shame associated with corporal punishment and reappropriates them as a conduit of his own erotic desire. In this scene, the homoerotic becomes a space of dissident, yet converging meanings: violence and submission, resistance and desire. Bom-Crioulo's wish is that through his pain, his endurance, his resistance to torture, he will awaken sexual desire in Aleixo, and that Aleixo will see him as a man out of gratitude.

Sociologist Michael Kimmel has argued that "masculinity is a homosocial enactment. We [men] test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood" (129). In this scene masculinity and sexual desire work in tandem, as both are articulated through Bom-Crioulo's resistance to physical pain. The white male body is positioned as an object of lust of the black man, and black male desire is first introduced in the text as being fettered to white male recognition. In other words, in order for this resistance and the signification that Bom-Crioulo gives to the torture of his body to be made manifest, they must be recognized by both his torturer and Aleixo.

In analyzing the depiction of homosexuality in *Bom-Crioulo* critics such as David William Foster and Robert Howes have observed that Caminha draws quite extensively from the classical Greek model of pederasty, with Bom-Crioulo

performing the role of *erastes*, the older partner, and Aleixo that of *eromenos*, the younger partner. Caminha refers to Bom-Crioulo's desire for Aleixo as that of a male "tortured by Greek carnality" (30). His novel diverges significantly from this Greek model first in its influence by nineteenth-century medical theories of homosexuality and prostitution, and more importantly, by being placed within the purview of slavery, colonialism, and abolition. By drawing from the nation's complex racial and sexual history, Caminha underscores that there are personal and political meanings manifested in sexual roles, and he shows how this connection between the personal and political creates a merging of the civic and the homoerotic.

For Bom-Crioulo belonging to the Brazilian nation is deeply rooted in the homoerotic. Caminha further explores these power dynamics in Bom-Crioulo's complex relationship to women. The text informs us that Bom-Crioulo has never been in love and possesses a relative indifference toward women, preferring the company of the men aboard the ship. He is described as possessing an almost "virginal purity." In the following passage the narrator makes us aware of two instances in which by "miraculous accident" he engages in sexual activity with women. Both instances, however, prove to be a source of shame and humiliation.

Não se lembrava de ter amado nunca ou de haver sequer arriscado uma dessas aventuras tão comuns na mocidade, em que entram mulheres fáceis, não: pelo contrário, sempre fora indiferente a certas cousas, preferindo antes a sua pândega entre rapazes a bordo mesmo, longe das intriguinhas e fingimentos de mulher. Sua memória registrava dois fatos apenas contra a pureza quase virginal de seus costumes, isso mesmo por uma eventualidade milagrosa: aos vinte anos, e sem o pensar, fora obrigado a dormir com uma rapariga em Angra dos Reis, perto das cachoeiras, por sinal dera péssima cópia de si como homem; e mais tarde, completamente embriagado, batera em casa de uma francesa no largo do Rocio, donde saíra envergonhadíssimo, jurando nunca mais se importar com "essas cousas"... (25).

Though Bom-Crioulo's disdain for women could legitimately be interpreted as

yet another proof of his homosexuality, however, a closer examination will reveal more complex meaning. In both instances in which he has sex with women, desire is absent, and more importantly the act is framed by a lack of consciousness, curiously occurring against his will. Though he does not express any particular revulsion toward women here, neither his recollections nor the language used to

describe them is favorable. Caminha refers to Bom-Crioulo's sexual performance with women as leaving "a great deal to be desired."

The two women in the above quote, and all of the women throughout the novel, are described as being from low social stations: prostitutes, licentious, deceitful, and above all powerless. Bom-Crioulo's masculinity as a principal source of pleasure, like all masculinities, is inherently performative. This performance, as we have seen, only becomes legitimated or validated in relation to men. Here we might think about how both slavery and the navy (two institutions in which white men possessed most, if not all political power and material wealth) have affected Bom-Crioulo's notions of value. Bom-Crioulo's physical attraction or desire for women is counteracted by their relative lack of societal and political influence. This is precisely why Bom-Crioulo conflates pleasure and mobility, and to an extent self-affirmation with white men. Bom-Crioulo was born and comes of age in the white-male-dominated institutions of slavery and the navy, which within the naturalist purview comes to inform both *how* and *what* he desires. Bom-Crioulo, besides his homosexuality, does not desire women because he sees them as powerless and having no material correlation or influence in the world that he knows. As a former slave, ship worker and pre- and postemancipation subject, he eroticizes white male power and influence. He relates upward mobility, belonging, freedom and pleasure to the white male body.

Sexual desire for Bom-Crioulo is invested with concrete political meaning. Sex with women is disempowering and a source of shame for him because he does not see women as a means to affirm his personhood and masculinity. Sexual pleasure is not derived from the physicality of the act but from what his sexual partner signifies in relation to his own subjectivity.

This is further evidenced in the following scene, in which Bom-Crioulo yearns to work aboard the ship of a certain Captain Albuquerque. The captain is known to be fond of "well-built" sailors. Aside from, or in connection to, his homoerotic desire, Captain Albuquerque is known to reward the hard work of sailors, who in exchange for their physical deeds are granted higher stations:

Tinha um forte desejo ainda: suspirava por embarcar em certo navio, cujo comandante, um fidalgo, dizia-se amigo de todo marinheiro robusto; excelente educador da mocidade, perfeito cavalheiro no trato ameno e severo. Bom-Crioulo conhecia-o de vista somente e ficara simpatizando imensamente com ele. Demais, o comandante Albuquerque recompensava os serviços de sua gente, não se negava a promover os seus afeiçoados. Isso de se dizer que preferia um sexo a outro nas relações amorosas podia ser uma calúnia como tantas que inventam por aí... Ele, Bom-Crioulo, não tinha nada que ver com isso. Era uma questão à parte, que diabo! ninguém está livre de um vício. (35)

Rather abstrusely, the narrator intimates the captain's sexual preference, and identifies him as a member of the Brazilian nobility. This detail is not gratuitous; rather, it represents a slight departure from the period medical literature we saw earlier: here Caminha diverges to show that homosexuality did not only exist in the demimonde, but was present in all levels of Brazilian society.

It is quite plausible, considering Caminha's naval career and knowledge of naval history, that he might have drawn inspiration for Captain Albuquerque's character—including his purported homosexuality—from the life of famed Portuguese nobleman and prodigious maritime commander Affonso de Albuquerque (1453–1515) together with Caminha's own direct, contemporaneous observations as a naval officer. Albuquerque was best known for conquering and establishing the Portuguese colonial empire in the Indian Ocean. But according to Brazilian historian Gilberto Freyre, Lopo Vaz de Sampaio, governor of Portuguese India at the time, “would have us believe that Affonso Albuquerque himself—the ‘terrible Albuquerque’—had his libidinous pleasures of this sort” (350).

Bom-Crioulo, prior to expressing his own homosexual desire, wishes to serve under Captain Albuquerque. The allusion to Bom-Crioulo's homoerotic desire is abruptly silenced and displaced in the end when Bom-Crioulo professes the captain's desire to be “none of his business” and a “private matter.” It is important to note that this desire is fundamentally linked to upward mobility and is not merely sexual in nature. Bom-Crioulo does not in any way perceive his own homosexual desire as related to the captain's; he maintains the established line between homosocial and homoerotic desire obscured. What this scene does underscore, however, is Bom-Crioulo's internalization of white male desire, and what this desire signifies in relation to his own personal interests and mobility.

Here Bom-Crioulo's homosocial desire, in this case for social ascension or mobility, converges with the captain's homoerotic desire. Bom-Crioulo takes note of the captain's "partiality" in hopes of using his body as both social and erotic currency as a means of renegotiating his position. The trope of prostitution and its period conflation with homosexuality is used here to illustrate this connection. But it is also here in this blurring of the homosocial and the homoerotic desire that the lines between slavery and emancipation become equally distorted. Here we might consider how Bom-Crioulo as a former slave uses the conjoining of labor and the erotic intrinsic to the miscegenous basis of Brazilian slavery as primal knowledge by which to operate as an emancipated subject.

Frantz Fanon draws attention to this vexed interconnection between desire and value inherent to black male identification with white men as he maintains, "The black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth" (154). *Bom-Crioulo* illustrates that in nineteenth-century Brazil, within the institutions of both the navy and slavery, mobility and protection can only be achieved in concert with white men. It was slavery that besieged Bom-Crioulo's freedom, and the navy that offered him the complicated and limited freedom that he enjoys. As his sole form of currency is his body, he constantly uses it to trouble structural and institutional power dynamics and establish affective bonds.

Throughout the narrative Bom-Crioulo worries about the end of his relationship with Aleixo—a relationship of contrived affection and material dependence. Observing their relationship more closely reveals how Caminha depicts the homosexuality between the two characters as a form of prostitution, established through a complex interplay of grooming, deference, and debt. Bom-Crioulo is never worried about whether Aleixo has feelings for him or finds him physically desirable. His concern is whether Aleixo could find this relationship of monetary dependence and protection with another. In essence, Bom-Crioulo's wish is not to be desired, but needed.

In the wake of abolition, Caminha shows an exceeding preoccupation with the possibility, or impossibility, of reforming slaves into national citizens. This experience of slavery, Florestan Fernandes argues, "posed a particular handicap to

the Afro-Brazilians in two ways. First, it left a strong inheritance of racism, which made whites unwilling to accept black people as equals, or to grant them opportunities for full integration into Brazilian society after emancipation” (71). Fernandes further maintains that even if such opportunities had been available to them, “most Afro-Brazilians would have been unable to take advantage of them because of the second aspect of the slave heritage: the ways in which slavery had crippled its victims intellectually, morally, socially, and economically” (71).

Aleixo is an allegory of late 19th century Brazil, a nation grappling with the inevitability of abolition, the dependence on slave labor, and the increasing resentment of period politicians of Brazil’s predominately African descended population that they sought to erase through European immigration. Aleixo profits from Bom-Crioulo’s protection and monetary gain, yet equally despises him. Bom-Crioulo’s pursuit of Aleixo and the work that Bom-Crioulo’s puts into “creating” him—acting as a father figure, teaching him how to navigate life in the navy, building his self-confidence, and ultimately making him into a man that others desire—is metonymical for the nation that Afro-Brazilians had worked to shape and create as slaves and to which now sought to belong and participate in as free people. Much like the enslaved Afro-Brazilian, the tyranny and violence of Bom-Crioulo’s desire for Aleixo abide in his awareness of the material and emotional dependence upon which this relationship is based and his acute awareness of his vulnerability and ultimate disposability.

The Love Triangle of Colonizer, Colonized, and Slave

Later in the narrative Bom-Crioulo is forced to change ships and he and Aleixo are separated. In Bom-Crioulo’s absence Carolina slowly becomes enticed by Aleixo’s youth and feminine beauty and resolves to take him as her lover. In the following scene Carolina invites Aleixo to take a bath with her. Drunken with desire, she fulfills her wish of possessing a younger man. As an allegorical

embodiment of Portuguese colonialism, Carolina cunningly draws Aleixo into her web of seduction only to “colonize him in bed.”¹

Ela, como se sentisse no próprio corpo as ferroadas daquele olhar, como se lhe experimentasse o calor vivo, a força magnética, o poder físico, material e irresistível, chegou-se ao grumete e disse-lhe ao ouvido estas palavras, que produzira, nele o efeito indizível e vago de um estremecimento nervoso: — Vamos tomar banho?...Aleixo não disse que sim nem que não. Quis ela mesma despir o rapaz, tirar-lhe a camisa de meia, tirar-lhe as calças, pô-lo nu a seus olhos. Bom-Crioulo já lhe havia dito que Aleixo “tinha formas de mulher”. . . . D. Carolina realizara, enfim, o seu desejo, a sua ambição de mulher gasta: possuir um amante novo, mocinho, imberbe, com uma ponta de ingenuidade a ruborizar-lhe a face, um amante quase ideal. . . Aleixo pertencia-lhe, enfim; era seu, completamente seu; ela o tinha agora preso como um belo pássaro que se deixasse engaiolar; tinha-lhe ensinado segredinho de amor, e ele gostara imenso, e jurara nunca mais abandoná-la, nunca mais! . . . Se Aleixo havia de se desgraçar nas unhas do negro, era melhor que ela, uma mulher, o salvasse. Lucravam ambos, ele e ela... Mas Aleixo não podia esquecer Bom-Crioulo. A figura do negro acompanhava-o a toda parte, a bordo e em terra, quer ele quisesse quer não, com uma insistência de remorso. . . . Todavia a noite foi como um delírio de gozo e sensualidade. D. Carolina cevou o seu hermafroditismo agudo com beijos e abraços e sucções violentas... (47-48)

In Carolina’s seduction of Aleixo, the most salient element, as in his sexual encounters with Bom-Crioulo, is the absence of his desire and unspoken consent. The ambiguity surrounding Aleixo’s consent to Carolina’s seduction is symbolic of Brazil’s complex relationship with Portugal, both as a former colony and independent nation

The text informs us that Aleixo “did not accept or refuse.” This sexual sequence is narrated through Carolina’s gaze and the language detailing the encounter is constructed around her desire to possess and dominate him. This language of domination frames the encounter as Carolina refers to Aleixo being “trapped like a bird that has allowed itself to be caged.” Sex with Carolina, as with

¹ See M. Almeida.

Bom-Crioulo, is not free, liberating, or pleasurable, but endowed with bondage and domination. Aleixo is yet again sexually coerced, and the identical vexed power dynamic is replicated.

Caminha intentionally juxtaposes this sequence as a direct mirroring of Bom-Crioulo and Aleixo's sexual encounters. This is also seen in Bom-Crioulo's haunting their thoughts as they engage in the act and Carolina's sexual mastery of Aleixo. In this instance, however, Aleixo does not feel ashamed or objectified. Many scholars have read Aleixo's relationship with Carolina as signifying Aleixo's desire to embody a heteronormative sexuality. But such a desire, or any desire for that matter, is never clearly expressed. At first glance this relationship between a fifteen-year-old adolescent boy and a middle-aged prostitute might appear to fit to some extent into the conventions of heteronormativity but for Caminha therein lies the danger. The intragender and interracial dynamics of Bom-Crioulo and Aleixo's sexual encounters made both homosexuality and the power dynamics explicit. Here, the heteronormative and intra-racial desensitize and obfuscate the oppressive mechanisms underlying their relationship, as Aleixo is unaware of the power that Carolina exerts over him and the personal and indeed narcissistic investment that she maintains in possessing him. Caminha uses this connection between the homosexual, representing slavery, and the heteronormative, Portuguese colonialism, to illustrate period debates regarding the causes of Brazil's tardiness in relation to the rest of the modern world and their visible and not-so-visible impact on the state and future of the Brazilian nation.

Throughout the narrative both Carolina and Bom-Crioulo's bodies are presented as outsiders, both nationally and socially, and are more importantly described as not Brazilian. Aleixo, curiously, is the only character whose national roots or physical relationship to Brazilian geography is concretely established. Carolina is repeatedly referenced as Portuguese, and Bom-Crioulo is referred to as "African" and coming from "God knows where." His sole connection to Brazil is not geographical, but is established by how his body is used in service to the Brazilian nation. Aleixo represents the turn-of-the-century Eurocentric vision for Brazil as a nation, and underscores the impact of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Brazilian whitening projects that sought to radically transform

Brazil's image as a "mongrelized" nation into a modern nation of white, blond, blue-eyed people. Bom-Crioulo and Carolina become obsessed with Aleixo precisely because he personifies this political future, and by possessing Aleixo, at any cost, they attempt to forge a space for themselves in that future.

The sequence between Aleixo and Carolina culminates with Carolina ardently giving in to her pronounced "hermaphroditic tendencies." This detail not only alludes to Carolina's bisexuality or lesbianism, but frames this seemingly heterosexual encounter as homosexual. Carolina's hermaphroditic tendencies allow her to embody and perform both as male and female thereby fluidly transgressing and blurring the boundaries of the heteronormative and the homoerotic. As with Bom-Crioulo, sex and sexual pleasure here are not mutually constitutive, but are achieved through an inherent form of intra-gender domination.

The absence of any reference to Aleixo's penis or penetration, as well as the vacillating descriptions of his body and gender throughout the novel allows each character to sexualize and consume Aleixo, fluidly, both hetero and homosexually, and a man and woman, thus destabilizing traditional meanings associated with gender and sexual roles.

In this very intricate love triangle, Caminha is showing that Brazilian history and racial history are embedded in a complex miscegenated history uniting Portugal, Africa, and Brazil. Aleixo's body and sexuality become the synthesis of these racial and sexual narratives and, like Caminha's idea of the Brazilian nation, do not develop according to his own volition but are the casualty of external influences.

Caminha uses Aleixo's ambivalent gender and sexuality, his inability to voice his desire, his failure to assume the sexually active role a physical metaphor of fin-de-siècle Brazil—a nation undefined. A nation that does not define itself for itself, as he illustrates, is a nation in danger of being defined and consumed by extraneous forces. From the text we can surmise that Caminha believed that Brazil's success in asserting and defining itself as a nation in relation to Europe and the Americas would be contingent upon, in a figurative sense, its appropriation of a heteronormative male sexuality. The sexual becomes the terrain in which Brazil must define itself in relation to these contending yet interlocking institutions.

In the end, this vicious cycle of bodily exchanges and broken covenants ends in veritable naturalist fashion. Bom-Crioulo, sick, frail, and a mere shell of the man he once was, learns of Aleixo's betrayal and sets out to decide his fate. He makes his way through a bustling crowd of onlookers, where he finds Aleixo and violently exacts his revenge:

Alguma cousa extraordinária tinha havido porque, de repente, o povo recuou, abrindo passagem, num atropelo. E D. Carolina também chegara à janela com a vozeria, com o barulho, viu, entre duas filas de curiosos, o grumete ensangüentado... Aleixo passava nos braços de dois marinheiros, levado como um fardo, o corpo mole, a cabeça pendida para trás, roxo, os olhos imóveis, a boca entreaberta. O azul-escuro da camisa e a calça branca tinha grandes nódoas vermelhas. O pescoço estava envolvido num chumaço de panos. Os braços caíam-lhe, sem vida, inertes, bambos, numa frouxidão de membros mutilados. A rua enchia-se de gente pelas janelas, pelas portas, pelas calçadas. Era uma curiosidade tumultuosa e flagrante a saltar dos olhos, um desejo irresistível de ver, uma irresistível atração, uma ânsia!

Ninguém se importava com o "o outro", com o negro, que lá ia, rua abaixo, triste e desolado, entre as baionetas, à luz quente da manhã: todos, porém, queriam "ver o cadáver", analisar o ferimento, meter o nariz na chaga...Mas, um carro rodou, todo lúgubre, todo fechado, e a onda dos curiosos foi se espalhando, se espalhando, té cair tudo na monotonia habitual, no eterno vaivém. (119-120)

Aleixo, the naïve opportunist, becomes ensnared in competing interests (including his own) and a vicious interplay of sex, slavery, and colonialism. His tragic end at the hands of Bom-Crioulo and Carolina in their homosexual seduction of him exemplifies the naturalist and medical horror of the contagious and ultimately deadly effects of homosexuality. But also, Caminha's concern is an identity crisis propagated by Brazil's failure to reconcile the material consequences of slave emancipation and the end of Portuguese colonialism. As so much of identity is tied into what we do with our bodies and what has been done to them historically, the sexual in *Bom-Crioulo* brings to bear the subject's relationship to power and serves as the terrain where individual desire and the imperatives of nation-building coalesce.

In this closing scene Caminha spectacularizes Aleixos's death. The onlookers do not run to save him; rather, they profess an almost pornographic yearning to bear witness, to see his wounds, his disfigured body. The scene unites people from all stations of society as they take pleasure in the spectacle of anonymous violence. The

spectators, unlike the victims, however leave the spectacle unchanged, hearts unmoved and ever complacent.

Caminha ends the novel in erasure. The novel concludes with Aleixo's murder Bom-Crioulo's imprisonment, and Carolina's disappearance. All the characters who occupied the narrative's trajectory as well as any memory of their existence are erased. The erasure of these characters represents turn-of-the-century Brazil's unwillingness to come to terms with its past, and the literal attempts to erase parts of the nation's history and people. Caminha's representation of the spectators connotes a certain complacency, lack of direction, and more importantly, an abounding perversion that he sees in postabolition Brazilian society. Ultimately, both Brazil's future and its hopes of progress are rolled away in the hearse at the culmination of this scene. Brazil at the end of the novel falls prey to both predators and perversions.

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