

‘After me fellow caïcaï you’: Eating The Other/The Other Eating

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As a demarcation between savage and civilised and identity marker of the primitive other, cannibalism has served as a useful tool for the colonial project in its quest to demonise indigenous, colonised peoples.¹ Much has been written on the veracity of accounts of cannibalism, with some denying its existence and others insisting that while anthropophagy was a real phenomenon, cannibalism, with all its associated horror, belongs to the realm of the Western imaginary.²

In the Pacific, the threat of being eaten by *anthropophages* is a common motif in the local colonial literature. Many of the stories of early New Caledonian writer Georges Baudoux (1873–1949), like those of his Anglophone predecessors and contemporaries,³ contain theatrical representations of cannibalism that serve to underline the dark, cruel, dangerous, bestial and less developed nature of the indigenous subject. In Baudoux’s *Légendes canaques*, despite the stories being upheld by anthropologists of the time as

¹ ‘Cannibalism,’ as Shirley Lindenbaum writes, ‘was to become the prime symbol or signifier of ‘barbarism’ for a language of naturalized typification and essentialized difference that would harden in the negative racism of the nineteenth century’ (2004: 488).

² Arens (1979) argues against the existence of institutionalized cannibalism due to a lack of reliable eye-witness accounts. See Lestringant (1997) and Obeyesekere (2001) who argue for seeing cannibalism as a colonial discourse on otherness. Obeyesekere writes, ‘I follow those who make the claim that the term cannibalism should properly be reserved for the fantasy found the world over, that the alien, the demon, the “other” is going to eat us’ (2001: 69).

³ Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London and Louis Becke were some of the better-known writers to feature cannibalism in their writings on the Pacific.

containing accurate depictions of Kanak mores and culture,⁴ the author succumbs to the sensationalism of the colonial genre, including grisly scenes of violence and cannibalism. In 'Kaavo,' for example, a Gomen warrior, seeking revenge, notoriety and power within his clan, kidnaps the daughter of the enemy Témala chief. He takes her back to his hut where he suddenly attacks her, putting out her eyes with his assegai. When his fellow tribesmen appear, he explains the presence of the blood-soaked, whimpering *popinée*⁵ as follows:

C'est Kaavo, la fille du chef de Témala, je suis allé seul la prendre dans sa tribu, je l'ai emmenée ici, je lui ai crevé les yeux pour qu'elle ne puisse pas se sauver. Je l'ai respectée, parce que, vous savez bien, la chair virginale des filles est meilleur [sic], et les hommes qui en mangent deviennent plus forts. Nous allons manger Kaavo (Baudoux 1952: 63-64).⁶

Impressed by Navaé's daring, the Kanaks start heating the cooking stones and when they are ready, 'Navaé acheva Kaavo en lui fendant la tête d'un seul coup de sa hache ronde en pierre bleue'⁷ and the Gomen chief and his warriors 'en mangèrent, chacun un morceau, pour avoir de la virilité, de la force' (Baudoux 1952: 64).⁸

The purpose of such passages seems clear: to justify the colonial project, the Kanak 'savages,' cannibals who Baudoux likens constantly to instinctive animals, must be shown to belong near the bottom of the scale of humanity, far removed from the higher rungs occupied by their rational, white 'superiors.' Indeed, despite moments of ambivalence and a degree of empathy with the other, Baudoux's *Légendes canaques* are steeped in racist discourses, including the survival of the fittest and a developmental view of history, which are spelled out in his 'Note de l'Auteur.' Describing himself as a transcriber of Melanesian tales (and here it could be argued that he has, in effect, cannibalised Kanak oral histories), Baudoux claims he wants to describe 'les moeurs d'un clan humain resté en arrière, attardé dans sa barbarie primitive, à ce stade

⁴ The famous pastor and anthropologist Maurice Leenhardt introduced the works of Baudoux to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Parisian anthropologist and ethnologist who vaunted the authentic quality of his descriptions of Kanak life. He not only made use of these in his own work in *La mentalité primitive* (1922) but also wrote a gushing preface to the 1925 French edition of the *Légendes canaques* (for details, see O'Reilly 1950: 198–99). While asserting that the *Légendes canaques* is not an ethnographic book, Alain Martin mentions that Lévy-Bruhl, Leenhardt, la Société d'Études Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie as well as numerous New Caledonian and Kanak readers have described the documentary quality and 'vérité calédonienne' (authentic New Caledonian quality) of Baudoux's work (1995: 213).

⁵ The term *popinée* (from Polynesian *vahine*) denotes a Kanak woman.

⁶ This and all subsequent translations are my own. 'This is Kaavo, the daughter of the Témala chief. I went on my own to her tribe to take her, I brought her here and put out her eyes so that she could not run away. I respected her for, as you well know, the virginal flesh of young girls is better, and men who eat it become stronger. We shall eat Kaavo.'

⁷ 'Navaé finished Kaavo off, splitting her head open with one blow of his blue stone club.'

⁸ 'each ate a piece [of Kaavo] to gain virility and strength.'

d'évolution où les instincts se dégagent de l'animalité.'⁹ At the same time, displaying his apparent adherence to a monogenetic view of humanity, he points out to the 'civilised' reader that these 'unevolved cousins' are reminders of 'the reality of our origins' and by studying them, 'c'est étudier soi-même, c'est sonder les tréfonds de son être, et y retrouver atténués tous ces instincts obscurs que parfois nous sentons sourdre en nous, sans nous les expliquer' (Baudoux 1952: 8).¹⁰ This acknowledgement of a commonality between primitive and civilised worlds foreshadows a theme that becomes prevalent in many of Baudoux's other stories—that of the savagery of so-called civilisation and the universal inhumanity of man.

Who was Georges Baudoux?¹¹

Georges Baudoux was something of a settler *extraordinaire*, a man who experienced colonisation to the fullest, trying his hand at a variety of jobs that took him from the penal installations to the city to the bush. Arriving in the colony as a four-year-old in 1875 on board the same ship that transported the Communards to the *bagne* of New Caledonia, Baudoux spent his childhood on the île des Pins and on île Nou where his father worked as a prison guard. The family moved to Noumea in 1882 and, at the age of twelve, Baudoux left school to work for the local newspaper *Le Moniteur de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*. Here he quickly progressed from street vendor to copywriter, developing a life-long passion for the *faits divers*, the daily events and odd news stories of the colony in which convicts and Kanaks played major roles (cf. Banaré 2010: 243).

When his father died, Baudoux moved to Koné in the north of New Caledonia, the most far-flung settlement from 'civilisation,' where he eked out a living as a fisherman and hunter. His taste for adventure saw him become a stockman before he decided to try mining. He went on to make his fortune in the mines before retiring in his forties, moving back to Noumea and taking up writing. Baudoux populated his stories with the Kanaks and *popinées*, *métis* and *métisses*, convicts and migrant workers from Vietnam, the New Hebrides and Reunion Island and settlers with whom he had come into contact during his time in the bush. Having listened intently to their stories, Baudoux had the

⁹ 'the customs of a human clan that had been held back, lingering in its primitive state, at that evolutionary stage when instincts are emerging from animality.'

¹⁰ 'It is studying oneself, probing the innermost depths of one's being, and finding traces therein of these dark instincts that we sometimes feel welling up inside of us, without being able to explain them.'

¹¹ The biographical details in this section are drawn from O'Reilly (1950), Gasser (1996), Speedy (2006, 2013) and Banaré (2010).

talent to bring their escapades, personalities, indeed voices to life in his fiction, which unashamedly focused on the local and was thus the first to be truly *Calédonien*.

Jean M'Barai the trepang fisherman

If cannibalism operates as a boundary line between the savage and civilised in Baudoux's Kanak legends (albeit one that has the potential to be blurred), how does it function in a story about a *métis*? First published in the local weekly newspaper *Le Messager* in 1919, Baudoux's *Jean M'Barai le pêcheur de tripangs*¹² features a *métis*, or half-caste, as its protagonist.¹³ Jean M'Barai is the son of a Breton sailor and Kanak *popinée*, who had been bought from the Ounouas, reputedly the most savage of the New Caledonian Kanaks,¹⁴ for 'une énorme marmite en fonte, un chaudron à trois pieds ... six écheveaux de laine rouge, et quarante bâtons de tabac' (Baudoux 1972: 13).¹⁵

Despite living with M'Barai's mother as husband and wife, M'Barai's father, a marginal, coast-dwelling adventurer, does not register his son's birth as there was no registry officer in the area and 'son fils était à lui, il le savait bien ... il n'avait pas besoin de paperasses' (14).¹⁶

Right from the beginning, then, Baudoux sets up two of the main themes of his narrative: the body as a commodity and object of exchange and/or consumption and the role of genealogy, kinship, lineage and breeding in the transmission of characteristics. He also establishes the theme of the recognition and the legitimacy of the *métis* that recurs throughout the narrative. While the term *métis* was used to describe ethnically mixed people in colonial New Caledonia, it was not a legal status. Whether the *métis* was considered 'Kanak' (and thus a colonial subject under the Indigenous Code of 1887) or a French citizen depended whether his birth had been registered and he had been legally recognised by his (white) father.¹⁷

¹² Henceforth, I refer to this story as *Jean M'Barai*. I use the version in *Les blancs sont venus* (1972).

¹³ It is worth noting that this story appeared at the same time as Noumean society (and Baudoux) were closely following the trial of the Kanaks who took part in the 1917 uprising, during which the supposedly extinct practice of cannibalism reappeared. Baudoux condemned it as 'inhuman' in the 'notes d'audience' of 19 August 1919 that he published in the *Messager*. See Gasser (1996: 28–29) for more details.

¹⁴ Gasser (1996: 12) writes that the Ounouas were considered 'by the Europeans as the most savage Kanaks on the mainland, and they kept this reputation until well after the revolt of 1917.'

¹⁵ 'a huge cast-iron cooking pot, a three-legged cauldron ... six skeins of red wool and forty sticks of tobacco.'

¹⁶ 'his son was his, he knew it ... he didn't need a piece of paper to prove it.'

¹⁷ Martin (1995: 444) reminds us that New Caledonia made the *métis* illegal in 1904. He goes on to claim that writers such as Baudoux and Jean Mariotti would show that no New Caledonian literature could be conceived outside a framework of hybrid semiotics.

Through recounting the ensuing adventures of Jean M'Barai, which include his job as a 'négrier' or blackbirder, his capture, incarceration and role as a breeder in a Malekulan tribe, his period of indenture in Queensland and brief career as a boxer, and his final return to New Caledonia, Baudoux explores the conflicting colonial discourses surrounding the nature of the *métis*. On the one hand, there is the trope of the monstrous being, a representation of the violation of the laws of nature and symbol of racial and social degeneration. According to Jeffrey Cohen's 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses),' we can see the *métis* as a 'mixed category,' a product of miscegenation whose 'ontological liminality' and 'incoherent body' 'resist attempts to include [him] in any systematic structuration' making him a dangerous 'monster of prohibition,' symbol of the racial 'borders that cannot—must not—be crossed' (1996: 6, 7, 13). On the other hand, there is the notion that the *métis* embodies hope for the future civilisation of the colonised 'race.' Mid-19th century monogenists proposed that race mixing was advantageous as *métis* children inherited the best qualities from their parents. 'Crossbreeding was perceived, moreover, as one of the most assured means of rehabilitation, of "renovation", indeed even redemption, of races declared "degraded"' (Blanckaert 2003: 47). What do Baudoux's accounts of eating the other and the other eating reveal about his position in this clash of differing, yet similarly racist, ideologies? For Baudoux, is the *métis* the site of degeneration or regeneration? Is he a man or a monster?

Jean M'Barai, *métis* in a white man's world

Jean M'Barai is related by a narrator, a white friend of the *métis*, who oscillates, just as his subject moves between Kanak and European worlds, between appreciation, even admiration, of M'Barai and his particular skill set and scorn for his perceived inherent weaknesses. Ironically, the narrator can almost be seen as a white (or legitimate) version of M'Barai, a marginal coast-dweller, a *broussard* who resides far from the reaches of civilisation. In terms of Monster Theory, we can even perhaps read M'Barai as 'an alter ego' of the narrator, 'an alluring projection of (an Other) self' (Cohen 1996: 17).

Interestingly, most of M'Barai's qualities and foibles are attributed to his Kanak ancestry, although he also seems to have inherited some of the more 'primitive' traits of his Breton father. The life of a blackbirder, the narrator explains, suited M'Barai as 'en lui sommeillaient les instincts ataviques du corsaire Breton et du guerrier canaque, qui

n'avaient demandé qu'à se réveiller' (Baudoux 1972: 16).¹⁸ Yet, as Alain Martin asserts, the narrator tends to see the *métis* M'Barai more as a (stereotypical) Kanak than a European (1995: 437).¹⁹ While physically strong and well developed (in some ways a 'monstrous' superhuman), the narrator, true to his apparent role as the gatekeeper of colonial ideologies, also portrays him as intellectually inferior with a 'simple,' 'uneducated' mind (Baudoux 1972: 29, 14). What makes *Jean M'Barai* interesting, however, is that the narrator's gaze is not the only one admitted; throughout the story we see the way the person of the *métis* is viewed by white society, Melanesian society and by M'Barai himself.

The story begins with the narrator setting up the savage and civilised opposition through the exchange of foodstuffs: Jean M'Barai swaps natural foods in their unadulterated 'savage' state (yams and crayfish) for the narrator's processed bread, wine and rum. It is no accident that Baudoux, master of ambiguity, selects alcohol as representative of civilisation as it is synonymous both with technological advancement and the European corruption of indigenous colonised peoples.²⁰ Bread and wine, of course, also feature in the Eucharist, the Catholic rite of symbolic cannibalism. Food is not mentioned again until M'Barai, sent by his father to work as a sailor with a 'pirate' captain on board a blackbirding ship, makes a passing, almost banal comment about cannibalism on Santo. He reports that they were lucky to have been able to 'recruit' Kanakas as there was warfare amongst the local tribes and '[a]près des luttes meurtrières et des mangeailles de chair humaine, des vaincus, ou des déserteurs, étaient venus, d'eux-mêmes, s'offrir à bord' (Baudoux 1972: 18).²¹

This seemingly off the cuff comment foreshadows what is to become a major preoccupation for M'Barai as his circumstances change. Meanwhile, on board the slave ship, Jean M'Barai lives in a white man's world, carrying out the white man's work, where the crew 'ramassait des canaques et des popinées comme on fait la chasse, et comme l'on pêche les poissons' (Baudoux 1972: 15).²² He participates enthusiastically

¹⁸ 'for the atavistic instincts of a Breton privateer and a Kanak warrior were lying dormant in him, waiting only to be awoken.'

¹⁹ See Martin (1995: 437–39) for a discussion on the ambiguity of the narrator's presentation of M'Barai.

²⁰ See Speedy (2006) for an analysis of Baudoux's critique of civilisation in his most ambiguous short story *Sauvages et Civilisés*.

²¹ 'After bloody conflicts and much gorging of human flesh, the defeated, or the deserters, had come to the boat themselves, wanting to be taken aboard.'

²² 'gathered up Kanaks and *popinées* as if they were hunting and fishing.'

in the 'pêches aux nègres,' village raids, kidnappings and other atrocities, seeming, like his white employers who, far from the reaches of civilisation, have 'regressed' to a 'barbaric' state, to believe that the 'nègres étaient des animaux créés pour leur assurer des profits et des plaisirs' (20).²³ Baudoux makes explicit a type of regression to primitivity when he describes the 'depraved' and 'immoral' white Pacific adventurers. 'Lorsqu'ils rôdaient dans les labyrinthes des archipels, loin des contrôles de la civilisation, ces hommes blancs devenaient des barbares' (20).²⁴ M'Barai, imbued with the racist views of the world in which he is living, views the Kanakas as inferior and animalistic. However, his desire to hunt them down, pillage and kill is also, according to the narrator, attributable to his savage Kanak ancestry.

He is very much aware of his position in the shipboard pecking order, a hierarchy that echoes his place as a *métis* in New Caledonian society. Excluded from the white officers' cabin, as bosun he is ranked fourth, below the officers but above the Loyalty Islander crew and other black sailors. His rank is in-between yet, like an enthusiastic overseer, a hybrid instrument of colonisation, he shows no sympathy for his underlings, whipping the black sailors 'pour se faire obéir plus vivement' (Baudoux 1972: 20).²⁵ The 'recruited' Kanakas, destined for the plantations of Queensland are barely portrayed as human, reduced to 'cargo,' 'stock' or 'merchandise,' metaphorical products of consumption for the Western capitalist market.²⁶ The females are used by the crew as cheap rewards for their continued service on the ship. M'Barai's *popinée*, 'devenue, de force, Madame M'Barai, au titre provisoire' (21), attracts the attention of other sailors and, through jealousy, the *métis* finds himself one evening cast adrift from the schooner.²⁷

The spectre of cannibalism in the black man's world

It is at this point that the spectre of cannibalism emerges as a dominant motif in the mind of Jean M'Barai. Drifting on the sea, his thoughts turn to landing on an island, but 'ces îles étaient inhospitalières, surtout pour un homme seul et sans armes. S'il y

²³ 'Kanakas were animals created purely for their profit or their pleasure.'

²⁴ 'When they prowled around the labyrinths of the archipelagos, far from the reaches of civilisation, these white men became barbarians.'

²⁵ 'to make them obey him more smartly.'

²⁶ See King (2000) for a discussion on the cannibalism extant in Western capitalism and colonialism.

²⁷ 'had become by force "Mrs M'Barai," temporarily at least.'

atterrissait, il serait tué, rôti et mangé' (Baudoux 1972: 25).²⁸ He fights as best he can against the tides as the black and mysterious coastline of Malekula gets alarmingly closer. When M'Barai is inevitably shipwrecked, his first waking thoughts are to proceed with utmost caution in his search for food 's'il ne voulait pas lui-même devenir la pâture des anthropophages' (28).²⁹ In one of the numerous inversions in the text, the hunter is in fear of becoming the hunted.

Indeed, on land, the brutish, violent M'Barai of the blackbirding ship is replaced by a new character who is both increasingly fearful of the 'nègres cannibales' (Baudoux 1972: 30) and what might become of him should he fall into their hands, and a survivor, who turns to apparently instinctive Kanak bush skills to find food (coconuts and fruit) and shelter and to remain hidden from the Malekulans. This shift into a more Melanesian persona is signalled by his assimilation to the local fauna and use of animal imagery; he becomes an 'invertebrate' to avoid injury when he is thrown to the rocky shore, he slithers like a 'reptile' through the undergrowth and when he finds a clearing where the sun penetrates the forest, he sits down to bask in its warmth '[e]t la douce chaleur le pénétrant, le métis s'engourdit comme un lézard' (27, 29, 41).³⁰ Despite this apparent identity (and power) shift, M'Barai still falls prey to malaria, the disease that 'tous les blancs qui séjournèrent à terre, dans les îles' catch (39).³¹ And the mounting fear of the unknown other, the 'devils' lurking unseen in the bush waiting to eat him stems from both his European background and the 'superstition ancestrale des canaques calédoniens' (29).³²

Cannibalism and the *imaginaire*

Spending the night in the forest, M'Barai's anxiety climbs as he hears, what he imagines are man-eating Malekulans, approaching. From the heights of a banyan tree, he waits as the 'horde infernale' emitting 'des cris, des plaintes, des gémissements' appear below him (Baudoux 1972: 32).³³ The tension breaks as he realises that they are not men, but wild pigs. Later, when he comes across a trail, he wonders whether it was 'un sentier

²⁸ 'But these islands were inhospitable, especially for a lone unarmed man. If he landed, he would be killed, roasted and eaten.'

²⁹ 'if he didn't want to become cannibal fodder himself.'

³⁰ 'and as the gentle heat penetrated his skin, the half-caste became drowsy like a lizard.'

³¹ 'all the whites who stayed on the islands.'

³² 'ancestral superstitions of the New Caledonian Kanaks.'

³³ 'infernal horde,' 'shrieks, moans, and groans.'

tracé par le passage fréquent des cochons sauvages, ou bien un sentier canaque' (33).³⁴ This conflation of wild pigs and local Kanaks is both a taste of what is to come and a pretext for any future violent action towards the Kanaks. Pollock notes, 'the slippage between cannibal and animal creates a flexible, mobile ideology for authorizing violence against whatever is animalized (notably non-Europeans), and the cannibal as object of imperialism incarnates that animalized human' (2010: 14).

M'Barai continues to imagine cannibalism without witnessing any evidence of its practice. The following night he hears a tremendous, hellish din with booming drums sounding like a 'grondement de cataclysme.'³⁵ The animalised Kanaks produce 'des cris sauvages, des hurlements de bêtes féroces, des mugissements de taureaux furieux'³⁶ and their feet pound the earth as they dance. M'Barai knows about these 'réjouissances infernales, probablement venues des anthropothèques'³⁷ as he used to hear them when the pirate schooner was moored at night. 'C'étaient les insulaires, cannibales, qui faisaient leur "sing-sing," un grand festin où l'on mangeait de la chair humaine et du porc, en dansant le pilou' (Baudoux 1972: 35).³⁸ When he catches sight of the alleged *anthropophages*, his tormented mind turns them into monsters or, at least, a highly racist, colonial vision of the primitive other. Appearing before him 'nus, noirs et luisants de sueur, hideux dans leur halo de lumière trépidante' they seemed to be 'des gorilles, ou des diables des légendes canaques' (36).³⁹ In M'Barai's eyes, the Kanaks have become the monsters who dwell at the gate of difference, their dark skin and 'menacing lack of humanity' symbolising their 'demonic provenance' (Cohen 1996: 7, 8, 10). Yet in spite of his conviction that he is dealing with human flesh-eaters, the food he actually sees (and steals) the next morning from the Kanak village consists of nothing but yams and cooked fish. Cannibalism, for now, remains in the realm of the imaginary.

When he is ultimately ambushed by a group of Kanaks, described as 'des êtres fantastiques, noirs, simiesques,'⁴⁰ M'Barai's dual heritage combines to produce a warrior of immense strength—'il eut l'entêtement et le courage du Breton, joints à

³⁴ 'a track made by the frequent passage of wild pigs or Kanaks.'

³⁵ 'cataclysmic rumble.'

³⁶ 'wild screams, the howls of ferocious beasts and the bellowing of furious bulls.'

³⁷ 'infernal celebrations which had probably come from the anthropoids.'

³⁸ 'It was the cannibal Islanders doing their "sing-sing," a big feast where they ate pork and human flesh while dancing the *pilou*.'

³⁹ 'naked, black and glistening with sweat, hideous in their halo of hectic light ... gorillas or the devils of Kanak legend.'

⁴⁰ 'fantastical beings, black and ape-like.'

l'agilité feline et à la férocité du guerrier calédonien'—who fights violently to save his skin.⁴¹ The demonic 'horde de sauvages,' frightened of this man they cannot vanquish with their traditional weaponry, finally cut him down with a (white man's) bullet and take him prisoner (Baudoux 1972: 42).⁴² While the *takatas* treat M'Barai's wounds and he recovers, the full range of Kanak cuisine is made available to him, including yams, fish and coconut milk. Even though human flesh is never on the menu and the Kanaks do not hurt him, the *métis* becomes possessed by the horrible thought that they are feeding him, fattening him up 'pour le tuer et le manger comme un pig, un cochon.'⁴³ His days pass sadly by 'dans cette hantise d'être mangé' and he is careful to eat only what is necessary so as not to put on weight.⁴⁴ He convinces himself that the 'savages' are waiting for a 'pilou' or 'sing-sing' to kill him and eat him (45–47).

It seems as if his darkest fears are to be realised when he is trussed to a hammock and carried through the forest by a 'caravan' of Kanaks to a destination unknown. M'Barai envisages a martyr's death before a large crowd of cannibals who would torture him and take pleasure in his suffering 'avant de mordre dans sa chair' (Baudoux 1972: 47).⁴⁵

When he is delivered to the receiving Kanak tribe, the final blow does not come, but, as if fully aware of the terror that cannibalism evokes among foreigners, one of the Kanaks explains, not without a touch of humour, that M'Barai will be given a house, five 'wives' and all the food he needs but, 'suppose you want run away, me fellow kill you finish, after me fellow caïcaï you' (48). This threat of being eaten remains a constant throughout M'Barai's incarceration in the tribe. While it can certainly be taken at face value, the reader wonders whether this dread of being consumed by the primitive other is not a case of 'cannibalism as incorporation into the wrong cultural body' making the *métis* 'vanish from the public gaze' (Cohen 1996: 14), denoting complete loss of identity.

Playing subversively with the role of breeding and the domestication of animals in the development of a 'science' of race,⁴⁶ Baudoux's narrator soon reveals the purpose of

⁴¹ 'he had both the stubbornness and the courage of a Breton teamed with the cat-like agility and ferocity of a New Caledonian Kanak warrior.'

⁴² 'horde of savages.'

⁴³ 'to kill him and eat him like a pig.'

⁴⁴ 'haunted by the thought of being eaten.'

⁴⁵ 'before biting into his flesh.'

⁴⁶ This development of a concept and a science of race can be traced back to the work of Enlightenment thinkers such as Buffon, Linnaeus, Blumenbach and Kant, to name a few.

M'Barai's captivity. Kept in a 'pen,' looked after and fed so well that he begins to resemble a bull, he is to become a 'breeder' with carefully selected *popinées*. Several of the members of this tribe had spent time working on a horse stud in Fiji and they put the white man's science to work on the *metis* who, stereotypically, takes to the easy life. 'Très porté à la sensualité par le sang mêlé de ses deux races, il prit goût à la fréquentation de ses femmes, n'eût bientôt plus que cette principale occupation et celles moindres de manger et de dormir' (Baudoux 1972: 50).⁴⁷ As a stallion, a domesticated animal, M'Barai produces many offspring who, due to the phenomenal strength of their *métis* father, when told they are to help the tribe become the strongest on the island, one assumes that they are to be raised as fighters. It is only at the end of the story that we discover why, once impregnated, M'Barai's women are taken from him and he is forbidden to see them or his children again. Rather than being brought up as warriors, M'Barai's children are in fact being bred for food and it is through eating them, an act of endocannibalism, that the tribe is to gain strength.

Cannibalism: The final frontier

Over time, M'Barai's appetite grows and we learn that he is particularly fond of 'la viande de porc, surtout quand elle était bien préparée' (Baudoux 1972: 52).⁴⁸ One day, he decides to watch his *popinées* unwrap the parcels of prepared food that they receive from outside of their enclosure. When they unwrap one particular package, they see pieces of bloody pork meat inside and hastily rewrap it. Suspicious of their actions and worried he might become a victim of poisoning, M'Barai snatches the parcel of meat from his women and removes the banana-leaf wrapping.

Autour d'un morceau de viande, il vit de la peau d'un rose sale zébré de jaune. Quelle était cette couleur inconnue ? Il regarda de plus près. Brusquement il se recula avec répugnance. Puis il s'avança encore pour voir, pour s'assurer qu'il ne s'était pas trompé; c'était bien de la chair humaine, il n'y avait plus de doute possible. On avait gratté l'épiderme noir, mais sur le derme épais il restait encore ces lignes de petits boutons que les canaques se font sur la peau, avec des pointes de feu, pour s'embellir. Cette chair était un morceau de poitrine d'homme. (53)⁴⁹

⁴⁷ 'Having a strong penchant for sensuality due to his mixed Kanak and Breton blood, he developed a taste for the company of his women, so much so that soon this became his principal occupation, surpassing his other pursuits of eating and sleeping.'

⁴⁸ 'pork, especially when it had been well prepared.'

⁴⁹ 'Around a piece of meat, he saw dirty pink coloured skin with yellow stripes. What was this unknown colour? He looked more closely and suddenly recoiled in repugnance. Then he went closer again to see, to make sure he wasn't mistaken. He wasn't, it really was human flesh, there was no doubt about it. The black epidermis had been scraped off but on the thick dermis there were still those little spotted lines that the Kanaks made on their skin to make themselves more attractive. This flesh was a piece of a man's chest.'

The *métis* finally has evidence that the Kanaks of this tribe are indeed man-eaters. He suddenly makes the connection between the well-prepared pork and his gruesome discovery and realises that he too has consumed human flesh. 'Il cracha de dégoût, s'efforça de vomir, mais il n'y parvint pas' (53).⁵⁰ While he has undoubtedly partaken in something that is equated with the 'primitive' other, because he had been tricked into eating human meat, it is not intentional, rather an act of 'innocent cannibalism' (Lindenbaum 2004: 479), he does not consider that he has permanently crossed the line. Rather, it reinforces his view of himself as a 'civilised' man, more white than black. He makes a reasoned argument that he did not know what he was eating and the consumption of human flesh was not conscious. He had not died or even fallen ill. Nonetheless, he resolves never to do it again. His *popinées* with their white 'dents de cannibales' evoke feelings of repulsion for M'Barai and once again the threat of becoming 'caïcaï' for the tribe comes to the fore (54).⁵¹

He does, however, still try to convince his *popinées* that eating people is morally wrong, arguing that white men did not do it and that this 'nourriture des diables' could kill them.⁵² He draws on both his European and Kanak spiritual beliefs to condemn cannibalism.⁵³ His women are not, however, prepared to swallow his sermon and put their case for the necessity of exocannibalism in times of war. M'Barai realises that he alone would not be able to change the morals of the Malekulans and resolves to keep to himself. This resolution does not last and he eventually settles back into life with his *popinées*, finding their cannibalism almost natural, yet taking care never to eat human flesh himself.

While M'Barai does condemn the practice, giving voice to the prevailing attitudes of civilised society, Baudoux's posture is more destabilising. By showing that eating the other does not immediately transform the consumer into a monster, indeed M'Barai cannot even make himself vomit nor does he become sick after the fact, and by

⁵⁰ 'He spat with disgust, tried to make himself vomit but just couldn't do it.'

⁵¹ 'cannibal teeth.'

⁵² 'food of the devils.'

⁵³ M'Barai is haunted by the ancestral superstitions of the Ounouas the night he finds out he has eaten human meat. Martin (1995: 440) writes: 'M'Barai refuse donc le cannibalisme au nom de l'éthique blanche, mais aussi des croyances canaques dans une interprétation particulière. Il craint l'action des diables, éprouve de la répulsion pour ceux qui en mangent et a peur lui-même d'être mangé.' [M'Barai thus rejects cannibalism on the grounds of both European ethics and a particular interpretation of Kanak beliefs. He fears retribution from the devils, is repulsed by people who eat human flesh and is afraid of being eaten himself.]

describing M'Barai's eventual acceptance of cannibalism, is Baudoux making the point that this is just an alternative cultural practice? In a similar vein, while the narrator is quick to mock the Malekulan *takatas* who treated M'Barai's wounds, referring to them as the primitive 'faculté de médecine,' Baudoux, by showing that their medicine does actually work—M'Barai is healed—seems to be acknowledging the possibility of accepting this alternate lifestyle and culture (Baudoux 1972: 45).⁵⁴

Becoming Kanak

Time passes and M'Barai slowly gains more freedom in the tribe, becoming more and more used to the lifestyle. After about four years, his transformation is almost complete. When his tribe is put in peril by a savage horde of enemy Kanaks, a colonial nightmare of the most depraved and barbarous of primitive beasts who 'se livraient à des orgies de chair humaine; dans des stupres de brutes, ils violaient des enfants et des cadavres, qu'ils dévoraient ensuite,' M'Barai begs to join the fight and is duly handed back his club and his knife, thus restoring his masculinity.⁵⁵ 'M'Barai, nu comme les canaques, ayant presque pris la même teinte qu'eux, se confondit dans la foule' (Baudoux 1972: 59–60).⁵⁶ The narrator uses the image of M'Barai's darker skin and nakedness to highlight his protagonist's movement into the Kanak world, his degeneration. Yet, darker is not black—he is not quite fully other—his physicality still marks him out as different. The enemy tribe is afraid of this 'homme terrible' who 'n'était pas de leur couleur, et qui était plus épais et plus fort que les autres hommes' (61).⁵⁷ And, despite enthusiastically participating in the violence, indeed taking a leading role, teaching 'l'audace et le courage à ces sauvages féroces qui en manquaient,' cannibalism again proves the stumbling block for full integration into the realm of the 'primitive' (64).⁵⁸

In passages designed to cause frissons of terror mixed with a certain amount of voyeuristic pleasure, the reader is finally treated to a full eyewitness account of the preparation of human war captives for a cannibal feast. Now, it is not only the butchered meat that is seen, but the entire process of killing, cooking and eating. After some furious fighting, M'Barai's tribe bring back some prisoners who walked 'comme du

⁵⁴ 'Faculty of Medicine.'

⁵⁵ 'revelled in orgies of human flesh. In brutish stupors, they raped children and corpses that they then devoured.'

⁵⁶ 'M'Barai, naked like the Kanaks, having almost taken on their same hue, blended into the crowd.'

⁵⁷ 'terrible man,' 'was not of their colour and who was broader and stronger than the others.'

⁵⁸ 'daring and courage to these ferocious savages in whom these traits were lacking.'

bétail conscient mené à l'abattoir' (Baudoux 1972: 62).⁵⁹ Then:

Auprès des brasiers préparés à leur intention, au milieu d'une foule froidement féroce, six prisonniers, presque inconscients, les yeux hagards, le teint jauni par la terreur, furent traînés sur leurs jambes molles, et maintenus debout. Puis, l'on procéda selon le rituel : des mains aux griffes noires immobilisèrent une tête en l'agrippant par les oreilles et le menton, tout en se méfiant de la mâchoire claquante qui soufflait de la bave et voulait mordre. Un boucher habile s'avança tenant une masse faite d'une grosse pierre ronde au bout d'un manche. Un coup sourd derrière la tête, les jambes fléchirent, la victime s'écroula, tomba accroupie entre les mains qui la maintenaient; du sang coula du nez, de la bouche, des oreilles. Un dernier coup sur la crâne, et les canaques allongèrent le corps inerte sur le sol. Un spécialiste muni d'un long couteau détacha la tête du tronc: il chercha un joint entre les vertèbres, sous la nuque, puis il coupa en suivant de sa lame crissante le long des maxillaires, jusqu'au menton. La tête coupée fut laissée à côté du corps ...

Ensuite les membres furent sectionnés aux joints, les ventres furent ouverts, les entrailles tirées. Les morceaux de chair furent enveloppés soigneusement dans des feuilles épaisses. Des pierres chaudes furent introduites dans les thorax, puis tous l'ensemble fut placé dans des fosses creusées au milieu des brasiers de charbon et de pierres incandescentes; de l'eau fut versée en crépitant sur les paquets de chair, mais avant qu'elle se vaporisât en entier, les fosses furent recouvertes de terre et formèrent des tumulus jusqu'à cuisson complète. (63–64)⁶⁰

M'Baraï, the *métis encanaqué*, has no qualms about taking part in the slaughter of the prisoners but he balks at consuming them. When the meat is shared around, 'il eut son morceau' but when he has to bite into the flesh, 'il n'osa pas, des nausées lui vinrent' (64).⁶¹ He is unable to cross the threshold; his Breton blood holds him back from full degeneration. For him cannibalism remains the dividing line between savage and civilised. Nevertheless, so as to save face (and save himself from the oven), he puts on a performance of cannibalism. He pretends to eat but secretly gets rid of his 'horrible part' (64).⁶²

⁵⁹ 'like livestock that know they are being led to the abattoir.'

⁶⁰ 'Beside the braziers being prepared to receive them, in the middle of a cold-blooded, ferocious crowd, six nearly unconscious prisoners with crazed eyes and skin pale with terror were dragged along on their wobbly legs and held upright. Then, the victors proceeded according to the ritual. Hands with black claws held down a head, gripping it by the ears and the chin, wary of the drooling, foaming jaws that were snapping open and shut wanting to bite. A skilful butcher stepped forward holding a mace made out of a large black stone on the end of a handle. A dull blow to the back of the victim's head and his legs gave way. He collapsed, falling in a crouching position into the hands that were holding him. Blood streamed from his nose, mouth and ears. A final blow to his skull and the Kanaks laid his motionless body on the ground. A specialist wielding a long knife separated his head from his body. He located a joint between the vertebrates, under the neck, then he began cutting with his blade crunching along the jawbone as far as the chin. The severed head was left next to the corpse ... Next, limbs were severed at the joints, bellies were opened and the victims were gutted. Pieces of flesh were carefully wrapped in thick leaves. Hot stones were put into chests then everything was placed in pits dug in the middle of the braziers of burning coals and incandescent stones. Water was poured over the packets of flesh, making a sizzling sound, but before it could all evaporate, the pits were covered over with earth, forming burial mounds until the meat was completely cooked.'

⁶¹ 'he took his share ... he didn't dare, nausea overcame him.'

⁶² 'horrible share.'

Is this graphic description an attempt to justify the enslavement of the Kanakas in Queensland and Fiji? An enslavement that is disguised as a civilising mission—for we are told when M'Barai is in Queensland that the 'black-fellows' were there 'pour se civiliser' (Baudoux 1972: 86).⁶³ It would seem, in their depiction both as animals for the slaughter and animals of prey, as if Baudoux, or more precisely his narrator, is attempting to use racial hierarchies to defend unequal and inhuman treatment of the blackbirded Kanakas on the part of white 'civilised' society. Perhaps, too, this vivid evocation of cannibalism is designed to bring home its inhumanity to his readers of 1919 in the aftermath and subsequent trials of Kanaks involved in the 1917 revolt during which acts of cannibalism were reported (Gasser 1996: 28–29).

In tandem with this reading, however, we cannot help but notice the matter of fact, almost anthropological tone of the description of the preparation of the human meat. Baudoux depicts a 'boucher habile,' 'un spécialiste' who separates the head from the body, locates 'un joint entre les vertèbres' and dissects the body (Baudoux 1972: 63).⁶⁴ The cooking process is similarly described as a methodical one, quite unlike the type of frenzied, chaotic free-for-all a 'civilised' witness might expect. Instead, the precision of the vocabulary and the professional nature of the slaughter let the reader understand that this is a rational cultural practice, one that is certainly different from the Western norm, but one that does not necessarily bear the hallmarks of savagery. While it does, then, reinforce a divide between 'us' and 'them' (thus comforting its white reader), it also gestures towards an acceptance of a variation in cultural practices. Whatever the case may be, it is evident that cannibalism is the final frontier for M'Barai and the fact that he does not cross it leaves open the possibility of regeneration.

Recognising the Other

M'Barai, despite appearances, remains aware of his difference from the Kanaks. He may have adopted most of their customs but he is not one of them. Nor is he fully accepted by the Kanak tribe, who still see him as an outsider—the men 'ne parlaient jamais de leurs affaires en sa présence, arrivait-il les conversations s'arrêtaient'

⁶³'to become civilised. Civilisation was primarily to come through work, but the Australians also subjected the Kanakas to bible teaching and every Saturday they were required to bathe and wash with soap before putting on a set of clean clothes. See McClintock (2005) for the importance of soap and washing in the Anglo civilising mission.'

⁶⁴'skilful butcher,' 'a specialist,' 'a joint between the vertebrate.'

(Baudoux 1972: 70).⁶⁵ The fear of being killed and eaten by the tribe resurfaces and M'Barai subsequently escapes with his young *popinée* to an English blackbirding ship. Once on board he hopes to be recognised by the crew as a fellow sailor in distress, a member of the civilised world, but he finds himself put in the hold with the other Kanaka 'recruits.' There he is stripped of his knife, dressed in ridiculously ill-fitting European clothes and 'une médaille en fer blanc, marquée du numéro 96' is hung around his neck (74).⁶⁶ He is now but a number, emasculated and dehumanised like his fellow Melanesian captives.

The next day, any hope of being recognised as a *métis* (and therefore above the black 'recruits' in the hierarchy of races) is dashed when the English blackbirders make out that they do not understand him. Instead, they choose to view him in economic terms, as a valuable commodity: 'Cet homme, robuste au teint brûlé, métis ou pas métis, était de bonne prise ; il valait quarante livres sterling, peut-être plus' (Baudoux 1972: 77).⁶⁷ They do not take him as one of their own. Their racist preconceptions and, perhaps more importantly, their capitalist greed, mean that they can only conceive of M'Barai as other, and others, in their world, are there to be exploited or (metaphorically) consumed. In an attempt to escape from 'savage' captivity, then, the *métis* has done nothing but swap it for its so-called 'civilised' version, becoming 'un nègre à vendre' (81).⁶⁸ The former *négrier* has now become the *nègre*.

In Queensland, while the Australians realise that M'Barai is not of the same 'stock' as the other 'black-fellows,' they (conveniently) never recognise him as a *métis* with European heritage. Instead, he is mistaken for a 'Maori.' He attracts a good price at auction due to his physical attributes. Yet his lighter skin does not afford him special treatment—for the Australians, he is a 'nigga' worker like the others—he is given the name of Peter, the number 7643, and is employed felling trees to prepare new land for planting (Baudoux 1972: 82–86). M'Barai, however, knows he is different.

This difference manifests itself through the 'sport' of boxing. The planter Sir Wentworth Ramsbottom and his friends organise boxing matches between the Kanaka

⁶⁵ 'never spoke of their affairs in front of him. When he arrived, conversations would stop.'

⁶⁶ 'a tin medal marked with the number 96.'

⁶⁷ 'This robust man with his burnt complexion, metis or not, was a fine catch. He was worth forty pounds sterling, maybe more.'

⁶⁸ 'a nigger for sale.'

workers. These 'matches' are nothing more than human blood sport, a spectacle to be enjoyed, the 'civilised' version of the fighting on Malekula. The white men sit in rocking chairs on the veranda with cigars and whisky, place their bets and watch the black men beat each other into a pulp on the front lawn. Just as he did when it came to defending himself on Malekula or in his role as a warrior for his adopted tribe, M'Barai demonstrates 'innate qualities' for boxing, qualities based on his physique and mixed blood characteristics. What is more, 'il bénéficiait du prestige du métis—les canaques les craignent' giving him a great advantage over his adversaries (Baudoux 1972: 89).⁶⁹

If white society views him as black, black society still views him as other. Still, as he easily beats his black opponents, in the name of sport, the whites find a white boxer willing to fight him—a difficult task given the repugnance whites have for fighting blacks 'à moins que ce ne soit pour les châtier' (Baudoux 1972: 89).⁷⁰ Pitted against 'Pat "the Irish,"' whose ancestry and intemperance place him near the bottom of white colonial society, M'Barai achieves a knockout and the 'sportmen' put him through a series of physical challenges. 'Lorsqu'ils eurent étudié les performances du métis, comme des maquignons étudient celles d'un cheval, ils convinrent que ce black fellow valait de la monnaie' (91).⁷¹ M'Barai's animalised body, compared to that of a horse, echoing his Malekulan experience, is once again conceived of purely as a commodity for the profit of others.

Dressed 'à neuf, en englishman' (Baudoux 1972: 91),⁷² the syndicate of 'gentlemen' send him to Brisbane to learn the 'science' of boxing, to tame his 'instincts' so he can make them money. There, the *métis* finds himself incarcerated and subjected to the kind of treatment afforded a prize stallion, again a parallel to his life in the Malekulan tribe. His diet and private life are closely monitored 'tout comme un animal qui ne s'appartient pas' (92).⁷³ He is 'reconduit dans sa stalle, puis douche, épongé, massé et couché ... On le menait dans une sorte de cellule que l'on fermait a clef' (92).⁷⁴

⁶⁹ 'he benefited from the prestige of the *métis*—the Kanaks feared them.'

⁷⁰ 'unless it is to punish them.'

⁷¹ 'When they had studied the half-caste's performances, like horse dealers studying those of a horse, they agreed that this black fellow was worth a few bob.'

⁷² 'up in new clothes like an Englishman.'

⁷³ 'just like an animal that was not its own master.'

⁷⁴ 'escorted back to his stall, then showered, sponged down, massaged and put to bed ... they put him in a sort of cell that they locked.'

Despite his training and although M'Barai has the physical prowess and all the skills required of a boxer, he is, according to the narrator, genetically doomed, unable to control his 'instinctive' temper. During his fight with Jack Nottingham, 'Peter M'Barai, the Maori' feels the racism of the crowd, 'parce qu'il n'était pas blanc, pas Australien' (Baudoux 1972: 93).⁷⁵ They call out 'Go on, Blackie! Get to him Nigger! Go it Sambo' (94) making him react animalistically, like a bull and a bull-dog. M'Barai is disqualified as he could not 'discipliner son caractère violent' and the white men cast him aside as 'un homme sans valeur' (94).⁷⁶

The narrator chastises him for not having been able to 'profiter de sa chance' to improve his lot, putting this down to his mixed blood heritage. He was not able to 'vaincre ses hérédités' as he always got angry, 'ainsi le voulait sa race' (Baudoux 1972: 95).⁷⁷ Later, when shunned completely by white society, M'Barai returns to his role on the plantation as a 'bête de somme' (96), adopting the habits of the Kanakas.⁷⁸ The narrator notes that he 'ne fit aucun effort pour s'élever, sortir de sa situation d'être inférieur' (96) and attributes this to the fact that he has inherited Melanesian values.⁷⁹ For the narrator, it would seem, regeneration through *métissage* is not necessarily a path to civilisation for the 'primitive' indigenous other.

When M'Barai finally makes it back to New Caledonia, after re-entering into a contract to avoid being dropped off in Malekula (where he feared he would be eaten) then jumping ship, his French ancestry is again not recognised. His father is dead and his rightful inheritance is occupied by a 'Beaucoup-malin-China-man' (Baudoux 1972: 112).⁸⁰ As his birth had not been registered, his father had never officially 'recognised' him and therefore, in the white man's world, he has no legitimate claim to the land. He nonetheless has no desire to live on a Kanak tribe and does not see himself as a Kanak but feels 'son état de paria chez les blancs, sans pouvoir le définir' (117).⁸¹ While in a drunken state, he also cries and talks of suicide as both whites and blacks have hurt him. After a series of unsuccessful and somewhat comical attempts, M'Barai eventually (and perhaps accidentally) succeeds in taking his own life. Then, like all good monsters, his

⁷⁵ 'because he wasn't white, wasn't Australian.'

⁷⁶ 'control his violent temper ... a worthless man.'

⁷⁷ 'make the most of his opportunity ... conquer his heredity ... as was typical of his race.'

⁷⁸ 'beast of burden.'

⁷⁹ 'made no effort to improve himself, to raise himself above his position of inferiority.'

⁸⁰ 'very crafty Chinaman.'

⁸¹ 'his status as a pariah among the whites, without being able to really define it.'

ghost returns to haunt his *popinée* (Cohen 1996: 5). The *métis*, in the narrator's eyes, belongs neither to white nor black society. He exists in a kind of no-man's land where, 'la dualité de ses races' means that he always had 'l'esprit en balance, sans qu'il put jamais se stabiliser' (117).⁸²

Conclusion

In *Jean M'Barai*, the person of the *métis* is often reduced to a domestic animal, one that can become wild if provoked. His body is a commodity destined for exploitation and consumption, and he is held captive by both Kanak and white society. In addition to the physical incarceration, he is perhaps also metaphorically a prisoner of both spheres, a captivity that prevents him from living fully in either. He is able to play limited roles within both white and black worlds, roles for which his genetic makeup predisposes him, yet, despite dressing up (or down) and a certain element of role-play or performance, M'Barai is not at home in either. Nor is he fully accepted or recognised by the members of these two opposing worlds. He inhabits a truly in-between or liminal space.

Initially functioning as a threat conjured up by the Western imaginary, the fear that the unknown other is coming to eat you, cannibalism is also played as a dividing line between savage and civilised in the story. However, it is a line that blurs when M'Barai unknowingly consumes human flesh. His wholehearted rejection of the practice, however, means that in his mind he has not crossed over to the fully primitive. While still other, not white, his choice to abstain from eating the other and thus avoiding complete degeneration, allows for the possibility of redemption or of becoming fully civilised. That he does not is blamed on his Kanak blood and wild upbringing on the coast (at the very limits of colonial society), too removed from civilisation to have had a formative influence on him during his early years.

Baudoux thus shows the potential *chez le métis* both for degeneration and regeneration, yet M'Barai is an example of neither. While the main thrust of the narrative rests upon the role of 'nature' or genes in a person's development, Baudoux seems to make a nod towards the 'nurture' school of thought in his attempt to explain why M'Barai cannot integrate into the white man's world. More importantly, perhaps, by giving M'Barai many of the hallmarks of a monster, he also shows that the racist views of society (both

⁸² 'the duality of his races ... his mind hanging in the balance, without ever being able to become stable.'

white and black) exclude the *métis* from belonging anywhere. His hybrid person, representing the taboo of miscegenation, threatens the borders of identity of both communities and he is condemned to live on the margins, as he does for a while before his suicide. Whether or not this lifestyle really brings happiness or fulfilment to M'Barai who, until the end, is painted as something of a lost soul, he does at least live freely on his own terms, as a *métis*, far from the *tribu* or white settlements and away from the use and abuse of either society.

Interestingly, if cannibalism, the other eating, is used to demonise Kanaks in *Jean M'Barai*, serving as an excuse for colonial crimes such as blackbirding and 'pacification,' Baudoux also portrays the metaphoric cannibalism of indigenous peoples through colonisation by way of body commodification, exploitation and consumption, capitalist greed, land expropriation and the civilising mission. Here we have the sublime ambiguity of Baudoux—for, if the black world is savage, frightening and brutal the 'civilised' white world is no less cruel and inhumane. *Jean M'Barai* thus has the dual function of presenting a critique of colonialism and civilisation while at the same time providing a vehicle for racist discourses.

Indeed, the text contains many cues for a dual reading. On the one hand, the narrator voices the prevailing views of white colonial society. He promulgates a Social Darwinist ideology, where the notion of the 'loi du plus fort' is paramount.⁸³ No matter whether we are on a blackbirding ship, in the New Hebridean bush or on a Queensland plantation, the strongest emerge the winners, and the losers either perish or are captured, exploited and consumed. M'Barai, the *métis*, the victim of both blacks and whites, is ultimately portrayed as the loser, weaker than the black or white 'races' that combined to form him.

Baudoux, the author, on the other hand, presents a warts and all vision of the colonial world. For him, there is no limit to the savagery of any society. This subversive parallel discourse, particularly the description of the barbarity of the 'civilised' in the colonial project, serves as a postcolonial critique of colonialism and emerges as a very important feature of the text. Baudoux, in effect, redefines the borders between us and them, pushing further the concept of savagery while also rethinking the notion of cannibalism,

⁸³ 'survival of the fittest.'

at times appearing to make a case for the acceptance of alternative cultural practices. In this context, we might read Jean M'Barai and his ultimate failure to find his place in the world as a symbol of the inevitable failure of the colonial project itself.

Whether this revolutionary message is one that Baudoux's early 20th century audience would have grasped is questionable. The narrator's racist comments and judgements seem there to appease or comfort the colonial reader, to reassure him or her that the frank depiction of the brutality of colonialism is a just reflection of the natural order of things. Baudoux, who enjoyed both the privileges that came with being a white man in a colonial context but who, for many years, lived on the edges of New Caledonian society where he frequented Kanaks, *métis*, convicts and migrant workers, undoubtedly developed a unique understanding of the complexity of the colonial encounter. Perhaps, through this story, he was attempting to enlighten his audience by giving them a lesson in cultural relativism—the duality of the text allowing him to do indirectly what he could not do directly. Perhaps too, the dialogical relationship between narrator and author represents Baudoux's own inner struggle with the inequities of his society and his role within it. Alternatively, the narrator's voice may epitomise Baudoux's own thoughts as well as those of his contemporaries with the unfolding realities and injustices of the story serving as a (subconscious?) foil to challenge his own deep-seated prejudices.

Exactly what Baudoux's purpose was cannot be determined by the 21st century reader. What we are left with, however, is a polysemous text that is testament to the universality of inhumanity. Exploring conflicting colonial discourses on breeding and heredity and underlining the shifting nature and dislocation of identity experienced by the *métis* as he negotiates a third space between black and white worlds, in *Jean M'Barai* Baudoux exposes, through his descriptions of cannibalism (literal and metaphorical) and portraits of the indigenous other, white pirates, slave traders and capitalist masters, the ambivalence of a colonial society where notions of savagery and civilisation are far from binary oppositions.

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