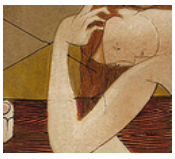

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Rethinking the Limits of Endemic Cannibalism: On Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso

Repensando os Limites do Canibalismo Endêmico: sobre Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso

Dossiê: intérpretes do Brasil

André Corrêa de Sá[1]

ORCID: 0000-0002-6468-745X

E-mail:
acorreadesa@ucsb.edu

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Abstract:

This paper undertakes the unconventional task of challenging the prevailing celebration of anthropophagy as a critical decolonial metaphor. Through a close reading of Alexandra Lucas Coelho's 2019 nonfiction book, Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso, I argue that the author mobilizes the concept of cultural cannibalism not as a contested idea, but as a symbolic shorthand for resistance, hybridity, and progressive identity. In doing so, Lucas Coelho inadvertently reinforces the idealized narrative of Antropofagia[2] as a unifying national trope—one that, rather than interrogating Brazil's cultural contradictions, often conceals them. Her interpretation turns Brazil's complexities into an exportable spectacle, aligned with hegemonic imaginaries. While not aiming to revisit the full critical history of anthropophagy or Brazilian modernism—both of which have been extensively debated—this paper reflects on the risks involved in the uncritical redeployment of their symbolic legacies. It critiques not the original formulation of cultural cannibalism, but its stabilized reception and inscription in contemporary transatlantic discourse. The article argues that the triumph of anthropophagy, as celebrated in Lucas Coelho's narrative, glosses over deep asymmetries and reduces a fraught cultural history to a consumable and affirmative image of Brazilian distinctiveness.

Keywords:

Alexandra Lucas Coelho, Anthropophagy, Caetano Veloso

Resumo:

Este artigo propõe o exercício pouco convencional de argumentar que a metáfora da antropofagia é frequentemente utilizada de forma superficial, muitas vezes sem um exame crítico apropriado. Através de uma leitura de *Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso* (2019), de Alexandra Lucas Coelho, defendo que o conceito de canibalismo cultural como uma força progressista e transformadora é moldado por autorrepresentações brasileiras que frequentemente obscurecem as complexas tensões históricas e culturais que lhe são inerentes, reproduzindo outras formas de excepcionalismo. Ao idealizar a Antropofagia como um método de crítica decolonial, Lucas Coelho, inadvertidamente, evidencia que essa noção foi apropriada por estruturas hegemónicas para

[1]University of California, Santa Barbara.
[2]In this essay, I use the terms cultural cannibalism, antropofagy, and antropofagia as functional equivalents. While each has its own specific trajectory in different critical and linguistic traditions, I am primarily interested in them here as interchangeable designations for a symbolic gesture — appropriative, critical, and self-formative — that involves devouring and reworking the other.

perpetuar narrativas de unidade nacional que dissimulam desigualdades persistentes. A sua leitura assenta numa estética de exotismo que transforma as complexidades históricas e sociais do Brasil num espetáculo exportável, alinhado com imaginários hegemónicos. Embora não pretenda revisitar a história crítica da antropofagia ou do modernismo brasileiro — já amplamente debatida —, este artigo procura refletir sobre os riscos associados à reinscrição acrítica desses legados simbólicos. A crítica aqui desenvolvida não incide sobre a formulação original do canibalismo cultural, mas sobre a forma estabilizada da sua receção e reapropriação no discurso *transatlântico* contemporâneo. Sustenta-se que o triunfo simbólico da antropofagia, tal como celebrado na narrativa de Lucas Coelho, oculta profundas assimetrias e reduz uma história cultural marcada por conflitos a uma imagem afirmativa e consumível da brasilidade.

Palavras-chave:

Alexandra Lucas Coelho, Antropofagia, Caetano Veloso

Introduction

Before me lies a list of Alexandra Lucas Coelho's books published in Portugal—perhaps not exhaustive. Fourteen in total, spanning from 2002 to 2025. It's an eclectic lineup, leaping across genres, themes, and continents with remarkable ease. Even a quick glance at the titles reveals the author's talent for steering through diverse cultural landscapes, effortlessly shifting between fiction and nonfiction, perspectives and locations. The list breaks down like this: seven travel books—ranging from Oriente Próximo to Líbano, Labirinto—and four novels, including E a Noite Roda and A Nossa Alegria Chegou. Throw in two children's books and a slim, 40-page fictional travel narrative with the mysterious title Mumtazz.

I haven't made it through every book on the list, but I've been a loyal reader of Alexandra Lucas Coelho ever since Vai, Brasil grabbed my attention back in 2013. Attempting to fit these titles into neat genre categories is both futile and counterproductive. Look at her novels and travel books side by side—pay attention to the style, the rhythm of the prose, the recurring themes, and the echoes of her own life—and you'll spot a striking resemblance. The novels read like autobiographies with a fictional twist. Thus, the lines between her fiction and travelogues blur, leaving you in this hybrid space where stories about meeting people, personal reflections, and political stances all flow together.

This time, my focus will primarily be on Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso, a work that also defies strict categorization. Part travelogue, part cultural reflection, and part love letter to Caetano Veloso, it offers an intimate and layered exploration of Bahia, a region often framed as the symbolic heart of Brazil. The book itself is, in a way, a response to a challenge posed by Caetano Veloso, who remarked that Alexandra Lucas Coelho's previous works on Brazil, while brilliant, were missing something essential: Bahia. Taking this observation to heart, Lucas Coelho embarked on a project to capture the essence of the region, resulting in a work structured around five journeys spanning over two decades—from the late 1990s to a more recent, yet-to-be-fulfilled "promised" return.

Through a blend of personal encounters, historical inquiry, and sociopolitical critique, the book unfolds as a sort of pilgrimage through the first encounters between the Portuguese sailors and the indigenous peoples in the early 16th century, the enduring legacies of colonization, the vibrant intersections of religious belief and culture, and the personalities that make Bahia what it is today. Music permeates the narrative through and through, blending into the prose. Caetano Veloso serves not only as a recurring protagonist of significant recollections but as a sort of a spirit of the text. Driven by curiosity and affection, the book is marked by Lucas Coelho's sharp observations, lyrical prose, and her refusal to shy away from the contradictions that define the region.

Travel isn't merely a theme in Alexandra Lucas Coelho's work—it's the driving force behind her writing, the spark that animates her prose and gives her books their magnetic pulling. I count myself as an unabashed admirer, frequently recommending her work and assigning it to my students. And yet, as often happens, it's the points of friction—not the objects of unqualified admiration—that most invite deeper reflection.

This paper is not concerned with dismantling the idea of Antropofagia only to replace it with another theoretical construct. Just as Alexandra Lucas Coelho embraces the concept without offering an explicit counter-model, my engagement here mirrors that refusal. Instead, I aim to examine how her reading of cultural cannibalism participates in a broader tendency to enshrine the notion as a self-evident critical strategy, often without fully reckoning with its limitations. Whereas this paper will not be wholly uncritical, rest assured that unreserved praise to *Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso* will feature prominently in its conclusion.

It is important to say that it is not the purpose of this article to revisit the extensive critical history of anthropophagy, nor to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the internal contradictions of Brazilian modernism or Tropicália. These traditions have already been thoroughly examined by scholars across multiple fields. My concern here is more limited and more focused: to examine how Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso, by Alexandra Lucas Coelho, mobilizes certain symbolic repertoires—particularly anthropophagy—not as contested concepts, but as stabilized emblems of cultural hybridity, resistance, and aesthetic liberation. The article thus analyzes the way these figures resurface in Lucas Coelho's narrative as affectively charged and ideologically invested tokens, often stripped of their historical frictions and contradictions.

[3]While this article does not aim to survey the critical history of anthropophagy in Brazilian modernism and its later appropriations, it is important to acknowledge the existence of a substantial tradition that interrogates both its conceptual foundations and its symbolic codification. Key contributions include Roberto Schwarz's critique of modernism, the volume *Antropofagia Hoje?* (organized by Jorge Ruffinelli and João Cezar de Castro Rocha), and Rafael Cardoso's *Modernidade em Preto e Branco*, which explores the ideological and aesthetic frameworks underpinning São Paulo modernism. It's also worth mentioning Luís Augusto Fischer's *A ideologia modernista* and Marcelo Moreschi's work on modernist self-historiography, both of which explore how modernist authors crafted legitimizing narratives of cultural authority. These and other texts aligned with that lineage are not directly engaged here, however, given the article's methodological emphasis: not on reconstructing the internal debates of modernism or Tropicália, but on examining how their symbolic repertoires are appropriated by Alexandra Lucas Coelho—who approaches them through already stabilized cultural formulations.

My Sentimental Journey

It's important to note that by the time Alexandra Lucas Coelho published her first books, she was already a well-established figure in Portuguese media. With a distinguished career spanning multiple outlets, Lucas Coelho had made her mark in Portugal's media landscape, particularly as a special correspondent reporting from regions such as Palestine and Brazil. Even though her books haven't reached bestseller lists, they've been published by prestigious presses in both Portugal and Brazil. These works have garnered notable visibility in the media, triggered significant discussion on social media, and earned recognition through major literary awards. As Margarida Rendeiro (2024) notes, although academic engagement with her work has been somewhat limited, it does exist, affirming her as a meaningful and valuable voice in contemporary literature.

Like many of the books that leave a lasting mark on our lives, *Vai, Brasil* holds profound personal meaning for me—enough that I'll depart from academic norms and begin by acknowledging my connection to it. For me, *Vai, Brasil* represents a kind of sentimental odyssey. In 2013, I was navigating a period of deep transition, clinging to the hope of leaving behind my established professional path as a pharmacist to try out something entirely new: teaching literature—a pursuit I had been formally preparing for during the previous years in graduate school and informally for most of my adult life. At that time, Brazilian universities radiated an energy and dynamism that far outshone their counterparts in Portugal. The idea of embarking on a new career across the Atlantic, in a place that, from the Portuguese vantage point, has long been tinged with the allure of Paradise, felt not only enticing but almost inevitable.

Brazil whispered the promise of a fresh start, an exciting professional adventure that felt like a golden opportunity—one that would allow me to immerse myself in something that truly mattered to me. The well-written and informed brief essays in *Vai, Brasil* accurately illustrate the Brazilian zeitgeist during that period of exuberance, confidence, and growth when Brazil, under the democratic policies of Lula da Silva, as *The Economist* famously put it, was taking off. As fate would have it, the move to Brazil to teach literature ended up happening shortly after.

A few years later, after I moved again—this time to California—leaving behind my chapter in Brazil—in a charming town tucked away in the interior of São Paulo—I decided to write a long, somewhat ambitious paper about three of Alexandra Lucas Coelho's books: *Vai, Brasil*, *Deus-dará*, and *A Nossa Alegria Chegou*. To me, the three books are fundamentally about Brazil, though Coelho herself disagrees in the case of the latter. My aim was to bring them into dialogue by examining how their portrayals of Brazil—especially from an ecological perspective—resonate with or diverge from those found in the works of Mário de Andrade and Machado de Assis.

I'm not about to dive into the reading I propose in that text here. But I will mention that crafting the argument pushed me to lay out some fundamental points about the genealogy of Brazilian literature before attempting to position each of those three books within that very genealogy. It wasn't just about reading the books; it was about understanding where they fit in the broader narrative of Brazilian literary history[4]. Alexandra Lucas Coelho read the text, and, well, let's just say her reaction wasn't exactly one of unbridled enthusiasm. She wrinkled her nose in a clear sign of disapproval. We even exchanged a few emails about it, and honestly, the conversation felt as off-key to both of us as the text must have seemed to her. It was like we were two musicians trying to play the same piece but somehow always hitting different notes.

I believe our primary disagreement centers on how we interpret the cultural significance of the concept of Antropofagia. It seems difficult to engage with decolonial thinking in the context of 21st-century Brazilian culture without saying something about the notion of cultural cannibalism. For Lucas Coelho, this idea carries not a shred of controversy: Oswald de Andrade's theory amounts to a transformative journey from bondage to freedom—both as a means of education for Brazilian selfhood and as an embodiment of its rebellious essence. This perspective, which is widely accepted, frames cultural cannibalism as a powerful celebration of nonextractive relations. Implicitly, it aims to dismantle the vested interests of North Atlantic corporate businesses and elites, who dominate the global economy and maintain control through social and cultural systems.

This interpretation draws on the work of influential thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, Aníbal Quijano, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who critique how hegemonic forces normalize inequality and silence the oppressed. When cultural cannibalism is discussed, it is often presented as an unquestionable model of critical theory—a form of resistance against the barbarism imposed by the exploitative system of liberal capitalism. However, the notion of nonextractive relations championed by urban intellectuals and artists in southeastern Brazil, who pay tribute to the modernist tradition, falls short of being truly nonextractive. The epistemological model underpinning Oswald de Andrade's cultural cannibalism, in relation to Marcuse's (2011, p. 165) concept of "real history," functions both as an emancipatory possibility and as a reactionary practice. While it offers insights into the power dynamics of a repressive society, it also projects the hegemonic identity of the "Paulistas" onto the "backward" regions of Brazil.

[4]As I noted in that text, and forgive me the implicit self-citation, Deus-dará is a fictionalized guidebook of Rio de Janeiro, featuring five Brazilians and two Portuguese characters, whom we follow over the course of seven days across three years. Deus-dará combines a vivid account of Carioca daily life with a historical-socio-linguistic exploration of the city's unique character, the roots of Brazilian identity, and the Portuguese tendency toward a relaxed, provincial conformism in the face of an imperial past of questionable renown. Deus-dará moves beyond that theme to paint a more nuanced portrait of Brazil. Addressed to Brazilians, the novel confronts the harsh realities of adulthood in a relentless, Darwinian world—unforgiving, often brutally unjust, and overwhelmingly cruel to vast swathes of humanity. Addressed to the Portuguese, the novel aligns itself with an ever-growing body of post-colonial and decolonial literature, inviting them to candidly reckon with our responsibilities in shaping the world that emerged in the wake of collapsed empires. It is a dual narrative, one that urges both introspection and accountability, challenging readers on both sides of the Atlantic to confront the legacies of colonialism that continue to ripple through contemporary society.

Brazilian modernism, especially the version shaped by São Paulo's elite, stands out as the most successful in crafting the country's cultural narrative. Rooted in the Modern Art Week of 1922, it sought to define a distinctly Brazilian identity by blending modernist experimentation with local themes. Oswald de Andrade's cultural cannibalism, emerging as a core element of this movement, positioned itself as a radical departure from colonial cultural norms. However, it reflected the perspectives of São Paulo's privileged intellectuals, whose connections enabled cultural dominance.

Brazilian modernism—despite the enduring influence of Andrade's anthropophagic vision—frequently cast the nation's cultural diversity in an idealized light, transforming difference into aesthetic capital while sidestepping the structural exclusions faced by marginalized groups. In this process, subaltern cultures were not so much celebrated as they were curated, filtered through the sensibilities of a privileged elite that reimagined otherness without relinquishing its vantage point.

Andrade's claim that the anthropophagic movement was a paradigmatic form of resistance to colonial dominance, originating in 1928, was later embraced by Brazil's urban avant-garde, particularly the Concretists of the early 1950s and the Tropicália movement of the late 1960s. Influenced by the radical political movements that agitated the 1960s and 1970s, these movements popularized Antropofagia as a countercultural stance aligned with the liberation of social norms, the sexual revolution, and a reimagining of political praxis. By reimagining the devouring myth as a progressive force, these movements gave voice to the intellectualized urban elite but also commodified a subversive idea. What began as a rebellious gesture of cultural devouring gradually calcified into a marketable formula—repackaged as a banner for unity and humanist ideals. In doing so, it muted the very fractures it claimed to expose, turning a subversive metaphor into a sleek export of national identity. Instead of unsettling colonial hierarchies, it ended up redecorating them, masking enduring asymmetries behind the language of inclusion.

This commodification promoted a nostalgic ideal of cultural resistance against the "colonizer," obscuring systemic inequalities rooted in Brazil's political history of European immigrant rule and internal colonialism. This internal colonialism is evident both regionally, through the dominance of the Southeast and South over the North and Northeast, and socially, through entrenched hierarchies that marginalize Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous populations.

Lucas Coelho enshrines cultural cannibalism as a politics of knowledge production, colonial defiance, and a hope for alternative futures. Yet, her interpretation risks further commodifying it, turning it into a standardized concept complicit in exoticism and hegemonic structures. Coelho's portrait of cultural cannibalism in Brazil is undoubtedly evocative, but it glosses over the thornier dimensions of appropriation and the unresolved

tensions of internal colonialism. Her narrative captures the allure of symbolic fusion, yet remains largely silent on the uneven terrain of autonomy and exclusion that continues to shape Brazil's sociopolitical fabric.

The non-practical sense of an identity

In one of the most important chapters of the acclaimed *Tropical Truth*, titled "Anthropophagy," Caetano Veloso offers a brief description of his country through the lens of the myth of cultural cannibalism: "for me, as for all Brazilians in my experience, it is above all a name" (VELOSO, 2002, p. 160). This perspective responds directly to Contardo Calligaris' argument in *Hello, Brasil!* that the cannibalistic trend reflects the fragile constitution of national identity.

Calligaris argues that the persistent appeal of Antropofagia stems from Brazil's inability to forge a cohesive national identity amid the legacies of colonization, hybridity, and inequality. Veloso, however, counters this view. He acknowledges that *tropicalismo* did play with Brazil's exotic image, but moves beyond this framing by offering a more layered and self-critical interpretation: "I myself reject what seem to me ridiculous attempts to neutralize the strangeness of this Catholic tropical monster, in the hunt for the crumbs of ordinary international respectability" (VELOSO, 2002, 159). And adds, with unwavering certainty: "All Brazilians have the impression that the country simply has no practical sense" (VELOSO, 2002, p. 160).

What Caetano Veloso means is that the country he lives in often behaves like a weak or irresponsible father. "It's like a father", explains, "with a good heart and an honest reputation whom we respect," yet struggles with heavy drinking and an inability to keep a steady job, thus wasting "great opportunities" (VELOSO, 2002, p. 160).[5]

However, there are some complications with this comparison. The first part doesn't distinctly capture a uniquely Brazilian reality. Many readers may see parallels with the sentiments expressed by the Portuguese about their own national identity. In fact, even before Veloso, the Portuguese philosopher Eduardo Lourenço had suggested that the greatest mystery of Portuguese national identity lies in the very name of the country. The second part of the comparison warrants closer scrutiny. Veloso argues that the father's inability to provide for his children is not necessarily a fatal flaw. More crucial, he suggests, is the belief in being "peaceful, affectionate, and clean" (VELOSO, 2002, p. 161). In his reflection, Veloso contrasts this with the experiences of Portuguese figures such as Luís de Camões and António Nobre—both of whom spent many years abroad—drawing a clear distinction between them and the Brazilian people.

[5]In contrast to Calligaris' interpretation, Veloso's comment entails the rejection of the idea that Brazilian identity is incomplete or fragile. For Veloso, the cannibalistic impulse is not a symptom of fragility but a creative response to the absence or instability of this paternal function in the formation of Brazilian identity. Rather than indicating a lack of foundational stability, the constant consumption and reconfiguration of external cultural elements signals a refusal of fixed paternal authority, embracing fluidity and asserting agency in the face of historical and social fragmentation.

The implication is clear: while the Portuguese intellectuals, marked by their prolonged time in foreign lands, perhaps embody a more complex and worldly identity, the Brazilians, in contrast, are perceived as being more rooted, in a specific emotional and national disposition. This division not only highlights a cultural self-perception but also reveals the deep-set belief in Brazil's unique, almost radical experience of identity, which, despite its historical and cultural complexities, insists on portraying itself as a land of warmth and authenticity: "It was unimaginable that anyone born here want to live in another country" (VELOSO, 2002, p. 161).

By invoking the legacy of Oswald de Andrade's bold and iconoclastic poetic performances, Caetano Veloso, much like Oswald de Andrade before him, plays with this self-definition of Brazilian identity as a unique experience of cultural cannibalism. Both Oswald de Andrade and Caetano Veloso conflate the coffee market with the cultural market, envisioning cultural autonomy as contingent on the growth of the export economy. Oswald de Andrade imagined Brazil not only as a powerhouse of coffee exports but also as a nation capable of exporting its poetry to the world—a vision Veloso echoes in his approach.

The imposition of new languages and the formation of audiences, to borrow an expression from Caetano Veloso himself, does not occur without consequences—an experience shared by many economies in the so-called Global South. It's easy to see, then, why Veloso, reflecting on those formative years, confesses that his tropicalist consciousness—first shaped by social awareness, and later by political and economic insights—emerged "as a painful experience" (VELOSO, 2022, p. 161). Qualities such as maturity, resilience, and lucidity were key in allowing him to respond not with reverence, but with sharp resistance to the imperialist cultural products (Beatles, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin) that could be forgiven, but never fully accepted.

This adjective, therefore, plays a crucial role, as it amplifies the magnitude of what Caetano Veloso, influenced by the Concretists, describes as the "oswaldian openness to the 'millionaire contribution of all errors'" (VELOSO, 2002, p. 162) a pivotal moment in his career. It marks the trauma that caused him to reassess the history of Brazilian literature—leading him to stop admiring certain writers, like Clarice Lispector, or to admire them for entirely different reasons, as in the case of Guimarães Rosa. This shift in perspective was transformative, reshaping his understanding of literary figures and their impact on Brazilian culture.

The heretic element of cultural cannibalism

Unlike *Vai, Brasil*, which explores the struggles of a Latin American nation plagued by widespread social injustice, in crafting *Cinco Voltas na Bahia* and *Deus-dará*, Alexandra Lucas Coelho undoubtedly drew inspiration from Caetano Veloso's understanding of

cultural cannibalism. This notion, shaped by figures such as Oswald de Andrade and the Campos brothers, has had an enduring impact since the countercultural movement of *Tropicália*. By engaging with this tradition, Coelho weaves an intricate narrative that aligns with the spirit of *Tropicália* while also reimagining the country's socio-political and cultural landscape. Indeed, Veloso, whom Lucas Coelho affectionately calls "meu Orixá," embodies the cultural synthesis these writers championed. "Sou da banda dele," Lucas Coelho states at the beginning of the book, "A banda dos que acham que o mundo, ao contrário da estupidez, não é chato" (COELHO, 2019, p. 16).

What unites Oswald de Andrade, the Campos brothers, and those who have extended their legacy is a shared conviction: that anthropophagy is not just a metaphor, but a constitutional feature of the Brazilian ethos—a method for thinking, making, and resisting. In this lineage, *Deus-dará* presents itself less as a conventional novel than as a contemporary homage to Brazil's enduring appetite for cultural cannibalism. It becomes a staging ground where national identity is neither declared nor discovered, but digested and rearranged. Like Oswald, and in the wake of the Concretists, Lucas Coelho doesn't just allude to anthropophagy—she wants to write books that eat.

In her attempt to create transatlantic narratives by overcoming oppositions, Lucas Coelho is undoubtedly closer to the cultural experiments that, recovering the tradition of Brazilian baroque and inspired by Ezra Pound, culminated in the *Plano Piloto da Poesia Concreta*, than to the legacies of Mário de Andrade, João Guimarães Rosa, or Manoel de Barros—writers who, in my personal ranking, although less quotable, sit several spots above the former. In this light, *Deus-dará* reads as a contemporary homage to that same drive toward cultural cannibalism—a lens through which Brazil's values, identity, and ways of life are once again digested and reimagined. Like Andrade and the poets of Noigandres, and with echoes of Tropicália's irreverent syncretism, Lucas Coelho wants to write anthropophagic books.

Parallels abound in the way the anthropophagic formula continues to echo through Brazilian cultural discourse. In recent decades, the notion of cultural cannibalism has morphed into a kind of rallying cry for those devoted to *brasilidade*—two concepts that together conjure an image of Brazil's "national character" as something both luminous and deeply rooted. They blend spirituality, nationalism, and a yearning for symbolic recognition. Alexandra Lucas Coelho taps into these resonances, but also abstracts them, elevating Antropofagia into a kind of radical therapy for a repressive society. In her hands, it becomes less a metaphor and more an ecstatic breakthrough—the expression of a mind determined to reinvent itself through cultural transgression.

From this perspective, cultural cannibalism is less a cultural stance than a political commitment—a shorthand for "transformation," a means of becoming other than oneself. Or, as Eduardo Sterzi aptly puts it, a full-fledged "war machine" (STERZI, 2022, p. 18).

2022, p. 18). For Lucas Coelho, the epitome of this anthropophagic transformation is Caetano Veloso—a musician and thinker who holds a central place in the pantheon of Brazilian Popular Music—the exemplary icon of Tropicália, whom Lucas Coelho sees as the long-standing heroic symbol of revolution. To embody Veloso's ethos is to prompt a rebellious, anti-nationalist, atheistic, and ever-evolving openness to the transvaluation of values—a continual readiness to remake oneself anew.

This chain of ideas doesn't quite sit right with me, and in the following pages, I will attempt to look beyond their surface. Lucas Coelho doesn't seem to consider that all cultures, including Portuguese culture, have plural genealogies and are shaped by absorbing and transforming outside influences, using them to change or broaden how we see the world and live in it. All cultures exist only in relation to otherness and are defined through processes of assimilation and differentiation. Brazilians are no more entitled than any other group to invoke the ability to reshape their identities according to the people they meet, the ideas they come across, the places they visit. The idea that Antropofagia stands as a Brazilian philosophy—this guerrilla-like philosophy that paves the way for a post-Western, "tupinized" way of thinking—has been floating around since the 1970s (STERZI, 2022, p. 18-22).

In this sense, Lucas Coelho is largely echoing a familiar and long-favored narrative —one embraced by many Brazilian modernist artists, cultural critics, and literary historians who see themselves as heirs to the legacy inaugurated by the 1922 Week of Modern Art in São Paulo. What she does not consider, however, is that the anthropophagic movement, though often framed as a response to colonial violence and moral repression, may function less as a call for emancipation than as a strategy for symbolic elevation. Its core impulse is not one of protest or organized resistance to colonial consciousness, but rather an effort to assert the competitive singularity of the "technicized barbarian" envisioned by Oswald de Andrade—what Eduardo Sterzi describes as an indigenous-alien collective, defined above all by the impossibility of a pure, unmediated gesture, and by its refusal of any fixed or stable identity (STERZI, 2022, p. 77).

Much like the significance of Caetano Veloso's tropical truth intertwines with his pursuit of status and recognition for Brazilian culture, we remain within the realm of competitive performance and cultural specificities—even if viewed from the opposite angle. Miguel Vale de Almeida's critique of Lusotropicalism, which he describes as a "positive reinterpretation" of historical processes rooted in extreme inequality, can similarly be applied here (ALMEIDA, 2004, p. 77). Lucas Coelho's engagement with Antropofagia through her political lens, without critically addressing its historical and cultural intricacies, fails to account for how the concept—much like Lusotropicalism—reinforces a narrative of national exceptionalism

The struggle, tension, and contradictory forces that Antropofagia represents as a cultural and philosophical stance cannot be easily disregarded; to do so risks stripping the term of the confrontational meaning it retains as part of Brazil's intellectual and artistic heritage. Rather than being a mere tool for transformation, antropofagia carries an inherent duality—one that Lucas Coelho leaves unexplored in her selective interpretation. The author herself admits, at the beginning of *Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso*, that the correlation between religion, Brazil, and anthropophagy causes her a "metaphysical tangle": "Continuo a achar que não há ateus no Brasil, mas eu própria já não serei a ateia que era quando escrevi essa crónica. Não por causa de deus, mas por causa do Brasil que vivi" (COELHO, 2019, p. 20).

Put simply, when logic falls short, Lucas Coelho falls prey to Brazilian intellectuals' self-descriptions and invites the reader to do the same. "Acreditemos na potência com que Caetano acredita nele mesmo" (COELHO, 2019, p. 20). I did not. I do think a big part of the link between the anthropophagic formula and the feeling of double consciousness that many Brazilians experience as a national allegory comes directly from the metaphors themselves. These metaphors, by celebrating both the local and the foreign, kind of create a tension—a sense of being stuck between identities—that runs through Brazilian culture as identity tactics. In Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma*, this duality is not a bold synthesis but rather a reminder of a fragmented identity, as if Brazilian modernity itself were an uneasy juxtaposition of incompatible parts.

This sentiment seems embedded in the anthropophagic ethos, which—though celebrated as an original Brazilian philosophy—reflects the complex, often conflicted self-awareness that comes from internalizing the foreign while struggling to assert an indigenous identity. I do believe that *Saint* Oswald de Andrade, attired as a shaman, is simply the poet Oswald de Andrade taking over garments and symbols that do not belong to his cultural heritage. His prophetic Indianism seems to me a sort of "luxury belief"[6] that is only plausible if one is the kind of person who never leaves the urban wonder of São Paulo to live in the backlands of the Northern territories.

Moreover, the extensive body of work employing terms like "hybridization" and "interaction," among others, demonstrates that the term "Antropofagia" is not indispensable for describing the intercultural encounters or the cultural continuities that took place in Brazil—let alone for emphasizing the significance of anti-authoritarian and libertarian perspectives. Take Macunaíma, for instance: I see no compelling reason to shoehorn this extraordinary work into the anthropophagic framework. Nor, it seems, did its author, Mário de Andrade. I much prefer Guimarães Rosa's Iauaretê to the Manifesto Antropófago, and I am inclined to believe that Manoel de Barros creates more

[6]In his concept of "luxury beliefs," Rob Henderson refers to certain social and political stances that serve as status symbols among the affluent. These beliefs, he argues, allow the upper class to signal virtue and progressive values without facing the potential negative impacts of such ideas, which often disproportionately affect those in less privileged circumstances.

revolutionary forms than any of the verbivocovisual objects that the Concretists, after indoctrinating the youth of *Tropicália ou Panis et circencis* with Oswald's system, dreamed up to annex the world in a general cathartic devouring that would assert Brazil's competitiveness in the Industrial-Age world.

However, it never occurs to the author of *Cinco Voltas na Bahia* that anthropophagic formula, as an agonistic practice, has largely become a set of clichés and institutional phrases, and that it is not a better designation for the desire to be another than the various words that other people have used for the same effect. Furthermore, the anti-colonialist position of Oswald de Andrade and the brothers Campos (unlike those of Mário de Andrade, João Guimarães Rosa, or Manoel de Barros) is grounded on the non-transparent rhetoric to carry out a *translatio imperii* from Europe to South America, which, let us agree, should alert those who, like Lucas Coelho, insist on stating that: "a minha praia, a minha pátria, é mais o antinacionalismo" (COELHO, 2019, p. 226).

As Eduardo Lourenço noted, it was against the colonial past, regarded as prehistoric, that the Brazilians defined themselves as Brazilians (LOURENÇO, 2014, p. 341). This, as Lourenço described, is Brazil's rejection of its Dr. Jekyll side, which it attributes to Portugal, whilst only displaying the anticolonial face of Mr. Hyde (LOURENÇO, 2014, p. 201). Lourenço further elaborates, stating that in the Brazilian imagination: "Cabral é uma espécie de extraterrestre, vindo de parte nenhuma, tocando nas costas brasileiras por acaso e logo sumido nas brumas da memória depois de cumprido o ocasional feito de ter contribuído para que o Brasil emergisse de um passado sem história" (LOURENÇO, 2014, p. 344).

It's understandable that many Brazilian academics and activists take pride in the idea of cultural cannibalism as a gateway to distinction, using it to highlight modes of being Brazilian and make sense of the country's complex historical development. They view it as an epistemological turn with significant consequences. However, Lucas Coelho needs to adopt a more critical perspective on its inherent limitations and potential pitfalls. While Oswald de Andrade's manifestos sound radical with their anticolonial rhetoric, they often obscure the more pragmatic, status-driven motivations behind them. As Ruy Castro discusses in *Metrópole à Beira-Mar*, the central issue is not just cultural resistance but the desire to elevate São Paulo in opposition to the cultural and political dominance of Rio de Janeiro.

By aligning too closely with a narrative deeply rooted in São Paulo's intellectual elite and its sociopolitical worldview, Lucas Coelho risks reinforcing a self-representation that, although seemingly inclusive, glosses over the systemic inequalities and regional rivalries embedded in Brazil's social fabric. This approach not only overlooks the historical role of Rio in shaping Brazilian identity, but it also risks reducing the cultural debate to a struggle for dominance between cities, rather than a broader reflection on the country's social and political disparities.

Moreover, this dynamic reflects a broader tendency in Brazilian scholarship and public discourse, where many intellectuals and political figures frame their positions within an anticolonial narrative. Even though this may seem empowering, it often masks the complex and multifaceted realities of Brazil's history—one shaped not only by European colonization at the expense of African and Indigenous communities but also by the historical domination of the South over the Northeast and North in the pursuit of modern development. A more critical awareness of how such narratives can either mask or reinforce structural inequities would deepen Coelho's interpretation and challenge the tendency to equate symbolic cannibalism with genuine cultural or social emancipation.

Coexistence of diversity

Enough with the criticisms—let's shift focus to the positive. There is much to admire in the works of Alexandra Lucas Coelho, particularly in the way they embody a public role and articulate emancipatory epistemologies in the present tense. While I personally feel that the vocabulary of cultural cannibalism somewhat clutters the narrative, this does not prevent me from recognizing and appreciating the significance of her purpose. As I've noted, her writing is a dynamic blend of autobiography, autoethnography, and vivid historical documentation, making it not only engaging but also a nuanced commentary on the complexities of Brazilian identity.

Lucas Coelho's narratives, especially *Deus-Dará*, stand out as essays of interpretation —autoethnographic meditations on Brazil, through the lens of a Portuguese woman experiencing the country. The intermingling of personal reflection with cultural analysis results in a rich, textured approach that illuminates the complexities of the South Atlantic. Her unique ability to convey the intricate relationships between people, history, and landscapes—through sensory experiences—adds layers of depth to her storytelling.

The author would probably be pretty upset with me if she heard me say this, but I can't help but feel that beneath the journalist, there isn't always a novelist. By this, I mean that her books seem to draw more from autobiography and autoethnography than from fictional imagination. However, this is also the source of one of the narrative's greatest strengths: a distinctive, almost universal quality. The combination of voices, perspectives, descriptions, and documents, all skillfully woven together, produces a richly polyphonic effect. This narrative technique—constantly shifting through intersections, overlaps, and transformations of viewpoints—infuses the storytelling with the fluidity and depth of lived experience.

In one of *Deus-dará*'s most quoted lines, Lucas Coelho warns that the narrator will be transatlantic—or not at all. Here, this term primarily reflects the expansion of subjectivity shaped by the intercultural transformations arising from the forced proximity of European, Amerindian, and African populations. *Deus-dará* takes the dynamics of coexistence with ontological seriousness. For the sake of truth, in the Luso-Afro-Brazilian context, I am not aware of any books that are more morphologically transatlantic—that is, more capable of applying the theoretical model that, through various logics, give a comprehensive account of the intercultural encounters between Portugal, Africa, and Brazil to concrete life. Nor am I aware of any that are more capable of reactivating, in a narrative without academic pretensions, the genealogy of colonial Brazil, which, as Luís Filipe Alencastro explains, formed extraterritorially in the midst of the South Atlantic.

This idea is perfectly illustrated in the pages of *Cinco Voltas na Bahia* and *Deus-dará*. As Margarida Rendeiro (2024, p. 135) elucidates, the significance of *Deus-dará* lies in its ability to uncover the genealogical ties between Portugal and Brazil within the long history of Portuguese colonialism, presenting an engaged and critical perspective on collective memory narratives. This perspective confronts the collective discomfort of recognizing ourselves as implicated subjects in this history and highlights a widespread state of denial in Portugal, where selective erasures continue to shape memory narratives.

As a counterpoint to the critiques that I made earlier, this aspect strikes me as a significant strength. Indeed, we cannot fully understand contemporary Brazil, nor certain aspects of Portugal, without returning to the sixteenth century and integrating that past into our present. The way the present is continuously reshaped by layers of the past—recontextualizing and reassembling the chain of events that have formed the present—is the most depolarizing aspect of Alexandra Lucas Coelho's transatlantic thought.

This, of course, does not diminish the ethical-political reflections of Lucas Coelho's work, which stages a special competence to traverse boundaries while preserving the dignity of individual modes of existence. Lucas Coelho seamlessly weaves together testimonies, biographies, landscapes, and time periods, engineering them into a transnational and intercultural historical hub that respects differences, expands perspectives and informs transformational action.

In books like Cinco Voltas na Bahia and Deus-Dará, Lucas Coelho brings new life to the interconnected histories of the South Atlantic, giving readers the means to better understand the present by looking to the past. Thus, these books provide tools and roadmaps to public engagement, As Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" notion suggests, the shared cultural and historical experiences between these regions are not isolated, but rather a network of exchanges that continue to shape contemporary identities and histories. That is what Alexandra Lucas Coelho does, crossing and blurring the lines between testimonies, biographies, landscapes, ideas, and times.

By combining two heuristic systems—permanent objects and ephemeral objects—in light of a historical perspective and a comparative context, she draws attention to certain objects and illuminates their function in the intercultural network. One of her goals—fully achieved—is to uproot the reader from their provincialism. Lucas Coelho draws connections between diverse elements, offering us the historical context necessary to better understand the present and envision possible paths for the future. Following Paul Gilroy's (1993) suggestion that the history of the Black Atlantic should be thought of as a political and cultural unit crossing both shores of the Atlantic, Lucas Coelho uses travel accounts to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural historical perspective.

Bahia as path-making

In *Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso*, Lucas Coelho creates a liminal space around the idea that Bahia was the first meeting point between Portugal and Brazil, making it a pivotal location in the transatlantic triangle. That said, I don't think the book would lose much without its reliance on metaphors drawn from Anthropophagy. These metaphors, in a way, attempt to project the identity of modernist and tropicalist intellectuals from São Paulo onto the whole of Brazilian territory. This approach often frames Bahia through hegemonic cultural ideals and discursive practices, overshadowing its own unique historical and cultural specificities.

The old philosophical notion of perspectivism, Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation, and Mary Louise Pratt's idea of the "contact zone" all offer fertile ways of thinking about Bahia—not as an emblem of national exceptionality, but as a porous site of entanglements, a supranational zone where cultures collide, overlap, and remake one another. Among these, Pratt's "contact zone" is particularly useful: it foregrounds the friction of encounter, and the unstable forms that emerge when cultural worlds rub against each other without ever fully merging. Bahia, in this sense, is less a metaphor for harmonious diversity than a palimpsest of unfinished negotiations—layered, contested, and always in motion. This framing sidesteps the national bias often embedded in interpretations like anthropophagy, which—despite its radical aesthetic posture—frequently ends up reinforcing a sense of Brazilian exceptionalism rather than challenging it.

To give an example, let me focus for a moment on Diana Taylor's concepts of "archive" and "repertoire," as applied in performance studies, to demonstrate how they offer a productive analytical tool for engaging with cultural dynamics. Taylor contrasts the archive, comprising tangible, enduring materials like texts and artifacts, with the repertoire, which encompasses ephemeral, embodied practices such as performances, rituals, and social behaviors. These categories provide a nuanced approach to understanding how cultural

expressions are preserved, transformed, and transmitted across generations. By focusing on the repertoire's performative and living dimensions, we gain a richer understanding of how Bahia's cultural encounters are enacted, remembered, and reimagined, within and beyond the contact zone.

For Taylor, the repertoire is a non-archival transmission system that allows identities and memories to be consolidated without the presence of written documents (TAYLOR, 2003, p. XVIII). In *Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso*, Coelho revisits what, in the Luso-Afro-Brazilian context, is the archetypal transatlantic and colonial scene to call attention to the importance of changing our perspective in order to recognize and value the autoethnographic responses embedded in these encounters. This shift challenges the dominant narratives and asymmetries of power tied to the "Descoberta"—the moment when, at sunset on April 23, 1500, "um homem branco, de pé num batel, se achou diante de indígenas com água pelo peito. Ou vice-versa: indígenas com água pelo peito se acharam diante de um homem branco, de pé num batel" (COELHO, 2019, p. 33). By framing this foundational moment as a site of mutual recognition rather than unilateral discovery, Coelho emphasizes the need to rethink how such encounters are narrated, making room for the repertoire's role in preserving and transmitting marginalized perspectives outside of the written archive.

The historical memory of this scene unfolds along two intertwined yet often competing paths. On one hand, it is shaped by the internal logic of the archive—composed of written records, institutional documentation, and curated testimonies. On the other hand, it emerges through living memory transmitted via cultural performances —practices both idealized and silenced by dominant symbolic systems, such as Catholicism. Consider, for instance, the syncretism found in religion, music, or dance, where marginalized histories and identities persist, adapt, and challenge the hegemonic narrative.

Cinco Voltas na Bahia reenacts the friction of encounters through a repertoire of contemporary cultural and performative practices, whose main function is to emphasize that "o mundo não acaba de se cruzar" (COELHO, 2019, p. 89). In this account of Brazil, Bahia emerges as more than a geographical setting; it becomes a location that reshapes the terms and techniques of cultural assembly. By providing a space where colonial enterprises, labor diasporas, and decolonial actions intertwine, Bahia actively participates in a transnational dialogue that bridges histories and geographies, embodying the ongoing negotiations and resistances that define cultural memory.

The theoretical backbone of this exploration draws from Afro-diasporic and visuality studies, offering critical tools to unpack these narratives within broader social, historical, and cultural dynamics. In this framework, visual and sonic registers do not merely illustrate identity. The sonic landscape of the book is intricately shaped by the music of

Caetano Veloso, whose work functions as a resonant medium for articulating the entanglements of transatlantic deep histories, affective memory, and cultural reparation. As Lucas Coelho herself notes:

> Desde que comecei a ouvir Caetano, a Bahia pareceu-me um lugar prodigioso, como os que imaginamos quando começamos a ler livros. Ele foi fazendo dela um lugar dos lugares, o lugar de Caymmi, de Jorge Amado, de João Gilberto, de Glauber Rocha. O lugar de Gil, de Gal, de Bethânia. O lugar de Mabel, Rodrigo, Roberto, Clara, Irene, Nicinha, irmãos de sangue ou criação. O lugar de seu Zezinho e dona Canô, pai e mãe. Mas também dos filhos Moreno, Zeca e Tom, todos nascidos na Bahia" (COELHO, 2019, p. 21).

This seemingly modest list of names associated with Caetano Veloso is anything but incidental: it accumulates layers of belonging and resonance, mapping Bahia as a palimpsest of Afro-Atlantic kinship, political resistance, and aesthetic formation. Rather than narrating Bahia through colonial frameworks of discovery or conquest, Coelho evokes it as a site of continuous intercultural performance—a living archive of voice, gesture, and relational presence.

Viewed through this lens, Alexandra Lucas Coelho's works become more than literary endeavors; they emerge as ambitious attempts to channel a cultural and political repertoire that decenters textual authority, privileging embodied memory, orality, and the non-linear temporalities of sound and presence. In so doing, they open a space where historical trauma and cultural reinvention can coexist—not as resolved tensions, but as a dynamic field of negotiation.

In doing so, Lucas Coelho draws on an archive that resists confinement within the ethnic absolutism of the victors. Her critical edge comes from the friction between the polished, idealized narratives of the past and the inconvenient, suppressed truths lying beneath them—truths that await the attention of newly mobilized subjects attuned to their social positions, personal histories, and performative identities. "Destes séculos de «expansão marítima»", stresses, "o que mais falta trazer ao de cima são os mundos ameríndios, africanos, orientais arrasados, virados do avesso, ou levados para o outro lado do mar, como aconteceu na Bahia" (COELHO, 2019, p. 258).

By the end of Cinco Voltas, one passage makes it crystal clear: Lucas Coelho's project is about shedding light on the neglected and forgotten corners of history while taking jabs at the Eurocentric narratives that still have society in a bit of a chokehold. In a word, it is a book about the abundance of the social and political imaginaries of the subaltern and the possibilities of reparation: "O mar que trouxe as invasões, os escravos, também leva o seu antídoto: viajar para descobrir que o outro nos descobre, que não há bárbaros" (COELHO, 2019, p. 258).

Let's bring it full circle by revisiting the iconic countercultural supergroup Doces Bárbaros, formed in 1976 by Gilberto Gil, Gal Costa, Caetano Veloso, and Maria Bethânia. They're the perfect embodiment of the cannibalistic energy coursing through *Cinco Voltas na Bahia e um Beijo para Caetano Veloso*. This legendary band captures exactly what Lucas Coelho delivers: a fearless understanding of cultural cannibalism as a bold and powerful decolonial lens: "Que avesso dos impérios, esses quatro mestiços proclamando-se Doces Bárbaros. Eles, na margem esquerda do Atlântico, frutos prodigiosos de uma história de violência, dela extraindo o futuro. Faz parecer 2019 passado de 1976" (COELHO, 2019, p. 260).

That said, my purpose here has never been to propose an alternative to Antropofagia, nor do I believe such a counter-framework is necessary. I also make no claim to be the first to raise these critiques—on the contrary, they echo and build upon concerns voiced by others. My aim is simply to revisit these tensions considering how the metaphor continues to circulate today, often in ways that obscure the very contradictions it was once meant to expose. Just as Lucas Coelho treats the concept as settled, I approach its paradoxes not with the intent to resolve or replace them, but to dwell in their discomfort. What I advocate, rather, is a more deliberate skepticism toward the inward-looking nationalism that cultural cannibalism reinforces all too easily under the guise of hybridity. Brazil is far more than the dramatic and enthusiastic slogans of Antropofagia, which is not always in dialectical opposition to the oppressive dimensions of capitalist society.

If we are to embrace the metaphor of devouring, then we must also ask: who is doing the eating, and who is being eaten? While cultural cannibalism often suggests a one-way process of appropriation or assimilation, the historical relationship between Brazil and its colonizers has always been marked by mutual influence—a dynamic of exchange rather than unilateral consumption. As with Brazil, there is no persuasive ethnic-based interpretation of Portugal. Since the seminal works of Alexandre Herculano, most historians have agreed that Portugal's emergence as an independent nation was not the result of a single defining moment, but rather the outcome of a deliberate process of political consolidation. This process can be traced back to the twelfth century, when the young Afonso Henriques began asserting his autonomy from León and Castile, envisioning a distinct political destiny and ultimately laying the foundations for what would become the Kingdom of Portugal. (RAMOS, 2009, pp. 14-47).

Imagining Brazil's *national distinctiveness* otherwise is not different from imagining Portugal's *national distinctiveness* otherwise. As Eduardo Lourenço has pointed, without having been "Brazilian," the Portuguese would not be what they are today" (LOURENÇO, 2014, p. 344). In his characteristically poetic—at times almost prophetic—style, Lourenço captures the complex, mutually transformative relationship between Brazil and its former colonizer: a dynamic that resists simplified narratives and reveals how Brazil's very existence has profoundly shaped not only its own identity, but also that of Portugal.

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