

The one who is *not* and *cannot* in Alain Mabanckou's *African Psycho*

Tendayi Sithole
Department of Political Sciences
University of South Africa
sitholet@unisa.ac.za

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to examine the protagonist and narrator Grégoire Nokabamayo in Alain Mabanckou's epic novel *African Psycho*. This is of interest in that this character is preoccupied by murderous lust and a desire to be like his idol, Angualima, who is known through his murderous legends and myths. The contention of this article is that Grégoire's desire to be like his idol is something that borders on what is not and cannot be. This is because, as a petty criminal, Grégoire cannot ascend to the status that will make an impression on Angualima. This is mainly because his murderous desires are in the form of a psychic struggle which paralyses the actualisation of any deeds that will impress Angualima. Thus, what fixates Grégoire is that he is the subject of failure which results in him being unable to mimic Angualima.

Keywords:

psychopath, psycho-sexual racism, dangerous individual, narcissism, pathologification, mimicry

Introduction

Who is the psycho in the *African Psycho* (2007), the epic novel by Alain Mabanckou? Is it Grégoire Nakobamayo (the narrator and protagonist) or is it Angualima (Grégoire's sadistic and murderous idol)? To answer this question is not the purpose here, but rather to unpack the realm through which the world of violence is meditated. It is clear in the novel that much of the violence is that which resides in the imagination of Grégoire while the other is that with which Grégoire wants to engage as a way to mimic Angualima. To have a lust for murder has proven to be something proverbial and that which cannot be achieved; it is something that has been proven to be unreal and has turned into utter failure. This is what defines Grégoire as the one who is not and cannot be his idol Angualima. Owing to the fact that murder is something that can bring him closer to his idol, he is caught in a neurotic state of abyss, to live inside his head and live a lie. Grégoire wants to be like Angualima to the extent that he is 'inside him'—the illusion at its best.

In this article, the setting of *African Psycho* is regarded as a place of placelessness; a continent that is fixated in negative stereotypes. The conception of the dangerous individual as articulated by Michel Foucault is examined in order to ascertain whether it is applicable

to Grégoire and Angualima. This article seeks to also understand whether the figure of the dangerous individual is indeed the author of the crime. Also, the conception of the illusive narcissist self, which is the persona that Grégoire assumes, will be engaged and will serve as justification for holding society in contempt. Linked to this, the article will apply the conception of pathologification specifically to crime committed against society. Also, the controversial and sensitive issue of psycho-sexual racism is broached, to show the way in which myths are perpetrated even though they are not intentionally racist in Grégoire's narrative. In this article, the idea of mimicry of the Other is examined and the affirmed position in this article is that mimicry produces a sense of the unreal. Lastly, the conception of failure is something that is innate to Grégoire; he fails because he is a failure.

A place of placelessness

According to Mudimbe (1994, p. 9.), 'Africa is a "refused continent" and a place of negative extremes'. Africa is a place of negatives and this quote renders it without form or essence. African is both at the levels of the imaginary and the real. The accounts given on the continent are often seen as unreal even though they are real, and vice versa. This means that the real and the fictional collapse into each other. As a place of negative extremes, it is rendered unworthy but to be dramatised to the extent of the abyss. In short, it is a place worth describing but not explaining—thus, it is reduced to a mere abstraction of things gone wrong. The setting of the novel is not clearly stated, although there are some clues given. Messier (2011) argues that the setting for *African Psycho* is an undisclosed location in Africa. It could be the Democratic Republic of Congo or maybe Congo-Brazzaville, but this is not stated in the novel except for Grégoire's reference to what he calls 'a country over there'. Therefore, the setting for *African Psycho* is in a place called *He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot*, a shanty town and wretched ghetto somewhere in Africa. This is the postcolonial place which is the colonial scrap. The lack of exact detail and specificity of the place reduces it to the level of peripheral description—where to be known or not is a fudged activity—elision of a place from its essence thus rendering it a place of placelessness. The setting of *African Psycho* is what it is—an abstraction of that thing caught in the negative extremes. In the form that it takes, it is a placeless place—that is, the essence of the place devoid of any sense of signification.

It needs to be highlighted that the subversion of the narrative is not that of portraying Africa in an afro-pessimist sense of the Eurocentric trope, but to turn what is generally accepted of Africa upside down. Apart from the placeless place being the setting of the novel, that is, *He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot*, what needs to be understood as well is the place of Grégoire in the world. Being the alienated subject through the stigma of being abandoned and assuming the label of being 'a picked up child', Grégoire assumes the place of placelessness. This is, of course, being born and/or bred outside the unit called family and the result being orphaned and poor. The absence of parents means that Grégoire's place is placelessness. It is that of being the outcast of society.

We learnt that Grégoire is a product of a country's foster care system and has suffered a great deal of arrested development. The pathos of Grégoire's upbringing is palpable, and thus we expect drama

and conflict as a result (Walsh 2009, p.154).

This stigmatisation is what has preoccupied Grégoire as the product of social misalignments—‘a picked up child’. To be a picked up child is to be an outcast and not to have a place in the family as a social formation. It is to be out of place even in the realm of being. Grégoire shares, for example, the being in isolation which is something that characterises the psychopath. That is, the place of the psychopath is the place of placelessness, in that such a figure of the human is regarded as not part of society, but a menace. To be a menace to society means that the psychopath should be eliminated from that society. However, in the case of the picked up child, the one who is regarded as not part of society is the one who is always at the receiving end of the stigma. Contrary to the psychopath, the picked up child is not a menace to society. But then, it is most likely if not probable that the picked up child can become a psychopath. Of course, this is not to say that if one is a picked up child he or she will be a psychopath. There are always exceptions. As regards Grégoire, however, it is not clear whether as a picked up child he is a psychopath even though he is neurotic and has murderous lust which he can fulfil.

Furthermore, it is essential to note that the idea of placelessness also applies to the realm of the criminal world. Grégoire is a petty criminal but he aspires to be a renowned criminal like Anguolima. But then, he is placeless for he cannot engage in crime to Anguolima’s proportional excess—and what preoccupies him is his fantasy of having a place in Anguolima’s world. What remains, and something which Anguolima affirms, is the placelessness of Grégoire. To be in that world demands that the crimes (which are murderous in nature) should have been something that Grégoire did to assume a place in Anguolima’s world. Even though Grégoire says ‘it is good that my idol is within me, this reassures me, gives me wings and comforts me with the idea that the gesture I am about to perform in a few hours interest him as well ...’ (Mabanckou 2007, p. 127). This clearly shows that the idea of place is at the imaginary level and the actual reality is that Grégoire is occupying placelessness.

Who then is the dangerous individual?

The figure of the dangerous individual is the one who poses a danger to the entire society. The figure of menace is not supposed to be in the realm of the society, but barred from it, if not entirely eliminated from it. The dangerous individual is limitedly approached from the figure of the criminal, the one who commits the crimes that breakdown the social fibre and spreads fear, terror and destruction. This is the figure that Foucault (1990:125) grappled with, the one who seems to be proud of his crimes. The sense of being proud is shown through the maintenance of silence, the gesture of not wanting to take responsibility or answer to the crimes committed against the public. ‘The accused hardly spoke at all’ (Foucault 1990:125). This means, in facing the public and its judicial power, he responds in silence. It is in this interesting account that the power of silence is detailed by Foucault thus:

'Have you tried to reflect upon your case?'

Silence.

'Why, at twenty-two of age, do such violent urges overtake you? You must make an effort to [analy s]e yourself. You are the one who has the key to your own actions. Explain yourself'.

Silence.

'Would you do it again?'

Silence.

'Then a juror took over and cried out, "For heaven's sake, defend yourself!"

It is clear from this that silence speaks. As a matter of response it shows that the accused holds the court in contempt and reveals himself as not a normal person who will try to explain his actions. The crying out of the juror emerges from the frustration that silence is not a way to respond and it indicates the power the accused possesses. What is important for the juror is that silence should not exist at all; the accused must answer to his crimes. For there to be a state of completeness, there needs to be what Foucault calls 'supplementary material' which is a confession, testimony, evidence and so on from the accused. Silence could have not caused the fury of the jury if it were not a symbol of resisting power—and power which resides in the juridical. As a juridical subject, the accused is in contempt of court by keeping silent instead of answering for his crimes. The accused subverts the normativity of the court. 'Beyond admission, there must be confession, self-examination and explanation of oneself, revelation of what one is' (Foucault 1990, p. 126). This clearly shows that the accused facing his crimes assumes power and thereby asserts it through silence. Thus, this means that he does not give the court what it wants and he refuses to be subjected to its normalcy in him having to defend himself. In short, to be silent is to be powerful in the court. The judge and juror have some of their power taken away from them—that is, the court as the space of power is disempowered and this is made evident by the shouting of the juror, calling on the accused to defend himself. The act of refusing to give has on the opposite side of the one who is supposed to be given, a sense of dispossession. To be dispossessed is to be made to remain without. To be silent means that the the accused is withholding something from the court and this act gives him power—and also the absence of fear—that is, the court is a scary place having the power to impose a sentence and take away one's life. The life of the individual is under the law. The law runs supreme, but the detailed nature of the crimes is the secret of the dangerous individual.

In *African Psycho* (2007) it is clear that Angualima is a dangerous individual. As Grégoire notes, he is 'one of the most ingenious murderous we have ever known' (Mabanckou 2007, p. 39). In his swagger, arrogance and contempt in the excess of his crimes, he is someone that can be likened to Foucault's dangerous individual. Of course, Angualima was not arrested, he gave the police a tough time and they could not trace him—but then, he was finally killed. He was not even in a court setting, nor did he face a judge, having to answer for his crimes. The nature of his crimes qualifies him as a dangerous individual since his crimes are sadistic and cold-heartedly murderous. The manner in which he conducted his

crimes showed contempt for the judicial order, and that he had no regard for authority and thus did not abide by the law that governs the public.

The claim made by Grégoire that Aguualima went to the police station and stole all the guns, which left the police without guns, attests to the fact that he (Aguualima) never had to answer to any crimes. All crimes were his and it is not farfetched to assert that Anguualima would have reduced a court of law to a mere circus, ridiculing the judge and the juror. The legendary Aguualima's crimes as they are narrated by Grégoire are something that he himself cannot do. He strongly identifies with them, having idolised Anguualima, but paradoxically he is pathetic in that he always fails. So, the figure of the dangerous individual is something that Grégoire wants to become and he is not and cannot be. The figure of the dangerous individual is Anguualima, and Grégoire does not even come close to the one Foucault narrates. Being pathetic as he is (not advocating crime of course), he is just an elusive narcissist.

The illusive narcissist self

Although narcissism is at the level of the self, *qua* intrapersonal relation or engagement of its expression is directed to others, more so in the societal realm, it is heavily clouded by the conception of the omnipotence of the self. As Fine (1986) notes, narcissism is brought about by too much individualism of the self. For Alcorn (1994, p. 14), '[t]he self thus takes internal structure, its being, its emotions, fears, and motivations, from its interaction with others in its world'. It is the false sense of the self in that the self adjusts itself in response to situations that seem to bear weight on it or those it perceives as weak in order to heighten the very formation of the importance of the self. In *African Psycho*, narcissism is what Grégoire displays and it is the manner in which the excess of self-love and the erotic desire of the self is projected in a manner that shows contempt for society. It is the retreat of the self to the self and away from society due to disappointment in or hate for others in society. Grégoire holds society in contempt for the very reason of making himself the only component of *He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-an-Idiot* and being typical of being a narcissist that it is only himself that matters, while others do not. In projecting narcissistic tendencies, the self wants to be held in high regard by the very same society it holds in contempt. The self and its meaning of the external world signify the exaggeration that is beyond measure.

Grégoire, as Fine notes (1986, p. 36), 'is an individual fixated at the narcissistic stage'. The self is elevated above others—it is the self-for-itself. Narcissism crudely means the self-without-others. It is clear that narcissism is relevant to that which borders on the level of sanity and insanity—both in different and fluctuating degrees. But in its functionality as something that demands consistency to that which it holds into contempt—that is, society should act and react in accordance with the narcissistic projection in order to keep the ego well intact. As Alcorn (1994, p. 15) states, 'the ego must cachet itself and must have itself as the object of its own aspirations'. This then explains the egotistical nature of Grégoire and his idol Anguualima. If society does not maintain this consistency, there

will be disturbance of the self-constitution of the narcissist through cognitive dissonance where the psychic structure fractures. This fracture essentially means that the self-potency of the narcissist is challenged and is rendered impotent.

It is important to make reference to the dangerous individual Foucault grappled with to suggest that the silence that was maintained during the court proceedings conveyed a contempt of court and society at large. This contempt is narcissism in the sense that the accused saw himself as more important than the rest. This even, of course, brings together the narcissistic self and the psychopath and in so doing it shows the justification of the deeds and not them being accounted for. So then, it is clear that the stance of the accused is that of being immune from his actions. This then shows that to be a narcissist is to be egotistic and to be filled with a sense of entitlement. It is to have a sense of the self that is untouchable and immune from any other form of accountability. The world of the narcissist, the one which Grégoire inhabits, is the world of delusions and lies.

For Grégoire, only the subject of the criminal has experience of the motives and actions that inform the criminal deeds. Grégoire appears here to have contempt even for the scientific milieu which appears to have more expertise in terms of explaining the phenomenon of the psycho-criminal character. The stance he takes suggests that only the criminal can explain his or her deeds. Here the issue of interiority and exteriority as diametrically opposed positions comes in, in which the exterior cannot explain the interior on the basis that it is not in the interior. 'I have my doubts about theories claiming to explain the behavio[u]r of people like me as the result of a disturbed past, a corrupted youth' (Mabanckou 2007, p. 29).

'People talk and have no clue on how far are they from reality!' (Mabanckou 2007, p. 29). Grégoire derides psychologists, psychiatrists and criminologists for claiming to understand crime and having committed none of it. It then means that the understanding of crime, as Grégoire suggests, is known only to those who commit crime. The narcissistic impulses of Grégoire makes him attach too much importance to crime and to even claim that '[e] very criminal has his [sic] pride' (Mabanckou 2007: 100). 'I felt as if I were stripping myself naked, allowing a person who was heavy with sins to come soil my holy place' (Mabanckou 2007: 118). This shows that narcissism, which is the false sense of the self, can lead to impulses that can be a danger to society. Arguably, it can produce hate in that the impulses aim to negate society for the fixated individual self to remain intact.

Narcissism creates a paranoiac against the society. Not only is that narcissism negative—it comes with an element of enjoyment too. As Fine (1986) argues, narcissism can be enjoyment at the level of the impulse. This also means that it can even prevent the element of suffering. It is both the self and the society in which the element of narcissism can arise, and it is excess to the extent of being pathological. As Fine (1986, p. 71) opines, 'the surface of narcissism covers up the inner states of despair and rage'. The mode of living and the self are exaggerated to the level of self-aggrandisement. For Dutton (2012), emotion was irrelevant to psychopaths. Dutton argues that they have traits such as having a sense of self-worth, persuasiveness, superficial charm, ruthlessness, lack of remorse and a high sense of manipulation. They lack remorse like the dangerous individual in Fou-

cault who showed contempt in court by not having regard for the ‘social, moral or legal consequences of their actions’ (Dutton 2012, p.8).

Psychopathy, in other words, is a composite disorder consisting of multiple, interrelated components which range discretely and independently along a number of different spectra: interpersonal, emotional, lifestyle and antisocial—a witch’s brew of personality offcuts (Dutton 2012, p. 53).

‘Narcissism thus emerges as a form of desire in which the ego is willing to entertain change as a movement toward that ever mythical “greater being”’ (Alcorn 1994, p. 15). This is a case in point for Grégoire in that his ego is expressed by the monologue he has with himself and always being alone is the very thing that makes him change. The change he makes is to be like his idol. He does not want to be the way he is—that is, not having the record of killing and major crimes of his idol Anguoalima. To ensure that he remains alive beyond the mythical being his life consists of wanting to become something which he is not in reality.

Pathologification: crime against the society

Notoriety of the criminal subject can be understood on the basis of pathologification and having a sense of being a criminal in society. The criminal subject can have a sense of justification in terms of his crimes against society. In this sense, the self assumes a form of self-righteousness and the criminal subject leads to ‘the manufacture of a particular personality’ (Marshall 1999, p. 275). As Marshall notes, this is in a form of play of personality, the societal organisation of the self and the establishment of a societal order. If such a personality is that of a serial killer, then this creates, as Marshall points out, the figure that is against society and it can be a psychopath—that which has an affinity to evil. The manufacture of the personality that Grégoire wants is that of the psychopath—Anguoalima, who has been idolised to the point of being elevated to the status of the Great Master. ‘Anguoalima has his place in the pages of this mythical book, a foundational text for the manner in which we perceive the criminal being’ (Mabanckou 2007, p. 53). Grégoire narrates Anguoalima’s legend thus, ‘[v]ery quickly, Anguoalima became synonymous with murder, invisibility, theft, rape and with the ability to leave the police behind’ (Mabanckou 2007, p. 42). This means that, he was a criminal at large.

To be a criminal against society is to commit crime so as to correct the perceived wrongs of that society; even that stance correction is maligned as wrong. Such conditions mean that the psychopath is under the illusion that he (Grégoire in this case) corrects the wrongs of society, and that correction in itself is wrong, and nevertheless as something right to the psycho. To commit murder, for Grégoire, is seen and justified as right—to correct society as the ultimate end. The psychopath does not become such on their own. The matrix of societal relations and dynamics form part of their nature. As a result of this, the figure of the psychopath is a symptom and there is a psycho after a crime has been committed. If the psychopath is known after a crime, then who is the psychopath in *African Psycho*? Is it Grégoire or Anguoalima? The psychopath is referred to as such at the societal level. Since Grégoire is not known and he is taking us through his psychic space which is a

private realm (that which is not known by society) and him wanting to be like Anguoalima is he not the psychopath? Of course, to be a psychopath does not mean that one must be arrested by madness. Added to that, is it the psychopath who creates a crime or is it a crime which creates a psychopath?

Often, the motives of the psychopath remain obscure in relation to the crime that has been committed. It is clear that even for Grégoire, Anguoalima still is an enigma, his deviance and the manner in which his crimes are committed is something that is still narrated in awe. Grégoire as the 'picked up child' creates in him the sense of alienation from society which he is part of. As Marshall states, Grégoire is made to lack the social and to render the social meaningless. He emerges from society and commits a crime against the very society he is rooted in. Grégoire's loner status justifies the very basis; he is also alien to society which serves as a legitimate basis for loathing and acting criminal against this very society.

The crimes against society create a form of theatre in that they demand to be recognised and to create a hype which creates fear, anxiety and panic—a frenzied society. The psychopath is, at times, reduced to a caricature paradoxically affirming existence through the brutality of crime. This means that the psychopath is represented both as a mythical figure and also as real. Fear, societal panic, paranoia and hysteria are the psychic economy through which societal arrangements are disturbed. This allows the psychopath to reign over society at will through manipulation. The society that the psychopath fights against is thus the audience of a crime. The society is reduced to the level of the pathological. *African Psycho* details spectacles of a crime, the script, its setting and the audience, making everything theatrical in the manner in which Anguoalima's crimes are narrated. Even in the psyche of Grégoire though his fictive imagination—his desire and psychopath prove a clear context of theatre. 'The spectacle of the wounded body has always had its lurid attraction' (Federman et al. 2009, p. 36). Society is often concerned and ends up preoccupied by the coverage of the brutality of crime.

Theatrical violence creates a condition where the psychopath want to be in charge of the script and the ways in which the narrative is narrativised. The latter is rendered mere speculation and the space of wonder—and to propel interest or the whereabouts of the killer. The killer often uses the same modus operandi and at times leaves some traces as a form of signature to highlight the point that it is the same killer. This, of course, is often scripted upon the body of the victim. The societal consumption is the obsession with the crime itself and this is coupled with fear and hysteria. Since crime is also the inscription of crime upon the body, the body is put out there as the figure of excess. The body is brutalised in a way that it disciplines forthcoming victims and to make the figure of Anguoalima and that which Grégoire wants to be an embryonic, so to be something that is feared at all times by society. The psychopath is represented to society—the very unit which is being harmed—and curiously society wants to dissect the very same harm.

According to Finlay (2011), psychopaths are said to have a cognitive insensitivity to reason. Psychopaths might or might not realise that somebody does not consent to their acts but still continue with them. So, it means that they might know or not know—or rather, choose

to not know while they know. This means, as Finlay states, that they are not blind to some facts in the world which hold them morally accountable. Psychopaths emerge from society, which bounds them through the moral stand (particular and/or universal), psychopaths would rather choose to continue to break the moral code to the point of normalising this. This normalising is essential in that they choose to be deviants of society. According to Finlay, attention should be paid to two characteristics of psychopaths' judgements: (a) differential judgements where '[p]sychopath's judgements of moral right and wrong differ to normal people's normative perspectives on reason' (Finlay 2011, p. 128). (b) man-differentiated judgements where '[p]sychopaths judgements of moral right or wrong are based on their own normative perspectives on reason' (Finlay 2011, p. 128). Often in their own deliberation of committing crime against society, which they do not have any regard for, their narcissism prevails in that they claim to 'fix' the society that is 'broken'. On the moral side of the coin, they are right for the fact that they are morally wronged.

Therefore, when they try to make moral judgements in difference to the normative perspective of ordinary people [society], they often go wrong, and even when they are right they are often unable to identify the appropriate grounds for those judgements (Finlay 2011, p. 130).

The crime is committed against society in that psychopaths have strong affinity to it, and they are, often, on the wrong side of the moral coin. Anguualima's horrendous crimes are on the wrong side, and this is the same with Grégoire's aspirations, let alone his petty crimes. The position of society is one with moral weight, and it surpasses the maligned justifications of the psychopath whose claims are the banality of righting the wrongs in that society.

The *xxl thing* unveiled

As claimed by what Mudimbe (1994) refers to 'construct stereotypes'—Africans are put outside the realm of being human. They are primitives who are reduced to mere adjectives and more so, to things genital. This is clear in the way Grégoire dramatises the penis of his idol Anguualima as a gigantic thing, calling it an *XXXL Thing* and it being regarded as a fifth limb. This confirms the stereotypes that border on psycho-sexual racism which operates as the mobilising factor to render black men as sexual beasts. Psycho-sexual racism is nothing but a myth projected as reality. According to Messier (2011, p. 224), 'the Black male's oversized penis serves to perpetuate the stereotypes that Africans are only gifted in the areas that relate to primary instincts and physical capabilities, thus denying them the intellectual capacity to think'. As Marriot (2000, 25) puts it, 'his penis is, to push the point, on the outside of the civilised'. It is in these stereotypes that the penis is something that is oversized and coming out of anything.

According to Mercer (1994, p. 174), 'black male sexuality perceived as something different, excessive, Other'. Stereotype of blackness and what Marriot (2000) refers to as 'black types' is what Anguualima can be understood to be. In the manner that he is overdramatised he can be reduced to be 'imbecile, oversexed, criminal, murderous, feckless, rapacious ...' (Marriot 2000, viii). Grégoire's narrative seems to confirm the

psycho-sexual racism stereotypes and the way the character of Anguualima develops. Grégoire's fascination with Anguualima's penis fixes black men in the excess of sexual exploits which are preoccupied with the size of the penis and sexual prowess. The black man is seen as the figure of impulse, the amorous and things bestial. The representation of Anguualima's sexuality is not some form of idolisation (though to Grégoire this might be the case), it is, rather, dehumanisation par excellence. This representation is not at the level of the erotic, but bestiality at best. Anguualima, besides the excessive proportional description of other body parts—at the level of genitalia he is placed in the existential plane of things animal. In no way does Anguualima pass the normative inscription of the things human because he is the outcast of humanity. Grégoire states that Anguualima was not an ordinary human being, he gives an account of the journalist who claimed to have seen him and in the interview Anguualima was described as having two faces (one in the back and one in the front), four eyes, four ears, two mouths and 12 fingers. 'One mouth begins the sentence and the other one finishes it, trust me!' (Mabanckou 2007, p. 44). This is the account of the journalist providing a description of Anguualima. Besides these characteristics outside the human and being this monstrous, what predominates is the genitalia. This is something the journalist did not give the account of—the *XXL thing*. Thus, to be human, if Anguualima were to be one, he would be the one 'identified as a state of deranged and degenerate subject [who is reduced to] a site of complete sexual savagery' (Thomas 2007, p. 104).

By the mere fact of being barbaric as a rapist he does not come closer to any form of humanity. According to the racist imagination which projects the psycho-sexual stereotypes, the black body is a phobogenic object with the penis being the primal effect (Fanon 2008 [1952]). Affirming Fanon's position, More (2011, p. 15) states that psycho-sexual racism means that a black man is 'a phobogenic object to non-black people, a stimulus of anxiety and extreme fear'. This stems from the mythic construction of psycho-sexual racism that portrays 'the black male body as dangerous, both physically and sexually' (Tamara and Ratele 2011, 31). Fanon even goes further to state that the black man is his penis. The sexuality that is attributed to Anguualima is what Saillant (1995, 406) refers to as 'a wild rapacious and sometimes a sentimental adhesiveness'. The representation of Anguualima is not based on race per se, but in the realm of colonial fantasy it affirms racist stereotypes. Suffice it to say here that the representation of Anguualima by Grégoire is 'representation of difference'—that is, Grégoire as an idol is different from things human. But what still stands is that this amounts to animalism in Anguualima. In short, he is 'a derivative of the human being' (Gordon 1997, p. 120).

According to Gordon (1997), the penis of the black man, no matter its size, represents and poses a danger to the racist colonial fantasy. The penis spells danger precisely because it is a symbol of destruction. It is also important to understand the manner in which Grégoire details the size of Anguualima's penis—it is not that of a human nor is it that of an animal since there is no penis that is the size of the limb. The penis here is bestial in excess, it is 'on the outside of both the civic and aesthetic' (Marriot 2000, p. 25). Then it confirms that Anguualima outside his criminal acts is also cast outside humanity to be abhorred because of the size of his penis and the manner in which he uses it as a weapon. Anguo-

alima's XXL *thing* raises fear, since this is the tool that causes terror and the destruction of female bodies. He is known for brutally murdering and raping his female victims and then stuffing 25 Cuban cigars in their private parts. The body of the female is a site on which brutality is inscribed. Angualima debases such a body from any form of human subjectivity. Grégoire narrates thus 'he left twenty-five cigars in his female victims' *things*, and why not, yes, why not me, sure I didn't have any Cuban cigars, sure my *thing* was not as huge as my idol Angualima's ...' (Mabanckou 2007, p. 79).

Grégoire in his overdramatisation does not come out clear in terms of the level of identification with Angualima especially in his acts of rape, for that is something he does not desire through the entire novel. What seems to emerge is the fact that he has 'penis envy'—and for the mere fact that he is sexually impotent he does not in any way want to be like Angualima. This is important because desire seems not to have any sense of impulse—that is, something that Grégoire wants to be, but something he wholly gives Angualima credit for. It is at the sexual level that mis-identification occurs even though Grégoire does not in any way explicate this.

The XXL *thing* reduces Angualima to a clownish figure. His cognitive faculties are lobotomised and he is a brainless entity only potent at the level of the genitalia. The sensory nature of Angualima is that of a savage and, according to Thomas (2007, p. 107), he occupies 'the inferior half of the dichotomy of rational and sensory nature that grounds social order of coloni[s]ation'. Black men, as Angualima is represented in the colonial fantasy, have 'brains [that] are smaller than those of other races, this rendering them less intelligent but more highly sexed and aggressive' (More 2011, p. 17). Even in Grégoire's account, there is nothing that humanises Angualima; he is reduced to the level of the genitalia, something which eclipses his entire being and it adds to the nature of the criminal acts—him as a murderous rapist to be precise. Thus, his penis is the sum total of not only body parts, but the whole site of his abstracted humanity.

Grégoire is trapped in the colonial fantasy; even if representation were true what stands out is that he is engaged in what Mercer (1994) refers to as the 'fantasmatic emphasis' which borders on the sexual fetishisation of the Other. But different from psycho-sexual racists, Grégoire does not loathe Angualima, he embraces his whole criminal persona, his brutality, including the attribution of his XXL *thing*. In the juxtaposition of Grégoire and Angualima, the former is sexually impotent while the latter is potent. The preoccupation of the sexual fantasy of Grégoire and to transpose it into Angualima means that the murderous and rapist desires border on envy, as Grégoire is not and cannot be Angualima. In the workings of the colonial fantasy, the size of Angualima's penis is something that must be subject to castration because, as Mercer (1994, p. 185) states, it is 'the forbidden totem of colonial fantasy'. Psycho-sexual racism is 'colonial fantasy, oscillating between sexual ideali[s]ation of the racial other an anxiety in defence of the identity of the white male ego' (Mercer 1994, p. 177). To unveil psycho-sexual racism is to expose the colonial fantasy, which operates as something that reduces the figure of the black man to something animalistic. This is something that is affirmed by Grégoire, even though he is not aware that he is affirming the racist stereotypes.

On mimicry of the (un) real

To make sense of Angualima is to think of him as a split subject and at the same time the embodiment of one. That is to say, Angualima is both the real and the unreal in that he was alive and is notorious for his criminal deeds—excessive as they are. Angualima's murderous deeds elevated him to the status of an idol to Grégoire, who in his mind thinks that in doing the very same murderous deeds he will become a disciple. Grégoire wants to emerge as a subject and this is informed by the desire to mimic. He wants his criminal exploits to be like those of his master—the imaginary figure to the level of mythical and exaggerated proportions (Messier 2011). This makes Grégoire want to be like Angualima. According to Marshall (1999, p. 278), mimicry is 'to make and remake the self endlessly'. It is the act of undergoing psychotic violence, to deny the self and wanting to be the other, even to the point of negating the existence of the self.

In an attempt to impersonate Angualima, Grégoire calls a radio programme *Listeners Speak Out* and makes threats to give the impression that Angualima is still alive. Of course, this shows that Grégoire is living in a world of lies and deceit. The act of mimicry renders him lacking, someone who is fraught with pathological discourses which are overwhelming and overbearing, and delusions, lies and incongruences that do not allow for an authentic disclosure of being a subject (Messier 2011). The formation of a lacking subject is the very act of self-mutilation—that is, alienation par excellence. This means that Grégoire is an incomplete figure.

The very act of mimicry is a way to seek recognition. Mimicry is in itself the very act of seeking recognition as it is the *self as the other*. Grégoire is a fractured subject and to be fractured means that he 'is trapped in the shadow of an idealised Other' (Messier 2011, 232). It is here that Grégoire wants to be like Angualima, and to be himself is not the case in point. He mimics in the sense that he himself does not have any sense of self-worth and being worthy of being himself in his full right.

In many ways, his desire to emulate and please his idol is emblematic of the errancy of the desire for recognition in the dialectic between self and this Other who is 'realer than the real'. His attempts to mimic and seek validation from this 'Master' lead only to a series of failures, highlighting both his impotency and immaturity as a subject. Consequently, Grégoire's misguided desire leads to his overall failure as a differentiated self-consciousness (Messier 2011, pp. 232–3).

As Mudimbe (1994) notes, the figure of the 'savage' compels recognition as it is cast as negative. Of course, this is in no way the racial problematic feature in *African Psycho*, but what exists is the identification of the Other at the level of being a criminal subject. The criminal subject being Grégoire's obsession to be like his idol Angualima, which is something he is not and cannot be. Grégoire is the figure of would-be murderer, but this is something that can never be and to mimic his idol is the very thing that negates mimicry. It is caught in the interregnum between to kill or not to kill. When Grégoire gives the account of his idol, what comes to the fore is violence in its excessive proportions. While the psychic desire is to imitate his idol, what seems clear in the narrative is the failure to engage in the deeds of his idol. The sadistic impulses do not materialise, they

merely actualise themselves on the psychic level and they materialise into failure itself and, of course, a failure to kill.

Failure to be because of being not

Grégoire is himself a failure because he cannot attain the status that he wants; and cannot execute what preoccupies his fantasies. He fails to deliver that which would bring him closer to Anguualima. This means that he has failed to make the transition from being a petty criminal to a lusty murderous criminal. Aware of his need to enter the realm of Anguualima's league, this alas results in failure. This failure should be understood on the basis of committing his crimes inside his head and, in the end, failing. Aware of his failure, Grégoire still fails.

'So Germaine didn't come back last night' (Mabanckou 2007: 136). Time passed and she did come. This was the point where Grégoire claimed to be ready to kill Germaine. But he later found out that somebody has already killed Germaine in his place. He saw her body lying in the street, which meant that Grégoire did not feature in the deed he wanted to claim as his own. The old woman who was the prime witness to the crime described it as barbaric, recounting how Germaine was stabbed a couple of times. Although it was not Grégoire, he was audacious enough to claim the crime as his and to go to Anguualima to put such claims before him. While Grégoire was about to announce his pseudo victory, Anguualima told him that while he was hesitating someone came to him and committed the crime. Therefore, Grégoire's lie was exposed. Indeed, Grégoire himself said:

Two days. I've been going around circles! Am I ready? Have I acquired the determination that characteri[s]es a person who accomplishes an important deed? I no longer have a choice. I am face-to-face with myself. I can't go back. Nothing can stop me (Mabanckou 2007, p. 122).

This is the moment of hesitation which shows that talking precedes action. 'The man who dreams of becoming a killer ... will never be able to "conjugate" this verb' (Walsh 2009, 160). The amount of premeditation is excessive to the point that it creates paralysis. 'In *African Psycho*, premeditation equals procrastination. While commitment allegedly foreshadows the act, it actually foreshadows Grégoire's failure to commit the act' (Messier 2011, 210). Grégoire failed to kill and all the premeditation did not come to fruition. What came about was a botched operation—a failure. It is not the actual planning that takes place, but the moment when planning does not materialise into something concrete but is itself a failure. By making simulations and creating scenarios signifies failure. According to Walsh (2009, p. 156), 'Grégoire's bold intention to kill obtains its meaning and weight in the novel from the linking possibility that he will never be able to kill Germaine'. These are done with a sense of actuality in the realm of the psyche but they nevertheless take place in reality and they do eventually materialise into failure.

Strengthened by this last idea, one afternoon, after Germaine left, I went through simulation once again, not wanting to be clumsy when the time came. The mistakes of amateurism were a thing of the past, now was the time to be prepared, even if my first exercise were more discouraging than reassuring (Mabanckou 2007, p. 98).

Nevertheless, Grégoire is still caught in a state of indecision, and his desires are excessive to the point of making him to fail. That is, what remains is the desire, which is unproductive. This is clear when Grégoire states that '[n]o, I couldn't kill Germaine in my workshop' (Mabanckou 2007, p. 97). This hesitation is with regard to the place the crime was to take place. As Walsh (2009) states, what preoccupies Grégoire is 'a moment of self-doubt that borders on cliché'. Like any other typical failure, Grégoire blames everything, including himself. Committing the act of murder is something that lacks factuality. It exists on the imaginary level, where premeditation takes its toll, but also on the paralysis and as Messier (2011) puts it, the realisation is curtailed. Messier uses this failure to argue that Grégoire 'often gets lost in a sea of endless chatter and nonsense' (Messier 2011, p. 213). This can be linked to his failure to kill.

To decide whether to use a gun or a knife is a sign of hesitation. Added to this is Grégoire's uncertainty whether he will enjoy the media coverage in terms of the weapons he chooses to use. What seems obvious to Grégoire is that using a gun seems mundane compared to a knife where the intention of the murder is to disembowel Germaine. Grégoire even goes to the point of detesting guns and regards the use of guns as only being suitable for those wanting to commit suicide. Hesitation sets in when he turns to the gun again as a method of killing and visits a gun store.

The fact of having to register for a gun and giving away his identity is another point of hesitation—and at worse, discouragement. Seeking solace, Grégoire claims that Anguualima detested guns as a weapon of killing. Grégoire says that 'the Great Master had an aversion to these weapons. Because he thought they meant utter cowardice' (Mabanckou 2007, p. 108). The failure of Grégoire is legendary and he cannot be like Anguualima. Therefore, he is the one who is not and the one who cannot. This is clearly articulated by Messier (2011, p. 209) thus, '[b]ut Grégoire fails to kill Germaine, as he failed to kill Mater Fernades-Quinoa or 'The Girl in White', and ultimately, also fails as a character and as a fully reali[s]ed subject'.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is clear that *African Psycho* brings the realm of crime to bear in the narrative account of Grégoire. His persona is that of failure as he is frozen in the realm of being a petty criminal who cannot commit murder as the gesture that will appease his idol Anguualima. Who the psychopath is in *African Psycho* can be concluded as being both Anguualima and Grégoire, but both are at the extreme ends of the psychopathic spectrum. The figure of being a dangerous individual can be solely attributed to Anguualima precisely because he is a known menace to *He-Who-Drinks-Water-Is-An-Idiot*. This is something that Grégoire wants to become and the end result is that he is *not* and *cannot be*. Crudely, Grégoire is a failure because he cannot ascend to the state of being like Anguualima, let alone leaving a lasting impression. The psychic struggle which has led to a point of indecisiveness has rendered Grégoire a figure of fixity—he is what he is—a failure.

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