

JAGUARS AND SLAVES: EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTIONS OF
CANNIBALISM IN COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA

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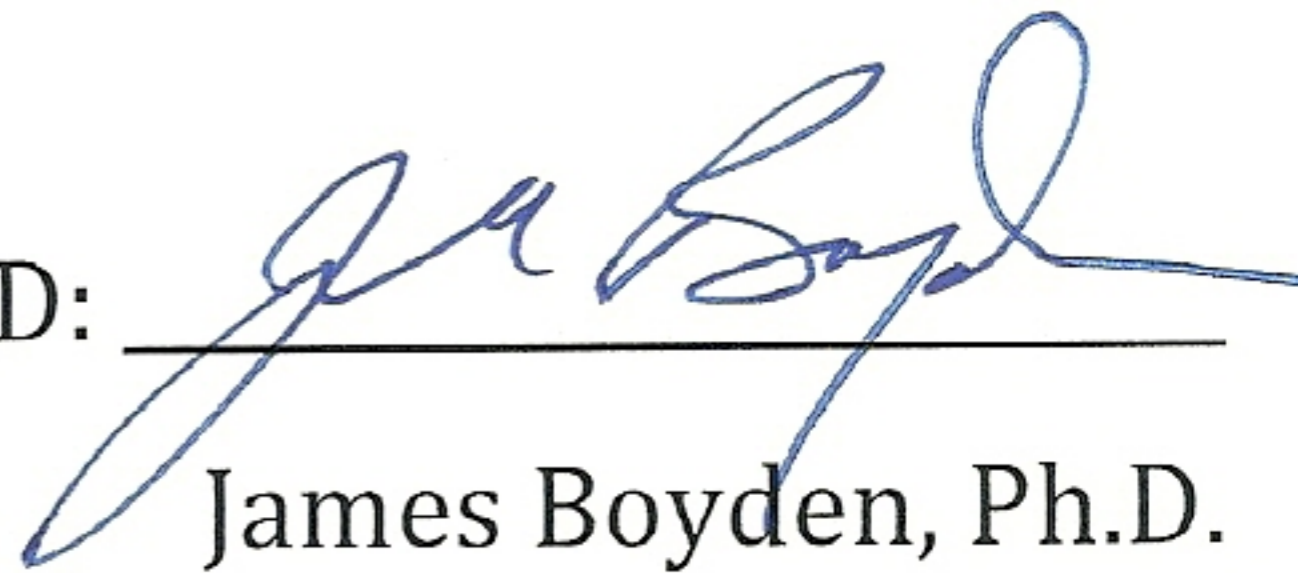
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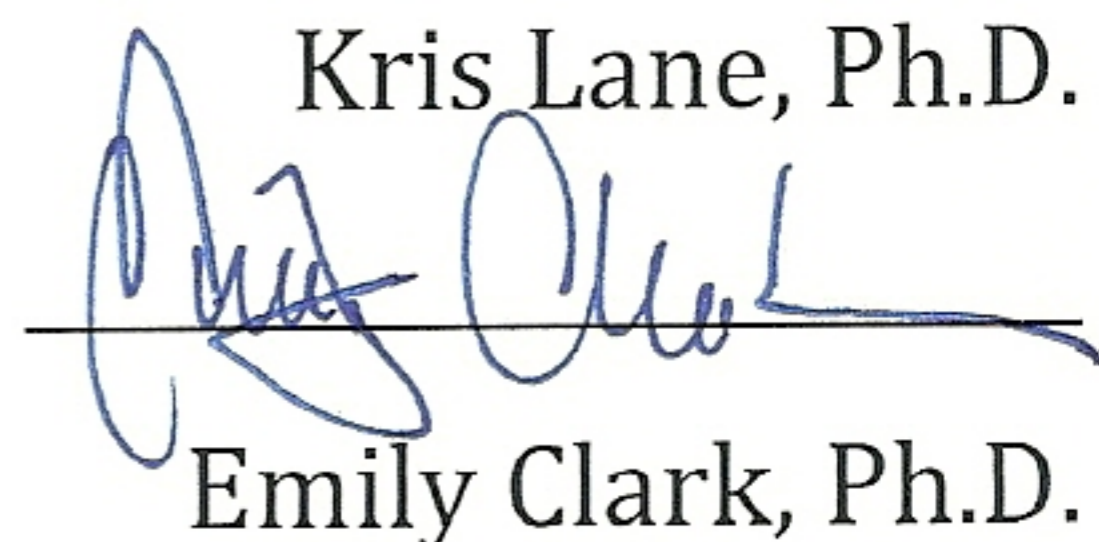
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Introduction

Cannibalism has always been associated with the very lowest forms of humanity. From ancient times to the modern day, cannibals have been described as savage, brutal, and bestial. Their choice to consume human flesh, usually a decision influenced by culture or religious belief, has historically been used against them. In Spanish America, stories of anthropophagy were used to justify the brutal forces of colonization and forced labor. Beginning in 1503, Queen Isabella signed a decree allowing conquistadors to enslave Island Caribs found practicing cannibalism in order to correct them. This was the first of many laws allowing settlers to enslave any Amerindians found to be practicing cannibalism, with new laws being enacted in 1511, 1533, and 1550.¹ Cannibals held a sort of fascination for Europeans of all nationalities. Although the practice was never at the forefront of complaints against the Indians, it was regularly used to make them seem less human, and therefore deserving of subjugation. Indians who did not eat human flesh were more likely to be found among Spanish allies, regardless of other factors that may have been termed “savage”. The figure of the cannibal was associated with all sorts of horrendous activities, from rape and murder² to devil worship.³ Being a cannibal was considered by Westerners to be a particularly strong mark of an animalistic nature, an indicator of physical inferiority. According to Neil Whitehead, during the colonial period, the cannibal played the same role that the “suicide bomber” does in today’s Western

¹ Kris Lane, “Punishing the Sea Wolf: Corsairs and Cannibals in the Early Modern Caribbean”, *New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 77 (2003): 204.

² *Ibid*, 203.

³ Fernando Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1994): 48.

society. The cannibal came to represent a violent and uncivilized society, a generalization that was applied to all Americans by the early modern Western media.⁴

The ways in which early modern Europeans constructed cannibals are important even in this day and age because they continue to be part of the Western narrative about Latin American cultures and about cannibals themselves. Our cultural understanding of cannibals is inherently and overwhelmingly negative. Even in modern times, Westerners associate cannibals with bestial natures and savage barbarism. Contemporary Westerners connect cannibalism either with a pathological criminality or with primitive, far away cultures not long for this world. This is regularly demonstrated in pop culture. In the 1970s, “cannibal porn” was a popular genre of film that reduced impoverished Latin Americans to rabid sexual beings. The men of these imagined rainforest communities were portrayed as indiscriminate sexual dynamos, interested only in ravishing innocent white women, who would then be gruesomely murdered and consumed along with their white male comrades. The women were portrayed as similarly sexual objects, seducing men of European descent and luring them into the traps set by their anthropophagite Indian lovers. The 1980 Italian film “Cannibal Holocaust” was particularly guilty of this sort of treatment, especially because the filmmakers chose to present it as a documentary. The actors were asked to disappear from public life for a year after the film was released so that it would actually appear as if they had died in the forests, and the controversy over the movie was so heated that director Ruggero Deodato was tried for murder.⁵

⁴ Hans Staden, *Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil*, ed. and trans. Neil L. Whitehead and Michael Harbsmeier (Durham, SC: Duke University Press, 2008): lx.

⁵ Ruggero Deodato (interviewee) (2003), from *In the Jungle: The Making of Cannibal Holocaust*(documentary) Italy: Alan Young Pictures.

To those of us reading this today, it seems likely that the notion that movies like “Cannibal Holocaust” could be portraying real people and true encounters with indigenous Americans appears preposterous. However, our current culture is inundated with references to primitive and animalistic cannibalism as well. The popular 2007 movie “Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End” contains a sequence in which the main character, played by Johnny Depp, finds himself captured by a violent cannibalistic Caribbean tribe, perhaps loosely based on the Island Caribs. The natives take the pirate hostage, planning to roast him on a spit and consume him. However, the clever white protagonist outsmarts them and makes himself their king/god. Furthermore, when Depp is “rescued” by his white comrades, all of them manage to outrun hundreds of natives. Finally, when the protagonists escape, the multitude of natives turns their attention and likely their appetites toward the dog, which also presumably escapes.⁶ These cannibals are depicted as simple, superstitious, and incompetent in the face of a greater European intelligence.

While this sort of depiction is offensive, it is also very obvious. However, the negative portrayal of cannibalism in American pop culture goes further than outright depictions of natives with bones through their noses. Ke\$ha, one of the most popular artists on today’s charts, in September 2010 released an entire album called “Cannibal”. The title song describes Ke\$ha as an animalistic female, ready to eat members of the opposite sex alive. The chorus openly construes cannibals with animals: “I eat boys up, breakfast and lunch/ Then when I’m thirsty I drink their blood/Carnivore, animal, I am a

⁶ *Pirates of the Caribbean 3: At World’s End*. Film. Directed by Gore Verbinski. San Diego, CA, Walt Disney Pictures, 2007.

cannibal/ I eat boys up, you better run”.⁷ She ends the song with a bark, underlining the equation cannibalism with bestial behavior.

Even in documentaries and travel shows, our fear and distrust of cannibals are naked and exposed. In a 2010 episode of the British travel show “An Idiot Abroad”, host Kyle Pilkington is sent to Peru to see Macchu Picchu. In attempt to frighten him and make him uncomfortable, the producers have him stay for several nights with an unnamed Amazonian “tribe”. The people are never identified by name, and the only piece of information given to Pilkington about their customs is that they once practiced cannibalism. Pilkington, the producer, and the cameraman proceed to joke about “being especially polite” unless he wants to end up as a meal.⁸ While this is certainly offensive and culturally insensitive, “An Idiot Abroad” could potentially be excused due to its comedic nature. Less acceptable is National Geographic Channel’s 2011 documentary “Eating With Cannibals”, looking at the formerly cannibalistic Biamei people in Papua New Guinea. The show’s host and self-proclaimed “adventurer”, Piers Gibbon attempts to drum up viewers’ shock and disgust for his subjects while trying to elicit some sort of shame or remorse in the descendants of Melanesian cannibals.⁹ Considering that the show’s premise is to reveal the human element of cannibalism, Gibbons’ commentary and questions are offensive and his analysis of his subjects is simplistic. His own distaste for the people he is speaking with is clear in his tone, manner, and choice of words.

These kinds of pop culture images show us that nothing has really changed about how cannibals are construed by people of European descent. Currently, cannibal cultures

⁷ Kesha Rose Sebert (Ke\$ha). Song. “Cannibal”, in *Cannibal* (Conway Production Studios: Hollywood, California, 2010), chorus.

⁸ “Peru”, *An Idiot Abroad*, Mentorn Media, 2010.

⁹ “Eating with Cannibals”, National Geographic Channel, 2011.

still exist in parts of the world, particularly in the Pacific. While the practice is perhaps not the healthiest of diets (sometimes leading to diseases like kuru¹⁰), today we recognize that the choice to engage in cannibalism does not make someone less than human. This realization should lead us to rethink our perceptions of different cultures throughout the world. To do so, we must examine the origins of these perceptions. This paper examines how and why Europeans constructed cannibals in the way that they did and how these constructions affected the ways in which cannibals were treated in the colonial period. This paper is less about cannibalism itself than about Western perceptions of it.

Much has already been written concerning the ways that Europeans exaggerated reports of cannibalism in the Americas and used that accusation to further their own interests. William Arens' controversial book *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* sparked debate concerning how seriously we take early modern accusations of cannibalism today and questioned whether or not the practice even occurred in Latin America at all.¹¹ While his work has largely been discredited, Arens paved the way for studying how cannibalism was used in a colonial framework. Neil Whitehead studied cannibalism and slavery in South America and the Caribbean in detail, focusing on how the Spanish and Portuguese used allegations of cannibalism to enslave native peoples when it benefited them and how native peoples learned to use the allegation to their own advantage.¹² However, very little analysis has been done of the European perception of cannibalism. Frank Lestringant's fantastic book *Cannibals: The*

¹⁰ Shirley Lindenbaum, "Cannibalism, Kuru, and Anthropology", *Folio Neuropathologica/ Association of Polish Neuropathologists and Medical Research Center, Polish Academy of Sciences* 47 (2009).

¹¹ William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

¹² Neil L. Whitehead, "Indigenous Slavery in South America, 1492-1820," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, ed. David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne studies French perceptions of the cannibal, linking their beliefs concerning anthropophagy to French historical and cultural memory.¹³ Lestringant was the first to tie French perceptions of cannibalism to religion and the religious wars, which the French were involved in during their early contact with cannibals, but he did not connect these perceptions to the ways that the French interacted with cannibals within the colonial framework. Furthermore, he did not tie this to a larger European perspective. This paper seeks to show how the French and the Iberians in particular used familiar tropes to construct an image of cannibals that suited their needs. The images of the cannibal that emerged from these tropes were very different and these were the images that governed how different nations dealt with cannibals in their New World territories.

Mutable Bodies and Religious Belief in Early Modern Europe

Diet was a considerable concern in the early modern European world. Health and wellness were intricately connected to what was being ingested and the environment in which it was consumed. Based on the Galenic theories of medicine, which were reintroduced into medical thought in the Renaissance, physicians believed it was necessary to eat foods that were not only familiar and home-grown, but ones that properly balanced the humors.¹⁴ Humors, the elements that shaped the disposition of the human body, could be affected by diet, exercise, environment, and natural born inclination.¹⁵ The humors consisted of black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm, and

¹³ Frank Lestringant, *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Andrew Wear, "Medicine in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700", in *The Western Medical Tradition 800 BC to AD 1800*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 360-361.

¹⁵ Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race, and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 26.

each of them corresponded to certain characteristics. An excess or deficiency of any of them was believed to be directly related to mood and personality. Each of the humors corresponded to bodies in the heavens, sorts of emotional responses, and a variety of different diseases.¹⁶

The humoral balance of the body was essential to maintaining good health. Diet, exercise, and environment were believed to have a strong effect on this humoral balance, and doctors often prescribed a new type of food or a change in patients' surroundings to help heal them of certain ailments.¹⁷ The practices of bleeding and purging were connected to Galenic medicine. Early modern physicians believed that an excess of a certain type of humor could be dealt with by physically removing the offending humoral agent through bleeding, inducing vomiting, or giving a series of enemas.¹⁸ Physicians believed that because humors could be ingested or taken in through the skin, they could be removed in the same ways that food byproducts exit the body or through cutting the skin to release them.¹⁹ The release of negative humors was essential to maintaining a healthy balance.

The humors also had consequences outside of health and wellness. Identity was strongly associated with the humoral makeup of the body. For example, Spaniards believed they had the characteristics that they had because of the weather in the Iberian

¹⁶ Gerhild Scholz Williams and Charles D. Gunnoe, Jr., "Introduction", in *Paracelsian Moments: Science, Medicine, and Astrology in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Williams and Gunnoe (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2002): xii.

¹⁷ Wear, "Medicine in Early Modern Europe", 360.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Vivian Nutton, "Medicine in Medieval Western Europe, 1000-1500", in *The Western Medical Tradition 800 BC to AD 1800*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 201-202.

Peninsula and the Iberian food that they consumed.²⁰ This made them physically different from other Europeans, providing a sort of national identity based primarily on diet.

Because different types of wheat grew in France or because the sheep raised in England were of a different breed than Spanish ones, Frenchmen and Englishmen were bodily distinct from Spaniards. These ideas of identity, along with the belief in humoral health, provide an interesting basis for the early modern European understanding of the body. If identity is shaped by the humoral makeup of the body and the outside influences of food and environment, then the body is mutable. Identity can change with the types of food ingested and the environment in which it is ingested. While the process was not immediate (for example eating one piece of brie would not turn a Spaniard into a Frenchman), identity could change through the regular consumption of foreign foods. This belief in the fluidity of the early modern body had strong consequences for American cannibals when they were discovered in the late fifteenth century.

Conceptions of how food affected the body had a great impact on how Spaniards interacted with indigenous peoples and on the commodities they sought from home when they arrived in the Caribbean. Rebecca Earle's recent book expertly details the ways in which food affected how Iberians saw themselves in relation to the new peoples they encountered. Columbus was particularly worried about how his men would fare without their usual staples. When Spaniards became sick, probably from a form of yellow fever, he immediately blamed the lack of home grown European foods.²¹ The rapid change from a Spanish environment to a new and foreign Caribbean one was something that could not be helped. Food, however, was something that the conquistadors could control.

²⁰ Earle, *Body of the Conquistador*, 64-65.

²¹ Earle, *Body of the Conquistador*, 1.

As soon as Columbus discovered that his men were feeling ill, he sent to Spain for a shipload of native Spanish foodstuffs to cure them.²² From ancient times, Europeans had been engrossed in the ideas of humoral medicine and it had become an integral part of their cultural ideas of health. Once they arrived in the New World, the variety of new sights, smells, and foods not only intrigued them, but frightened and repulsed them. While foreign foods were not by nature unhealthy, being completely separated from one's native food supplies was. Spaniards soon discovered that their staples of wheat, wine, olive oil, and pork were completely absent from indigenous diets. As several Spanish medical professionals insisted, while eating popular native foodstuffs in moderation was acceptable, to maintain good health it was necessary to eat foods either grown in Spain or of Spanish origin.²³

There were two options for peninsulars and creoles living in Spanish territories: they could grow Spanish foodstuffs in the New World or they could import them directly from Spain. Early on, they chose to import the necessary foodstuffs, especially grapes, wheat, pork, and olive oil. These foods were especially important to the Spaniards because of their religious significance. Grapes and wheat were an essential part of the Eucharist, making up the wine and the wafer that when blessed would become the blood and body of Christ. Olive oil was essential for many of the sacraments, including baptism of native converts. While in Spain, olive oil was used most widely in Andalusia and by those rich enough to afford the luxury, it still had strong religious significance for the conquistadors.²⁴ Pork, although it had no actual import to the Christian religion, was important to Spanish Catholics because of their struggles with Jews and Muslims within

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 58-59.

their borders. Because Jews and Muslims were forbidden to eat pork, eating it came to be seen as an indication of devotion to the Catholic faith.²⁵ The spiritual significance that these foods held made them very valuable to the conquistadors, as Catholicism was integral to Spanish identity.

From an early modern medical perspective, the connection between food and identity had much more physical consequences than they do today. Humoral medicine promoted the idea of mutable bodies, and so diet had the capability to change the physical body.²⁶ This conception of corporeal mutability emerged early on in the Spanish encounter with New World peoples. Once they encountered the Indians, Spaniards began to try to explain their existence. One of the most popular theories concerning the new peoples discovered by Columbus was that they were descended from a lost group of Europeans. This theory was made popular by Diego Andrés Rocha in 1681, when he published a treatise concerning the origins of American peoples.²⁷ He postulated that a group of Europeans had made their way to the New World and become stranded. Over time, as the new climate and new foods began to gradually affect them, these Europeans turned into the Indians that the Spaniards found when they landed.²⁸ The changes induced by diet and environment included a darkening of the skin, loss of facial hair, and a general loss of civility. However, these ideas were also circulating much earlier. In the sixteenth century, chronicler Diego Duràn insisted that the Aztecs were so distastefully similar to the Jews back in Spain, that they must be descended from them. For Duràn, this is obvious because of their shared brutality.

²⁵ Ibid., 61.

²⁶ Ibid., 47.

²⁷ Ibid., 46.

²⁸ Ibid., 46-47.

They made sacrifices in the mountains, and under trees, in dark and gloomy caves, and in the caverns of the Earth. They burned incense, killed their sons and daughters, sacrificed them, and offered them as victims to their gods. They sacrificed children, ate human flesh, killed prisoners and captives of war. All of these were also Hebrew rites practiced by those ten tribes of Israel, and all were carried out with the greatest ceremony and superstitions one can imagine.²⁹

Rocha and Duràn's notions indicate that Spanish ideas of race during the early colonial period were not concrete. If food and climate could turn white people into savages, then it seems that race as a permanent characteristic was not an established concept.

Ideas concerning mutable bodies were not confined to the Indians. Food an important factor in Spanish colonial life not just because settlers craved the comforts of home, but because the regular consumption of foreign food had the potential to transform Spaniards. Although Columbus feared that the lack of European foodstuffs was killing his men, physicians were concerned that it was changing them into Indians.³⁰ This posed many problems for the peninsulars in New Spain. The foods that they imported often deteriorated beyond suitability for consumption by the time they arrived in the New World. Wheat, the most important of the Spanish staples, was especially difficult to keep fresh over long trans-Atlantic voyages. This led many settlers to try to grow Spanish foods on their American lands. Luckily for the Spaniards, many European crops and livestock flourished in New Spain. Pigs, sheep, olives, and grapes were grown extensively in parts of America.³¹ Unfortunately, other staples like wheat did not do well in most of the New World, prompting many creoles and peninsulars to subsist on the native staple, maize.³² Medical professionals of the period were highly affronted by this, fearing that regular consumption of a native staple combined with the rapid exposure to a

²⁹ Diego Duran, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, ed. Doris Heyden (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994): 10.

³⁰ Earle, *Body of the Conquistador*, 140-143, 146-147.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

³² *Ibid.*, 143.

new and unfamiliar climate was bound to transform good Spanish Catholics into heathens. Although many Spaniards in New Spain did in fact rely on maize, they were prone to attribute any illnesses they contracted to the unsuitable New World diet.³³

In this new and foreign environment, losing all sense of Spanish identity was a common fear. Settlers who subsisted almost entirely on maize, tomatoes, chocolate, and other indigenous foods were viewed with suspicion. Other settlers, who indulged only sparingly in indigenous foods, claimed that these were the people who began to look and act like Indians.³⁴ Spaniards dreaded “becoming” Indians, and may have taken steps to distance themselves from the indigenous peoples by exaggerating the inferiority of the indigenous diet.

Health was not the only major factor in European perceptions of the New World. Religion was just as important to early modern Europeans as their health. Although not a pertinent factor when Columbus first reached America, the Reformation swept Europe early in the colonial period. Although Protestantism made few inroads in Spain, the Spaniards soon found themselves to be the main defenders of the Catholic faith. While Ferdinand and Isabella were not directly involved in fighting the Protestants, they spent much of their reign recapturing Spanish lands from Muslim powers.³⁵ Charles V and Philip II spent the majority of their lives fighting wars of religion throughout Europe while also attempting to colonize the New World and make its inhabitants into proper Christians.³⁶ Spain’s constant involvement in wars of religion defined its people as strong, militant Catholics. Settlers were often very religious people, advocating regular

³³ Ibid., 148.

³⁴ Ibid., 147-148.

³⁵ J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963): 60.

³⁶ Ibid., 62-76.

prayer to protect themselves from the indigenous peoples and for aid in converting them. Converting indigenous peoples of all lands was even believed to be tantamount in bringing about the second coming of Christ.³⁷ The religious state of the indigenous people was of utmost concern to the Spanish crown. Along with the ruthless conquistadors came many missionaries, especially Franciscans.³⁸ Perhaps partially in order to make up for the losses the Church was suffering in Europe, these friars made it a point to baptize as many people as they could, with or without consent.³⁹ Spaniards saw themselves as defenders of the Catholic Church and saviors of the indigenous soul. The main goal of these friars was to make every Indian they encountered into a proper Christian in order to extend Catholicism throughout the world and to protect the innocence of these new, naïve people. These baptisms were meant to save the souls of Indian.

Not only were the Spanish fighting heresy abroad, but they were dealing with groups of non-Christians within their own borders as well. The same year that Columbus set out for the Indies, Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the Jews from Spain. Many chose to convert instead of lose their homes, creating a new population of Christians who were not only reluctant converts, but poorly educated in their new faith. Over time, this led the Old Christian community to deeply mistrust the newly converted families, known as conversos. This was the basis for the infamous Spanish Inquisition, which originally sought to unmask and punish clandestine Jews who were pretending to be Christians.

³⁷ John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1970): 12.

³⁸ Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 47-56.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

Furthermore, Jews were not the only religious group that posed a threat to Catholicism during the colonial period. In 1609, the monarchy expelled the moriscos, putatively converted descendants of Spanish Muslims. Moriscos were known for maintaining much of their Islamic culture, something the monarchy decided it could no longer tolerate within Spain's borders.⁴⁰ It was therefore a crime for anyone practicing Judaism or Islam to remain in Spain, and anyone caught doing so was subject to Inquisitorial trial. If found guilty, the convicts could be killed or sent to work in the galleys as slaves.⁴¹ There was, therefore, a precedent for enslaving people of different religious views, even "People of the Book", within Spain during the colonial periods.⁴²

It was not only the Spanish whose New World contacts were influenced by the harsh realities of the Reformation. The French felt the same sorts of pressures to convert in America, although their missionaries were not all Catholic. French Huguenots were more familiar with cannibalism than most other colonizers, having seen it firsthand at the battle of Sancerre and after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre.⁴³ During the sixteenth century, France was embroiled in devastating civil wars over religion. These wars pit Huguenots against Catholics, first to determine the religion of the monarch and then to see if French Calvinists would be able to practice their religion at all. As we shall see, this familiarity with cannibalism and religious strife would shape the way the French people understood anthropophagites in the New World. However, it is important to remember that the conflicts in France pulled much of the monarch's attention away from

⁴⁰ Anwar G. Chejne, *Islam and the West: The Moriscos, A Cultural and Social History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983): 20-22.

⁴¹ Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965): 185.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Claude Rawson, "'Indians' and Irish: Montaigne, Swift, and the Cannibal Question" *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 (2007): 301-303.

America, allowing him to focus on the strife within his own country and leaving most of the efforts concerning religious conversion to missionaries.

These religious and scientific beliefs framed how Europeans viewed the New World. They shaped the views that conquistadors, missionaries, and traders would have of their new charges. Of all the practices in the New World, cannibalism was among the least reconcilable to these European worldviews, and cannibals elicited extraordinary fear and outrage. Cannibals were treated even more harshly than their non-cannibal counterparts in the New World, especially by the Spanish. They could be made to suffer much harsher penalties than other indigenous peoples, who were often compared favorably to cannibals by missionaries and chroniclers. A cannibalistic lifestyle and the forms cannibalism was practiced made certain Indians appear more inferior to the European newcomers than their peers. Spanish understandings of the humoral body and of militant religious conversion played a major role in how cannibals were treated in the New World, perhaps even more so than early racialized thought.

European Understanding of Cannibalism

Europeans hoped to explain American cannibalism in terms that were familiar to them, so much of the commentary regarding anthropophagy was framed by religion or health. During the Enlightenment, Spanish intellectual Alejandro Malaspina tried to justify the practice by postulating that the Indians were forced to eat their fellow man due to protein deficiency.⁴⁴ This was much later proved to be entirely false, but it remained a popular viewpoint until the 1970s.⁴⁵ Many religious thinkers (including José de Acosta)

⁴⁴ David J. Weber, *Barbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005): 38.

⁴⁵ Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano, "Aztec Cannibalism: An Ecological Necessity?" *Science* 200 (1978).

insisted that the practice was strongly connected to devil worship.⁴⁶ However, one of the most common early modern explanations for the practice was that it was due to a lack of indigenous discernment when it came to food.⁴⁷ This explanation was perpetuated by some of the most well known thinkers both in Spain and in the New World. Bartolomé de las Casas, “defender of the Indians”, and Francisco de Vitoria, one of the most prominent jurists in sixteenth-century Spain, were some of the most prominent men to proclaim that Americans simply did not know any better. They claimed that Indians who practiced cannibalism were unable to tell what was meant to be eaten from that which was inedible, which led them to eat their fellow man. Cannibalism was often described in conjunction with other unsavory gustatory practices, including the consumption of snakes, insects, and lizards.⁴⁸ From this belief came the logical conclusion that cannibalism could be cured with education. Considering that cannibalism continued long past the initial period of colonization, this obviously was not the case.

While it is certainly true that prominent people like Vitoria and las Casas attributed cannibalism to a mere lack of knowledge concerning food, beliefs about cannibals went much deeper than this. Cannibalism was closely connected to ideas of religion during the period. The young chronicler Pedro Cieza de León insisted that the only times he saw evidence of cannibalism was in direct connection to Satanic altars.⁴⁹ José de Acosta quite adamant that cannibalism was connected to disgusting rituals

⁴⁶ Cervantes, *Devil in the New World*, 31-36.

⁴⁷ Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnography* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982): 85-86.

⁴⁸ Earle, *Body of the Conquistador*, 124-126.

⁴⁹ Pedro Cieza de León . *The travels of Pedro de Cieza de León, A. D. 1532-50: contained in the first part of his Chronicle of Peru*, trans. and ed. Clements R. Markham (London: Hakluyt Society, 1864): 97.

devoted to the devil.⁵⁰ These rituals included human sacrifice and indiscriminate sexual deviance. Europeans also attributed much of what the Indians were doing not to traditional rituals practiced before conquest, but to a direct rejection of Christianity. Acosta believed that these cannibalistic rituals were directly profaning the Christian sacrament of communion.⁵¹ For Acosta, this meant that even when Indians were educated in Christianity and what was proper to eat, they chose specifically to ignore those teachings and remain true to their pagan religions. He insisted that cannibalistic rituals consciously flouted and mocked Christianity and that they were devoted not to any sort of indigenous deity but to Satan as Christians understood him.⁵² This infuriated Acosta and his followers, prompting some of the poor treatment accused cannibals faced in Spanish America.

Not everyone harbored animosity toward cannibals. Las Casas insisted that although the actions of cannibals were disgusting and deplorable, they should not be enslaved or killed for what they did.⁵³ Las Casas was a believer in education, and pressed his fellows to try to understand why cannibals engaged in anthropophagy. He tried to show other Spaniards that at least some of the time, indigenous peoples engaged in cannibalism because they were starving.⁵⁴ Even when this was not the case, as one of the people who believed that cannibalism arose from a lack of discernment in diet, las Casas advocated rigid correction. His works defended cannibals when they were acting in the

⁵⁰ Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006): 88.

⁵¹ Cervantes, *Devil in the New World*, 31-36.

⁵² Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, 88-92.

⁵³ Bartolomé de las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians: The Defense of the Most Reverend Lord, Don Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, of the Order of Preachers, Late Bishop of Chiapa, Against the Persecutors and Slanderers of the Peoples of the New World Discovered Across the Seas*, trans. and ed. Stafford Poole, C.M. (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992): 219-220.

⁵⁴ Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. and trans. Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin Books, 1992): 39.

name of justice. He compared the ritual murder and consumption of criminals and prisoners of war to the treatment those elements of society faced back in Spain.⁵⁵

Although he advocated understanding, even las Casas believed that cannibals were inferior to their non-cannibal neighbors, though only because they killed innocents, not because they ate them.⁵⁶ When non-Spaniards encountered cannibals, some of them were similarly understanding.

One of the best examples of someone who lived among cannibals and promoted acceptance of them as humans was Jean de Léry, a Huguenot missionary who lived among the Tupinambá Indians in Brazil. Léry was very much disturbed by the cannibalism practiced by the Tupinambá. He described their rituals and ideology as revenge cannibalism. Strangely, he blamed the most bloodthirsty behavior on the old village women, whom he claimed got the most enjoyment out of cooking and eating human flesh.⁵⁷ This was likely an extension of European ideas concerning cannibalism and witchcraft, which will be discussed briefly later on. While he found the practice deplorable, Léry tried not to judge the Indians too harshly, and urged his readers to do the same. He reminded his readership that this was not a phenomenon that was unique to the Indians, as there had been instances of very recent cannibalism back in Europe, though he does not go into detail.⁵⁸ Here, Léry referred to the cannibalization of his fellow Huguenots following the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris and the survival

⁵⁵ Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians*, 219.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

⁵⁷ Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America: Containing the Navigation and the Remarkable Things Seen on the Sea by the Author; the Behavior of Villegagnon in That Country; the Customs and Strange Ways of Life of the American Savages; Together with the Description of Various Animals, Trees, Plants, and Other Singular Things Completely Unknown over Here*, trans. Janet Whatley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 126.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

cannibalism that was practiced by both Catholics and Huguenots after the Siege of Sancerre, something that he himself saw when he moved back to France after living in Brazil. In this, he leads us to consider how common anthropophagy was outside of the Americas.

In Europe, cannibalism as an accepted cultural practice was rare, but isolated incidents of anthropophagy were relatively common and charges of such behavior even more so. Devout Catholics throughout Europe accused Jews of ritual murder and the cannibalization of children, particularly the consumption of Christian blood.⁵⁹ Witches were often accused of eating their victims, especially children.⁶⁰ But documented cannibalism existed as well. In late medieval Italy, there were at least two cases of civic officials being cannibalized during revolts.⁶¹ While cannibalism was not as common as it was in the Americas, the practice was used to make political statements. In the cases of the Italian politicians, cannibalism was directly connected to the vendetta, a system in which public revenge against an enemy was deemed necessary to maintain honor. For example, in Florence the opponents of the Medici and Donati families, Guglielmo d'Asciesi and his son, were dragged from their home by an angry mob of Florentine citizens, dismembered, and eaten raw.⁶² Edward Muir speculates that the Medici and the Donati encouraged this behavior, as the act of eating Asciesi showed publicly their dominance over his master Walter of Brienne, the Duke of Athens.⁶³

⁵⁹ Duran, *History of the Indies*, 10; R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 96-97.

⁶⁰ Lyndal Roper, *The Witch in the Western Imagination* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012): 134-135.

⁶¹ Edward Muir, "The Cannibals of Renaissance Italy" *Syracuse Scholar* 5 (1984): 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6.

Muir also discusses how cannibalism was believed to dehumanize both the practitioner and the victim. It was commonly noted by European observers that anyone who practiced cannibalism was bestial or animalistic. Eating another human went directly against natural law and only the most savage of beasts were believed to eat their own kind.⁶⁴ As discussed above, dehumanizing cannibals was one of the ways that Spaniards sought to separate and distinguish themselves from indigenous people. However, in the Italian cases, Muir indicates that not only was the victim dehumanized, but his consumption led to a sense of fraternity among the perpetrators.⁶⁵ Debased to nothing but meat, the victims lose all power and all humanity, becoming no better than mutton or beef. The ritual cannibals, however, all complicit in the murder, dismemberment, and finally the act of eating bonded over their bestial crimes. Not only were they brought together by the action of killing, but in Naples, they all sat down to a meal together.⁶⁶ After dismembering another politician, rebellious Neapolitans actually sat down as a group and consumed the victim together.⁶⁷

For early modern Europeans, eating had certain negative connotations that a public act of cannibalism could signify. Even the poetry of Dante depicted eating as an act of hatred and anger. In Dante's *Inferno*, Count Ugolino della Gherardesca is condemned to stew in his own hatred, gnawing forever on his enemy's skull without any sustenance.⁶⁸ His attempt at consumption is an expression of abject hatred. The Italian peasants in Florence and Naples who cannibalized their civic leaders were indicating

⁶⁴ Staden, *True History*, 91.

⁶⁵ Muir, "Renaissance Cannibals", 13-14.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Dante Aligheri, *Inferno*, trans. John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954): Canto XXXII, lines 124-29, pg. 299.

their extreme hatred for the figures.⁶⁹ The symbolism involved in anthropophagy takes the practice far beyond the practical. Muir admits that the Italian peasants who ate their victims were probably starving, but it is also clear that they did not kill and consume for nourishment alone. Peasant revolts were spurred on by famine, disease, oppression, but there is no evidence that the motives behind their attacks involved satiating their hunger with human flesh. The consumption of a political figure was in itself symbolic, a show of their hatred for that figure and everything he represented. They were angry because they felt they were being taken advantage of, so they killed and ate their civic leaders, symbols of the power that oppressed them, to make the ultimate public statement. That they may have been nourished by his body in times of famine was secondary, especially as it was unlikely that the small amount of raw flesh each individual consumed would have been enough to satisfy their needs even for a short period of time.

Cannibalism as a statement in Europe was not confined to medieval Italy and the vendetta. In his essay *Des Cannibales*, published in 1580, Michel de Montaigne actually praised Indian cannibalism when he compared it to what he saw in Europe. Montaigne, like Jean de Léry, was referring to the acts of anthropophagy he saw during the French wars of religion.⁷⁰ As in the Italian cases, cannibalism of French Huguenots was not an act of passion, but symbolized hatred and disgust for the victims. In parts of Europe, human flesh was actually sold for consumption, the same as any animal meat would have been.⁷¹ Following the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in parts of France, Huguenot flesh was sold. While this may have been a symbolic gesture, the fact that the bodies of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 11-12.

⁷⁰ Rawson, "Indians' and Irish", 301-303.

⁷¹ Henry Kamen, *The Iron Century: Social Change in Europe, 1550-1660* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973): 335.

Protestants were deemed no better than those of livestock is telling. Jean de Léry recounts acts of cannibalism at home, reminding his readers of the reputed case of an old woman who salted children like pigs and ate them⁷² and of a couple found to be eating their neighbors at the urging of an old woman in their family.⁷³ These are accounts of what Léry personally experienced during the starvation that followed French battles. While it is impossible to authenticate the tale of the old women salting children, the case of the cannibal family is substantiated in court records. Most important to my analysis of European cannibalism is how these offenders were punished. Everyone involved in each of these events was harshly punished. The old lady who ate children was burned at the stake.⁷⁴ The family of cannibals was also put to death, although the man died in prison, despite the fact that most of the blame was placed on the old woman, who was believed to be the mastermind behind their anthropophagy.⁷⁵

Léry's stories, along with his claims that elderly Tupinambá women were most involved in cannibalizing their enemies, reflect a gendered pattern that was commonplace throughout Europe. Witches were often accused of cannibalism, especially of children. While recent research suggests that many of the people prosecuted for witchcraft were not in fact old women⁷⁶, the accusation was used to further ostracize women who chose to stray too far from the gender roles early modern society designated for them. Women who remained single and independent into their old age represented a threat to the traditional patriarchy, and accusing them of witchcraft served the dual purpose of

⁷² Rawson, "Indians' and Irish", 303.

⁷³ Léry, *History of a Voyage*, 212.

⁷⁴ Rawson, "Indians' and Irish", 303.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200): 34-36.

creating a scapegoat for any hardships that had been happening to the community and removing a threatening woman from society.⁷⁷ To this day, Western fairy tales are filled with images of old hags plotting to kill children for their dinners. In Hansel and Gretel, the witch lures children in with candy and then fattens them on it in hopes that they will become juicy enough to make a proper meal.⁷⁸ In Russian lore, Baba Yaga roasts lost children for her dinner.⁷⁹ Furthermore, witches were believed to have sexual congress with the devil, making their crimes even worse in the eyes of God and the Catholic Church, and perhaps creating precedent for Acosta's belief that Satan, sex, and the cannibal were all intimately connected.⁸⁰ In these ways, the Europeans who arrived in the New World were no strangers to cannibalism or to how its practitioners ought to be dealt with.

Cannibalism in Brazil, Mexico, and the Caribbean

Europeans encountered American cannibals almost as soon as they landed in the Caribbean. Columbus quickly became acquainted with the Caribs, ferocious enemies of his Indian allies. While recent scholarship by Neil Whitehead and Peter Hulme shows that "Carib" was just a catch-all term for anyone who opposed Columbus' allies, called "Arawek"s (or Arawaks), the indigenous word for friend or ally⁸¹, the Spanish were adamant that all Caribs shared a similar bloodthirsty habit: they ate the flesh of their captives. The Arawaks warned Columbus not to venture outside of their territory, because

⁷⁷ Roper, *The Witch*, 3.

⁷⁸ The Brothers Grimm, "Hansel and Gretel", in *The Grimm Reader: The Classic Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. and ed. by Maria Tatar (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010): 52-53.

⁷⁹ "Baba Yaga and the Brave Youth", in *Russian Fairy Tales* ed. by Aleksandr Afanas'ev, trans. by Norbert Guterman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945): 78-79.

⁸⁰ Roper, *The Witch*, 162.

⁸¹ Neil L. Whitehead, *Of Cannibals and Kings: Primal Anthropology in the Americas* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011):15.

many people who did never returned. They claimed that the other inhabitants of Aiti (Hispaniola) took captives as a food source. Having seen no sign of Caribs, Columbus was dubious. However, his indigenous allies were proved correct in January of 1493 when a group of Spaniards were attacked by anthropophagites, confirming much of what the Arawaks had claimed.⁸²

While many terms were used to describe American cannibals in the early modern period, the one that stands out the most is “bestial”. In the European mind, cannibalism was never separate from ferocious violence, and the examples they saw in the New World did little to change their minds. The cannibalistic inhabitants of Aiti, the Aztecs, the Tupinambá, and the Garrones all exhibited extremely violent behavior above and beyond anthropophagy, and much of this ferocity was directed towards their enemies. Although they were hardly peaceful themselves, this violence frightened the Europeans. Their fear of being violently killed or tortured was probably much stronger than any abhorrence they felt for the practice of anthropophagy itself. This is exhibited in the way that some chronicles indicate that cannibalism and other unsavory behaviors were acceptable in their allies but not in their enemies. Hernando Cortés describes in his letters how some of his Tascaltecan allies would violently kill and eat the innocents in conquered enemy polities, while he did nothing to stop them.⁸³ However, when Cortés dealt with people he did not need militarily, he swore in the name of God and the King of Spain that he would be very harsh with any cannibalism he encountered.⁸⁴

⁸² “Extracts from the Journal of Columbus’ First Voyage to America”, 1492, published in Whitehead, *Cannibals and Kings*, 68-69.

⁸³ Cortes, *Letters From Mexico*, 223.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 351-352.

On the west coast of South America, Pedro Cieza de León describes a similar incident. León encountered a young Amerindian woman from a hostile polity on her own in the forest. Before they could be stopped, his Indian allies set upon her, bludgeoning her to death and eating her entrails then and there, not at all deterred by a Spanish presence. While León insisted that this girl was innocent, the fact that she was from an enemy group was enough to get her killed.⁸⁵ While the young man was understandably upset by the scene, he did nothing to help her and made no attempt to see the offenders punished.

In their attempts to gain control over the newcomers, indigenous peoples may have promoted the idea that they all practiced cannibalism in order to keep the Spaniards in check. For example, the Tlaxcallans, Cortes' allies in Mexico, indicated to the Spaniards that they would eat them if they defeated them in battle.⁸⁶ While this may in fact have been true, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that the Tlaxcallans practiced cannibalism, even on the limited scale that their Mexican enemies did. This was likely a scare tactic and perhaps a common one. These attempts to instill fear in the conquistadors may have helped to solidify the idea back in Europe that cannibalism was rampant throughout the Americas. However, for many Spanish leaders, the aid of cannibals was often deemed necessary for conquering the New World. When the offending party was a Spanish ally, the practice was accepted in an attempt to keep them on the Spanish side.

The French and Portuguese experienced similar dilemmas in Brazil with the Tupinambá and the Tupiniquin. Taken captive by the Tupinambá, Hans Staden was told that he was being kept specifically as a sacrifice to be eaten. He describes his first encounter with an enemy Frenchman early on in the account.

⁸⁵ Cieza de León, *Travels*, 79.

⁸⁶ Peggy Rosana Preciado, "Cannibals in the Chronicles: Francisco López de Gómara's *Conquista de Mejico* and Bernal Diaz del Castillo's *Historia Verdadera*" (PhD diss, Yale University, 1995): 45.

Four miles away from the huts where I was, there was a Frenchman. As he heard the news [of my capture], he came and entered one of the huts opposite to the one where I was being kept. Then the savages came running to me and said: A French man has now arrived here. Now we want to see whether you are a Frenchman or not. This made me very happy, and I thought: he is a Christian; he is probably going to put in a good word for me. Then they took me to him, naked as I was. It was a young lad, and the savages called him Karwattuware. He addressed me in French and I could not understand him well. The savages stood around and listened to us. Then, as I could not answer him, he spoke to the savages in their own language: Kill and eat him, the good-for-nothing. He is a real Portuguese, your enemy and mine.⁸⁷

Luckily for Staden, circumstances intervened to save him and he was able to converse with that same Frenchman later on that year. At that point, his fellow European apologized to him and attempted to explain that they must allow the Tupinambá to continue in their customs if they want to survive in Brazil.⁸⁸ These examples, both Spanish and French, indicate that the newcomers were very frightened of the people they encountered, even when they were allies. Although the Europeans were morally opposed and often repulsed by cannibalism, by allying themselves with indigenous cannibals, Europeans decreased their likelihood of being cannibalized themselves.

However, this close association with anthropophagites did little to improve European opinion of them. Other chroniclers were keen to disassociate themselves from cannibalism. Bernal Diaz del Castillo repeatedly stresses that Cortés wanted nothing to do with anthropophagites, regardless of how much the Spaniards may have needed their assistance or the enthusiasm with which the indigenous peoples greeted them.⁸⁹ While Cortés himself disputes these claims, Diaz was clearly uncomfortable with the practice. In one particular case, he recounts talks with the Sempollans, an indigenous group whose aid the Spanish deemed necessary if they were going to defeat the Aztecs at Tenochtitlan.

⁸⁷ Staden, *True History*, 60.

⁸⁸ Staden, *True History*, 72.

⁸⁹ Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *The Memoirs of the Conquistador Bernal Diaz Del Castillo, containing the true and full amount of the Discovery and Conquest of Mexico and New Spain, volume ii*, ed. and trans. John Ingram Lockhart (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1844): 119-21.

Once the Spaniards arrived in the city, the Sempollans offered them several female slaves, encouraging them to remove their hearts and then eat them if they wished. Diaz claims that the sinful actions of the Sempollans made Cortés uneasy. The Spanish leader reportedly informed the Sempollan cacique that they could not become allies while such atrocities were being committed in their territory. The cacique replied that they could not stop because their gods demanded sacrifices and anthropophagy. According to Diaz, this greatly offended the Spaniards, and they threatened to tear down the Sempollan idols for their impertinence. Doña Marina, Cortés' indigenous translator, forcefully reminded them that the Sempollans had to be recruited in order to defeat the Aztecs, but her warnings went unheeded. The Spaniards sacked the palace in order to destroy the Sempollan gods themselves.⁹⁰ Such incidents were repeated several times in Diaz's *Conquest of Mexico*, as the author made every effort to point out how morally repugnant the Spaniards found cannibalism and human sacrifice. In this way, Diaz not only painted the indigenous gods as bloodthirsty and primitive, but elevated his own Christian God by comparison.

In an interesting turn of events, in Diaz's account of the Sempollans, he presents Doña Marina, a Mayan slave, as the voice of reason. Also known as La Malinche or Malintzin, Doña Marina's skills as a translator were essential to the Conquest of Mexico, and her role established a strong precedent for the conquest of the entire continent. While Cortés rarely mentioned Doña Marina in his letters, perhaps to promote the impression that he was more personally responsible for conquest than he truly was, Bernal Diaz regularly praised her skills, intelligence, and beauty.⁹¹ Although she became a slave, Doña Marina was likely the daughter of a highborn Mayan lord, and was probably

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

enslaved after her father was defeated in battle.⁹² Her people, according to Spanish sources, were considered to be very noble. According to Diaz, Doña Marina was well loved and respected by the Spaniards she traveled with, and Cortés never traveled in Mesoamerica without her. The Spaniards considered her one of their greatest assets in the fight against other indigenous peoples, and she was valued much more highly than European translator Jerónimo de Aguilar. When Doña Marina eventually retired from translating for Cortés, he arranged a very advantageous marriage for her to one of his captains. The high esteem in which the Spaniards held both Doña Marina and the Mayans she was descended from is only one example of how some indigenous people were considered to be superior to others.

As discussed above, almost as soon as Spaniards landed in the Caribbean, they allied themselves with the Arawaks, who were decidedly non-cannibalistic. Although the Arawaks were just as violent as their anthropophagite counterparts, Columbus and his men described them much more positively, calling their allies “noble”, “beautiful”, and “well-formed”⁹³. They quickly established a dichotomy between the two types of Amerindians in the area: the calm, good, and peaceful Arawaks vs. the violent, savage, man-eating Caribs. Although this distinction was almost entirely false, it became the commonly accepted version of Caribbean history. In reality, the Arawaks were just as violent towards the Caribs as the Caribs were to them, although they likely did not practice cannibalism. Even to this day, scholars who have not studied early Caribbean history in detail accept that the Arawaks were peaceful and the Caribs were vicious. On the contrary, the terms meant very little to the indigenous people who used them, and the

⁹² Camilla Townshend, *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 2006): 16, 20-24.

⁹³ Whitehead, *Cannibals and Kings*, 51.

majority of indigenous groups in the Caribbean were very violent towards one another. However, the Spaniards persisted in spreading the notion that their Arawak allies were peaceful and good-natured, while emphasizing the brutish man eating practices of their enemies.

When describing Arawaks and Caribs, Spaniards indicated stark physical differences between them. While the Arawaks presented the image of what would become the “noble savage”, the Caribs were depicted as less than human. The Arawaks claimed that their enemies had the heads of dogs, and when Columbus and his men encountered the Caribs, their descriptions seem to have been colored by their earliest imaginings of them. Even when the Caribs were encountered face to face, Spaniards returned claiming that these new Indians had canine features. In the European mind, Caribs were defined by two characteristics: a sense of rebellion towards the Spanish and the tendency to eat human flesh.⁹⁴ Beyond this, there was little that distinguished Caribs from the Arawaks, and yet the Caribs were consistently described as animalistic and bestial while the Arawaks were called noble.

While it is certain that the Spaniards played up Carib diets because they wanted to turn their enemies into “the other”, the connection between cannibalism and an animal nature cannot be ignored. It shows up in almost every European account of cannibalism during the early modern period. By eating other human beings, cannibals made themselves less human. As Hans Staden tells a Tupinambá chief, only the lowest of animals eat their own kind.⁹⁵ Because Europeans were so convinced of the effects of diet on the body, they were primed to believe that a strange and perhaps unsavory food source

⁹⁴ Whitehead, *Cannibals and Kings*, 15.

⁹⁵ Staden, *True History*, 91.

could revoke the properties of humanity. If eating maize was enough to change a posh and cultured European conquistador into a naïve and uncivilized Indian, it would not be considered strange if eating another human being was enough to rob one of humanity all together.

Furthermore, religious intellectuals found evidence that cannibalism was a crime against God. Francisco de Vitoria, in his treatise on dietary law and restraint and the implications that traditional European law had on Latin American anthropophagy, cites direct Biblical evidence that cannibalism is against natural law.⁹⁶

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning: from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God he made man.⁹⁷

In Vitoria's eyes at least, these verses proved without a doubt that cannibalism was against natural law. In Central and South America, cannibalism was almost always facilitated by violent murder. Furthermore, culturally driven cannibalism was usually a part of religious rituals honoring indigenous gods. In the eyes of many Spaniards, from young soldiers like Pedro Cieza de León to prominent religious intellectuals like José de Acosta, these rituals and the worship of native gods were akin to devil worship.⁹⁸ Acosta went so far as to say that indigenous cannibals were not worshipping their own gods at all, but had transferred their allegiances to Satan himself.⁹⁹ He also believed that cannibalism in any ritual form did not exist separately from satanic rituals, all of which

⁹⁶ Francisco de Vitoria, *Political Writings* ed. and trans. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 207-230.

⁹⁷ Genesis 9: 3-6 (NKJV)

⁹⁸ Cervantes, *Devil in the New World*, 31-36.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

involved indiscriminate sexual orgies.¹⁰⁰ In his mind, cannibals represented everything that was wrong with the indigenous people: sickening gastronomical practices, indiscriminate and immoral sexual behavior, and, worst of all, an overt lack of respect for the Catholic God.

Almost as soon as he confirmed the existence of cannibalistic Caribs, Columbus wrote back to the king and queen in Spain, offering a way of dealing with them that would also benefit the Crown. In his letter, Columbus suggests sending cannibals back to Europe as slaves in exchange for necessary provisions. He claims that once they were removed from their savage and uncivilized homes, they would become perfectly fit for slave labor.

The goods could be paid for with slaves, drawn from among the cannibals, who are folk so wild and naturally so equipped, well formed and of good understanding, that once freed of their inhumanity we believe they would make better slaves than any other people. And they will lose that inhumanity once they are away from their land.¹⁰¹

While this particular plan did not come to fruition, the Crown soon passed a series of “cannibal laws”, allowing explorers and settlers to enslave cannibals whenever they were found, using repression of the practice to justify the exploitation of native labor. In his letters, Columbus makes clear his belief that cannibals are especially suited to slavery because of their animalistic natures. Unlike his Indian allies, who seem to have no interest in the consumption of human flesh, the Caribs displayed by their diet what Europeans saw as a shocking lack of humanity.

After conquest, many Spaniards found themselves in a strange position. While many Spaniards came to the New World specifically to convert the masses, others came

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Christopher Columbus, quoted in Felipe Fernandez-Armesto *Columbus on Himself* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2010): 121.

to exploit the riches of the Americas and to make a profit. Early on, those who would profit could easily enslave almost any group of indigenous people and force them to work in mines, on plantations, or in a variety of other occupations. However, over time, the enslavement of indigenous peoples drew considerable fire at home and abroad. In 1542, the Spanish Crown decreed that absolutely no American Indians could be enslaved for any reason. Unfortunately, the law was almost impossible to enforce and created serious problems for economic interests in the New World. Five years after slavery was outlawed, a new law was issued reinstating it, but only under specific circumstances and applying only to certain people.¹⁰² Following the traditional Roman laws of slavery, Spanish law dictated that Indians could only be enslaved if they were captured in the course of a “just war”¹⁰³.

In the case of colonial Spanish America, “just war” usually meant that the enemies of the Spanish were either Indians hostile to a European takeover or cannibals. According to Juan Gines de Sepulveda, not only did this law mean that anyone who violently opposed Spanish dominion could be enslaved, but that peaceful cannibals were vulnerable as well.¹⁰⁴ However, there were other precedents in European law that allowed for the enslavement of cannibals. According to the ancient Roman laws on which the early modern European justice system was based, anyone who does not follow the natural law of man shall not be considered man, and is therefore vulnerable to slavery.¹⁰⁵ Vitoria showed how God had forbidden cannibalism amongst his people, and he wrote more on

¹⁰² Whitehead, *Cannibals and Kings*, 14.

¹⁰³ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1984): 154.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁰⁵ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France c. 1500- c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995): 20.

the subject of cannibalism and natural law. “Even if they [indigenous peoples] sacrifice criminals to eat, they still commit an injustice (*iniura*), since there is a law of nation (*ius gentium*), indeed a natural law, that the bodies of the dead are exempt from this injustice”¹⁰⁶. Vitoria’s sermon “On Self-Restraint” was only one of many asserting that, according to traditional laws of man and God, cannibals were subject to slavery. Several articles within the sermon focused specifically on cannibalism in the New World and what that meant concerning slavery. “Question 1, Article 3: Is it lawful to eat human flesh?” and “Question 1, Article 5: Is it lawful to make war on the barbarians if they practice anthropophagy and human sacrifice?” conclude that war on cannibals is in fact just war.¹⁰⁷ The following treatise “Des Indies” applies these laws to Amerindians, concluding that it was lawful for the king to enslave cannibals according to the precedents established by Roman and Biblical law.¹⁰⁸

While laws allowing for the enslavement of cannibals had certain provisions separating indigenous slavery from the lifelong enslavement that applied to Africans, these were rarely enforced. The laws stated that indigenous people could be enslaved for 7 to 10 years after their capture¹⁰⁹, but for many native slaves the work they were forced to perform was so backbreaking that they died long before that period expired.

The labor of cannibals was highly valued by the Spanish. Following in the steps of Columbus, many Spaniards believed that anthropophagites were very suited to the labor they were being forced to perform. Vitoria compared cannibals to beasts, animals to

¹⁰⁶ Vitoria, *Political Writings*, 225.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 207-230.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 233-264.

¹⁰⁹ Lane, “Punishing the Sea Wolf”, 204.

be domesticated and worked.¹¹⁰ While it was rare for Spanish intellectuals to explicitly indicate that cannibalistic Indians were more physically suited to slave labor than their non-cannibal counterparts, they all agreed that cannibals were ideal for the institution. Perhaps because of the negative image of their conquest and treatment of the Indians that was already circulating throughout Europe, the Spanish were keen to justify any sort of slavery with religious and moral motives instead of economic ones. After the blatant exploitation of cannibals by Columbus, the most general justification for enslaving cannibals was that they were to be educated during their confinement. First of all, the Spaniards considered it one of their many duties to civilize and educate the Amerindians. Because many Spaniards believed that cannibalism was the consequence of native ignorance concerning food, by enslaving the offenders the Spaniards could take them under their charge, teaching them what was edible and what was not meant to be eaten.¹¹¹ Proponents of slavery also cited religion as a strong motivation for keeping cannibals as slaves. While under the care of a Catholic owner, slaves would be forced to learn the tenets of Christianity, and oftentimes they were forcibly baptized before they could die from disease or an accident.¹¹² By enslaving cannibals, Spaniards were able to control and perhaps to “reform” them to a much higher degree. It was easy for them to force their religious and cultural views on their laborers, stamping out the practices that they saw as immoral and limiting how openly their slaves could worship their own gods.

Unfortunately for Europeans, this practice of forced education was not always as successful as they had hoped. The Tupinambá of Brazil in particular were notorious for

¹¹⁰ Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, 87.

¹¹¹ Earle, *Body of the Conquistador*, 124.

¹¹² Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, 48.

finding ways to return to their cannibalistic ways and pagan religious practices.¹¹³ In the regions of Brazil inhabited by the Tupi peoples, missionaries were dismayed to see that every time they managed to create a strong following of Christians, leading them to believe they had stamped out the old ways, many of their flock would return clandestinely to traditional rites and habits. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has studied Tupinambá “inconstancy” in detail, trying to determine why the efforts of the missionaries failed. While the missionaries believed that their charges were simply fickle and inconstant, Castro shows that the missionaries did not make enough of an effort to understand their new converts.¹¹⁴ One of the main reasons that the Tupinambá engaged in revenge cannibalism was to acquire beautiful names. In Tupi culture, names were connected to masculinity and power, and were necessary to become a respected member of society. For each enemy a warrior killed and consumed, he was given a beautiful name. The more names a warrior had, the greater his prestige in the village.¹¹⁵ This practice is mentioned briefly in Staden’s account, although he did not seem to understand how important it was to his captors.¹¹⁶ Once the missionaries came and forbade the Tupinambá from raiding to acquire victims, they did not provide any sort of cultural substitute for the naming tradition or for vengeance. As such, warriors had no way to cope with what they saw as a loss of masculinity. From this, the Tupinambá men began to see Christianity and the missionaries who practiced it as effeminate. As hard as the missionaries tried to keep the warriors on track, Tupinambá men could not tie themselves to a religion that they regarded as relegating them to the roles of women. Because the

¹¹³ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul: The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in 16th Century Brazil*, trans. Gregory Duff Morton (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2011)

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Staden, *True History*, xlvi-ii.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

missionaries did not know what was making the Tupinambá so ambivalent towards their God, they had no way to counteract the phenomenon. This sort of issue was common all over Latin America. For example, in Mani in 1562, several idols were discovered in an Amerindian village, incensing the friars who found them. Instead of trying to understand the behavior in order to correct it, the friars indiscriminately tortured several Amerindians in order to discover who was responsible. The goal was to scare the Americans into submission, not teach them the proper way of doing things.¹¹⁷

Regional Constructions of Cannibalism

Even when Europeans tried to understand cultural anthropophagy, they drastically oversimplified the reasoning behind the practice. For some Europeans, cannibals ate other people out of ignorance of what was proper food. For others, it was purely about revenge. Still others saw the practice as a quick and bloody way to satisfy the Indians' equally bloodthirsty gods. Little attempt was made to dig beneath the surface and truly understand the practice or the people who engaged in it. For most Europeans, their superficial understandings of cannibalism were enough.

Still, even in Europe, opinions of cannibalism varied according to culture and national background. For example, Spanish and French understandings of anthropophagy and the immorality that surrounded it were almost opposite. People of both nationalities agreed that there were degrees of evil when it came to anthropophagy, but they firmly disagreed on the moral hierarchy of cannibals. French writers like Montaigne, L ry, and Andr  Thevet, for example, held revenge cannibalism at a much more humane level than

¹¹⁷ Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, 72-79.

cannibalism motivated by hunger.¹¹⁸ In their minds, the Tupinambá were incredibly human, almost even noble because of the ways in which they practiced cannibalism. Montaigne especially found revenge cannibalism to be unsavory, but recognized its strong capacity for humanity. The French considered revenge to be motivated by honor, something that was unique to humanity. It was noble for a man to take revenge on someone who had wronged him, and the action showed that he was above the animals.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, cannibalism for the sake of hunger or survival was considered by Frenchmen to be disgustingly low behavior. Writers like Jean de Léry and Michel de Montaigne make it clear that eating another human being because of necessity makes the cannibal animalistic.¹²⁰ For them, it was better to die of starvation than to sink to the level of the animals.

This response to cannibalism was probably shaped by the violence of the Reformation in France. During the Wars of Religion, cannibalism was common. Fresh in French commentator's minds was the Siege of Sancerre of 1572 and 1573, in which a Catholic army surrounded a hilltop fortress to which Huguenots had fled to following the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. The Siege lasted for about a year, and both Catholics and Huguenots starved in the harsh winter. Survivors on both sides were forced to eat the remains of the dead, even family members.¹²¹ This type of cannibalism was abhorrent to Léry and to Montaigne, and they made their revulsion clear by praising the Brazillian cannibals in contrast to the cannibalism they had encountered in their native France. Some Frenchmen even used humoral reasoning to back up their beliefs regarding

¹¹⁸ Lestringant, *Cannibals*, 90.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹²¹ Léry, *History of a Voyage*, 212.

cannibalism. French jurist and philosopher Jean Bodin postulated that the cold weather in the North created an excess of blood, causing an intense rage against their fellow man that translated into a hunger for their flesh, much like wolves hungered for carrion. On the contrary, in the South, where the Brazilians lived, the heat created an excess of black bile, leading them to be more easily offended and creating in them a sense of righteous fury, a bloodlust for their enemies.¹²²

While modern day readers may find it hard to see the differences between rage and fury, for the French, rage was a trait found in animals, while fury was a trait found in noblemen. Louis Le Roy, another French philosopher of the period, believed that all cultures had at one point practiced cannibalism in order to survive, but that this was the most primitive form of humanity. He called these people “very simple and brutal, hardly different than beasts”.¹²³ In fact, according to Neil Whitehead, this distinction is how the French justified supporting some Brazilian cannibals and not others. Whitehead discusses André Thevet’s mapping of the types of cannibalism he encountered on his voyage to Brazil. Thevet marked French allies as revenge cannibals and French enemies as those who engaged in anthropophagy “as a matter of diet”, meaning that they consumed other humans either from hunger or a taste for human flesh.¹²⁴ For this reason, the French were fine to support the Tupinambá, who they believed to be noble and brave, but not their neighbors the Tupiniquin, who they considered to be violent monsters with a taste for human flesh.

In contrast, the Spanish had never experienced something quite so gustatorily jarring as the French Wars of Religion. While famine and warfare were familiar, for them

¹²² Lestringant, *Cannibals*, 90-93.

¹²³ Louis Le Roy, quoted in Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 24.

¹²⁴ Staden, *True History*, xxxiii-xxxiv.

cannibalism was mostly the stuff of witches and sorcerers.¹²⁵ Their experiences in the New World softened them to survival cannibalism. It had happened that Spaniards were forced to eat companions' bodies when they ran out of food or were surrounded by enemies, and while they found this necessity unsavory, the perpetrators drew little outrage. Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, one of the earliest American explorers, mentions in his chronicle how he and his companions were forced to eat another comrade (though he died of circumstances beyond their control). Although Cabeza de Vaca expresses remorse, he says that his priest's response was that if he confessed God would forgive him. He was encouraged not to advertise what had happened, but that he could not be blamed for surviving.¹²⁶ By confessing, Cabeza de Vaca proved that he was not a pagan, and that he felt remorse over what had happened. As we have seen before, the Iberians were satisfied in thinking that people who indulged only once or twice in unsavory foodstuffs merely to survive would not experience any lasting bodily effects from one isolated incident. It would follow that one taste of human flesh would have little lasting impact on a European body. To truly become savage, it would be necessary to consume the offending foodstuff (whether it be human flesh or something as banal as maize) on a regular basis. As such, situational cannibals were safe from too much Spanish criticism. However, Spaniards were quick to condemn forms of ritual cannibalism. In Mexico, both Cortes and his chronicler Bernal Diaz del Castillo described the cannibals they meet as animalistic, bestial, and savage. For Spaniards, eating another human being out of choice instead of necessity constituted a different kind of hunger, a barbaric taste for human flesh. Many chroniclers and even the German captive Hans Staden indicated that the

¹²⁵ Roper, *The Witch*, 92-95.

¹²⁶ Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America*, trans. Cyclone Covey (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983): 60.

cannibals they encountered had developed a taste for the flesh of other men. Staden gives evidence of this taste for flesh in a conversation with the Tupinambá leader, Konyan Bebe.

Konyan Bebe had a great basketful of human flesh in front of him. He was eating a leg and held it to my mouth, asking whether I also wanted to eat. I said [to him]: a senseless animal hardly ever eats its fellow; should one human then eat another? He took a bite, saying: Jau ware sche. I am a tiger [jaguar]; it tastes well. With that, I left him.¹²⁷

Diego Álvarez Chanca, the Spanish physician who accompanied Columbus shared a similar view. Describing the Caribs, Chanca says “They say that man’s flesh is so good that there is nothing like it in the world.”¹²⁸ For southern Europeans, the choice to eat another human being because of revenge, religion, or an acquired taste was intolerable and went against all the teachings of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, this sort of prolonged consumption seemed to physically change the body. If Europeans engaged in cannibalism over long periods of time, the general Spanish belief was that they would become Indian. Luisa de Navarrete, a mulatto woman who was enslaved by Caribs and rescued in 1580 gave testimony concerning other captives.

There are two women and a man who were already as much caribes as the rest of them, and the women say they no longer remember God, and the man neither more nor less so, and he eats human flesh and they do just as the Indians do, neither more nor less, and another man comes with these said Indians that has now become as caribe as them and likewise eats human flesh [sic]¹²⁹

Navarrete’s narrative indicates that eating human flesh and being Carib are the same thing, that they cannot be separated.

The differences between French and Spanish ideas concerning cannibalism may be traced back to their European experiences. During the Reformation, Europeans were

¹²⁷ Staden, *True History*, 91.

¹²⁸ Diego Álvarez Chanca “The Report of Diego Chanca on Columbus’ Second Voyage to America (1494)”, in Whitehead, *Of Cannibals and Kings*, 77.

¹²⁹ Luisa de Navarrete, “The Captivity of Luisa de Navarrete (1580)”, in Peter Hulme and Neil Whitehead, *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to Present Day- An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 42-43.

regularly exposed to religiously motivated violence. At the same time that cannibals and indigenous insurgents were being oppressed in America, religious conflict was sweeping the European continent. As discussed above, the French had seen the devastating wars of religion directly before their contact with Brazilian cannibalism, strongly influencing their opinions concerning the morality of different types of anthropophagy. Once the Spanish were firmly established in the New World, they instituted an Inquisition in Mexico and the Andes of similar purpose and structure to the one in Spain, taking the cause of the missionaries to new heights. This American Inquisition was just as violent towards offenders as the one back in the metropole, serving as a governing institution as well as a religious watchdog. Through the expansion of the Inquisitions role in Latin America and the far-reaching Christianizing efforts of Franciscan missionaries, the Spanish tightened their hold on their self-held reputation as the defenders of Catholicism worldwide. The Dutch, embroiled in a prolonged war with the Spanish for their independence and religious freedom, made incursions into America and publicized Spanish atrocities there to weaken the enemy's position at home and abroad.¹³⁰ In England and Germany two religious wars were decimating populations during the Age of Discovery.¹³¹ The Reformation at home very strongly influenced the ways in which Europeans not only saw themselves, but how they saw the inhabitants of the New World.

Regardless of the dominant form of Christianity in the metropole, imperial powers were keen to establish their own religions among the people they were conquering. Many Spaniards believed that if they brought the Gospel and Catholicism to every heathen in

¹³⁰ Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001):123-185.

¹³¹ Kamen, *The Iron Century*, 307-330.

the world, it would ensure the Second Coming of Christ.¹³² Philip II, perhaps the most zealous imperial monarch of them all, was adamant that all of his subjects, in the Old World and the New, should embrace the true religion of the Roman Catholic Church. Among Spain's many enemies at the time, the unruly Netherlanders strongly identified with the Americans. The Dutch especially used the indictment of Spanish behavior in Bartolomé de las Casas' *In Defense of the Indians* to argue that the Americans were facing the same persecution in the New World that they were facing at home. This perceived similarity shaped the way in which the Dutch constructed themselves as a people. They saw America as their sister, and themselves as the protectors of her innocence. In their own national narrative, they formed a strong bond with the Amerindians. Therefore, they were extremely surprised when they arrived in America offering friendship, protection, and Protestantism and were rebuffed. Afterwards, they also began a campaign to convert the Americans to a Protestant way of life.¹³³ Among the French, in the era of religious wars missionaries, both Catholic and Huguenot, tried to recruit the Indians to their way of life. Catholic missionary André Thevet was the first ethnographer of the Tupinambá, and, despite his distaste for them, worked hard to cultivate Catholicism among them.¹³⁴ On the opposite end of the spectrum, Protestant Jean de Léry lived among the same Tupinambá trying to encourage their adoption of Protestantism.¹³⁵ Some Tupinambá Indians were even brought back to France in 1562 so that the king could see what kinds of people he was striving to convert. These Indians

¹³² Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 12.

¹³³ Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad*.

¹³⁴ Andre Thevet, *Andre Thevet's North America: A Sixteenth-Century View* ed. and trans. Roger Schlesinger and Arthur P. Stabler (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986)

¹³⁵ Léry, *History of a Voyage*.

were the ones who inspired Michel de Montaigne's famous "Des Cannibales".¹³⁶

Throughout Europe, the tumultuous religious situation encouraged imperial powers to seek to create converts elsewhere.

This zeal for conversion had terrible consequences when Europeans met resistance. As mentioned above, cannibalism, like idolatry and other forms of indigenous resistance, was difficult to stamp out. Different European powers had different methods of dealing with anthropophagy, perhaps based on how negatively they saw the particular practice. The Spanish, fighting their international reputation as brutish thugs, tried to frame their treatment of cannibals in a new light. Some of the most damning evidence of Spanish mistreatment of Indians came from las Casas, and these were the stories that the Spaniards dealt with first. Spaniards openly admitted that they were harsh on some Americans, but Spanish intellectuals claimed that they had to treat certain Indians this way. According to them, only some Indians were mistreated, and it was for the protection of the others. Cannibals especially were threatening the safety and the salvation of the Indians who had converted to the true faith. Thus, they had to be enslaved or killed so as not to taint the vulnerable new American converts.¹³⁷ Spanish colonizers, both secular and religious, worked to create an image back home of cannibals not only as terrible influences on their good Christian Indians, but as actual physical threats. Juan Gines de Sepulveda claimed that one of the reasons that some Indians had to be enslaved was "To save from great perils the numerous innocent mortals whom these barbarians immolated every year placating their gods with human hearts."¹³⁸ Francisco de Vitoria maintained that cannibals were actively trying to kidnap, kill, and eat Christian Indians, and that their

¹³⁶ Lestringant, *Cannibals*, 1-3.

¹³⁷ Vitoria, *Political Writings*, 225.

¹³⁸ Todorov, *Conquest of America*, 154.

enslavement was necessary to keep better Indians safe. He claimed that to defend the innocent, Spain had the right to enslave the aggressors. At the beginning of his treatise justifying the enslaving of cannibals, he says “First, if they eat or sacrifice innocent people, princes can defend the latter from harm”.¹³⁹

In French territories on the other hand, there were no obvious successes in stamping out cannibalism with slavery or violence. Unlike in Spanish America, the French government seems to have made no attempt to fight cannibalism unless cannibals attacked their settlements, as the Tupiniquin do in Hans Staden’s narrative.¹⁴⁰ It seems that only French missionaries like Léry and Thevet tried to change cannibalistic behavior. Because the French needed cannibalistic peoples as allies to protect their economic interests in Brazil, they had to walk a finer line than the Spanish. Their fierce rivalry with the Portuguese outweighed any abhorrence of cannibalism, and the French were inclined to simply let cannibals be cannibals as long as it was not French allies they were cannibalizing. This explains the reaction of the French liaison with the Tupinambá when Hans Staden begged for his aid. Later the Frenchman claims that by telling the Tupinambá to consume Staden, he was only trying to appease his native allies.¹⁴¹ He claimed that the barbaric actions of his allies disgusted him, but there was little he could do to stop them, so they [the French] were forced to accept it if they were to survive in Brazil. Staden faced similar difficulties afterwards when he was unable to convince a sympathetic French ship captain to rescue him. The captain was extremely apologetic, but stood firm in his decision not to antagonize his allies.¹⁴² This acceptance of cannibalism,

¹³⁹ Vitoria, *Political Writings*, 225.

¹⁴⁰ Staden, *True History*, 64-67.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 82-83.

however unwilling, indicates the agency of indigenous actors. Although their French contacts were unhappy with their lifestyle, they were able to leverage their skills and their value in order to maintain their cultural way of life, at least in the sixteenth century.

Conclusion

The ways in which Europeans constructed cannibals were clearly related to their experiences at home. The Spanish emphasis on diet as a changing element comes directly from the medical practices they embraced in Spain and the dietary regimens they placed on themselves. These medical beliefs, along with the strong Spanish tradition of militant Catholicism, urged the Spanish to attempt to eradicate cannibalism within their territories, whether through education (meaning enslavement) or the deaths of offenders. On the other hand, when it came to anthropophagy, Frenchmen were more influenced by their personal religious experiences than any sort of scientific beliefs concerning cannibals. Because of their own struggles with cannibalism, French writers justified doing business with cannibals by demonstrating that only some cannibals displayed humanity. The French claimed only to be doing business with anthropophagites who displayed human emotion by engaging in revenge cannibalism or cannibalism fueled by rage. Others, who supposedly engaged in anthropophagy from hunger or a taste for human flesh, were considered bestial by intellectuals like Jean Bodin and were therefore not acceptable business partners. This was the type of cannibalism the French had experienced during the Wars of Religion, and the experience had left them with a strong distaste for it. In these particular circumstances, European actors based their perceptions of cannibalism and their subsequent actions on familiar aspects of European life.

As these cases show, European constructions of cannibalism sometimes had little to do with racial background. While there are aspects of underlying racism throughout the history of colonial Latin America, the European struggle against cannibalism indicates that there was more going on than the definition of alterity by differences in skin color. For many Europeans, the combination of a hot humid climate and a strange diet of human flesh completely dehumanized anthropophagites. Europeans believed that the steady consumption of other people would cause the human body to deteriorate into its most primitive state. For most Spaniards, cannibals were no better than wild beasts, who at best might be converted into beasts of burden. Furthermore, the religious experiences of different European peoples strongly influenced how they viewed cannibalism. For some, for example among the French, cannibalism was a reminder of the harsh and brutal realities they had faced back home. For others, it was a representation of Satan's power on Earth, a conscious obstacle to converting the Americans and saving their souls. These factors, combined with the more favorable treatment of docile, non-cannibal Indians, show that race, even early conceptions of it, was not the main factor in how cannibals were imagined and treated by the colonizing agents in colonial and pre-colonial Latin America.

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