“I LAID MY HANDS ON A GORGEOUS CANNIBAL WOMAN:”
ANTHROPOPHAGY IN THE IMPERIAL IMAGINATION, 1492-1763

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines European writings about cannibalism in North America from 1492 until 1763, uncovering insights into the establishment and maintenance of imperial power. It contributes to existing scholarship about cannibalism, empire, gender history, and the history of sexuality. Imperial power depended upon the assertion of European superiority and the assumption of Indian inferiority, and the discourse of cannibalism played a key role in the establishment of these hierarchical determinations. Because imperial expansion always involved the conquering of bodies in addition to land and resources, it is imperative to acknowledge and scrutinize the way that conquered bodies were gendered. Cannibalism is an embodied act, and an investigation of the discourse of anthropophagy illuminates the development of early modern ideas about savagery, civilization, gender, and sexuality.

Situated at the crossroads of history and cultural studies, this dissertation employs discourse analysis in order to reveal new insights into historical documents and to re-center gender in the study of the discourse of cannibalism. This comparative project traces the discourse of cannibalism in the context of Caribbean exploration, the Spanish empire in Mexico, the French empire in Canada, and the English empire in Atlantic North America, in order to develop an understanding of the ways in which the discourse of cannibalism changed across empires, time-periods, and geographic locations. This project compensates for the lack of scholarly attention that has been afforded to the study of cannibalism in North America. Ultimately, it uncovers some of the ways in which the
discourse of cannibalism reinforced, created, and shaped developing ideas about gender and empire.
To Jason, you are truly without equal.
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INTRODUCTION

*I think there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practices; for indeed it seems that we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of opinions and customs of the country we live in. There is always the perfect religion, the perfect government, the perfect and accomplished manners in all things.*

Michel de Montaigne, “Of Cannibals,” 1580

In his famous essay, “Of Cannibals,” Michel de Montaigne argued that Western societies rarely judged other cultures on their own terms. Rather, they projected negative qualities onto Others and the cultural practices that they observed reflected their own faults. Montaigne used the practice of cannibalism in Brazil to reflect upon European civilization, arguing for a nuanced understanding of difference and a careful examination of cultural practices prior to declaring them barbarous. Despite the seriousness of his argument for cultural relativism, Montaigne was not without a sense of humor. He ended the famous essay with the clever joke: “All this is not too bad – but what’s the use? They don’t wear breeches.” He indicated that any reason or intelligence possessed by Indians was negated by their lack of clothing. This amusing phrase highlighted the difficulties of the work that Montaigne asked of his reader. No matter how hard one tried, cultural assumptions were difficult to overcome. European writers often cited the lack of clothing among Indians as an important indicator of savagery, but Montaigne underscored the absurdity of this assumption. Simply because they did not don clothing, should they have been assigned a lower place in the hierarchy of humanity? “Of Cannibals,” written in 1580, was an

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2 Ibid., 156. “I may call these people barbarians, in respect to the rules of reason, but not in respect to ourselves, who surpass them in every kind of barbarity.”
3 Ibid., 159.
important essay and shaped intellectual thought about imperialism and cannibalism in France, but beyond that, it also highlighted the inevitable tensions that resulted when Europeans encountered cannibals.

Montaigne further argued that, “our eyes are bigger than our bellies, and that we have more curiosity than capacity; for we grasp at all, but catch nothing but wind.”4 This clever phrase played with the idea of cannibalism, as it argued for the limitations of the incorporative epistemology of imperialism. Montaigne hinted at the limits of European knowledge about the New World and its peoples as he denigrated the rapid processes of imperialism and colonialism. Europeans rushed forth into the New World, conquered its peoples, destroyed its cities, and exploited its landscape without a thorough understanding of what they were doing and why they were doing it. Montaigne’s passage depicted European conquest of the Americas as greedy and impetuous. European powers claimed lands and divvied up resources successfully, yet as they grasped at everything, they ignored the wider implications of their desires. This metaphor for European imperialism also provides a useful way for thinking about the discourse of cannibalism.

This dissertation uncovers insights into the discourse of cannibalism as well as the ways in which this discourse helped in the establishment and maintenance of imperial power in North America. The writings that are discussed rarely connected the supposed acts of cannibalism that they described with the larger issues of imperialism; yet, hierarchy, dominance, and power were implicit in each account. The desire of the writers to record the supposed atrocities of Indigenous Americans for a voracious readership back in Europe masked the true power of anthropophagic accusations. European writers implicitly and explicitly argued that Indians were inferior through their accusations of cannibals. As these conquerors, soldiers, priests, and settlers documented their perception of Indian barbarity, they underscored their belief in their own superiority.

4 Ibid., 150.
However, following Montaigne’s pleas that capacity exceeded curiosity, this dissertation examines the sources of cannibalism from a new perspective. Rather than taking descriptions of cannibalism in European accounts as either true representation of savage Indian acts, or dismissing these descriptions as merely propaganda, this dissertation uncovers the ways in which imperial context affected the discourse of cannibalism represented in European texts as well as the ways that the discourse of cannibalism changed the dynamics of imperial power in North America. More specifically, this dissertation also investigates the subtle and often hidden ways in which imperial power was gendered and simultaneously created gendered and sexual norms.

Situated at the crossroads of history and cultural studies, this dissertation employs discourse analysis in order to reveal new insights into historical documents. It argues for a re-centering of gender in the analysis of the discourse of cannibalism. Twentieth-century discussions of cannibalism have tended to focus on the connection between cannibalism, savagery, and race. However, in the early modern period, European understandings of cannibalism and savagery were more closely linked with gender and sexuality. Imperial power depended upon the assertion of European superiority and the assumption of Indian inferiority, and the discourse of cannibalism played a key role in these determinations. This dissertation contributes to existing scholarship about cannibalism, empire, gender history, and the history of sexuality. It examines the ways that discourse of gender informed early modern imperial projects.

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5 See: Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. C. Gordon, ed. C. Gordon. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980). I refer here to discourse in the Foucauldian sense, although I recognize that the specificities of Foucault’s nineteenth century model cannot be simply transferred to the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries. In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault writes, "Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. I must make allowance for the concept’s complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it". Discourse is the way in which I talk about identity and culture, and it creates a complex web of power and influence. A study of the discourse of cannibalism can be a point of resistance against the continued presence of the civilization/savagery binary in scholarship. The constructed nature of discourse and identity is what makes the figure of the cannibal so telling.
Because conquest always involved the conquering of bodies in addition to land and resources, it is imperative to acknowledge and scrutinize the way that conquered bodies were gendered. Cannibalism is an embodied act, and an investigation of the discourse of man-eating illuminates the development of early modern ideas about race, gender, and sexuality. There has been much modern scholarship in cultural studies and history that has investigated the racialized and gendered discourses of empire and colonialism but there is a dearth of scholarly work that develops these ideas in early modern North America. Additionally, this dissertation creates a bridge between the discipline of history and the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies.

This project focuses on the discourse of cannibalism in European records from approximately 1492 until 1763. The objects of inquiry for this dissertation are primarily written texts, however, some due is also given to the role of images in the establishment and maintenance of imperial power. Through an analysis of these sources, this project interrogates the construction of the idea of the cannibal in European empires rather than the actual practice of cannibalism among the Native people of the Americas. Not only is it virtually impossible to locate the reality of Indigenous practices solely through European records, the idea of cannibalism and its associations with savagery were significantly more important in imperial discourse than the actual rituals of human consumption.

Even more than other subjects dealt with in European sources, descriptions of cannibalism were particularly prone to exaggeration and projection. The act of man-eating, in medieval and early modern Western European society, was always associated with savagery and Otherness. Culturally sanctioned cannibalism threatened to destroy the most basic foundations of Christian society. For, if humans ate other humans, then they could not be easily separated from animals. The taboo against man-eating was, in fact, one of the key markers of civilization. For
European writers, the failure to recognize the boundaries between human and animal, and the refusal to value the lives of humans above all other creatures, was an indicator of savagery and primitiveness. Civilization created order out of chaos, and the presence of cannibalism served as a reminder of the barbarity from which all humans emerged.

European writings about cannibalism can help us to understand the development of racism, patriarchy, and hetero-sexism in colonial and postcolonial contexts. An analysis of cannibalism is certainly not the only way through which the connections between gender and empire can be examined, yet the prominence of descriptions of cannibalism in European discourse indicated its importance. European men, for almost all of the pertinent writers were male, were fascinated by the acts of cannibalism that they claimed to have discovered among the peoples of the Americas, and because of this, they wrote about them often. Their descriptions revealed both a fascination with and revulsion for anthropophagus acts. However, the specific relationship between the discourse of cannibalism and the gendered nature of imperial power changed depending upon the geographic, temporal, and imperial context. The sources evaluated in this study do not provide a totalizing framework, but open up a conversation about the relationships between cannibalism, gender, sexuality, and race within the confines of empire.

Most scholarship that has discussed cannibalism, whether as an actual occurrence or as a discursive construction, has tended to focus on Latin America and Brazil. Only modest consideration has been given to the study of cannibalism in North America, for which this project compensates. While the intent of this study is to examine North America, certain geographic regions receive more focus than others. The extant sources dealing with cannibalism in North America typically concentrated in the following regions: the Eastern seaboard of the U.S., southeastern Canada, the Great Lakes region, the American southwest, Florida, the
Caribbean, the Yucatán peninsula, and the Valley of Mexico. This project does not delve much into the discourse of cannibalism in Florida and what is now the southwestern United States in order to keep the focus as narrow and specific as possible in terms of imperial context and time-period.

In *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Anne McClintock wrote that, “The representation of male *national* power depends on the prior construction of *gender* difference.” Following this assertion, this dissertation develops a theory of gender and empire through an exploration of the origins of masculine imperial power. In order to understand the institutions of patriarchy and racism in a colonial or postcolonial situation it is necessary to interrogate first the origins of such ideas. From where did the notion of gender difference that McClintock insisted was a necessary precedent for masculine national power come? By examining the discourse of cannibalism in the encounter period of North American history, the role that cannibalism played in the formation of European ideas about gender difference, sexual mores, and racial hierarchies will be explicated. As Ann Stoler argued, “a feminist-informed cultural studies places questions of homo- and heterosexual arrangements and identities not as the seedy underbelly of imperial history . . . but as charged sites of its tensions.”

Thus, the fundamental anxieties upon which imperial power rested become clear through an interrogation of the ways in which gender and sexual norms were established within the confines of empire in North America. Implicit within ideas about barbarism in the early modern world was the inability of barbarians to conform to the established norms of gendered power and sexual practices. Cannibalism, then, existed alongside the perception of other inappropriate cultural

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6 Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds., *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 89.

practices in the writings of European men. The formation of masculine and later, racist imperial power, insisted upon the perceived presence of cannibalism. In the early centuries of conquest, cannibalism above all else determined savagery, and savagery established one’s place within the hierarchy upon which civilization and imperialism rested.

One of the most documented aspects of the colonial project was the insistence of the colonizers upon control of the bodies of the colonized. The body itself was a fundamental site upon which imperial power was negotiated and enforced. Sexuality was one important realm through which control was maintained; the threat of pollution through miscegenation was a common fear expressed by colonizers. The body became a permeable border through which an early form of biopower, in the Foucauldian sense, was enacted. While bodies were a site for the enforcement of imperial control, they also were simultaneously a site for subversion. In the history of the Americas, the body was a contested space. Imperial power was enacted upon the body, even while the body remained a space for the subversion of this power. The functions of the body had to be controlled and regulated in order for civilization to prosper. Thus, the threat of uncontrollable bodies loomed large in the minds of early writers. The act of cannibalism represented an inability to control the body; the bodies of its victims were violated through penetration, ingestion, and incorporation. Cannibalism represented bodies out of control—bodies that functioned outside of the regulatory norms of Western Christendom. Because of this, the fear of cannibalism was also a fear of alternative ideas about embodiment.

Implicit within colonialist discourse was the supremacy of civilization over savagery or barbarism. While the definitions of these three terms (civilization, savagery, and barbarism) were

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8 See: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality - Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York; Pantheon Books, 1978). Foucault defines biopower as the disciplining force that is enacted upon the body. Biopower is enacted from the state as a technology of control over the bodies of its citizens.
variable, the European perception of cultural superiority was constant. This was especially
evident in commentary about norms of gender and sexuality. Europeans, most especially in the
earliest years of contact, recorded Americans violating these norms with practices such as
polygamy, serial monogamy, promiscuity, etc. Native communities often maintained political,
social, and kinship networks which seemed at odds with European ways. Women’s participation
in warfare and government, the ease of divorce, the prohibition of inter-clan marriage, and looser
restrictions on women’s sexuality, among others, served as evidence of barbarism and thus
inferiority.

Together the early texts, and the images they inspired, demonstrated the depth and
complexity of the discourse about cannibalism and encounter. What has been left out of much of
the scholarly discourse on cannibalism to date is the role that gender played in labeling a group
as cannibalistic and in the consequences of this label. The cannibal was, and continues to be,
simultaneously racialized and gendered. In this period that this dissertation covers, ideas about
both race and gender were not static. However, this did not preclude the existence of
understandings of racialized and gendered difference. The distinction between what is race and
what is racialized difference is slightly muddy, however the key distinction in terms of this
project is that, in general, European writers in the late fifteenth through the mid-eighteenth
centuries did not directly equate skin-color and other associated physical characteristics, that
would later come to defined as race, with inferiority. Rather, Europeans understood the
differences between themselves and the Indians that they encountered in the Americas in ways
that also took into account geographic, religious, cultural, and gendered elements. In other words,
variances in physical appearance between Europeans and Indians were not considered by
Europeans to be the primary indicator of Indian inferiority. Rather, European men justified their
perception of their own superiority over Native peoples through a range of complex indicators including but not limited to geography, religion, culture, and norms of gender and sexuality. Skin-color did not serve as a straightforward heuristic that indicated savagery in this period as the determination of the savagery of a group of people relied upon assumptions about proper human behavior and beliefs.

The binary oppositions of civilization and savagery provide a clearer framework for understanding the ways in which Europeans articulated difference and otherness. The idea of savagery was used by European writers to describe the behaviors, beliefs, and actions of Indian peoples in the Americas. However, both civilization and savagery were considered variable, and writers indicated that there existed degrees of each, which shall be discussed in more detail in individual chapters. For example, seventeenth-century Frenchman, Pierre D’Avity, sieur de Montmartin, described what he believed were the five indicators of brutishness. These included the inability (or refusal) to use reason, a savage diet, nakedness, poor quality of shelter, and a lack of government. Together these characteristics indicated that a particular group of people was savage, which in turn opened them up for conquest.

Race, as expressed through an understanding of physical and phenotypical characteristics which represented moral worth, social standing, and intellectual potential, would play a much more important role in the discourse of cannibalism in later centuries. By the nineteenth century, the connection between emerging ideas of scientific racism and cannibalism was firmly established. Therefore, in the period discussed by this dissertation, gender was of greater importance to the discourse of cannibalism and was central in determining the effect that such discourses had on imperial power dynamics. Within the complex set of indicators of savagery

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and civilization, understandings of gender and gendered practices were fundamentally important for European authors in establishing the place of a particular group within the hierarchy of human beings. Civilization itself was viewed primarily as a gradual process of cultural, social, religious, and intellectual developments. Therefore, the so-called savage peoples of the Americas were seen as inferior and primordial and their understandings of sexuality and gender were viewed as equally backwards and dangerous. For Europeans, the image of the cannibal hearkened back to an earlier era, a savage time that has been all but eliminated by the march of civilization. When these conquerors encountered “real live” cannibals, it was easy to see them as holdovers from the past. Furthermore, not only were the conquerors very truly men, but they held complex understandings of Native peoples as simultaneously feminized and as failed men.

Although this study begins with Columbus’s landing in the Caribbean in 1492, the choice to begin with the “discovery” of the Americas should not be taken as an acceptance of this date as the first European interaction in the “New World.” Nor should it be taken as an acceptance of the great historical division between pre-Columbian and “modern,” as such divisions are always messy. The shift from the medieval to modern did not occur in a moment and medievalist ideas and traditions played an important role in the so-called modern world. The discovery of the Americas by Columbus did not, as is often believed, spur an immediate rethinking of historical processes. Rather, the “discoveries” made by Columbus set events in motion that would eventually radically reshape the histories of both Europe and the Americas. However, since this project will be focusing on European imagination and discourses, it is necessary that the interrogation begin with their intervention in the Americas. While there is no one specific year

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10 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 89. McClintock wrote, “women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking, and natural) . . . men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent, and historic).” McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 92.

that can be clearly used to distinguish between the colonial period of North American history and the nationalist one, as different parts of this vast landscape were colonized at different times and European imperialism did not end in one fell swoop, however, the end of the Seven Years War in 1763 provides a satisfying end to this project.

The Treaty of Paris, which ended the Seven Years War in North America, did not signal an end to European imperial expansion in the Americas. However, it did radically reshape the balance of power between France, Spain, and England in North America. In mainland North America, the power of France was greatly reduced by the end of the war and Jesuit efforts at converting Indians to Catholicism declined. Furthermore, the triumph of English imperialism in North America signaled a shift in the balance of power between Europeans and Indians. As the English became the most influential power on the Eastern Seaboard, groups of Indians, like the Iroquois, were less able to play European groups against one another and carve out an influential space as middle-men, gate-keepers, and trading partners. Additionally, after the American Revolution, tales of cannibalism decreased rapidly in the east and were recorded more commonly on the western frontiers. Thus, the “triumph of civilization” in eastern North America meant that cannibalism ceased to be an important trope through which alterity was negotiated in that specific context. The firm establishment of imperial power, in the Caribbean, Mexico, New France, and New England also led to the decline of writings about cannibalism. In other words, it seems that once the tangible threat of contact with savagery was eliminated, cannibalism was no longer an important topic of discussion in a particular region. Rather, accusations of cannibalism lodged against Native peoples traveled along a moving imperial frontier.

Most of this dissertation will rely on textual records written in the late fifteenth to the eighteenth century and will not cover all periods fully in all regions. Instead, this study aims to
be comparative and provide general findings about cannibalism and empire. The vast swath of time from “discovery” to the Seven Years War allows us the ability to witness and report on more than the mere presence of cannibalism within European discourses regarding the New World; it also enables us to document the changes in these discourses over time.

The academic study of cannibalism has largely been limited to the disciplines of anthropology and literary studies, although historians have not been completely silent. The study of cannibalism within the broad field of cultural studies has largely focused on modern film and media, and has not dealt with the historical development of the discourse of cannibalism in any great depth. This study, then, aims to combine the insights from all of these disciplines, in order to compensate for the limitations of a single disciplinary approach. However, this dissertation also maintains a foundation in the discipline of history and does not focus as much on literary analysis. Despite this, the works of literary theorists like Tzvetan Todorov and Frank Lestringant among others have proven quite useful for their rich interpretations of the literature of conquest.

Todorov’s important book, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, is a linguistic and semiotic account of the ways in which Europeans constructed Americans as Other and an investigation of the effects of this imbalance of power. Although Todorov focused primarily on the Spanish conquest of the New World, his ideas about Otherness nonetheless resonate in other contexts as well.  

Todorov’s important book, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, is a linguistic and semiotic account of the ways in which Europeans constructed Americans as Other and an investigation of the effects of this imbalance of power. Although Todorov focused primarily on the Spanish conquest of the New World, his ideas about Otherness nonetheless resonate in other contexts as well.  

Frank Lestringant’s less well-known book, *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne*, is quite important for being one of the first books to focus solely on the ways in which the idea of the cannibal impacted European thought. He documents the changes in European understandings of the figure of the cannibal over time in order to demonstrate its continued importance. Lestringant’s

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study is of great importance as an inspiration to this dissertation, but it also has its limitations for this study. Like Todorov, Lestringant primarily restricted his investigation to Central and South America. Furthermore, he engaged with the idea of the cannibal in the works of important French thinkers and philosophers, rather than the writings of observers. This dissertation aims to further the studies of both Todorov and Lestringant in the North American context and to deal more explicitly with issues of gender and imperial power.

Scholars of psychoanalysis, from disciplines such as literary studies, anthropology, and sociology, have also taken an interest in cannibalism as a cultural phenomenon. For example in his book *Cannibalism: Human Aggression and Cultural Form*, Eli Sagan argued that cannibalism, as both a fantasy and as an actual practice, stemmed from sublimated aggression.\(^\text{14}\) The provocative writings of psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein argued that cannibalism is one of humanity’s basest desires and that during infancy children have to learn to effectively sublimate their desire for the consumption of the Other or risk developing psychological problems in later life.\(^\text{15}\) The use of psychoanalytic insights by literary scholars is also quite common. The work of Maggie Kilgour, for example, examines cannibalism as a trope through which writers negotiate opposition between forms, such as inside and outside, consumer and consumed. The act of incorporation, which was at the center of all acts of cannibalism, is both something to be feared and desired according to Kilgour. In this way, cannibalism in literature reveals the primary tension between Self and Other.\(^\text{16}\)


Kilgour’s work was featured in an important interdisciplinary collection entitled, *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*.17 This work included the writings of key researchers about cannibalism, including literary scholars Peter Hulme and Maggie Kilgour and anthropologists William Arens and Gananath Obeyesekere, among others. Together, this collection traced the idea of cannibalism from the colonial to the post-colonial world, from literal acts to metaphor and demonstrated a wide array of approaches to the study of cannibalism. Despite the range of methods and topics covered in this collection, it does not discuss the discourse of cannibalism in North America. Peter Hulme, who edited and introduced this collection, is an important scholar of the literature of cannibalism, in particular in the Caribbean. He has published numerous books on the subject.18 Hulme and anthropologist Neil Whitehead are among the most important scholars of Carib cannibalism, and anthropophagy in general, in the last several decades.19 Whitehead’s careful reporting on the evidence of Carib cannibalism in European records has proven to be especially useful.

Although this project will not be predominately anthropological in nature, it is nonetheless of great importance to understand the place of cannibalism within the discipline.

Anthropological studies of cannibalism can be grouped into several categories, all of which asserted that cannibalism was reflective of larger cultural factors. Psycho-anthropology, a branch

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of the field that examined culture through the lens of psychoanalysis, typically articulated cannibalism as a manifestation of internal psychological processes. Cultural material anthropologists, like Marvin Harris, felt that cannibalism could be best understood as a response to environmental factors and an inadequate protein supply. The most famous of all structural anthropologists, Claude Lévi-Strauss, asserted that one of the fundamental binaries upon which all human culture rested was the division between the raw and the cooked. This division played itself out in a number of ways, including nature versus culture, civilized versus savage, et cetera. By this framework, cannibalism was a characteristic of “primitive” groups. It was a kind of disordered consumption that was opposed to civilization and culture. Another of the fundamental human distinctions for Lévi-Strauss and other structural anthropologists was the divide between men and women. Thus, humanity was pitted in a constant tug of war between two opposing forces with cannibalism residing squarely within the primitive, savage, and feminine side of the binaries. While each of these models has its merits, together they fail to evaluate cannibalism in the historical record effectively as, at least in part, the product of a European imperial imagination.

Anthropologist William Arens continues to be a polemical figure in the study of cannibalism. His controversial book, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*, argued that there has never been a society that has positively sanctioned cannibalism.\(^{20}\) He operated under the assumption that all of the evidence for cannibalism was merely propaganda to support European imperialism and served only to emphasize the “primitiveness” of conquered peoples. However, the majority of modern anthropological scholarship asserts that many groups

did, in fact, practice cannibalism. What is often misunderstood about William Arens is that he did not categorically deny the existence of cannibalism. Rather, he argued that whether or not cannibalism was a real social practice, it existed as a discursive trope. He asserted that the real and/or imagined existence of cannibalism did not diminish its importance in historical discourse.

Historian, Thomas Abler confronted Arens in his article “Iroquois Cannibalism: Fact not Fiction,” and debunked several of Arens’ assertions. Arens stated that there was no definitive evidence of cannibalism in the Jesuit Relations. However, as Abler adroitly pointed out, 31 volumes of the Thwaites edition contained references to cannibalism. Certainly, the mere preponderance of references in the Jesuit Relations does not prove that the practice actually occurred. It does, however, help to illustrate the importance of the trope of cannibalism in the discourse of the New World. There was also evidence for Iroquoian cannibalism contained in various speeches and captivity narratives. However, like Arens’s work this dissertation examines references to cannibalism in texts like the Jesuit Relations as elements of discourse, not as actual occurrences. While this middle-of-the-road stance, which refuses to weigh in on the veracity of such accounts, may seem frustrating to the reader at times, the nature of the study of discourse insists on a critical distance from determinations about the actual practice of cannibalism in North America.

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22 Arens wrote: “Firstly, even for the skeptics, cannibalism, does exist: it exists as a term within colonial discourse to describe the ferocious devouring of human flesh supposedly practiced by some savages. That existence, within discourse, is no less historical whether or not the term cannibalism describes an attested or extant social custom.” In, Francis Barker et al., Cannibalism and the Colonial World, 4.
23 Abler, 309.
24 Ibid., 312.
Historians have criticized anthropologists for failing to historicize adequately their studies of cannibalism and for assuming that there was something cross-culturally consistent and determinable about cannibalism. Those few historians who have examined cannibalism with any depth can rightly be criticized for relying too heavily on European writings of cannibalism in their discussions about Indian practice, and for failing to make connections about cannibalistic practices among groups and in response to the presence of Europeans. Furthermore, some historians have used the European textual record as definitive proof of Native American practice rather than as a discursive construction of European creation. Previous scholars of cannibalism have not satisfactorily investigated the ways that European discourses of cannibalism were linked not only with imperial context, but also functioned within a set of emerging gendered and racialized discourses.

This project lends itself naturally to a comparative analysis; in order to make conclusions about discourses of cannibalism in early post-encounter North America, it was necessary to evaluate a range of sources from several imperial contexts. This dissertation asserts that imperial context, in addition to the social and cultural traditions of the Native group in question had an important impact on discourses of cannibalism. D.W. Meinig’s characterization of Spanish conquest as “stratification,” French conquest as “articulation,” and English as “expulsion” serves as an important model for this project. The means and goals of empire had consequences, not only for the frequency of reports of cannibalism, but in regards to the power of such reports in propelling conquest and colonization.

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25 D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). As with any general and comprehensive theory, there are certainly limitations to Meinig’s model. This dissertation is using Meinig’s categorizations simply as a heuristic model, and recognizes that it is perhaps an oversimplification.
In *American Pentimento: The Invention of Indians and the Pursuit of Riches*, Patricia Seed argues that the way in which the empires of England, Portugal, Spain, and France conceived of ownership of land, resources, and people shaped the development of imperial power in the Americas. For example, the Moorish influence on Iberian political thought after the *reconquista* created an understanding of ownership of land and resources in which deposits of natural resources below the surface of the land were believed to have been put there by God for use by his people.\(^{26}\) The successful elimination of Muslim power in Spain was seen as proof that Spaniards were the true people of God and therefore riches were theirs for the taking. Spanish tradition also insisted in the payment of one fifth of all profit to the Crown.\(^{27}\) This complex understanding of public versus private ownership carried over into the issue of slavery. Seed argued that although the Spanish Crown expressed no concern with the coercion of Native labor in the pursuit of riches, slavery was not condoned because it implied private ownership of labor and resources.\(^{28}\) The development of the *repartimiento* system reflected this, as it apportioned native labor into private hands in a trustee relationship, not full ownership.\(^{29}\) Thus, the Spaniards, in general, believed that the pursuit of riches was a common goal to benefit all of God’s people. The control of natural resources obtained through the exploitation of Indian labor was of primary importance to the Spanish empire in the Americas.

Drawing from Seed’s insights, this dissertation argues that the ways in which a particular empire understood their relationship to land and Others was important in determining the place of cannibalism within discourse. For example, as the Spaniards understood the exploitation of natural resources as central to their imperial goals, they were more likely to carve out a

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 62.
\(^{28}\) Ibid., 62-5.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., 62-3.
subservient position for Indians in order to maintain a local labor force. Chapter One examines the ways in which the slave trade and the mining of raw materials were directly related to accusations of cannibalism. In opposition to Spanish conceptions, Englishmen conceived of their efforts in the New World in more individualized ways, and were far more interested in private land ownership. While success for the conquistadors may have been measured in gold and silver, success for the Englishmen was measured in land ownership. Based upon these general priorities, the English colonies in North America tended to show less interest in affording Indians a space in their New World. Thus, the prominence of cannibalism within English discourse, and the relationship between cannibalism and imperial power, differed from the Spanish and French and had consequences for the gendered nature of imperial power as shall be discussed throughout.

In order to understand the discourse of cannibalism (keeping in mind imperial context), it is necessary to understand the distinction between civilization and savagery and to acknowledge the power of this binary. The conquest of the New World rested on the assumption of a fundamental difference between the European and the Indian. No matter how profoundly Europeans felt their own differences, and no matter how uncivilized they may each have believed one another to be, they nonetheless understood an innate superiority of the Christian European over all others. Certainly, the English, for example, believed that Catholicism was fundamentally flawed and Catholics were savage and brutish, but they nonetheless continued to operate under the assumption that a flawed belief in God was superior to no belief in God at all. Thus, in order to make the conquest of the Americas viable, Europeans had to see themselves, and their social and cultural traditions, as different from American ones.

30 Ibid., 70.
31 Ibid., 12.
Anthony Pagden discussed many of the heated Spanish arguments about Indian humanity in his book *The Fall of the Natural Man*. He demonstrated that mainstream Spanish thought came to recognize the shared humanity of Spaniards and Indians, even if they considered Indians to be inferior men. Therefore, Spaniards assumed that if Native Americans were human it was their job to provide Indians with the knowledge denied to them by their fall from grace. Spaniards presumed that one of the most fundamental tenets of humanity was that humans should not consume on another. God called humanity forth to prosper, populate, and control the world through his word and glory; consuming one another violated his divine will. A similar sentiment was echoed in other imperial contexts, and although the English and the French may have had different ideas about God and about their relationship between the land and peoples of the New World, they still believed that human consumption violated fundamental tenets of Christianity.

There has been much recent scholarly work that deconstructs the Westernized version of the process of Othering. It is nearly impossible to provide an accurate definition of the Other, for the term is purposely difficult to describe. The definitions of Self, Subject, Other, and Object are elusive. The Other comes in many disguises. It can take the form of anything: a woman, a circus performer, a medical marvel, even a cannibal. The Other serves to provide a culture with a point of reference, something which it is not and something which it must strive not to be. Although the Other represents what a society should not be, there is also often a fetishistic reverence for the Other. It stands in opposition to the Self, the Subject, the Signifier. In order to define itself, a being must determine what it is not. The Subject is not merely constructed in opposition to its

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Object however, as the reverse is also true. The “civilized” being existed because of the cannibal, just as the cannibal took form because of the existence of the civilized world.

In his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha put forth a methodology for the analysis of the Other in discourse. He stated, “my reading of colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the process of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse.”33 The cannibal was a key site for mapping subjectification for European writers, as the opposition between presumed American cannibal savages and civilized Europeans became a fundamental trope through which early modern ideas about identity, and especially masculinity, were formed. While there have been some texts that were more “sympathetic” to the cannibal, most hold the image of the cannibal as the supreme representative of savagery.34 To oversimplify the matter, it was not because Native peoples were cannibals that Europeans felt they needed civilizing, rather that since they needed civilizing they must be cannibals.

It is important to separate the very real physical act of anthropophagy from the idea of the cannibal. The cannibal is a construct, produced by imperialism, maintained through discourse. The image of the cannibal was the product of a complex set of interaction and assumptions. As Peter Hulme argued, “to concentrate on the notion of a dialogue is to insist on two emphases, not always present in discussions of cannibalism; on the agency of those described as cannibals – difficult to access but necessary to posit; and on the relationship between describer and described, between Europe and its others. The figure of the cannibal is a classic example of the way in which that otherness is dependent on a prior sense of kinship denied, rather than on mere

33 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 95. (Emphasis in original).
34 The most obvious example of this can be seen in the essay “Of Cannibals” by Michel de Montaigne, who although sympathetic in some ways is often contradictory.
difference.” Thus, in order to understand the idea of the cannibal, one must first understand the complex power dynamics at hand in interactions between Europeans and American Indians, which drew from earlier understandings about alterity. Many sources revealed instances where Native peoples called Europeans cannibals and feared them for their cannibalistic reputation. What differentiated this kind of relationship was the imbalance of power that existed between colonizer and colonized. This difference was most clearly manifested through European control, through the technology of writing, of traditional historical discourses. The image of the savage cannibal Native is one that remains, one that has lingered and prospered over time. The figure of the bloodthirsty cannibal European however, has not. Thus, cannibalism still remains perhaps the most powerful and enduring image of savagery.

The selection of primary sources discussed in this dissertation were chosen based on a number of criteria. While there were some accounts in the historical record about Europeans consuming one another, especially in times of starvation or extreme stress, these were rare and remarkable, thus the sources discussed in this dissertation engage with acts cannibalism primarily between groups of Indians. For example, John Smith reported that one Virginia colonist resorted to killing and cannibalizing his wife during the so-called “starving time,” and Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca’s account of the ill-fated survivors of the Narváez mission in Florida recorded their desperate acts of man-eating. There were also numerous of accounts of shipwreck cannibalism among Europeans, most famously remembered in the wreck of the ship Méduse in 1816. These occurrences were always dealt with differently in European texts than

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35 Barker et al., 6.
37 Jahoda, 97.
those perpetrated by Natives, as there was never the assumption of a cultural pattern of cannibalism. While starvation cannibalism was considered singularly abhorrent by some, as evidenced by Jean de Léry’s writings about the siege of the Sancerre for example, they were nonetheless treated as momentary aberrations.\textsuperscript{39} The most prevalent type of cannibalism presented in European chronicles was performed by Native peoples upon Natives peoples. Less common, but still notable, were accounts of Natives consuming Europeans.

This dissertation draws primarily from published works because of the popularity of accounts of cannibalism and exploration. However, after examining a great number of written records from Spain, France, and England it is evident that references to cannibalism were often unsubstantiated, brief, and contradictory. Furthermore, when cannibalism was actually mentioned it was usually only in passing. This study cannot claim to encompass every possible source that included anthropophagus references, but instead focuses on those that contained more substantive references. The evidence discussed in the following chapters is limited to explicit references to cannibalism. At times, the discourse of cannibalism was connected to other related practices, such as human sacrifice, torture, and sexual violence, but largely out of concern of the vastness of the material to examine, this study discusses representations of the consumption of human bodies alone. It would be useful in future projects to explore the connections between cannibalism and related practices more fully, as well as to investigate more veiled references of anthropophagy. For example, this dissertation does not treat the use of terms like blood-thirsty to describe Native peoples as a descriptor of cannibalism, yet there was clearly a connection between the European conceptions of warrior bloodlust and the desire to consume human flesh. Finally, whenever possible, the sources discussed in this dissertation were limited to

\textsuperscript{39} Frank Lestringant, \textit{Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 75.
observational accounts, rather than strictly philosophical ones, like the writings of Michel de Montaigne.

The sources on cannibalism were not evenly distributed across empires and will be discussed more specifically in each chapter. The Spanish records were by far the most extensive and were particularly strong for their records of cannibalism in sixteenth century Mexico. French sources yielded a reasonable amount of information and the records of Jesuit missionaries in the Great Lakes region were especially strong. English sources, however, were far more difficult to come by. These differences in the historical record spoke not only to the differences among the Native peoples encountered, but also to the priorities of empire and the time period in which considerable intervention occurred. Large-scale English efforts, for instance, occurred much later on the Atlantic seaboard and they were overall far less interested in incorporating Native peoples into their Anglo-American world.

The figure of the cannibal has fascinated Western writers and readers for centuries. Typically, modern scholars trace the origins of the trope of the cannibal back to the ancient writings of men like Herodotus or Pliny who detailed the monstrous races of the world. Upon arriving in the New World, Europeans brought with them traditions of contact with alterity; men like Columbus learned from travel writings of John Mandeville and Marco Polo, among others, or from the more fantastic tales of St. Brendan and Prester John. Thus, there was an extant discourse about cannibalism in Europe prior to 1492. They brought ideas with them to the New World about how to interact and engage with difference.  

Typically, in the middle ages, cannibals were either distant foreigners from the East, witches, Jews, or savage forest-dwelling wild-men. The cannibal was always an individual who

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40 For a thorough examination of the importance of the tales of Prester John in shaping European expansion see: Michael Brooks, “Prester John: A Reexamination and Compendium of the Mythical Figure Who Helped Spark European Expansion” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Toledo, 2009).
resided outside of mainstream culture. European traditions about the Other reinforced a civilizing agenda, in which strangers were meant to be converted to the proper Christian way of life or eliminated. Because these processes were set in motion long before the first European settled on the American continent, the writings of early European explorers of the Americas tended to focus on the differences between the inhabitants of the Americas and civilized Europeans. As it was common in medieval Europe for individuals to label peoples and cultures that were quite different from their own as cannibalistic, this contributed to the abundance of references to cannibalism in the Americas. Additionally, medieval European writings were rife with references to the threatening powers of women. This was evidenced in the numerous accounts of witches. This pattern of viewing women’s sexual freedom in particular, as threatening carried forth into the Americas.  

Some of the earliest written accounts of cannibalism were composed in ancient Greece, and these accounts laid a foundation for centuries of European discourse. The Greeks believed that there existed a hierarchy of humanity, which was determined not only by morality but by geography as well. The people of Scythia, a group of semi-nomadic people from the Russian steppes, were the most common target of Greek accusations of savagery and barbarism and their reputation for man-eating carried forth even in medieval and early modern Europe. Herodotus described the Androphagi from Scythia as “more savage than those of any other race” and

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42 Jahoda, 98.
43 I am reluctant to make such generalization as this, because Greece was by no means a unified place with a singular culture. However for the sake of brevity and to stay on track, I have done so.
indicated that they were cannibals.\textsuperscript{45} The Scythians represented everything that the civilized Greeks were not. The presumption of the barbarity of the Scythians provided a justification for their subjugation, a pattern that would be repeated in the Americas. Herodotus began a lengthy textual cannibal tradition that not only provided a model through which countless peoples have called those different from themselves cannibals, but also provided a very real literary model for many of the cannibal texts to follow. The writings of Roman naturalist and philosopher Pliny the Elder were also important in developing medieval and early modern ideas about the cannibalism and monstrosity.\textsuperscript{46}

Writings about travel to exotic lands were enormously popular in the Middle Ages, and it was not uncommon for these accounts to feature descriptions of cannibalism. The dubious fourteenth-century travel narrative of Sir John Mandeville, for example, described the “evil customs” of lands to the east. His portrayal of the practices of the people of the Isle of Lamary, presaged many of the descriptors that European writers would later employ to depict American cannibals.\textsuperscript{47} The people of Lamary were described as unabashedly naked, promiscuous, and communitarian.\textsuperscript{48} However, it was their practice of cannibalism that so astonished Mandeville. He wrote,

\begin{quote}
But in that country there is a cursed custom, for they eat more gladly men’s flesh than any other flesh . . . Thither go merchants and bring with them children to sell to them of the country, and they buy them. And if they be fat they eat them anon. And if they be lean
\end{quote}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{49} Ibid., 119.
\end{thebibliography}
they feed them till they be fat and then they eat them. And they say, that it is the best and sweetest of all the world.\textsuperscript{49}

In Mandeville’s description, not only were the people of Lamary cannibals, but they also traded in the flesh of children. Another writer Friar Odoric, whose writing was a model for Mandeville’s, described a place called Moumoran in which the men and women had dog’s heads and ate the flesh of their enemies.\textsuperscript{50} The presence of dog-headed men was also reported in the Caribbean, as chapter one discusses.

Before moving forward into a description of the chapters to follow, an important idea must be presented which is fundamental to this dissertation, and any study of cannibalism. As some readers may know the modern English words, \textit{cannibal} and \textit{cannibalism} are the etymological ancestors of word Carib. This tribe, as chapter one argues, in addition to having inspired the name of the Caribbean and the term that we now use to describe man-eating, were one of the main targets for European accusations of savagery. In discourse, they were placed in opposition to their supposedly more docile neighbors, the Arawaks. Despite the etymological relationship between Carib and cannibalism, the language employed in the early descriptions of the Caribbean to describe the act of human-eating and the people now known as the Caribs was more complex and it is not always clear if an individual was referring to the Caribs, man-eaters, or both. Columbus and other writers sometimes wrote about the Caniba, or people of the great Khan.\textsuperscript{51} It is not within the scope of this project to detail all of the important linguistic work that has been done on the use of the words Caniba, Caribes, Carib, etc. in early writings, but suffice it to say that while the meanings that Columbus and others attached to these words cannot be fully

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 120.
recovered, these early writings established a precedent in which Carib became equivalent to cannibal. However the modern word came to be, what is important to note is that “cannibalism” and “cannibal” differed from the more formal terms “anthropophagy,” and “anthropophagite.” Cannibal and cannibalism have come to be associated with a whole host of other savage traits and carried a heavy discursive legacy. Anthropophagy, on the other hand, derives from the Greek and simply means human-eating. This dissertation primarily examines cannibalism, not anthropophagy. It is not concerned with acts of human-eating, but rather with the development of the discourse of cannibalism and all of the historical and etymological baggage that this term carried with it. In fact, there is a debate within anthropology as to whether or not the term cannibalism should be reserved for use “for the ideology that constitutes itself around an obsession with anthropophagy.” Despite the important conceptual differences between these two terms, this dissertation uses them interchangeably in order to reduce repetitiveness.

The chapters that follow are organized in chronological order, but each also explores the discourse of cannibalism from the position of a specific subject position within an imperial context. Each chapter explores the complex set of intersections in one geographic and imperial context, which helped to create the discourse of the cannibal. Furthermore, each chapter engages with a specific subject position from which the discourse of cannibalism was developed and maintained. For example in the case of the French empire in the Americas, this project focuses on the writings of Jesuit missionaries in Canada. The limited perspective of the Jesuits cannot be

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53 Despite this important distinction, I will use cannibalism and anthropophagy as synonyms throughout this project in order to reduce awkward repetition. The use of the term anthropophagy in the title of this dissertation is used in connection with the idea of the imagination, as in the imperial imagination, anthropophagites became cannibals.
54 Barker et al., 4.
easily extrapolated to make conclusions about the French empire writ large, but the uniqueness of the encounters between Catholic priests and the Iroquois can provide insight into the relationship between religion, the discourse of cannibalism, and imperial power. In this way, no one chapter represents the discourse of cannibalism from the position of empire; rather together they speak to the ways in which the discourse of cannibalism was fundamental to the establishment and maintenance of European imperial power, in all of its manifestations, in North America.

Chapter one, “Discovering the Cannibal,” investigates the emergence of the idea of the cannibal in the writings of European explorers of the Caribbean. Unlike the succeeding chapters, the connections between the discourse of cannibalism and empire are far less explicit here. Beginning with Christopher Columbus and continuing through to Amerigo Vespucci, this chapter establishes the development of the idea of cannibalism, as opposed to anthropophagy. The encounter between European men, who hailed from a variety of homelands, and the Caribs and the Arawaks was fundamental in creating the discourse of cannibalism. While these encounters did not happen in a vacuum, and these writers drew explicitly from medieval and classical ideas, they radically re-shaped the power of the discourse of cannibalism. Furthermore, in these writings the discourse of cannibalism was gendered based on pre-existing understandings of gender, sexuality, and monstrosity. In these accounts, European men expressed great fear about the cannibalistic appetites of Carib women, which reflected their fear of the unknown and its feminine nature. Furthermore, these early writings and images set the stage for the discourse of cannibalism on the mainland.

In the context of the conquest of Mexico, explored in Chapter Two, the conquistadors expressed much less fear of the anthropophagus appetites of the women they encountered. Rather,
they used accusations of cannibalism in order to justify their conquest of the Aztecs, and to further the establishment of the superiority of Spanish masculinity. The descriptions of horrific sacrifices and cannibalism practiced by the Aztecs enabled Hernán Cortés and his men to establish the superiority of Spanish civilization. Additionally, continuing a practice established in the Caribbean, these men connected cannibalism with savagery and assumed that people who practiced cannibalism were also prone to sexual violations. By referring to them as cannibals, the bodies of the Aztecs were made ripe for conquest. This conquest took place on the battlefield, but also in the bedroom. Cortés was the proto-typical masculine imperial hero who exploited the bodies and labor of the native women that he encountered. His successes portended not only the erasure of the “abominable” customs of cannibalism and sacrifice among the Aztecs, but helped to establish a stratified society in which power was masculine and women’s participation in political matters was voided.

Chapter Three focuses on the discourse of cannibalism in New France, specifically through the documents of the Jesuit Relations. Unlike Cortés, Columbus, or Vespucci, the Jesuit missionaries did not arrive in North America desirous of the bodies of its inhabitants, rather they sought souls. As an avowedly celibate order, the Jesuits sought to prove their masculinity by enduring the trials of the wilderness and the cruelties perpetrated by the Indians, particularly the Iroquois. Their accounts of martyrdom and cannibalization at the hands of their potential converts, not only drew more dedicated missionaries to Canada, but also reiterated the seriousness and importance of their cause. The goals of the French empire were less clearly articulated than their English and Spanish neighbors, and their settlements in the Americas were typically smaller and more distant from one another. The French sought to establish economic relations with the Indians in order to profit, rather than fully conquering and dominating the land.
and peoples. Thus, the accusations of cannibalism in the Jesuit Relations spurred religious interest in the peoples of Canada, rather than inspiring full-scale conquest.

The fourth chapter examines the discourse of cannibalism in the English empire, focusing particularly on New England. Captivity narratives provided the richest source of references in cannibalism, however English writers were far less preoccupied with man-eating in general. This chapter argues that this is due to the legacies of Spanish and French efforts, the practices of the Native groups that they encountered, and the particular goals of English colonization. The English, much less than the French or the Spanish, were not interested in making space for Indians in their new empire. The captivity narratives demonstrated that discussions of cannibalism reinforced the development of a new understanding of Anglo-American masculinity that defined itself against the wilderness and its inhabitants. The ability to endure the threat of cannibalism and other trials at the hand of the Indians, allowed the English to justify their presence in the Americas and assert their power over the lands and its people.

Historical writings about cannibalism tended to focus on the stark separation between civilization and savagery and this binary formation continues to predominate even in the twenty-first century. Cannibalism is still seen as something practiced by those that are believed to be less civilized. The discourse of cannibalism remains powerful today and continues to intersect with ideas of hetero-sexism, racism, and misogyny as the conclusion touches upon.

This dissertation argues that there cannot be a proper discussion of cannibalism as a cultural phenomenon when the pervasive thought is that cannibalism discriminates – that is, that it only plays an important role in societies that are “primitive.” Thinking of Jeffrey Dahmer, of the Donner Party, or even the popularity of the film Alive, and one cannot help but see that the trope of cannibalism endures. Perhaps the role of cannibalism in society has changed, but that
does not negate its (discursive) existence. Cannibalism has traditionally been a very difficult topic to discuss as it is often accompanied by Euro-centric biases and the pervasive fear of the unknowable and unquantifiable.

It may seem logical to dismiss cannibalism as an element of the past, something that we, as humans, have “moved beyond,” but this dismissal is too easy. It ignores the contribution of cannibalism in constructing modern identity. In many ways, cannibalism is inseparable from racism, colonialism, sexism, etc. The trope of cannibalism was employed by European writers as important justification for the subjugation of peoples. It was the discursive presence of cannibalism, which was consistently linked to understandings of gender and sexuality, that indicated savagery long before race, as we understand it in the modern context, became fully developed.
CHAPTER I. DISCOVERING CANNIBALS

The figure of the cannibal has become one of the most enduring images of the European conquest of America. The originator of this trope was none other than the Admiral of the Ocean Sea himself, Christopher Columbus. He was most certainly not the first person to indicate the existence of savage cannibals in a faraway land, but his momentous discovery ushered in a new era in which cannibalism replaced anthropophagy.¹ This chapter will focus on the discursive origins of the idea of the cannibal. The discussion will be limited to the island Caribs of the Lesser Antilles (also known as the Caribbees), which included both the Leeward and Windward Islands of the western Antilles, and the Netherlands Antilles off the coast of Venezuela. The major islands of this group include (in modern terms): Barbuda, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Montserrat, Martinique, St. Lucia, Grenada, Barbados, Aruba, Curaçao, and Trinidad and Tobago among others. It is on these islands that European invaders believed that the fearsome Caribs resided.

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the development of the discourse of cannibalism in the writings about the four voyages of Columbus. Then, it will uncover the ways in which the figure of the cannibal differed in the writings of Amerigo Vespucci, especially in regards to the gendered nature of cannibal discourse. Finally, the analysis will be expanded to include visual representations of man-eating. In each of these discussions, this chapter will argue that the discourse of Carib cannibalism was gendered in a variety of complex, and sometimes contradictory ways. European writers about the New World possessed preconceived notions about proper exhibitions of gender and sexuality, and these assumptions about appropriate

¹ See: Eviatar Zerubavel’s book *Terra Cognita: The Mental Discovery of America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992). Although this “discovery,” has been undeniably important for western history, it was not readily received as such at the time.
gendered and sexual norms led them to construct Indians as inferior Other in their accounts. By examining the intersections of the discourses of cannibalism, sex, and gender in the Caribbean, the development of European ideas about alterity and difference, which were fundamental to the establishment and maintenance of European power in the New World become clearer.

Europe was first made aware of the Caribs by neighboring Arawakan Indians of the Greater Antilles who informed Columbus and his crew about the fearsome tribe to the East who came over the sea to terrorize and consume them. European writings revealed the Arawaks and Caribs to be long-standing enemies.\(^2\) This enmity has come down to us as reflecting the divide between “good Indians” and “bad Indians.” The Caribs, from the first moment of European contact, were portrayed as villains who terrorized the innocent Arawaks and posed a significant impediment to European expansion. Their reputation for cannibalism became one of the most damning pieces of evidence of their savagery and accordingly their ripeness for conquest. On his first voyage Columbus did not venture into the Lesser Antilles. On his second journey across the Atlantic, however, he embarked with the express purpose of finding the islands of the Caribs. Thus, the presence of cannibalism in the West Indies was an important catalyst for early exploration and conquest. By the mid-sixteenth century, the practice of cannibalism would also define the ability to enslave a given population.

The men who participated in these voyages came from many different parts of Europe and they did not possess a unified understanding of Otherness. While Columbus sailed for Spain, he was Italian by birth, as was Vespucci who sailed for both Spain and Portugal. Italian mariners dominated the seas in the fifteenth century and they led the way in the conquest of America. Despite the multi-ethnic nature of the crew on voyages to the Caribbean, the writings about these

\(^2\) See the Introduction of Philip P. Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Scholars continue to debate whether or not the long-standing dispute between the Caribs and the Arawaks was real or imagined by Europeans.
voyages all indicate that European men brought pre-existing traditions about encounter with difference with them on their journey. The discovery of the Americas represented the first time that Europeans had been exposed to such a large, unknown, and seemingly barbaric population.³

There were innumerable accounts of wild-men and witches living among them in Europe, who were considered savage and uncivilized. What distinguished the encounter with the savage Americans was its scale, not necessarily its novelty.⁴

There was a rich European tradition of encounter with monstrous races. Ancient texts were rife with examples of the horrors that travelers faced if they left the safe confines of the polis. Based on this intellectual tradition, Columbus fully expected to encounter amazing and monstrous creatures when he arrived in the New World.⁵ While belief in the existence of dog-headed men does not persist today, the cannibals of Columbus’s day were part of the same family of monsters and their existence has been doubted less.⁶ While the cannibals of Europe’s imagination may have been considered among the monstrous and magical, this was no longer the case less than a century after discovery. Through an examination of the writing of Columbus, Vespucci and others, the ways in which the figure of the cannibal became disassociated with the realm of the imaginary and instead came to represent real, living people with disastrous consequences become clearer.

In traditional historical discourse, Columbus’s discovery of the Americas was a harbinger of modernity. In many ways he was a man straddling the medieval and the modern; he

³ Dickason, 63. Europeans had certainly come into contact with peoples that they considered strange and savage before, however the presence of such peoples was not unknown to them. For example, while Marco Polo’s travel writings brought much new information about the places and peoples to the east and their savagery, these lands were known to exist. The peoples of the Americas were (almost) completely unknown to Europe and the discovery of such a vast amount of undiscovered land and people challenged much conventional wisdom.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Jahoda, 15.
challenged conventional wisdom about geography (although, contrary to prevalent American cultural myth, most believed the world to be round), traveled widely throughout Europe, and opened Europe’s eyes to the vast lands to the West. Yet, at the same time, he was obstinate in his belief that he had discovered the western route to Asia and found evidence to confirm his belief without recognizing the glaring errors in his observations. Furthermore, his way of understanding difference was shaped by medieval epistemologies. Through his writings it was clear that he was greatly influenced by other fantastic travel writers like Marco Polo, Friar Odoric, Saint Brendan, Prester John, and John Mandeville.

The first reference to cannibalism in Columbus’s diary of his first journey (which comes down to us through the editorial hand of Bartolomé de las Casas) came from Sunday November 4, more than three weeks after the crew first sighted land on October 12.\(^7\) This initial observation is often overlooked because it does not relate directly to “real” Indians, but it is nonetheless very

\(^7\) For the sake of clarity, this essay will refer to Columbus as the author of this journal, despite the fact that its authorship is far more complex. See: William F. Keegan, “Columbus was a Cannibal: Myth and First Encounters,” in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, eds. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville: The University of Florida, 1996), 18-19.
important. Columbus wrote, “He [the Admiral] understood also that, far from there, there were one-eyed men, and others, with snouts of dogs, who ate men, and that as soon as one was taken they cut his throat and drank his blood and cut off his genitals.”

Columbus unquestioningly recognized the presence of wondrous creatures, like the fabled dog-headed men. He and his crew never encountered these creatures, although he did find a couple of mermaids who turned out not to be as beautiful as he anticipated. Despite the fact that Columbus’s idea of what a mermaid should be was challenged by what he claimed to have seen, he still insisted that they were in fact mermaids. Similarly, he insisted that the Islands of the Caribbean were actually India, in spite of the evidence to the contrary. He exhibited a curious combination of empirical observation, by noting the appearance of the mermaids, coupled with a confidence in his ability to interpret data based upon a preconceived understanding of the outcome. Tzvetan Todorov refers to this as a “finalist strategy;” that is, Columbus knew what he would find in the New World and simply looked for evidence to confirm his assumptions. Rather than letting his observations speak for themselves, Columbus insisted on the existence of Truth in medieval and classical texts that he simply needed to confirm. In this way, Columbus was no great innovator or discoverer, for he was only discovering what he believed had already been proven to exist. His real discovery in this sense, then, was the route that he took to get there, not locating new lands and peoples.

In his famous letter to Luis de Santángel, Columbus remarked that because of God’s divine will the lands that had been “talked or written” about by men but were known only

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8 Christopher Columbus, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America, 1492 – 1493.* Abstracted Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, Transcribed and trans. by Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 133.
9 Mandeville, 130.
10 Columbus, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage, 321.*
11 Todorov, 15.
through “conjecture, without much confirmation from eyesight, amounting only to this much that
the hearers for the most part listened and judged that there was fable in it than anything actual,
however trifling” had been observed and were now known to Christendom. In the past several
decades, much doubt has been shed upon the novelty of Columbus’s discovery, but that is not at
issue here. It does not matter whether or not Christopher Columbus was the first European to set
foot in the Western Hemisphere, but rather that his actions set forth a chain of events that
radically reshaped history. He may not have discovered America and its peoples, but through his
writings and their legacy, he did create the idea of the cannibal which not only affected the ways
in which scholars and laypeople speak about indigeneity, savagery, and civilization, but had real
tangible effects on people’s lives.

There are very few extant records of Columbus’s voyages in his own words; the vast
majority of what remains are summaries and abstracts of his work written by his contemporaries.
Bartolomé de Las Casas abstracted and edited Columbus’s journal of his first voyage and
published it as part of his larger work, Historia de las Indias. His records contained both the
actual language from the no longer extant journal, as well as editorial summaries of its missing
contents. Columbus’s son Ferdinand also abstracted and summarized his journal in a biography
he wrote about his father that survived in a Latin translation from 1571. The state of the
historical records makes it difficult to know where Columbus ended and the editorial hand began.
In the passage quoted earlier, from Las Casas’s record of the journal of the first voyage,
Columbus did not doubt the veracity of the existence of dog-headed cannibals or men with one
eye. However, in his widely published letter to Luis de Santángel, which was written in his own

hand and published in Barcelona in April 1493, Columbus displayed a very measured skepticism about the wonders of the New World. He wrote, “Down to the present, I have not found in those islands any monstrous men, as many expected, but on the contrary all the people are very comely.” One might reasonably expect that men with dog-heads would be considered monstrous.

Columbus said that he had not obtained any information about the existence of monsters in the Indies except for an island which was inhabited by those who other Indians “regard as very ferocious, who eat human flesh.” The people, he reported, plundered the other islands in their canoes. These cannibals were “no more ill-shaped than the others, but have the custom of wearing their hair long, like women.” Their ferocity was starkly contrasted by the excessive cowardice that Columbus attributed to other Indians. Finally, he indicated that the cannibals consorted with the women of the Island of Matinino. Columbus reported that this island was populated only by women and that they “practice[d] no female urges.” In this description of the peoples of the Caribbean islands, he denied the existence of monsters in the West Indies, but confirmed the presence of cannibals and the Amazon-like women of Matinino, with whom the cannibals mated. According to what was expressed in this published letter, Columbus did not doubt that the Cannibals were indeed human; they may have behaved monstrously but they were not actually monsters. While his journal contained the record of what occurred on his journey, including that the Natives told him of the existence of the fabled dog-headed people, his letter to Santángel was more careful and did not relate such tales as reflections of reality.

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14 Santángel financed most of Columbus’s second voyage.
16 Ibid., 270.
17 Ibid., 269-270.
During his first journey to the New World, which departed from the Canary Islands on September 6, 1492 and returned to Barcelona on March 15, 1493, Columbus and his crew explored the islands that constitute what are now called the Greater Antilles, including Hispaniola and Cuba. It was here that he encountered the Arawaks.\textsuperscript{18} His first written impressions of this group of Indians stressed their docility, generosity, and of course, their nudity.\textsuperscript{19} In this initial contact, he also learned from them that they were being terrorized by a fearsome neighboring tribe. Ferdinand Columbus reported that, “Some Indians had scars left by wounds on their bodies; [we] asked by signs what had caused they, they replied, also by signs that the natives of other islands came on raids to capture them and they had received their wounds defending themselves.”\textsuperscript{20} Columbus’s journal also contained a similar account of this fateful meeting.\textsuperscript{21}

Throughout these first travels in the Caribbean, Columbus often heard about the atrocities of the neighboring Caribs. He recorded on Friday November 23, 1492 that the Indians expressed great fear of the island of Bohío, where the well-armed one-eyed cannibals resided. Columbus doubted what the Arawaks told him; he wondered if perhaps their people were simply taken captive and because they did not return, they were assumed to have been eaten. He remarked that

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item[18] For more information about the important debates about the historical differences and similarities between the Arawaks and the Caribs see Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., \textit{The Lesser Antilles in the Age of Imperial Expansion}, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996) and Neil Whitehead, \textit{Lords of the Tiger Spirit: A History of the Caribs in Colonial Venzuela and Guyana, 1498-1820}, (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Foris Publications, 1988). Scholars continue to debate about whether or not the Caribs and Arawak were indeed two different people and whether or not the Caribs were mainland invaders as is often claimed. Linguistic evidence suggests that Carib islanders spoke an Arawakan language, with the use of Carib restricted to men during certain occasions. The European textual record is not clear about the linguistic difference between the two groups as some remark that that spoke mutually intelligible languages with others recording a great variety of languages in the Caribbean.
  \item[20] Ferdinand Columbus, 61.
  \item[21] Columbus, \textit{The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage}, 67.
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they expressed the same fear about Columbus and his men when they first encountered them.\textsuperscript{22}

The Arawak’s fearful exultations inspired him with the hope that based upon their superior technology and organization these Caribs might in fact be the same people of the Great Khan for whom he had been searching. Despite the repeated times that the Arawaks reportedly told him that the Caribs had one eye and the face of a dog, he did not believe them and his excitement to meet the Great Khan made famous by Marco Polo, only increased. Columbus believed at one point that he encountered some Carib individuals based upon their hideous appearance. However, he did not record much of importance about this encounter and based upon the navigational records of his journey, it is unlikely that these individuals were actually Caribs.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to the stories of being terrorized at the hands of cannibalistic sea-faring Caribs, the Arawaks also told the Europeans about the legendary women of the island of Matinino. Columbus recorded that only women lived on this island and that they did not practice the traditional employs of their sex, but rather were fierce warriors. These women were said to be the consorts of the Carib warriors, who at a certain time of the year traveled to Matinino to mate with them. Male children were returned to their Carib fathers, while female children were raised by the women.\textsuperscript{24} Together, the cannibals and the women of Matinino, who were clearly reminiscent of the Amazons, fascinated Columbus and filled him with the desire to encounter them on his second voyage. While the cannibals and the women of Matinino may not have been the monsters of legend, they violated some of the most basic tenants of rational European traditions, and these transgressions lent themselves to conquest.

On his first voyage of discovery, Columbus did not find great caches of gold or spices, but his encounters with the Indians provided him with clues about their location, and what he

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 167.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 329.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 339-343.
believed to be the location of the Great Khan. The writings from this voyage revealed a profound ambivalence about the presence of cannibalism in the Caribbean. At times, the Admiral was quite skeptical of what was revealed to him, at other times, however, he was eager to hear about the sophistication of the man-eaters and the possible presence of gold in their midst. His diary and the published letter to Santángel further emphasized this ambivalence; he recorded that the cannibals were supposed to be one-eyed and dog-headed, yet he doubted the truth of this. He was less skeptical about their cannibalistic ways, but still did not unquestioningly accept it.

Neither Columbus himself, his son Ferdinand, nor Las Casas provided much detail about the gendered or sexual practices of Caribbean natives. However, Columbus was intrigued by their nudity and remarked upon it a number of times. He fixated upon the beauty of some of the Indians, but in the published versions of his accounts, he stopped short of describing sexuality in any detail. He wrote that the men on Hispaniola each only possessed one wife, except for the king who could have as many as twenty.” The sexual practices of the women of Matinino and their Carib lovers did appear of some interest to the Admiral, perhaps because of their relative strangeness.

The connection between sexuality and cannibalism, which was first hinted at in the descriptions of the yearly mating of the Caribs and the women of Matinino, became more firmly established in the writings of the second voyage and subsequently in the writings of Michele da Cuneo and Amerigo Vespucci. Additionally, the first reference to cannibals referred to above, told of dog-headed cannibals who drank blood and removed the genitals of their victims. Little was made of this connection at the time, but in the coming decades, Caribs would be widely

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26 Idem, The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage, 225 and 255.
accused of castrating and consuming their victims. This particular threat to masculinity embodied the most deep-seated fear of European men. Not only did the Caribs and other islanders practice strange sexual behaviors, but they also enacted their rage and vengeance on the virile men, first by removing their “manhood,” then by ingesting and incorporating male bodies into their own.

There were a number of other published second-hand accounts that also dealt with the Admiral’s first voyage to the Americas. For example, Allegretto Allegretti wrote in 1493 that, “on one island there are men who eat other men from a nearby island, and they are great enemies to each other and do not have any type of weapons.” Allegretti displayed none of the ambivalence evidenced in Columbus’s writings. He also incorrectly asserted that none of the islanders had any weapons, which was directly contradicted by the letter to Santángel, which was published in the same month that Allegretti wrote his account. He remarked that the Indians welcomed the Spaniards by presenting them with “many young virgins,” an event which did not occur in the extant records of Columbus.

In his chronicle of the history of Venice from 1493, Domenico Malipiero repeated that the Indians of the New World were generous, timid, and good-natured. However he also noted, “the island called Santa Maria has people like the others, except they have very long hair and eat human flesh, and they go about in the vessels referred to above [canoes] abducting men from other islands.” In this passage, the Caribs and those that eat human flesh were clearly conflated. Interestingly, Malipiero indicated that the length of their hair was as important and interesting as

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29 Columbus, “Letter of Columbus to Sántangel,” 270.
30 Domenico Malipiero in *Italian Reports on the Americas, 28*. 
their man-eating. He did not doubt that the cannibals were men and not monsters, nor did he doubt the veracity of the Arawak descriptions of them.

Another example of the circulation of tales from the first voyage came from the account of an Augustinian monk named Giacomo Filippo Forest da Bergamo, written in 1493. He repeated a story that Columbus told in his letter to Santángel that there was an island in the Caribbean on which all of the people are born with tails.\(^{31}\) This is an example of the direct passing on and re-circulating of knowledge about discovery. Bergamo also wrote “The admiral took those people [from Hispaniola, home to the first European settlement of La Navidad], who were living like wild animals and brought them to a more cultivated way of life.”\(^{32}\) This statement nicely encapsulated the burgeoning civilizing agenda of Europe—through the beneficence of European men, the New World “savages” were taught to use the land properly (through cultivation) and thus were brought from bestiality to rationality. He also recorded the tale of the women of Matinino and noted that on the Island of Charis there was “a very fierce race of men who eat human flesh.”\(^{33}\)

The prominent theologian Peter Martyr, in his widely dispersed book De Orbe Novo, reported the tales of cannibals recorded by Columbus with some embellishment. He wrote that the peaceful men of Hispaniola lived in great fear of their formidable neighbors whom they referred to as Cannibals and Caraibes. Martyr told the oft-repeated story of the castrated captives taken by the cannibals, but he provided a level of detail not previously seen. He indicated that the cannibals captured children, whom they castrated, just as we do chickens and pigs we wish to fatten, and when they were grown and became fat they ate them. Older persons, who fell into their power, were killed and cut into pieces for food; they also ate the


\(^{32}\) Ibid.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.
intestines and the extremities, which they salted just as we do hams. They did not eat women, as this would be considered a crime and an infamy. If they captured any women they kept them and cared for them, in order that they might produce children; just as we do with hens, sheep, mares, and other animals.34

Martyr dehumanized both the Caribs and their captives in this passage. He indicated that the Caribs treated other humans like animals, a practice which called the superiority and uniqueness of the human species into question. Furthermore, by consistently referring to the captives as animals, Martyr emphasized the presumption of the bestiality and barbarity of Indians.

Martyr, an Italian like the Admiral, was an important humanist in Spain and served in the household of Ferdinand and Isabella. He collected information about the discovery and conquest of the Americas and over the course of his life published a detailed account of these events. He had access to Columbus’s writings, many of which are no longer extant, and therefore his work is an invaluable resource for understanding the genesis of the idea of the cannibal. It is nearly impossible to determine what was embellished in his account. What is clear, however, is that New World cannibals were becoming infamous. Martyr believed that the actions of the Caribs towards the other Caribbean peoples were akin to the ways that Europeans treated their livestock. In this way, he simultaneously connected the victims of the cannibals and the cannibals themselves with animal-like behavior.

Records of Columbus’s first voyage indicated the presence of cannibalism in the Americas, but did not provide much in the way of detail or certainty. It was on the second voyage that the discourse of the cannibal really began to emerge. The second voyage was

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expressly intended to bring Europeans and Caribs into contact for the first time. Writing several years after the voyage, Allesandro Zorzi remarked that Columbus “had been commissioned . . . to persecute and destroy their enemies, those very wicked men, the Cannibals.” Columbus and his crew set out from the Canary Islands on October 13, 1493. By the third of November, the crew had their first view of the island of Dominica in the Lesser Antilles. After sailing around the western islands, they proceeded to Cuba, Puerto Rico and Hispaniola. On this voyage, Columbus had his first real encounter with men who he believed were the fearsome cannibal Caribs. The primary evidence for the second voyage came from several letters of members of the expedition. There was Nicolo Syllacio’s translation of a letter he received from a crewmember named Guillelmo Coma, which was first published in 1504. Another important source was a letter written by Dr. Diego Alvarez Chanca that was only uncovered and printed in the nineteenth century. There were also numerous second-hand assemblages of the events, the most important of which were the writings of Peter Martyr from late 1494/early 1495.

Early on in the second voyage, Columbus and his men encountered a group of women who claimed to have escaped the voracious jaws of the Caribs. They fled to the Spaniards for salvation, but instead of freedom the women were given gifts and asked to give them to the Caribs. After this, according to Ferdinand Columbus, the women begged the Spaniards to take them with them and indicated by gestures that their captors were man-eaters. The Spaniards eventually conceded and allowed the women to remain with them. Ferdinand Columbus recalled that these women felt more comfortable in the hands of strangers than “among those wicked, cruel men who had eaten their children and husbands. It is said the Caribs do not eat or kill

37 Chanca, 281.
women, but keep them as slaves. This assertion that the Caribs did not eat women reoccurred consistently throughout the early accounts of Caribbean exploration. The agents of the Spanish Crown indicated that the appetites of Caribs were so disordered and antithetical to civilization that they ate men and used women as beasts of burden. Unfortunately, for these and other women that the Spaniards encountered, life with the Admiral and his men was not likely to have been much better. If they did not die from disease, they were probably sold into slavery.

During the journey, Ferdinand Columbus reported that members of the crew found cannibal villages, which were notably more sophisticated than the Arawak villages from the first voyage, in which they saw human body parts roasting on spits. He also described an encounter with a group of Indian women that he believed to be from the all-female island of Matinino because of their intelligence and strength. In his biography of his father, Ferdinand Columbus did not dwell considerably on the practices of Native Americans and thusly did not devote much time to the cannibalistic appetites of the Caribs. His biography was written after his father’s death in 1506 and as many years had passed since the initial encounter, the supposed atrocities of the Indians were less important to Ferdinand than redeeming his father’s character, which was paramount.

Dr. Diego Alvarez Chanca’s account of his travels with Columbus on the second voyage was the first to be written by a trained scientist. Chanca’s account presented an attention to ethnographic detail not evident in other writings. However, his letter was not made widely available until the publications of Navarrete’s compendium Viages in 1825. Therefore,

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38 Ferdinand Columbus, 113.
39 Ibid., 114, 170.
40 Ibid., 170.
41 Martín Fernández de Navarrete, Coleccion de los viages y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los españoles desde fines del siglo XV : con varios documentos ineditos concernientes a la historia de la marina castellana y de los establecimientos españoles en Indias, 5 vols. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Guarania, 1945-6).
Chanca’s letter did little to contribute to the circulating discourse of cannibalism in early 16th century Spain, but it nevertheless did reflect one individual’s interpretation of cannibalism and revealed much about how Spanish agents comprehended the actions of Indians.

Chanca recorded that some of the crew went forth into a village on the island of Guadeloupe returned with parrots, spinning implements, food, and “four or five bones of human arms and legs. On seeing these we suspected that we were amongst the Caribbee islands, whose inhabitants eat human flesh.” For Chanca, the simplest conclusion to the presence of human bones in the village was cannibalism. This speaks to the prevalence of cannibalism as an explanatory trope for scattered, incomplete evidence. He assumed that the human bones were evidence of cannibalism, but this was not necessarily an obvious conclusion unless one already assumed the existence of the practice of cannibalism among the Caribs.

At another port, Chanca indicated that he and other members of the crew found “a vast number of human bones and skulls hung up about the houses like vessels intended for holding various things.” Remarking upon this same incident, the sympathetic and astute observer, Bartolomé de Las Casas, argued that the bones must have belonged to important members of the tribe or loved ones, not victims of cannibalism, “because if they ate as many as some say, the cabins would not hold all the bones and skulls, it seems that after having eaten them there would be no object in keeping the skulls and bones for relics unless they belonged to some very notable enemies. Las Casas reached a different conclusion than Chanca from the same evidence; his sympathy toward the plight of Indians meant that cannibalism was not his first conclusion for the presence of human bones. In both cases, these men allowed their predisposition towards the Indians to shape their conclusions.

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42 Chanca, 288.
43 Quoted in Chanca, n.1, 289.
Modern research has confirmed Las Casas’s suspicions to some degree, revealing that the presence of bones and other body parts in Carib houses was not necessarily a sign of cannibalistic practices; rather, the Caribs cleaned, displayed, and venerated the bones of powerful members of their own tribe.\footnote{Boucher, Cannibal Encounters, 15.} Looking at this episode from this perspective, then, reveals a cultural misunderstanding in which the agents of Spain interpreted events based upon their knowledge and experience from the first voyage. In other words, Columbus and his men had reported that the Caribs were man-eaters, and thus the presence of bones in their homes was interpreted to be evidence of this.

Fear of the Caribs guided the actions of the members of the Spanish fleet and their interactions with the Indians. They assumed that the tales about the unbridled anthropophagic appetites of the Caribs were true and this caused them to fear for their safety and to doubt Carib motives in any exchange they had. In one case, several crewmembers had left the ship to go explore an island. When they did not return, their shipmates feared the worst. Chanca wrote, “we already looked upon them as killed and eaten by the people that are called Caribbees; for we could not account for their long absence in any other way.”\footnote{Chanca, 288.} As it turned out, however, the men had simply gotten lost and eventually rejoined the group. Fellow shipmate, Michele da Cuneo echoed these sentiments in a letter he wrote in 1495.\footnote{Michele da Cuneo in Italian Reports on the Americas, 51.} Chanca’s and Cuneo’s assertions that the absence of the crewmembers must be attributed to their consumption at the hands of the Caribs, revealed a reversal of Columbus’s sentiments from his first voyage in which he believed that the Arawaks may have been mistaken and that their people were merely captives among the Caribs and that their extensive absence was evidence of captivity, not necessarily consumption.
Unlike Columbus on the first voyage, Chanca appeared to have incorporated fully the belief that Caribs were man-eaters and thus believed that they must have killed and eaten the men. Chanca gave a direct, and rather damning, account of Carib cruelty. He described their constant warfare with the peoples of neighboring islands, in which they sought to obtain captives, particularly young women to be servants and concubines. Chanca recorded that the Caribs were exceedingly cruel to these women and that they even ate the children they sired with them. The children born to their Carib wives however, were unharmed. Thus, in this scenario, the copulation between Carib men and their captive women existed outside of the structure of Carib kinship. Children produced from these couplings were not considered members of the tribe and thus their Carib fathers bore no financial or familial responsibility for them. Despite the fact that children born out of wedlock were often shunned in medieval and early modern Europe, Chanca was horrified that Carib men engaged in sexual relations with captive women without ethical consequences or obligations towards either mother or child.

Chanca also indicated that the Carib raiding parties took as many male hostages as they could whom they brought to the village and immediately killed and ate.

They say that man’s flesh is so good, that there is nothing like it in the world; and this is pretty evident, for of the bones which we found in their houses, they had gnawed everything that could be gnawed, so that nothing remained of them, but what from its great hardness, could not be eaten: in one of the houses we found the neck of a man, cooking in a pot. When they take any boys prisoners, they cut off their member and make use of them as servants until they grow up to manhood, and then when they wish to make
a feast, they kill and eat them; for they say that the flesh of boys and women is not good to eat. Three of these boys came fleeing to us thus mutilated.\(^{47}\)

The castration of animals in order to fatten them is a common practice in animal husbandry and thus, Chanca’s description furthered the connection between Indians and animals. Additionally, castrated male animals were believed to be more docile than non-castrated ones. In this example, Chanca encapsulated all of the most important tropes that Europeans believed about cannibalism among the Caribs. The Caribs were believed to live on different islands from the non-cannibalistic Indians and they traveled widely for their conquests. Whether or not the two broad cultural groups of the Caribbean at this time, the Arawak and the Carib, were in fact two wholly different groups remains a subject of great scholarly debate. However, this debate is less important here than it might seem; it does not matter whether or not the Caribs were a separate cultural and/or linguistic group, only that European invaders went to great lengths to distinguish between the “good Indians,” meaning the Arawaks, and the “bad Indians,” referring to the Caribs. The extent to which their origins and languages differed mattered far less to many contemporary observers and writers than what kinds of behaviors they exhibited. The presence of man-eating signaled the presence of Caribs and vice-versa.

Chanca also discussed his belief that the Caribs consumed the male members of tribes that they conquered and kept the females to work as slaves, to serve as concubines, and to bear children for eventual consumption. The desire to eat the flesh of men, and possess the flesh of women drove the Caribs to terrorize their neighbors. The connection between sex and cannibalism was made quite evident in the previous example. Dominance, for the Caribs, came through different incorporative practices according to Dr. Chanca. Male enemies were incorporated through ingestion—their flesh was consumed immediately after the battle and was

\(^{47}\) Chanca, 290-1.
the ultimate object of desire. Female enemies, on the other hand were incorporated through forcible sex and their labor was exploited through slavery. In Chanca’s understanding, the place of Arawakan women in the cannibalistic practices of the Caribs, then, was two-fold: to produce children with their captors who would eventually be served up at cannibal feasts and to fulfill deviant sexual desires. Even though the Carib men possessed their own wives, they desired congress with powerless women (something of which the Europeans were also guilty).

Chanca reiterated that the Caribs castrated the young men that they took captive, as well as reasserting that the presence of bones in Carib households was solid evidence of their voracious anthropophagic appetites. He indicated that they consumed the male warriors of enemy tribes, but the young men were emasculated and forced into servitude alongside the women of their tribe. This practice was quite curious, for if the Caribs desired the flesh of men above all else, why would they not imprison the young men and allow them to grow into adulthood and consume them when they were ripe, so to speak? If this questionable practice is taken to be true, perhaps Chanca and others failed to recognize fully the importance of consuming warriors rather than passive captives (and by castrating male captives the Caribs, according to European conceptions of gender, rendered them passive). However, the consumption of the offspring of Arawakan women and Carib men calls this into question. It is evident that by the time of the second voyage, Europeans were beginning to create specific gendered associations around the practice of cannibalism.

The connection between Indian women’s sexuality and cannibalism was made most explicit in the famous letter of Michele da Cuneo to his friend Gerolamo Annari in 1495. Cuneo, a friend of Columbus’s who accompanied him on the second voyage, reported on his interactions with Caribs, expressing no uncertainty that they were anthropophagites. The most widely
referenced portion of his letter discussed his sexual conquest of a young Carib woman. The crew had engaged in a battle with a canoe of Indians, which contained three or four men, two women, and two presumably Arawak captives who had recently been castrated.\textsuperscript{48} The crew was victorious over the Caribs, despite the latter’s determination and vigilance. Those that were captured, both Carib and Arawak, were sent to Spain. Cuneo then proceeded to tell his friend about his interaction with one of the captured Carib women. He wrote,

While I was in the boat I laid my hands on a gorgeous cannibal woman whom the lord admiral granted me; when I tried to satisfy my craving she, wanting none of it, gave me such a treatment with her nails that at that point I wished I had never started. At this, to tell you how it all ended, I got hold of a rope and thrashed her so thoroughly that she raised unheard-of-cries that you would never believe. Finally, we were in such accord that, in the act, I can tell you, she seemed to have been trained in a school of harlots.\textsuperscript{49}

It is from this passage that the title of the dissertation derives, for it effectively underscored the power that accusations of cannibalism, and more broadly, the discourse of cannibalism, could have on lives of native people. This incident is an appalling tragedy to most modern-day readers, but it was obvious in Cuneo’s rather flippant attitude about the whole affair that he saw nothing wrong with his actions; in fact, he chose to brag about it to his friend.

Cuneo explained throughout his letter that he believed that there were two different kinds of people inhabiting the Caribbean, Cannibals and Indians.\textsuperscript{50} Their differentiating characteristics, according to Cuneo, were that the Cannibals were fiercer and cleverer than the Indians and additionally that the Cannibals had “an insatiable appetite for that human flesh.”\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{48} Cuneo, 51.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 56-8.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 57.
differences between Caribs and Arawaks, however, appeared to be cultural, not biological. Cuneo described the physical characteristics of the inhabitants of the Caribbean, but did not differentiate between the two groups.\textsuperscript{52} His physical descriptions focused much more on sexuality than did the Admiral’s. Cuneo carefully recorded his observations about the beauty of Native women, describing their breasts, stomachs, and procreative practices.\textsuperscript{53} He gave detailed accounts of their orgiastic religious practices and their sodomitic tendencies.\textsuperscript{54} Cuneo’s account provided a level of detail about the practices of cannibals that was not present in Columbus’s writings. For example, he wrote that the Caribs gouged out the eyes of their victims immediately after killing them and then ate them.\textsuperscript{55}

The fate of the unfortunate young women in the quoted passage above was sealed by Cuneo’s assumption that she was a cannibal and/or a member of the Carib tribe. It is not clear what led him to this conclusion, other than the fact that the Natives put up a good fight, were traveling by canoe, and seemed to have captives with them, all of which were reported to be characteristics of the Caribs. The woman’s body became one of the spoils of victory. Cuneo was careful to state that she was given to him by none other than Columbus himself. Because of this example, it is apparent that in claiming the lands of the Caribbean for Spain, Columbus also claimed dominion over the bodies of its inhabitants. The fact that she was a tradeable commodity exemplified the extension of European gender norms onto Native peoples, in which women’s bodies were property to be exchanged and controlled. The justification for her rape was two-fold. First, possession of the bodies of women on the losing side of a war was commonplace for victorious European men. Second, her status as a cannibal effectively erased any limited agency

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\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 57-8.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 52.
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that she might have possessed in the eyes of men like Cuneo. The fact that Columbus felt justified in giving the Carib woman as a gift to his friend indicated the extent of the power that he assumed was vested in him by the crown of Castile.

The notion that the young woman merely needed to be coerced into sex and then she would show her true colors was a window into the way that the Spaniards viewed the possession of the Indies in general. Columbus, and others like him, argued that what they were doing was ultimately in the best interests of the Indians; they believed, in effect, that they were saving the Indians from themselves. The *requirimento*, for example, simultaneously established Spanish power, and presented Indians with a false choice; they could submit peacefully and happily to the will of Spain, which would ensure their protection and their ability to enter paradise, or face destruction for their refusal.

Several of the second-hand reports that circulated about Columbus’s second voyage told similar tales of cannibalism on the Carib islands. After speaking with Columbus and several members of his crew, Simone dal Verde composed an account of this voyage in 1494. He reiterated the good Indian versus bad Indian divide, which had come to dominate most discussions of life in the Caribbean. He stated that while Indians were “meek and trusting,” Caribs were “suspicious and cruel, for they eat human flesh.”\footnote{Simone dal Verde in *Italian Reports on the Americas*, 32.} Thus, according to Verde, the practice of cannibalism among the Caribs was the most important evidence of their cruelty. Beginning with accounts of the second voyage, the idea that the human-eating habits of the Carib defined them was dominant. No other real evidence needed be given of their behavior, practices, or beliefs, because their cannibalism said it all. This idea had profoundly disastrous effects for the island Caribs. After assuring us that the Caribs were indeed cannibals, Verde mentioned the evidence of cannibalism that they discovered. The Spaniards captured several Arawak prisoners
of the Caribs who lead them inland to a recently abandoned village. In this village, they found two young girls and two young boys. The “genital member[s]” of the two young boys had been removed. Verde reported that this was done in order to “fatten them for eating.”\(^{57}\) Importantly, he wanted to assure his audience of the truthfulness of his statements because “this is such a horrible thing to think about, let alone assert that it actually happens” and so he insisted upon the reliability of his evidence. He also reported that the Caribs ate men and kept the women. His informants told him that they found many bones in their houses and that “in one house human flesh was roasting and a man’s head was on the coals.”\(^{58}\) Although Columbus did not accompany his men inland to discover this cannibal village, they brought him back evidence of the horrors that they found. Verde was doubtful about the stories that the crew members told because he did not deem them trustworthy, but nevertheless he concluded that he believed this information “based on what everyone says.”\(^{59}\) Verde also claimed to have spoken with a Carib prisoner in Spain, who now exhibited shame and regret for his former cannibalistic ways. According to Verde, this Carib man was made to see the error of his ways through the power of contact with civilization, as sentiment that was echoed throughout the Americas. Finally, much like Cuneo, Verde reported that the Cannibals and the Indians were physically indistinguishable, but that the Caribs were more “robust and clever” with a slightly more “scorched and rugged” complexion, revealing the complicated ways in which early modern European writers connection physical difference, savagery, and, status.\(^{60}\)

Verde’s account was one of the earliest second-hand reports of the voyage available to us. Many other writings of this period echoed similar sentiments, reporting on the fierceness of the

\(^{57}\) Ibid.  
\(^{58}\) Ibid.  
\(^{59}\) Ibid.  
\(^{60}\) Ibid.
Cannibals and presenting evidence of their acts. Interestingly, several of these accounts went to
great lengths to assure their audiences that they were reporting truth and were not slandering the
Caribs without provocation. Nicholò Scillacio wrote in 1494 that his evidence about cannibalism
came from “Pedro Margarit, a very reliable Spaniard who went to the east with the Admiral,
drawn by the desire to see new regions” who reported that “he saw there with his own eyes
several Indians skewered on spits being roasted over burning coals as a treat for the gluttonous,
while many bodies lay around in piles with their hands removed and their extremities torn off.
The Cannibals do not deny this, but openly admit that they eat other humans.”61 The grim scene
described by Scillacio highlighted the excess of the Caribs and described practices not known
before, such as the removing of extremities prior to roasting. Authors like Verde and Scillacio
presented their indictments of Carib savagery carefully and cautiously, yet the detail that each
provided calls into question the veracity of their accounts.

It was often repeated in the decades following Columbus’s second voyage that the Caribs
traveled far and wide to capture the Arawak and when they did so, they killed and consumed the
male warriors, castrated the young boys whom they then fattened for eventual consumption, and
kept the women as slaves and/or concubines.62 Interestingly, successive accounts of the voyage
embellished one another. For instance, the story told by Verde about the discovery of the
cannibal village was also reported by Angelo Trevisan in his Libretto about All of the Spanish
Sovereigns’ Navigations to the Newly Discovered Islands and Lands from 1504. He wrote that
the men discovered that although the Indians’ houses contained stone vessels “like our own,”
they also found human flesh roasting alongside parrots, geese, and ducks. Additionally they saw
“bones of human arms and thighs which they keep to make the tip of their arrows for they have

61 Nicholò Scillacio in Italian Reports on the Americas, 39.
62 Scillacio, 40; Marcantonio Coccio in Italian Reports on the Americas, 69; Angelo Trevisan, 83
no iron. They also found the head of a boy not long dead, which was attached to the beam, still dripping blood.” Marcantonio Coccio also described this example in his report, which was written in 1500 and published in Venice in 1504. From the initial rumors of cannibalistic activity on neighboring islands that Columbus received on his first journey, to these gruesome descriptions of the horrors of life on the Cannibal islands, an important shift had occurred. The skepticism that Columbus initially displayed had been replaced by the certainty of gossip. These early authors displayed a desire to prove their horrific accusations, while simultaneously repeating the dubious tales of sailors as fact. It was certainly possible that one member of the crew described the charnel house still dripping with the blood of sacrificed victims and this story was passed from person to person until it was published and distributed. If this was the case, it was likely that this eyewitness account is lost. What remains instead is a series of increasingly disturbing descriptions of Carib behavior that demonstrate the further enmeshing of the idea of the Cannibals and the Caribs.

In many accounts of the second voyage, Carib and cannibal were one and the same. Whatever term the individual author might use, be it Caribees, Canibales, or something else entirely, the defining characteristics of these people was their human-eating. Curiously, however, Allesandro Zorzi’s letter described a group of people who “live on human flesh, as do the Cannibals.” Thus, while these early writings indicated a further linking of man-eating and Carib, there was still some ambivalence about these two terms.

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63 Trevisan, 86.
64 Coccio, 69. “The Spaniards found visible proof of these reports [that they ate men, kept the women as slaves and ate their children] when they broke into the houses which the Cannibals had abandoned: the tables were set, and on them were bowls like ours, filled with parrots, other birds the size of pheasants, and human flesh. Nearby hung a human head, still dripping blood.”
65 Allesandro Zorzi in *Italian Reports on the Americas*, 112.
Any ambivalence about New World cannibals would be erased by a series of laws passed by Spain, which have become known collectively as “the Cannibal Laws.” Immediately after Columbus’s return to Spain in 1493, the freedom of Indians (in the sense that they were free to chose to become subjects of Spain) was established. However, in 1503 Queen Isabella issued the first in a series of important pieces of legislation relating the practice of cannibalism in the New World. This law first asserted that the souls of all Indigenous Americans were redeemable and therefore they were to be offered the chance to convert to Christianity. The decree continued describing the efforts of conversion made on the early voyages. Isabella noted that on certain islands the explorers and the accompanying priests and missionaries were greeted kindly and treated with respect yet on other islands they encountered vicious cannibals hostile to their presence. Based on these observations the Spanish crown gave permission for its subjects to use any means necessary to subdue the cannibals and

that if the said cannibals should resist and not wish to receive and welcome in their lands the captains and peoples who by my command go and make the said voyages, and if [the cannibals] do not wish to listen to them in order to be indoctrinated in the things of our Holy Catholic Faith and enter my service and become subject to me, [then persons under my command] may and can capture [the cannibals] in order to take them to whichever lands and islands . . . in order that [the cannibals] might be sold and a profit be made. . .

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67 “Let it be known that my Lord the King and I, intending that all people who live and are on the islands and Terra Firma of the Ocean Sea become Christians and be converted to our Holy Catholic Faith, have ordered by means of a letter of ours that no person or persons who by our command went to those islands and Terra Firma should dare to apprehend or capture any person or persons of the Indians . . . in order to take them to any other place, and that no injury either to their persons or their property be done unto them, under certain penalties spelled out in our letter, even if the motive be to help the Indians.” Quoted in Michael Palencia Roth, “The Cannibal Law of 1503,” in *Early Images of the Americas: Transfer and Invention*, ed. Jerry M. Williams and Robert E. Lewis (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 23.
68 Ibid., 24.
Notably, this embraces a slippage of identity, as any who resisted colonization became cannibals in the eyes of the Spanish Crown. This and other such laws provided a shaky security to Native Americans who were eager to give up their freedom to serve the Spanish Crown and their religion for Catholicism. This was, of course, an ideal that would likely never have existed. How many peoples were eager to give up their sovereignty? Therefore, in practice this law paved the way for the slave trade in the Americas that led to the near extinction of many of the peoples of the Caribbean, including the Caribs and the Arawaks. The slaves of the New World provided the resources and labor necessary for any large-scale settlement in the Americas. The success of European expansion in the Americas depended upon the blood and labor of cannibals.

This legislation proved difficult to enforce and by 1518, the Crown found it necessary to form a council to determine formally which regions were inhabited by Indians/Arawaks and which by Cannibals/Caribs. Additionally the discovery of certain natural resources, like gold, caused great concern over the appropriate division of labor. Rodrigo de Figueroa was given the task of classifying Native cultures; earlier classificatory determinations had already been made, but Figueroa’s job was to come up with the definitive system. Figueroa collected testimony relating to the practices of cannibalism and sodomy, among others, and within two years produced a report that designated which regions were inhabited by Cannibals.69 In this way, the developing discourse on cannibalism in the Caribbean had a significant impact on the ways in which Spanish interests in this region shifted from exploration to colonization.

The evidence of cannibalism, which was often little more than hearsay, helped to determine whether or not a group of people, and the islands on which they lived, were available for Spanish exploitation. Interestingly, Figueroa’s classification system was not static, but changed with economic and political developments in the Americas. The island of Trinidad had

been deemed to be inhabited by Cannibals in 1511, prior to Figueroa’s classification. Based upon
the interventions of priest and Indian advocate, Bartolomé de las Casas, Trinidad was not labeled
as a cannibal island by Figueroa. However, despite Las Casas’s altruistic intentions, the fact that
gold was discovered on Trinidad in the intervening period might indicate that the reason for the
change in status was less about empathy for the inhabitants and more about preserving the
indigenous labor force for the encomenderos. Lending credence to this theory was the fact that
Trinidad’s status was once again changed in 1530, this time from Arawak to Carib, when its
natural resources proved less valuable than initially believed. Since a larger labor force was no
longer necessary to extract natural resources, the enslavement of the Indigenous population on
other islands would prove more beneficial to the empire than maintaining their presence on
Trinidad. Thus, their re-categorization as Caribs opened them up to the slave trade.

While these classifications and the resulting legislation sought to restrict the enslavement
of Arawakan Indians while opening up the Caribs for exploitation and destruction, women and
children no matter what their tribal affiliation were excluded. It was not until much later in 1569
that women’s culpability for cannibalism was determined and they were allowed to be enslaved
alongside their male Carib compatriots; the ban on enslavement of children under fourteen years
old was maintained, however. Thus, the official Crown position of the early sixteenth century
insisted that women, although they might have been considered morally culpable for the
cannibalistic actions of the tribe, were not considered legally responsible for these actions. Men
like Michele da Cuneo used the Carib women’s status as a cannibal as a justification for his
rapacious actions, thus ensuring a kind of sexual enslavement to European men even if

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70 Ibid., 71.
71 Whitehead, “Carib Cannibalism.” 71; Hugh Thomas, Rivers of Gold: The Rise of the Spanish Empire, from
actually took place before the first official so-called Cannibal Law was in place, it provides a useful example for thinking about the presence and absence of Carib women from the perspective of imperial Spain. Women were legally absent from the restrictions on slavery, and so, in theory it did not matter if they were determined to be Carib or Arawak, they were not to be enslaved. Instead, women were afforded the same “choice” offered to the friendlier Arawakan Indians: submit to Spanish authority willingly or face the consequences. Descriptions of the participation of women in cannibalistic rituals existed in the literature of the period, but was much more prominent in visual representations of conquest. The writings of Amerigo Vespucci, and the images inspired by his works add an important dimension to a discussion of the origin of the trope of the Cannibal, allowing for a more sustained connection between gender, sexuality, cannibalism, and empire.

Vespucci has the honor of being both namesake of the continents of the western hemisphere and one of its least trusted explorers. There is some doubt as to whether or not Vespucci was present on all of the voyages that he claimed to be and whether or not his accounts were mere fabrication. 72 It is not within the scope of this project to discuss fully the dubious nature of Vespucci’s four voyages to the Americas, because whether or not his writings contained “Truth,” they were popular and widely published by the early sixteenth century. 73

Vespucci hailed from the Republic of Florence but he sailed for both Spain and Portugal. He claimed that his first two voyages were undertaken for Spain and his last two for Portugal. He was not the captain of any of these voyages, which makes the credit afforded to him for discovery all the more curious. After returning from his voyages he was given a prestigious

73 Amerigo Vespucci. The Letters of Amerigo Vespucci and other documents illustrative of his career, trans. Clements R. Markham, Hakluyt Society 1st series, no. 90 (New York: B. Franklin, 1964 (1894)).
position as chief navigator for Spain and he was granted Spanish citizenship. At this time of exploration rather than straightforward conquest, one’s place of origin was less important than claims of loyalty to a particular crown.

Vespucci’s first published piece, a letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici commonly called *Mundus Novus*, was first printed in Florence in late 1502 or early 1503 and had an immediate and lasting impact. Along with his letter to Piero Soderini, which was published in 1505, Vespucci’s account of life in the Americas greatly impacted the discourse of the cannibal. A Latin edition of the Soderini letter was published in Martin Waldseemüller’s important book on cosmography and geography entitled *Cosmographiae Introductio*, in which the term America was first applied to the western continents. In addition to the two published accounts, there also existed several other personal letters to Lorenzo de Medici and one fragmentary letter called the Ridolfi Fragment. Since both of his published writings about his voyages to the Americas were written and published after he had already returned from his four dubious voyages, they tended to describe the Indians in more general terms, rather than describing his impressions on each successive voyage. The “Letter to Soderini” was broken up into descriptions of each voyage, but made general assumptions about Indian behavior and character throughout.

Vespucci’s writings, in contradiction to those of Columbus, focused much more on the sexual behaviors and the gendered practices of the natives that he encountered. For example, Vespucci reported that

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76 Formisano, xxii-xxv.
They have another custom that is appalling and passes belief. Their women, being very lustful, make their husbands’ members swell to such thickness that they look ugly and misshapen; this they accomplish with a certain device they have and by bites from certain poisonous animals. Because of this, many men lose their members, which rot through neglect, and they are left eunuchs.77

This explanation for the presence of eunuchs among Caribbean Indians did not occur in earlier writings. As was discussed previously, the existence of eunuchs among the Carib was attributed to their practice of castrating young boys for eventual consumption. How Vespucci learned of this practice was not clear, nor did it seem that he understood how it was achieved. Regardless, Vespucci saw the female members of the community as the most lustful and to blame for the deformities and inadequacies of the men. It is unclear how and why the men lost their penises through neglect if the women were so lascivious. He also assured his readers that their lustfulness was evidenced by their incestuous practices and promiscuity.78 Furthermore, in this passage, Vespucci hinted at his own dueling fascination and repulsion of Indians and their practices. While he appeared to be astonished by these practices, he nevertheless was careful to report upon them. His cautious ambivalence was expressed in passages such as the following, “They are not very jealous, and are inordinately lustful, the women much more than the men, though decency bids us pass over the wiles they employ to satisfy their inordinate lust.”79 He wanted the reader to know that about the strange habits of Indian men and women, but did not want it to seem like he was presenting a sensational tale that was meant to titillate.

Without reading too much into his psyche, one could argue that Vespucci’s writings reflected the competing desire for Native women and revulsion at such a prospect. His

77 Vespucci, “Mundus Novus,” in Formisano, Letters from a New World, 48.
78 Ibid., 49.
descriptions of native women were laden with contradictory terms of desire and loathing. For example, Vespucci wrote “Their women, as I have said, although they go naked and are exceedingly lustful, still have rather shapely and clean bodies, and are not as revolting as one might think, because being fleshy, their shameful parts are less visible, covered for the most part by the good quality of their bodily composition.” He continued describing the bodies of the women, indicating his surprise that their breasts were never saggy and that the one could not tell the difference between the “virgins” and those who had borne children merely by their physical appearance. In his “Letter to Soderini,” he gave a similar account of the physical appearance of Carib women, further remarking upon their beauty, fecundity, lustfulness and cruelty. Most interestingly, however, Vespucci stated, “When they were able to copulate with Christians, they were driven by their excessive lust to corrupt and prostitute their modesty.” This statement seemed to describe a situation in which the European men were powerless against the sexual wiles of Indian women who were driven only by their desires. Since Vespucci indicated that Indian women were not always able to copulate with their chosen mates, he afforded European men some agency in this matter; they were not wholly powerless, but were also at the mercy of their desires. However, as men of civilization they were able to be more temperate than were Indian women.

Vespucci lacked any sense of cultural relativism and instead insisted upon basing his assessments of the sexuality of Native women upon his preconceived ideas of modesty and chastity. By asserting that Indian women were forceful in their lust, he seemed to be excusing the

behavior of the European men who copulated with them. Vespucci never indicated in his writings whether or not he engaged in carnal relations with Indian women, but he did not deny that some members of the crew did. Excessive lustfulness was an indication of savagery, because it followed that one who could not restrain his/her sexual desire would also be incapable of showing restraint in other areas of life. Caribs and Arawaks were both accused of eating improper foods (human flesh was but one of these), not abiding by consistent mealtimes, excessive laziness, etc. Vespucci even criticized Native peoples for being too generous, because this trait caused them to not only give freely of their possessions, but also of their bodies. He reported that it was a great honor for parents to give their virginal daughters as a token of friendship. The trade in the bodies and, from his perspective, the honor of young women, seemed to disturb Vespucci. Michele da Cuneo, on the other hand, showed little regard for the innocence of the young woman that he encountered. In fact, in Cuneo’s account the fact that she was presumed to be a cannibal ensured that she was not an innocent, regardless of her sexual history.

In his discussion of the cannibalistic practices of the Indians, Vespucci veered from the descriptions of other accounts and insisted that the Caribs were indiscriminate in their man-eating. In *Mundus Novus*, he indicated that victorious Caribs ate the vanquished Arawaks and that “human flesh is common fare among them.” He insisted on the veracity of his observations stating, “This you may be sure of, because one father was known to have eaten his children and wife and I myself met and spoke with a man who was said to have eaten more than three hundred human bodies; and I also stayed twenty-seven days in a certain city in which I saw salted human

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83 Idem, “Letter to Soderini,” 63. “They [Indian women] showed themselves to be very desirous to copulate with us Christians.”
84 Ibid., 65.
flesh hanging from the house beams, much as we hang up bacon and pork.” Any pretense of uncertainty about the practice of cannibalism among the Caribs had disappeared from this passage. He was confident in the fact that human flesh was a common element of their diet.

Unlike others who described cannibalism, Vespucci believed that the Caribs practiced both exocannibalism as well as endocannibalism. Based on the writings surrounding Columbus’s first two voyages, it seemed that the Caribs only consumed outsiders (exocannibalism), however the consumption of a wife and children described by Vespucci was an act of endocannibalism. If this were indeed the case, it changed much about what Europeans had known about Carib anthropophagy up to this point. The consumption of enemies, while abhorrent, could be understood in the context of the practices of de-humanizing and humiliating vanquished enemies, which was common throughout Europe. The consumption of members of one’s own family, however, was much less comprehensible as it implied a complete lack of community and disrespect for the sanctity of familial relations.

Vespucci’s accounts were contradictory in a number of ways, not the least of which was the failure to distinguish between endocannibalism and exocannibalism. In the “Letter to Soderini,” he described the cannibalistic habits of the Caribs writing,

They eat little meat, except for human flesh; for Your Magnificence must know that in this they are so inhuman that they surpass all bestial ways, since they eat all the enemies that they kill or capture, female as well as male, with such ferocity that merely to speak of it seems a brute thing—how much more to see it, as befell me countless times, in many places. And they marveled to hear us say that we do not eat our enemies, and this Your

Magnificence should believe for certain: their other barbarous customs are so many that speech fails to describe such facts.\textsuperscript{87}

In this passage, Vespucci again directly contradicted the descriptions from earlier writings and Columbus himself by insisting that the Caribs ate both male and female enemies. While most modern scholars recognize that all reports of cannibalism were somewhat dubious, Vespucci’s were particularly questionable. He was adamant that the Caribs ate members of their own tribe as well as both male and female enemies despite all previous assertions to the contrary. He also insisted on proving the veracity of his account by continuing to emphasize that he observed these behaviors on a number of occasions with his own eyes. It is interesting to note, however, that whenever specific details might have lent further credence to his reports, he hid behind a veil of civilized decorum. Additionally, by emphasizing that the Carib propensity for man-eating existed alongside a range of other “barbarous customs,” he symbolically linked cannibalism with other descriptors of savagery making them inextricable. While Vespucci’s writings deviated from the established base of knowledge about Caribs in late fifteenth/early sixteenth century, he also repeated a number of now-familiar tales. He reported on the practice of Carib castration of enemies prior to their consumption; in fact, his story of this encounter was remarkably similar to earlier accounts.\textsuperscript{88} He also recorded the presence of the Amazon-like women, but added that they were giants.\textsuperscript{89}

One of the most infamous passages that referred to the practice of cannibalism came from Vespucci’s description of a deadly encounter during his third voyage. The shipmates encountered a group of Indians that they wanted to meet and communicate with, but the Indians seemed reluctant to do so. As the crew landed on the shore, all of the Indian men ran away and in

\textsuperscript{87} Vespucci, “Letter to Soderini,” 66.  
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 80.  
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 81.
an effort to reassure them, the crew returned to the boats leaving just one young man on shore to converse with them. The young man approached the Carib women and as he did so they gathered in a circle around him. All the while another woman was sneaking down from the mountain with a club raised in her hands. This woman then snuck up behind the young sailor and hit him; the rest of the women grabbed him and started to drag him away as the Carib men emerged from their concealed positions and shot arrows at the ship. The ship’s crew retaliated and began firing upon the people on the beach causing them to flee towards the mountain,

where the women were already hacking the Christian up into pieces and then eating them; and the men, indicating by their gestures that they had killed and eaten the other two Christians [who had been sent to them earlier]; which weighed upon us heavily, and we believed them, having seen with our own eyes the cruelties they committed upon the dead man. All of us considered this an intolerable wrong; and more than forty of us prepared to land and avenge such a beastly and cruel deed, but the captain general would not consent; and they remained unpunished for so great an offense; we departed from them most unwillingly and greatly ashamed because of our captain.90

In this tale, Vespucci seemed certain that it was the duty of Europe to change the behavior of Caribs and not to tolerate their man-eating. The cruelties that the Caribs reportedly performed on the European emissary served as a perfect justification for their destruction. Yet, the captain of the mission would not allow the crew to seek revenge, which filled Vespucci with shame and regret. Such a passage seems as though it was intended to inspire outrage and revenge against the Indians who were getting away with these cruelties as European men merely watched. The voyeuristic element of Vespucci’s tale is evident; they were forced to watch Carib women kill, dismember, and consume a member of their community without being able to act effectively.

90 Ibid., 88.
How they could have seen such detail from the safety of their ships is, of course, questionable. The European counter-attack against the Indians on the beach did not deter their actions and ultimately the captain forced the ship to turn away. The whole situation was emasculating for Vespucci: not only did the Europeans fail to protect their young crewmember, but they were also forced to retreat like cowards. He had to watch helplessly as Carib women consumed a European male body. The vulnerability of the young man at the hands of women, who Vespucci and the rest of the crew clearly underestimated, reflected masculine anxieties of conquest. Travel to a foreign land and interactions with strange people in this case led quite literally to the incorporation of “civilization” into “savagery” rather than the triumph of Europeans over Americans. The ferocious appetites of the Carib women not only threatened European men through sexual deviance and corruption, but also posed a deeper menace to the very fabric of their civilization: their bodies.

In the writings of Amerigo Vespucci, Indian women and Carib women in particular, posed the most significant impediment to European conquest. It was against their actions, and even on their bodies that the conquest of the Americas needed to take place. Despite the obvious errors in Vespucci’s accounts, including his navigational reports, the popularity of his writings were on par with those about the Columbian voyages. While Columbus’s works may have set the stage for the development of the trope of cannibalism, it is through Vespucci that these ideas achieved their clearest, most lasting articulation. The gendered nature of savagery that was established in Vespucci’s writings, in particular as witnessed through the act of cannibalism, carried forth as Europeans moved across the vast continents of the Americas. In addition to the continuation and contestation of these discourses in written work that shall be discussed in successive chapters, the circulation of visual images reflecting the voyages of Vespucci were
quite popular and well-circulated. In such images, the culmination of all of the elements of the
trope of the cannibal was apparent. Particularly evident, more so visually than textually, is the
connection between sex, cannibalism and conquest.

Visual depictions of the cannibal were no more reliable than the writings they often
accompanied. Simply interrogating the writings of early explorers cannot provide a complete
picture of the cannibal. Images of cannibalism help to fill in some of the gaps in knowledge.
Additionally, visual images would have been more comprehensible to a largely illiterate
populace. Together, writing and images opened new avenues for discursive exploration. For
instance, the role of women and the feminization of the New World become clearer through this
investigation. Women featured more prominently in the images produced about the New World
than in the writings of early explorers. In such images, women were often shown taking on an
active role in the performance of cannibalism. The descriptions of cannibal women in European
writings of the encounter period were often contradictory, unclear, or left out all together. The
combination of the visual and textual helps to create a more complete picture of the cannibal.

The strategies employed by European explorers to make sense of the New World insisted
that the inhabitants fit in pre-existing categories. Thus, the medieval association of women’s
bodies with food and consumption carried forward. In many ways, women’s bodies were bearers
of both corruption and salvation and the paradigmatic cannibal in visual images was a women.91
In the earliest decades of the sixteenth century, the written and visual texts displayed a complex
set of association between savagery, cannibalism, gender, and sexuality. In visual representations
of the conquest, most of which were produced decades after the event, the fear of corruption at
the hands of Indians and incorporation into their lives was much more evident. While writers like

91 For more on the medievalist traditions see: Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious
Significance of Food to Medieval Women, (New York: Zone Books, 1991) and Merrall Llewelyn Price Consuming
Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (New York: Routledge, 2003).
Columbus and Vespucci were not devoid of political intentions, their writings, to one degree or another, attempted to describe events linearly and incorporated previously understood models for contact with radical alterity. Images of conquest, on the other hand, did not need to describe encounters with Indigenous Americans, so much as represent them. This difference between description and representation highlights one of the important facets of the discourse of cannibalism. The act of cannibalism, for Europeans venturing to the New World, both symbolically represented the savagery of the inhabitants of the Americas, and it was also something to be witnessed and described.

The American landscape itself was feminized in the writings of encounter and discovery, beginning with Columbus himself. After landing in the Caribbean, Columbus wrote of the errors of earlier navigators. Instead of assuming that the earth was flat or centered at Jerusalem, he believed that it was actually shaped like a woman’s breast with a center that resembled a nipple where the earthly paradise resided.  


93 Ibid., 22.

Columbus’s words bring to mind the image of a man searching for sustenance, glory, and wealth from the earth through its nurturing nipple. It was not male virility and strength that this representation of the landscape asserted; rather the great discoverer appeared infantilized.  

The conqueror sought enlightenment, riches, and salvation from within the female body; from his conquest of the woman came his domination of the world.

The conflation of the breast with the New World is seen in many of the visual depictions created in the period of discovery and encounter, and such images were linked with representations of cannibalism. Images of cannibal women with a suckling baby in tow were common and created a strange visual resonance that indicated both savagery and humanity, but more importantly pointed to the maternal character of the New World. The figure of a lactating
woman was common in the writing and art of the middle ages. Symbolically and tangibly, the breastfeeding mother linked the bodies of women with food and consumption. Breast milk was essential for the survival of infants, and thus the continuance of humanity. The primal food of humanity issued from the bodies of women. Caroline Walker Bynum noted, “Medieval people did not simply associate body with woman. They also associated woman’s body with food. Women were food because breast milk was the human being’s first nourishment – the one food essential for survival.”

Breast-feeding and the sustenance it provided featured regularly in medieval writings and images. Male writers often spoke of receiving the spirit and spiritual wisdom from the breast of Christ. Commonly, the Virgin Mary was represented as the bare-breasted, lactating provider of nourishment to Christ, and by extension Christianity at large. Religious cults that centered on the breast-milk of the Virgin proliferated throughout Europe in the medieval period.

The understandings of cannibals in the New World were part of prior traditions of alterity and encounters with Others and these medievalist traditions remained at the foundation of the earliest encounters with the inhabitants of the New World. The images produced from these travels to the Americas both referenced the traditions of breast-feeding, but also diverged from them in profound ways. While the bodies of the cannibal mothers were depicted as providing food, the sacred dimension was missing. In the absence of the Christ, conquering European men stood in as the intermediaries between truth/civility and barbarism. It was their civilizing power that would soon nourish the wanting, savage masses of the Americas.

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94 Bynum, 269-270.
These traditions were evident in one of the earliest images of the New World from 1505 entitled "The People of the Islands Recently Discovered" [Figure 2]. The image was not specifically labeled as representing Island Caribs, but based upon the traditions of Carib representation in writing, it is clear that these were not the timid Arawaks of the Greater Antilles. Towards the center of the visual space, there is a woman with a suckling child at her breast and two other children who appear dependant upon her. This family is calm and serene, yet surrounded by a scene of cruelty where human flesh is being carved and hung from the rafters. In the background, European ships approach, coming to interrupt the young mother from her nursing. The ships spelled doom for the Carib way of life. The children who once sought their sustenance from their cannibal mother would soon be subjects of European civilization. A woman in the image appears to be cutting up the body of some unfortunate man. Another woman is even shown gnawing on the uncooked flesh of an arm. The men stand poised for battle in full regalia, yet shockingly ignorant of the imposing ships on the horizon. Thus, they appear emasculated and unable to protect the women and children from the advancing Europeans. This image represents the New World “savage” as feminine and maternal. The breast-feeding woman
embodied the fear of being consumed as well as the possibility of consumption. In such a way, the visual representation of cannibal discourse in this image shifted from the ways in which Columbus et al depicted Caribs as masculine and Arawaks as feminine. Instead, it presented a more confident scene in which European civilization would be brought to bear upon the Americas and European masculinity would undoubtedly triumph.

Figure 3: "Amerigo Vespucci: Letter to Sonderini (German Edition) - Life Among the Indians," Woodcut Strassburg, 1509.

Figure 3, ("Life among the Indians") also shows the maternal side of the Americas. There is a group of Natives engaged in the preparation of a cannibal meal. Each figure is remarkably similar to the others and it is difficult to determine which are male and which are female. One can assume that the figure with the suckling infant is female, yet her body is not very different from the others around her. Her breasts are small and not very distinct from the pectoral muscles of her fellow tribesman. The figure on the right of the image is obviously male, as he is shown urinating. The two individuals in the back, engaged in the dismemberment of the body, appear to
be a woman and a man. The woman on the left seems to be cupping her breast as the man lowers his axe towards the body splayed out before them. The image of the female breast features prominently in this image. There is a suckling infant who, once again, survives on the life-giving milk of the cannibal mother. The woman in the back left gazes at the dismembered body part and reaches towards her bosom. Her position reinforces the cyclical nature of the act of cannibalism. The sustenance provided by the human body before her will in turn be processed and redistributed to the next generation of her tribe through her breasts, thus ensuring the perpetuation of the cannibal tradition. What differentiated this image from Figure 2 is that this represents an uninterrupted cannibal scene. There were no European ships lurking on the horizon. The cannibal mothers continue to nurse their children from the blood of humans.

Images played a critical role in the “construction and maintenance of relationships of colonial power and subordination in the early modern Atlantic world.” The success and popularity of the writings of Amerigo Vespucci’s work can be attributed not only to his literary skill, but also the illustrations printed in his published works. Columbus’s works were sometimes illustrated with simple practical engravings, but despite their spotty publication record and difficult provenance, Vespucci’s works were more fancifully illustrated. Tzvetan Todorov also argued that the narrative style of Vespucci lent itself to more spectacular and enthralling images. Vespucci’s penchant for exaggeration and hyperbole in writing was quite evident in his accompanying images, which included numerous depictions of the “savages” of the New World.

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By the late sixteenth century, representations of the New World as a nude female had become prevalent. One very famous image was an engraving created by the Flemish artist Jan van der Straet [Figure 4], which was later reproduced by Theodore Galle and used to illustrate the influential book *Nova Reperta* (*New Discoveries*), which was first published around 1600. The images that accompanied this text documented the invention of many different things such as, gunpowder, the printing press, olive oil, and eyeglasses in addition to the discovery of the New World. The caption added to the image in the print edition read *Americen Americus retexit - Semel vocavit inde semper excitam* (Amerigo rediscovers America – He called her once and henceforth she was always awake). The waking figure is positioned next to a sloth, whose very name represented inactivity. On the other side of “America” is Vespucci himself. He carries the symbols of western technological innovation, progress, civilization, and conquest; “a cruciform

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98 My translation.
99 Montrose, 4.
staff with a banner bearing the Southern Cross, a navigational astrolabe, and a sword – the mutually reinforcing emblems of belief, empirical knowledge, and violence.”100 The native landscape in contrast, appears much more primitive and lacking in technology. Thus, the image presents a land that although peopled, was a blank slate upon which European civilization could be placed.

Van der Straet depicted the moment of encounter in symbolic form. The image shows the meeting between a man, Vespucci, who represented Europe, and a woman, representing America. The sexual overtones in their meeting are undeniable. The depiction of a cultural encounter represented as a sexual encounter was a common trope in early modern texts.101 This image did more than follow in the footsteps of its predecessors; it also paved the way for depictions of America for generations to come.102 In his article, “Vespucci Rediscovers America: The Pictorial Rhetoric of Cannibalism in Early Modern Culture,” Michael J. Schreffler offered an insightful interpretation of the role of cannibalism in Van der Straet’s images. He asserted that unlike many contemporary and subsequent images, the association of cannibalism with the allegorical figure of America occurred quite subtly in this image. The cannibal scene is relegated to the background, yet remains centered and visually enthralling. Schreffler noted the juxtaposition of cannibalism with the figure of America’s outstretched hand and asserted that this revealed the nature of depictions of colonial power in early modern images. He argued that the placement of the cannibal scene near the center of the composition, but just outside of the grasp of the waking figure of America, established the preeminence of the relationship between America and Vespucci, rather than America and the cannibals.103 The image, therefore, foreshadowed the

100 Ibid.
101 Schreffler, 297.
102 Ibid., 299.
103 Ibid., 301.
future of American anthropophagy. It shows that the benefits of contact with the Native peoples of the Americas far outweighed the dangers imposed by their cannibalistic nature, for cannibalism appeared as but a secondary feature of their societies. However, even though the cannibal scene is relegated to the background, it is still ever-present in this rendering. Vespucci’s arrival awakened the formerly sleeping figure of America, but the cannibals were already preparing their feast. They lurked in the background, present but not active in the scene.

The presence of the cannibals seems to offer no danger to Vespucci in the image, yet there is a sinister nature to their persistence in the scene. According to Louis Montrose in “The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery,” the visual space of the image also represented the passing of time. The events occurring closest to the horizon represented the perceived past. The meeting between Vespucci and the figure of America, on the other hand, occurred in the present, indicating the potential of the New World. Thus, the cannibal scene was one that would soon be relegated to the past. The Allegorical figure of America represent the civilized version of the continent. She was what the inhabitants of the Americas were moving towards: what contact with the European explorers would bring to them. Although she appears mostly naked, with bare breasts, her modesty is still somewhat protected. She is seated on a hammock, not on the bare ground like the cannibals in the distance.

The placement of the cannibal scene in a distinct and separate space from the two central figures also indicates, according to Schreffler, the “anxiety about the practice of cannibalism as well as the ambivalence and instability of early modern discourses of colonial power.” The image represented the European assurance that cannibalism existed in the New World but also

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104 Montrose, 5.
105 Schreffler, 304.
demonstrated their inability to adequately witness and document it.\textsuperscript{106} This pattern would continue through the centuries. The image forces the viewer to acknowledge the existence of cannibalism but allows for an understanding of its elusive nature.\textsuperscript{107}

The image also showed a compartmentalized vision of the Americas. The depiction of Europe is more cohesive and is embodied by Vespucci and his invading ships. America is represented by its flora and fauna, the sexualized reclining allegorical woman, as well as the cannibal scene. European colonial power rested on the ability to perceive the inhabitants of the Americas, and indeed the land itself, as consumable. Therefore, the scene of physical consumption is pushed into the background.\textsuperscript{108} Native peoples were primarily consumable objects and only secondarily consumers. This recasting of Native peoples was evident throughout the era of European colonization. The settlers in North America felt that it was their right, their duty in fact, to consume the lands that they felt the Native peoples were letting go to waste. Europeans saw the New World as the ultimate vessel for their consumption.

Montrose asserted that the image created by Van der Straet depicted the event discussed earlier in which a young man from Vespucci’s mission was killed and cannibalized on the beach as the rest of the crew looked on helplessly.\textsuperscript{109} Montrose offered little evidence as to why he believed this incident to be that which may have inspired the Van der Straet image. He argued that this story was an early example of cannibal discourse that reinforced the emergent themes of cannibalism, savagery, and deceit. He stated, “Of particular significance here is the blending of these basic ingredients of protocolonialist ideology with crude and anxious misogynistic fantasy,
a powerful conjunction of the savage and the feminine.”

Thinking of the Van der Straet image as an allegorical recreation of a real occurrence limits the power it possessed. It forces it to remain constrained within the imagery and the implications of its real world counterpart. The worldview of the European conquerors of the Americas must then be drawn out from the image; extrapolated, expanded, and then applied to their understandings. However, if the image is treated as an allegory for the European conception of the New World, the discourse is contained within the image itself. This is not to discount context, but rather that such allegorical depictions need not point to a real tangible incident to have discursive meaning. Their meaning was created in their visual resonance. Read this way, the image indicated more than the actual fear of being cannibalized that Vespucci and his men may have experienced, but it also referenced anxieties about the role of women, and most importantly women’s bodies.

“Nova Reperta: Vespucci Awakens a Sleeping America” foreshadowed the role that gender played and continues to play in the colonial project. Anne McClintock discussed this image in her important book Imperial Leather. She wrote, “her nakedness and her gesture suggest a visual echo of Michelangelo’s ‘Creation.’ Vespucci, the godlike arrival, is destined to inseminate her with the male seeds of civilization, fructify the wilderness and quell the riotous scenes of cannibalism in the background.” Thus, the encounter itself was an act of penetration. As Vespucci penetrated the lands of the Americas, he also positioned himself as the purveyor of civilization, which he provided through his masculine dominance over the feminized figure of America. He awakened the sleeping continent and called her by name. Thus “invested with the male prerogative of naming, Vespucci renders America’s identity a dependent extension of his and stakes male Europe’s territorial rights on her body and, by extension, the fruits of her

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110 Ibid., 5
111 McClintock, 26.
It is through Vespucci’s utterance of the name America that the continent woke up. Without the masculine force provided by the European conquerors, the Americas would never have awakened to realize their true potential and would have remained forever primitive and cannibalistic (and feminine).

The work of gender is evident in this image beyond the central awakening figure, as the cannibal figures in the background also appeared to be women. McClintock presumed the body roasting in the background to be male, likely following the assumption that the neutral body was always gendered male.\(^\text{113}\) While it cannot be decisively proved that the figure is in fact male, assuming it as such further illustrated the ambivalence of conquest and the desire of European men to be both the consumer and the consumed. Furthermore, the neutral/male body in the scene demonstrates what many Europeans perceived to be the unnaturalness of gender roles in savage societies. For, if the women were preparing to consume the body of a man, this placed them in a position of power and dominance and simultaneously weakened their male counterparts. For in this period the dangerous bodies were often those of women, and thus the “savage” was not predetermined to be virile and masculine and the existence of societies in which women held varying degrees of power threatened to expose the fragility of male dominance in Europe.

Transgressing the boundaries of European gender norms caused Indians to be perceived as savages, and this savagery was in turn read as emasculating. Indian men, in this view, failed to achieve any recognizable standard of European masculinity, just as women failed to fit into existing standards of femininity. Thus, Indians were perceived as less masculine, and therefore

\(^{112}\) Ibid.

\(^{113}\) Ibid. “Here, women mark, quite literally, the margins of the new world but they do so in such as way as to suggest a profound ambivalence in the European male. In the foreground, the explorer is of a piece – fully armored, erect and magisterial, the incarnation of male imperial power. Caught in his gaze, the woman is naked, subservient and vulnerable to his advance. In the background, however, the male body is quite literally in pieces, while the women are actively and powerfully engaged. The dismembered leg roasting on the spit evokes a disordering of the body so catastrophic as to be fatal.”
less powerful than their European conquerors. The conquest of the Americas can then be read as a contestation between competing understanding of gendered norms, which for the Europeans was expressed as a fight between their masculine selves and the emasculated people of the Americas. In this way, the contact between Europeans, Caribs, and Arawaks was as an elaborate contestation for male dominance. The Arawaks were commonly represented as fearful, timid, and overly kind, all feminine traits, whereas the Caribs were depicted as fearsome, irrational, and driven only by desire, which were all masculine traits, but taken beyond the limit of acceptability.

By presuming the corpse being roasted in the image to be male, McClintock read the image as one that was “less about the soon-to-be-colonized ‘Other,’ than it is about a crisis in male imperial identity.”\textsuperscript{114} Thus, the image embodied the idealized encounter as well as depicting what McClintock calls “a dread of engulfment.”\textsuperscript{115} The figure of the cannibal most easily represented this fear and served as a projection of European desires for consumption.\textsuperscript{116} The projection of the cannibal trope onto the unfamiliar inhabitants of the Americas allowed the Europeans to name their fear. By calling the Natives cannibals, they were no longer fundamentally unknown, but could be categorized and dealt with accordingly. As shall be demonstrated in the following chapters, calling Native peoples cannibals allowed the Spanish, French, and English empires to justify their actions and establish imperial power in the New World.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid. (Emphasis in original).
CHAPTER II. CONQUERING CANNIBALS

Chapter One explored the ways in which cannibalism was a formative trope of early imperial expansion in the New World. Furthermore, it investigated the gendered genesis of European expansion in the Americas.\(^1\) Drawing from these insights, the primary focus of this chapter will be the conquest of the Aztec empire by Spain under the leadership of Hernán Cortés, although comparisons, extensions, and exceptions from other contexts will be advanced as well. Through this interrogation, the ways in which the discourse of cannibalism changed in the context of conquest, as well as the ways in which the discourse of cannibalism shaped the nature of imperial power in Mexico will become clear. This chapter will begin with discussion of cannibalism in conquest and an overview of gender and sexuality in the Spanish empire. Then, it will proceed towards an investigation of the first-hand evidence of the conquest, arguing the discourse of cannibalism in this context drew from the precedents established in the Caribbean but also changed in order to adapt to the shifting conditions of Mexico. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of the legacy of the discourse of cannibalism in New Spain.

There are many sources available to the modern reader about the conquest of Tenochtitlan; however, most of these were second-hand accounts that drew from the writings of eyewitnesses. With the exception of the codices that detailed the conquest from the Aztec perspective and the writings of a few friars about pre-conquest Mexico, there is limited textual evidence from the Indians themselves.\(^2\) In fact, only 16 codices remain.\(^3\) The early Catholic

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Church in Mexico systematically destroyed many of the extant Aztec and Maya texts and few escaped the fire. Thus, this chapter focuses on European discourse and representation rather than actual Indigenous practices and uncovers that cannibalism played an important role in the gendering of conquest and the ways in which Spanish conquistadors constructed their ideas about masculinity.

Just as Columbus and Vespucci brought earlier understandings of difference and cannibalism with them to the Caribbean, Hernán Cortés and his contemporaries inherited their intellectual legacy. By the time that Cortés and his men began traveling inland across the Yucatán, the existence of cannibals in the New World was well established. There was little debate about whether or not the Caribs were cannibals, even if there were extensive arguments about how the practice of cannibalism related to their potential enslavement. Based on this established discourse and its underlying assumptions about the existence of savagery in the Americas, it would seemed logical to readers back in Spain that the practice of cannibalism extended inland. What did pose a challenge to the ideas about cannibalism that had been established in the previous decades was the sophistication of Aztec and Maya societies. The Caribs were reported to have been uncivilized, in part because of their practice of man-eating, but also because of other practices such as nakedness, promiscuity, lack of recognizable religion, and lack of centralized governmental power. The peoples of Mexico, however, did not meet many of the characteristics of savagery. The specific cultural context that the Spaniards encountered in Mexico forced them to re-evaluate and re-articulate their understandings of cannibalism. Because they encountered more “civilized” cultures in Mexico and because they


were interested in exploiting the natural resources and labor available in the regions they conquered, they necessarily understood the presences of cannibalism and other aberrant cultural practices as impediments to their efforts, but not as impasses.\(^4\)

In discussing the differences in approach to conquest and the ways in which power functioned in the various empires of the Americas, Patricia Seed argued that control of mineral resources was of the utmost importance for the Spanish Crown. Based on these priorities, Spaniards tended to be much more interested in the exploitation of Native labor than their English counterparts would be nearly a century later in Virginia and New England. Spanish conquistadors needed Indian labor in order to obtain the vast riches that God had placed beneath the earth for his faithful servants to uncover and from which they should profit. They developed a system for the division of Indian labor known as the *encomienda* system, in which Spaniards (and sometimes Indians) were entrusted with a specific number of Natives whose resources and labor were given in exchange for their protection. While this system was not explicitly slavery, it often functioned as such and will be referred to in those terms.\(^5\)

Cannibalism and slavery had an important relationship in Spanish legal history, and man-eating was commonly referenced as one of the sins for which Indians could be enslaved without provocation. Slavery was a necessary part of the Spanish imperial machine, for Native labor was necessary to obtain the riches awaiting them beneath the surface. Expansion into new territories, like Mexico, enabled the Spanish to increase their supplies of labor, resources, and converts. The *encomienda* system also had important consequences for the discourse of cannibalism, as men writing about the conquest years later felt the need to defend their actions in Mexico through

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\(^5\) The *encomienda* system revolved around the ownership of labor, not people.
descriptions of the atrocities that Indians committed in order to preserve their economic rewards.\footnote{6}

The Spanish hoped to bring religion and civility to the peoples of the Americas, but they also hoped to bring back wealth to support the growing mercantilist economy of Castile. The islands of the Caribbean proved useful in enriching Spanish coffers through the exploitation of Indigenous labor and the extraction of natural resources. However, the native peoples of the Caribbean did not possess great wealth and their numbers were rapidly declining due to disease and overwork. The discovery of the Yucatán peninsula by Francisco Hernández de Córdoba in 1517 spurred interest in the lands to the west and encouraged the voyages of Juan de Grijalva in 1518 and Hernán Cortés in 1519. Córdoba’s expedition was filled with violence and tragedy, but witnesses brought back tales of cities of stone and large populations. For enterprising men like Cortés, who were stifled by the existing power structures, the allure of great wealth to the West was irresistible. On February 18, 1519, Cortés set sail from Cuba with ten ships and 530 men. His mission defied protocol and was a direct affront to the governor of Cuba, Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, who had ordered Cortés to conduct a mission of trade and diplomacy not conquest. Thus, his mission was a test of the extension of imperial power and the ability of an individual to justify his possession and conquest of a sovereign people.\footnote{7} Cortés’s mission in Mexico was one of both conquest and settlement, for he believed that without both they could not succeed and prosper. He also recognized the importance of converting the Native populations in order for Spain and Spanish civilization to triumph in Mexico.\footnote{8}

\footnote{8} Ibid., 21.
Cortés was the proto-typical masculine imperial hero who exploited the bodies and labor of the native women that he encountered. His successes portended not only the erasure of the “abominable” customs of cannibalism and sacrifice among the Aztecs, but the establishment of a stratified society in which power was masculine and women’s participation in political, social, and religious matters was voided. The conquistadors employed the trope of cannibalism in order to make sense of and demean Indigenous bodies and cultures. This does not mean that Natives did not in fact practice ritualized cannibalism, but rather that Europeans specifically interpreted native culture in order to support their imperialist desires. Beyond the fact that accusations of cannibalism helped to justify acts of conquest, for men like Hernán Cortés and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, cannibalism also epitomized the anxieties of imperial masculinity and served as a representative trope through which they understood native lives and bodies.

Unlike the people that Europeans came upon in the Caribbean, the Mayas and Nahuas of Mexico appeared to be more civilized by European standards. They possessed empires and cities that were organized in ways that, although decidedly foreign, were nonetheless recognizable as civilizations. Unlike the Arawaks and Caribs of the Leeward and Windward Islands, the Chontal Maya and Nahuas lived in permanent houses and practiced a more recognizable organized religion. They possessed great caches of gold, engaged in the exchange of material goods, and had a recognizable hierarchical political and social order. In other words, they did not appear to

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9 Chontal Maya derives from a Nahua term for foreigner and denotes the Maya peoples of the Yucatan generally, and more specifically those of the modern state of Tabasco, but has been used to refer to a variety of different Maya ethnic groups throughout Mexico. Nahuas (or Nahua peoples) refers to Uto-Aztecan peoples who spoke variations of the Nahuatl languages. This group includes the Toltecs, Aztecs, Tlaxcaltecs, Xochimilcas and others. The term Mexica may also be employed here; this term refers specifically to the ruling ethnic group of the Aztec empire, who were a Nahuatl speaking group. Lastly, Aztec refers to the Mexica of Tenochtitlan, but can also be extended to the Nahuatl speaking people of the allied cities of Texcoco and Tlacopán, and even more generally it can refer to all those living within the Aztec empire who spoke Nahuatl and shared related cultural patterns.

be living in a state of nature. They were not the atavistic savages that Europeans imagined in the Caribbean. Therefore, the encounters between Europeans and Indians took on a decidedly different character on the mainland.\textsuperscript{11} Rather than being able to construct these interactions in terms of masculine civilization and feminine savagery, the circumstances on the mainland forced the Spaniards to re-articulate the ways in which power functioned in their interactions with Native peoples. The encounters between Europeans and Natives in the Caribbean discussed in the previous chapter did not take place in the context of a full-scale invasion. European intervention in the Caribbean began, not as an invading force, but rather as an exploitative, sporadic economic system. Although colonies in the Caribbean developed quickly, Columbus did not arrive as conqueror or a colonist.

Spanish expansion into the New World came on the heels of the successful elimination of Moorish power from Spain in 1492, when the country had become united under the banner of the Kingdom of Castile. In many ways, the Spanish expansion into the Americas was an extension of the \textit{reconquista}. From the conquest of Al-Andalus the Spaniards learned valuable lessons about conquest and colonization, which they brought with them to the Americas. In fact, they often referred to Indians in similar ways to their Moorish counterparts and their descriptions of Indian culture and objects were based on Moorish traditions.\textsuperscript{12}

D. W. Meinig characterized the Spanish model of imperialism as an incorporative system, in which Spaniards inserted themselves into pre-existing hierarchies. There was a place for Indians, albeit a subordinate one, in this system. Despite the inequalities that existed between the

\textsuperscript{11} The encounters between Spaniards and the Indians of Florida, arguably, followed a pattern somewhere between the island tribes of the Caribbean and the “civilizations” of Mexico.

Spanish and Indian subjects, there was still a great degree of dependency. The Spanish conquest of Mexico would not have been able to succeed without the help of a large number of Indian allies. In a simplistic sense, these groups were disaffected with Aztec control and were willing to cast their lot with the Spanish in order to rid themselves of their oppressors. Because of this, and later on because of their dependence on Indigenous labor, the Spanish needed the Indians. The Spanish presence in Mexico was not sustainable without them. In the early years of conquest and settlement, Spanish men relied upon Indian women as cultural intermediaries and for sexual gratification, marriage, and procreation. From these unions came a large population of *mestizos* who would greatly influence early imperial policies in Mexico. The relatively small population of Spaniards in Mexico in the first half of the sixteenth century forced them to rely on Indian resources and to associate more directly with their Mexican subjects and allies than would occur in the English colonies in North America, for example. This level of intimacy between the Spanish population and the Indians made the elimination of the practice of cannibalism that much more important.

Meinig also argued that while the Spaniards brought the idea that humanity was innately hierarchical with them from Europe, they were not inflexible. Rather, “it would appear that different local circumstances, and especially basic differences in imperial objectives were critical.”¹³ In other words, it is important to take into account the circumstances that Spaniards encountered in the Americas in order to understand fully how the discourse of cannibalism took shape. Meinig also indicated that based on what they encountered in Mexico, the Spaniards developed a stratified society which included racial and cultural hybridity to varying degrees. Therefore, it is only logical to assume that the ways in which Spaniards thought about cannibalism were, at least in part, influenced by the local circumstances they encountered.

¹³ Meinig, 72.
The idea of the cannibal established in chapter one hinged upon negotiations between differing notions of masculinity and femininity, and this discourse stressed that travel to new lands and contact with strange people posed a threat to masculine order. Thus, European representations of cannibalism among the Caribs often emphasized the participation of women and the threat to the European male body. Cortés and his men were greatly influenced by these Caribbean precedents. However, the Mexican mainland posed its own unique challenges and forced them to understand cannibalism in different terms. Rather than representing the cannibals as monstrous, the belief that the Aztecs and the Maya practiced cannibalism forced the conquistadors to develop new strategies for eliminating their anthropophagic appetites while still incorporating them into the empire as allies and subjects. Furthermore, in the accounts of conquest, women were far less likely to be accused of participating in acts of cannibalism. Rather, Spaniards wrote about cannibalism among the Aztecs and the Maya as a predominately masculine ritual which took place both on the battlefield and in temples.

The Spanish also brought ideas about the gendered nature of power to the Americas. Sexuality and gender were inextricably intertwined in sixteenth century Spain. Power was expressed through sexuality, which was manifested through the assertion of masculine dominance and feminine submission.\footnote{Trexler, 63.} In the context of warfare, Spaniards viewed their defeated enemies as effeminate and weak. However, in order for their victory to be meaningful the feminized losers had to be re-articulated as masculine, for victory over women was no real victory at all.\footnote{Ibid., 73.} Spaniards believed that deviant sexual practices were more common in certain geographic regions and because of this, they expected to encounter homosexuality, polygamy,
cross-dressing, etc. in the Americas. Furthermore, they believed that engaging in what they perceived as deviant sexual practices indicated savagery. Thus, the success of Cortés’s conquest of Tenochtitlan hinged not only upon military victories but also upon the remaking of Native worlds and the imposition of Spanish ideas about gender and sexuality. In fact, “the Iberian discourse on the character of conquest was itself unmistakably gendered, indeed phallic in character.” The gendered contestations of power in Mexico took place both on and off the battlefield. The battles pitted differing masculinities against one another, while the civilizing mission of Cortés challenged Aztec and Maya gendered and sexual norms. Aztec and Yucatecan Maya societies were structured around gender complementarity and gender parallelism, as opposed to the male-dominated arrangement of European society. However, in the gendered configurations of both Spaniards and Mexica, the separateness of male and female spaces was paramount—to turn one into the other was a breach of norms and a humiliation.

It is difficult, if not impossible to encapsulate the norms of gender and sexuality in early modern Spain. Furthermore, the dominant discourses of gender and sexuality espoused in the legal discourse, both royal and ecclesial, and public discourse cannot be said to represent accurately the practices of everyday Spaniards. Rather, these general norms represented ideal Spanish gendered and sexual practices. Because of this, it is important to be mindful of the disparities that existed between discourse and practice when making general statements about the gendered and sexual practices of early modern Spain. According to Catholic doctrine and royal law, women’s virtue and honor insisted upon virginity and purity. However, in practice,
women’s lives and their positions in Spanish society were far more complicated. By the time that Cortés was heading towards Tenochtitlan, the status of women in Spain had begun to decline because of an increasing social emphasis on religious and ethnic purity. These concerns of Spanish identity and national culture led to an increasing policing of women’s sexuality in order to ensure the homogeneity of the Spanish population. The more rigid definitions of appropriate behavior for women, which emerged in the wake of the reconquista, insisted upon domesticity, obedience, and silence.20

At the same time that the bodies of women and female sexuality were being increasingly regulated in Spain, understandings of masculinity were also changing. Spanish literature of this period was intensely concerned with defining masculinity. Edward Behrend-Martínez argued that being a man in early modern Spain generally meant, “keeping one’s word, supporting one’s family, heading a patriarchal household, demonstrating sexual prowess, sobriety, maintaining one’s independence of thought and action, and defending family and personal honor.”21 In 1519, being a man was predominately defined by a set of behaviors, not strictly by biology.22 Based on this understanding, conquistadors judged the masculinity of Indian men by how they performed their gender according to Spanish standards, and the reverse was true for Indian women. Thus, when Spaniards and Indians encountered one another, Spanish men used their own definitions of masculinity and femininity to judge the value and status of Indians. Differing understandings of gender and sexuality shaped the interactions between Europeans and Americans, and in turn, they affected the discourse of cannibalism.

22 Ibid. In the mid-seventeenth century, the re-definition of masculinity meant that there was an increasing emphasis on biological sex, rather than gender. In other words, being a man was more than just a set of gendered performances that demonstrated masculinity. In this period, it also meant possessing physiological indicators of male sex.
Discussion of Native gender roles, sexual practices, and cannibalism featured prominently in early Spanish imperial writings. Each of these evoked fear and desire in the minds of Spanish men. The body of the “Other” was an important site for the assertion of imperial dominance, and the enactment of imperial fantasies. Merrall Llewellyn Price noted that the cannibal as Other paradoxically depend[ed] on both a hyperdelineation and a blurring of categories of gender, under which the indigenous women were represented as voracious and sadistic sexual aggressors and the men as sexually perverse and malformed monsters, each of whom practices a bestial and bloodthirsty cannibalism deserving only of enslavement and extinction.23

Thus, the conquest of Mexico depended upon the idea that Native bodies and their practices were somehow out of order with the natural ways of the world. While this was established to some degree in the Caribbean, it was not until the conquest of Mexico that the link between cannibalism, sex, and conquest achieved preeminence. Price argued that Cortés established the connection between cannibalism and sexual practices in his first letter from Vera Cruz, and “from this point on, cannibalism and various acts interpreted as sodomy travel hand in hand in New World narratives.”24

Through the bodies of women, the conquistadors negotiated their understanding of both sexuality and cannibalism. Their accounts reinforced that even though neither Native nor European women typically participated in the military actions of conquest, their bodies played a fundamental role in it. They served as translators, wives, mistresses, servants, and property to be exchanged. Women were often given by local caciques as gifts to Cortés and his men as they

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23 Price, 84.
24 Ibid., 98.
traveled across Mexico, and while these women may not have fought and died on the battlefield, conquest was negotiated through their bodies, quite literally in the case of Malintzin.25 Spanish textual sources indicated that conquistadors defined themselves against native men and women in different ways, emphasizing difference over similarity in order to reinforce their perception of European superiority. Spaniards believed that men who fought and lost on the battlefield were symbolically emasculated and were able to be incorporated into the winning society in a subordinate position; on the other hand, Spanish men sought to incorporate Indigenous women through sex and servitude.

The bodies of Indigenous women were one of the many stages upon which the conquest was enacted. The interactions, both on and off of the battlefield, between Spanish conquistadors and Natives were gendered in nature and as Karen Vieira Powers argued, “considering that human sexuality is, universally, the most powerful instinctual behavior, it is probably in this arena that gender collisions of the Indian-Spanish encounter took its most drastic form.”26 Gender and sexuality were not only the most pervasive metaphors through which both Europeans and Indians understood warfare, but sexual acts, as both punishment and as a negotiation of power, were integral to the success of a given military endeavor for both. In From Moon Goddess to Virgins: The Colonization of Yucatecan Maya Sexual Desire, Pete Sigal pointed out that, “the Maya viewed the winning group as masculine and as penetrators in sexual acts. The losers were viewed as feminine and as those who were penetrated by the penises of the opposing warriors. This distinction formed one core of the cultural matrix around which the Maya

25 Malintzin was also sometimes referred to as Doña Marina or La Malinche. It is possible that none of these names accurately reflected her forename but I have chosen to use Malintzin as it was neither given to her by the Spanish like Doña Marina, nor used as a derogatory term like La Malinche. For example see: Durán, The History of the Indies, 511, 523 and Martyr D’Anghera, vol. 2, 35.

26 Powers, 53.
organized their perceptions of sexual desire."\(^\text{27}\) Conquest and domination were gendered affairs for Maya, Aztecs, and Spaniards. Iberians understood politics and religion in gendered terms as well. The monarch (whether male or female) was like a father who headed a masculine social structure that gendered dependency as female.\(^\text{28}\) Warfare for the Iberians was a masculine space. Even on the battlefield, it was important for masculinity to be defined against femininity and these ideas were extended over the conquered Aztecs and Mayas.

From the thirteenth century on, Spaniards had begun persecuting acts of sodomy and foreigners were most commonly accused of this crime.\(^\text{29}\) In previous centuries, Spanish wartime practices may have involved sodomy and male rape, but as the Crown and Church began to police masculinity more strongly, they discouraged soldiers from engaging in penetrative punishment and erotic relationships with one another. To compensate for this, Spanish commanders often brought prostitutes with them to serve as a more acceptable outlet for sexual urges. Thus, upon arrival in Mexico, the conquistadors fully expected to include women in their camps for sexual fulfillment and to perform menial tasks. Because of this, the women that were given to them by the various groups that they encountered on their journey were easily incorporated into the Spanish world. For Cortés and his compatriots the presence of cannibalism and sodomy not only justified conquest, they also granted them access to the bodies of Native women. Indian men were castigated for their “sins” on the battlefield, whereas Indigenous women’s bodies were threatened with rape, coercive sex, and enslavement. Thus, the cultural “crimes” committed by the Aztecs and the Chontal Maya were corporally punished. Spaniards took it upon themselves to “correct” the wrongful practices of Indians, and the body was the

\(^{28}\) Trexler, 59.
\(^{29}\) Ibid, 45.
locus of their imperial discipline. However, the extent to which sins like cannibalism and sodomy actually justified the conquest varied across the records. For Díaz, Cortés, Juan Gines de Sepulveda, and Alonso Zuazo, the fact that the Native peoples of Mexico were presumed to be heathens, cannibals, and sodomites justified the Spaniards actions. Zuazo asserted that “[e]stas gentes tienen la tria peccatela que decia el Italiano: no creen en Dios; son casi todos sodomitas: comen carne humana . . .”30 However, Las Casas and other more writers more sympathetic to the Indians tended to downplay both the practice and importance of cannibalism and sodomy.31

In the conquest narratives of Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and others, earlier Caribbean patterns continued. For example, the assumption of cannibalism and other “inappropriate” cultural practices that were believed to accompany it, such as promiscuity, polygamy, and effeminacy, persisted often in the absence of evidentiary support. However, these writings did not support the notion that being a cannibal made one irredeemable, even if they argued that the practice of cannibalism made one ripe for conquest.32 In other contexts, such as in Iroquoia, human-eating was believed to transform the practitioner physically and psychologically into an insatiable monster.33 Copulating with a cannibal monster would have certainly been unacceptable to Cortés and his men. Therefore, they represented the Indians they encountered as humans who practiced cannibalism, not as inhuman monsters.

Hernán Cortés’s version of his adventures was recorded in a series of letters written while he was in Mexico. There were originally five, but one has been lost. These letters served the dual

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30 Alonso Zuazo, “Carta Del Licenciado Alonso Zuazo,” in Colección de documentos para la historia de México, ed. Joaquin García Icazbalceta (Mexico: Librería de J.M Andrade, 1858), 565
purpose of narrating events and justifying the conquest. Cortés devoted a great deal of space to convincing the monarchs of their necessity. He went against the direct orders of his nemesis Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, the governor of Cuba, who had correctly predicted that Cortés was overly driven by ambition. Velázquez was more interested in establishing trade with the Natives in order to enrich his own coffers, than in funding permanent settlements on the mainland. The rivalry between these two men would have disastrous consequences later on, and would result in Cortés’s abandonment of Tenochtitlan to fight Velázquez’s forces under Pánfilo de Narváez.

In his letters, Hernán Cortés was driven to justify his brash actions. He often did this by recording the atrocities committed by the peoples he encountered. Indeed, he repeatedly wrote of the horrific sacrifices and idolatry practiced by the Aztecs and the Mayas. He further indicated their aggressive actions towards him, which provided evidence of the necessity of using force to conquer and convert. He understood the people of Mexico as already subject to the crown of Castile through God’s divine providence, and the reading of the requerimiento cemented this authority.  

Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who was a soldier in Cortés’s force, wrote down his version of events many years later and his motives, while quite different than Cortés’s, were nonetheless just as political. Diaz began writing his account in 1551 and continued his work for almost two decades. Díaz had accompanied Córdoba and Grijalva on their respective voyages to the Yucatán before joining forces with Cortés. His account has been widely reported to be the most definitive and trustworthy. Throughout his narrative, he humbly admitted his own weaknesses in style and acknowledged his inability to remember certain events. However, Díaz also had very clear motives for writing his account of the conquest. He directly confronted the writings of other

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34 Díaz, 48-50.
more educated and respectable men like Francisco López de Gómara and Bartolomé de Las Casas. Díaz was offended that Gómara’s writings had received such recognition because of his class and stature. Thus, Díaz wrote his narrative of the common soldier in the conquest in order to counteract more high-minded writings. But even more than his anxieties about class and status, Díaz was very concerned with the legacy of the conquest. He was disturbed by Las Casas’s indictment of the actions of the conquistadors, particularly about the massacres at Cholula and at the Templo Mayor at Tenochtitlan. Díaz wanted to defend their actions and justify the conquest in order to preserve the economic privileges that the conquest had afforded them as well as their reputation and status. Because of this, Díaz actively insisted that the actions of Cortés and his men were acceptable based upon the horrific practices of the Indians. He supported the arguments of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda who used arguments about natural law in order to rationalize the conquest of Mexico. Thus, while Díaz’s account was perhaps the most extensive record of the conquest, it was not without political motivations and because of this it contained more frequent references to cannibalism among the Indians than either Las Casas or Gómara.

An individual known only as the Anonymous Conqueror penned another eyewitness narrative. Scholars question whether or not he was an actual eyewitness or if he merely based his accounts on the writings of others, like Alonso de Zuazo. Overall, his account was far less detailed, although it did contain an important discussion linking the practices of sodomy and cannibalism. The Anonymous Conqueror’s account does not survive in its original Spanish, only

36 Ibid., 212.
37 Ibid., 213.
38 Zuazo was one of the three men left in charge of Cortés’s government, when the governor left for Honduras in addition to other important positions in the Spanish government in the Americas. See Alonso Zuazo, “Carta del Licenciado Alonso Zuazo,” in Icazbalceta, Joaquin García. Coleccion de Documentos para la Historia de México. (Mexico: Libreria de J.M. Andrade, 1858): 558-567.
an early Italian translation and later Spanish versions exist. The Italian version was first published in the third volume of Ramusio’s *Navigationi et Viaggi* in 1556.\(^{39}\)

The brief account of the officer Andrés de Tapia was focused upon military exploits and provided less insight into Indigenous culture.\(^{40}\) His account only covers the first stage of the conquest and ends with arrival of Narváez’s troops. Tapia had great respect for Cortés, and held his actions in high regard and in fact his account “Relation of some things that happened to the Very Illustrious Don Hernando Cortés, Marqués de Valle . . .” was based upon a deposition he was asked to give in the 1540s during an investigation of Cortés’s actions in Mexico. It was not published until the nineteenth century.\(^{41}\) The writings of Francisco de Aguilar (also known as Alonso Aguilar), which remained unpublished until 1900, were a very clear and concise version of the events, making only minimal reference to cannibalism.\(^{42}\) Aguilar, a soldier like Díaz, also wrote his narrative many years later in 1560. Finally, there is the brief account of Ruy González, who recalled his version of the events of the conquest in a letter to Emperor Charles V in 1553.\(^{43}\) González feared the growing ill will towards the conquistadors and feared for their legacies, just as Díaz would write in his account several years later. Tapia, Aguilar, González, Díaz, and the Anonymous Conqueror recorded accusations of cannibalism and used its presence, along with other sins, to justify what they had done in Mexico. For the most part, none of these accounts were particularly critical of the conquest itself or Cortés.


There were also a number of important writings by men who were not directly involved in the conquest. The most important of these for our purposes are the writings of Francisco López de Gómara and Bartolomé de Las Casas. Francisco López de Gómara served as Cortés’s chaplain and secretary in Spain, but never traveled to the Americas himself. He began writing his account in 1552, more than thirty years after the Cortés landed on Yucatán peninsula. Although his writings did not directly challenge to the morality of the conquest, they nonetheless greatly offended Díaz, who lampooned the inaccuracies in Gómara’s account. The writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas were far more controversial despite the errors that littered Gómara’s account. Las Casas was not interested in glorifying the events of conquest in order to preserve the legacy of the conquistadors, nor did he have to justify his actions like Cortés. Rather, Las Casas questioned the very foundations upon which other accounts rested: the assumption that the conquest was morally justified because of the atrocities that the Indians committed. Therefore, while Las Casas did not ignore the existence of acts such as cannibalism and sodomy, they were minimized and referenced only as occasional aberrations, not as indicators of a cultural pattern of barbarity. In addition to Las Casas and Gómara, the chronicles of Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés and Peter Martyr d’Anghiera also featured important discussions of cannibalism.

The legacies of the discourse of Carib cannibalism were evident in all of these accounts. The reputation of the Caribs was already well established and their perceived practices were often extended to other inhabitants of the Americas. Indicating his assumption of the prevalence of cannibalism in the Americas, Cortés remarked that on one province of the Yucatán, the Natives killed a handful of Spaniards because they had “always been very warlike and

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rebellious.” Not only had these men attacked and killed Spaniards but “they are all cannibals, of which I send Your Majesty no evidence because it is so infamous.”46 Based on their actions, he enslaved them, setting aside the requisite royal fifth. Not only did Cortés assume that the rebelliousness of the Indians and their cannibalism justified their conquest and subsequent enslavement, but that their cannibalism was so well-established that he need not provide any further proof. How their actions could have been proven thoroughly when their previous contact with Europeans would have been very limited was obviously questionable. Based upon the discourse of cannibalism established in Chapter One, it seems that many Spanish visitors to the Americas made few distinctions between groups of Indians and that their habits of one were extended to all. Thus the anthropophagic habits of the Island Caribs and their cousins in modern-day Venezuela were used to support the existence of cannibalism throughout the Americas. Cortés felt that he needed no evidence to back up his claims of cannibalism among the Chontal Maya; in fact, he seemed to imply that their rebelliousness was an indication of their cannibalistic ways, which is supported by imperial legislation that linked rebelliousness with cannibalism. In his writings, Cortés did not display a great degree of sensitivity to cultural differences, rather these discussion were limited to writings of chroniclers like Fernández de Oviedo and Peter Marytr d’Anghera who were not present during the actual conquest.47

46 Hernan Cortés, Letters from Mexico. 146.
47 Myers, Fernández de Oviedo’s Chronicle of America, 123; Martyr D’Anghera, De Orbe Novo, vol. 2, 39; Montaigne, Michel de. The Complete Essays of Michel de Montaigne. Trans. Donald M. Frame. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976. Oviedo mentioned that there was classical evidence for the existence of savage customs like cannibalism and sodomy. Martyr, on the other hand was more explicit about considering cultures on their own terms. He discussed the Indian practice of wearing lip plates and expressed his disgust, yet he wrote that “This example proves the blindness and the foolishness of the human race: it likewise proves how we deceive ourselves. The Ethiopian thinks that black is a more beautiful colour than white, while the white man thinks the opposite. . . . we are influenced by passion rather than guided by reason, and the human race accepts these foolish notions, each country following its own fancy. In deference to another’s opinion, we prefer foolish things while we reject solid and certain ones.” The most famous expositor of Indian cultural relativism was obviously Michel de Montaigne, whose famous essay “On Cannibals” set the stage for centuries of anthropological and philosophical debates.
According to Francisco López de Gómara, Cortés was quite explicit that eliminating cannibalism was one of his primary goals in Mexico; in fact, he referred to it as an obligation.\textsuperscript{48} Interestingly, in a cédula from 1523, the Spanish Crown also charged Cortés with the elimination of cannibalism.\textsuperscript{49} In this instance, the discourse of cannibalism had a direct impact on imperial policy. Cortés convinced the monarchs of the necessity of his actions, and most importantly, he employed the trope of cannibalism in order to sway imperial power in his favor. It appeared that Cortés echoed Columbus’s belief that the existence of cannibalism provided justification for conquest. Whenever Cortés encountered a new group of people, he reportedly told them that the Spaniards had come to save them from idolatry and the sins of sacrifice and cannibalism.\textsuperscript{50} Bernal Díaz repeatedly indicated that the primary goal of their mission was to stop “abominable practices” like cannibalism, sacrifice, and polygamy.

While all of the firsthand accounts make it clear that Spaniards believed that human sacrifice and cannibalism were widespread and prevalent practices, they each also accused the Indians of breaking other taboos of western Christendom. Again, following the example set in the Caribbean, charges of sodomy, bigamy, lasciviousness, and other acts that challenged the established gender norms of Europe were commonly discussed. The Anonymous Conqueror accused Indians of treating their women inappropriately and having little regard for their purity. He wrote, “there are no people in the world who hold women in less esteem, for they never tell them what to do, even though they should know that by doing so they would be benefited.”\textsuperscript{51} He also indicated that they possessed many wives, like the Moors, but only the sons of the principal wife inherited the father’s property. By asserting that Indian men were not capable of controlling

\textsuperscript{48} Gómara, 114.
\textsuperscript{49} Henry R. Wagner, \textit{The Rise of Fernando Cortés} (New York: Kraus Reprint for the Cortes Society, 1969), 369.\textsuperscript{50} Díaz, 170.
\textsuperscript{51} The Anonymous Conqueror, 75.
their women, the Anonymous Conqueror questioned their masculinity and their virtue. Spanish imperial discourse insisted that women needed to be controlled because of their “proclivity to disobedience.”

The Anonymous Conqueror ended his account with a description of the vices of the people of Mexico. He wrote, “all of this province of New Spain and of those other provinces eat human flesh, which they have in greater esteem than any other food, so much so that many times they go to war and place themselves in peril only to kill someone to eat. They are commonly sodomites as I have said and drink without moderation.” In this passage, cannibalism, sexual practices, and gender roles, are closely linked. For the Spaniards, being a sodomite indicated that a given group’s gendered practices were out of order. Zuazo indicated that Indians engaged in the “tria peccatela” which included not believing in God, practicing sodomy, and eating human flesh. Together these three sins made the Indians available targets for conquest on religious grounds. In order to protect Nahuas and Maya from themselves and their vices, Spaniards insisted that they had to bring Catholicism to them, by force if necessary.

Scholarly debates continue about the actual practices of homosexuality and sodomy among pre-conquest Mexicans; however, Spanish sources consistently mentioned its presence. Much like cannibalism, it matters less for our purposes whether or not Indians engaged in sodomy, but what accusations of such practices meant to Spanish writers. Additionally, sodomy captured the imagination of Spanish observers and chroniclers in the initial years of conquest, but after a time it was rarely mentioned. The same was true concerning cannibalism.

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54 “Estas gentes tienen la tria peccatela que decia el Italiano: no creen en Dios; son casi todos sodomitas: comen carne humana . . .” Alonso de Zuazo, 565.
56 Ibid., 562.
Accusations of cannibalism played an important role in the justification of conquest, but once domination had been achieved, it was not a common subject for writers.

According to Spanish norms, sodomitic Indian men had failed to live up to their responsibilities as *men*; if they were engaging in sex with other men, especially as the passive recipient, these men were making themselves like women, an unforgivable offense for Spaniards. Furthermore, the practice of sodomy not only indicated failed masculinity, but failed womanhood as well, for women must not have been properly performing their duties as the presumed passive sex for men to be driven to one another. Indian woman were sometimes accused of being too masculine by performing men’s work. Indian men were guilty of abusing their women by either not telling them what to do, as the Anonymous Conqueror said, or forcing them to work like slaves. Many Europeans saw the grinding of corn, an important womanly duty in both the Aztec and Maya traditions, as a metonym for their oppression under Mexica rule.

Rape and coercive sex in war, “were designed to denigrate and feminize the enemy, declaring that enemy to be unable to protect the women and even the men of that society.” Thus, the battlefield extended to the body and insisted upon the superiority of European cultural norms. The literature of justification relied on the trope of bodily disorder; it was assumed that the role of the European man was to correct the bodies of Indians. These accounts reflected differing notions of sacrifice and incorporation between Europeans and Indians. Each demanded the sacrifice of bodies, whether through ritual or on the battlefield. The Spaniards incorporated Indian bodies through sexual congress, just as they appropriated and incorporated land and treasure.

Throughout the narratives of conquest, women were traded as commodities. The Aztec system was based upon the payment of tribute, which included both goods and labor. The status

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57 Idem, *From Moon Goddess*, 44.
of the women exchanged by the Nahua varied according to the context. For example, slave 
women were typically gifted as a gesture of submission after losing a battle or to fulfill tribute 
obligations. The daughters of caciques and other important women were given as potential 
marriage partners in the hopes of establishing an alliance. Thus, local caciques followed 
protocol and provided Cortés and his men with goods, including women, whose bodies provided 
a physical and political link between two groups of people. For example, Gómara remarked, 
“They [the Tlaxcalans] provided them with everything for their means, and many offered their 
daughters as a token of true friendship, so they might bear children by such valorous men and 
bring into the world a new warrior caste.” Diplomacy in the accounts of conquest rarely took 
place without the exchange of goods, and women were almost always among the commodities 
presented. This was not a two-way trade, however, Native women were given to the Spaniards as 
gifts, but Spanish women were not offered in return, nor were they even available for trade. The 
Spaniards did sometimes offer goods in return; however, their worth was always significantly 
less than what they had been given according to Spanish norms of valuation.

After receiving women through gift-giving diplomacy, Cortés inconsistently applied the 
rule that these women had first to be converted to Christianity before being taken as mistresses or 
wives. Indeed, contradictorily, the very thing that caused these women to be perceived as 
sexually available commodities was threatened by their conversion to Christianity. In order for 
them to be able to become respectable women, Cortés contended that they must be converted to 
Christianity. In order for this conversion to be achieved, they first had to give up the practices of 
sacrifice and cannibalism. The control of bodies became a fundamental aspect of the conquest as

58 Camilla Townsend, Malintzin’s Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico (Albuquerque: 
University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 72.
59 Gómara, 116.
Cortés moved towards Tenochtitlan. The bodies of women served as mediators between two groups of people and through them they forged sexual, kinship, and political ties and through their children they fostered bonds that would forever tie the peoples of Mexico to those of Spain and reshape traditional hierarchies and lines of descent.⁶⁰

Nearly thirty years earlier in the Caribbean when Michele da Cuneo used a young women’s perceived status as a cannibal as justification for her rape, enslavement, and torture, he asserted a right to sovereignty over her body. On the other hand, Cortés declared that unless the women he had been given ceased to be cannibals, sexual diplomacy was unavailable, though sexual relations were not necessarily out of the question. Díaz recalled a moment where the Spaniards were given a series of gifts, including women. After receiving them kindly, Cortés told the caciques that the Spaniards could not accept these gifts unless they agreed to put an end to their idolatry and sacrifice. Furthermore,

he added that these damsels must become Christians before we could receive them. Every day we saw sacrificed before us three, four, or five Indians whose hearts were offered to the idols and their blood plastered on the walls, and the feet, arms, and legs of the victims were cut off and eaten, just as in our country we eat beef bought from the butchers. I even believe that they sell it by retail in the tianguez as the call their markets.⁶¹

Again, the commodification of women’s bodies and the link between sexual congress and cannibalism was explicit. This exact same exchange of bodies, goods, and words occurred repeatedly on the march to Tenochtitlan, linking the sexual availability of Native women with the practices of sacrifice and cannibalism as part of a larger imperial fascination with controlling

⁶⁰ Gómara, 118; Townsend, 72.
⁶¹ Díaz, 102.
indigenous practices and bodies and reshaping native hierarchies and gender and sexual norms.\textsuperscript{62}

Thus, the subjugation of women’s bodies served as an implicit goal of the American conquest and sexual coercion was an important tactic of conquest. Susan Kellogg suggested that “the frequency of sexual violence and the willingness of military leaders such as Cortés and Pizzaro to distribute indigenous women among their close lieutenants suggests that conquerors indeed used ‘the phallus as an extension of the sword.’”\textsuperscript{63}

The women given to the Spaniards in the earlier example were quickly baptized and distributed by Cortés.\textsuperscript{64} Their acceptance as part of the Spanish entourage cemented the filial bonds between the Indians and the Spaniards.\textsuperscript{65} The role that these women played in the invading force is difficult to determine. Some, like Malintzin were important cultural mediators. Based on Iberian precedent, it was likely that many of the women that Cortés was given functioned as prostitutes like those that accompanied the soldiers back in Europe. There were also instances in which the Indians gave Cortés women, not for the purposes of sexual diplomacy, but in order to sacrifice their bodies and consume them, their bodies literally objects for European consumption.\textsuperscript{66}

From a European perspective, the practice of cannibalism, was fundamentally threatening to a bodily order that insisted upon wholeness, purity, and the sanctity of the body. Sexual relationships with Indians were an undeniably attractive possibility for the conquerors according to their own writings. Díaz openly discussed his desire to obtain a Native mistress. He asked a page that they had given to Motecuhzoma to request “a very pretty Indian woman” for him. To

\begin{footnotes}
\item[62] Ibid., 62-3, 102, 122, 136, 153-4, etc.
\item[63] Kellogg, 60.
\item[64] Díaz, 106.
\item[65] Ibid., 106.
\item[66] Ibid., 140. At one point, Cortés was also given five slaves and asked to prove that he was a god by consuming their flesh. Gómara, 105. It was likely that Cortés and his men were not actually perceived as gods, but that this is a fabrication. See, Camilla Townsend, “Burying the White Gods: New Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico,” American Historical Review vol. 103, no 3 (June 2003), 659-687.
\end{footnotes}
which, Motecuhzoma replied, “Bernal Díaz del Castillo, they tell me that you have quantities of cloth and gold, and I will order them to give you to-day a pretty maid. Treat her very well for she is the daughter of a chieftain, and they will also give you gold mantles.” Thus, this unfortunate woman was a commodity to be traded along with other goods to the highest bidder. Díaz never mentioned her again.

On another occasion, Cortés consulted a friar before deciding what to do with the gift of women that he had been offered. He believed that this would be a good opportunity to convince them to turn from their evil ways. In reply, the friar stated, “Sir, that is true, but let us leave the matter until they bring their daughters and then there will be material to work upon, and your honour can say that you do not wish to accept them until they give up sacrifices – if that succeeds, good, if not we shall do our duty.” What was meant by “do our duty” is quite unclear. Perhaps their duty was to punish these women for the sins of their people or perhaps they were to be killed. Based on the available evidence, it was likely that this punishment would have involved forcible sex and slavery. Thus, their bodies became the sight of moral persuasion: material to mold into a fantasy of imperial womanhood for which the admonition of sacrifice and cannibalism were prerequisites. Since the thirteenth century, the Spaniards had been moving away from punishing men on and off the battlefield with rape, and had begun instead to extend the battlefield to women’s bodies.

While on his journey, Cortés appropriated the bodies of native women and took them as slaves, lovers, interpreters, or some combination of all of these. The stated goals of his conquest included conversion in order to stop the abominable native practices, and the collecting and distributing of wealth. These goals implicitly included and excluded the bodies of Indigenous

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67 Díaz, 236.
68 Ibid., 153-4.
woman. The Spaniards collected gold, treasure, and women on their march towards Motecuhzoma. Women played an important role as cultural representatives, as was most famously recorded in the case of Dona Marina, more commonly known as Malinche, and perhaps more correctly known as Malintzin. At times both Cortés and Malintzin were referred to as Malintze. Since Malintzin was the mouthpiece for the Spanish, her title extended to him. While the conquerors did not openly recognize that theirs was also a conquest of bodies, they demonstrated implicitly through their actions that a successful conquest must control the bodies of its subjects. Malintzin’s value, according to Díaz, rested with her masculine virtue. He wrote, 

Let us leave this and say how Dona Marina who, although a native woman, possessed such manly valor that, although she had heard every day how the Indians were going to kill us and eat our flesh with chili, and had seen us surrounded in the late battles, and knew that all of us were wounded and sick, yet never allowed us to see any sign of fear in her, only a courage passing that of a woman.

Thus, Malintzin’s worth went beyond her role as a sexual object, although she was married to a Captain and became a lover of Cortés’s, because she disavowed and confronted the “abominable customs” of her people.

Europeans countered threats of cannibalism with the assertion of the supremacy of masculinity and masculine virtues. Natives were able to ape European masculinity but never truly achieve it and even attributing manly valor to a woman like Malintzin pointed to the absurdity in doing so. Through her role as lover and spokesperson of the conquest, she embodied

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69 The genealogy of Malintzin’s name was quite complicated. Camilla Townsend suggested that Malintzin was a corruption of the name Marina, which was given to her by the Spaniards. The suffix –tzin was added as an honorific, and based on prevailing linguistic forms of address, she was called Malintze. In turn, this was corrupted by the Spaniards into word Malinche. Townsend, Malintzin’s Choices, 55.
70 Ibid.
71 Díaz, 135.
European virtues, but was nevertheless denied access to the respectability afforded to the women who fulfilled the hegemonic definition of Spanish womanhood, which stressed piety, submissiveness, and *limpieza de sangre*. She was most well remembered as a conduit for exchange.

For Cortés and his men, it was easy to perceive the exchange of women as reinforcing the ill treatment assumed by the Anonymous Conqueror mentioned earlier. Indigenous conceptions about gender and sexuality cannot be understood adequately by simply reading about them from a European perspective. However, scholars should not deny that Native women may have had agency, simply because European authors erased it. The constructions of gender complementarity and parallelism that existed in pre-conquest Aztec society were not the same as gender equality. Women in Aztec society were powerful within their own spheres, but the pinnacle of the parallel system was always a man. However, kinship and succession were determined by both parents and oftentimes an individual would claim status from whichever side of the family held more prestige. Susan Kellogg argued that prior to the Spanish conquest there is evidence of the increasing use of images of female subordination to bolster Aztec imperial power. Furthermore, it is important to recognize the diversity of cultures and experiences in Mexico. In certain regions, women’s work was more valued and governing structures were more equitable. Thus, it is extraordinarily difficult to determine how much power these women had over their own destinies. In the case of Malintzin, throughout much of her life she had was traded as a commodity outside of her control; she was reportedly sold into slavery to the Maya by her Nahua mother and later was given to Cortés and his men by the Chontal Maya. She was passed around among the Spanish men as well.

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72 Kellogg, 7.
73 Ibid., 25.
74 Ibid., 30.
75 Kellogg, 32.
First, she was given to the aristocrat Alonzo Hernández Puertocarrero. She then became Cortés’s most trusted translator and bore him a son, Martín. Finally, she married Juan Jaramillo, which some considered a farce, as the groom was drunk throughout the ceremony. Despite all of this, however, Malintzin was able to accrue a fair amount of power and influence, which exemplifies the complexities of native diplomacy and women’s agency.

Accounts of the conquest describe it as a constant struggle of desires: the desire for power, souls, sex, gold, etc. The Spaniards accused the Indians of sins like polygamy, but in Díaz’s description of the great majesty of Motecuhzoma, for example, he was amazed and impressed by his number of wives. Díaz was thus torn between the fantasy of sexual freedom and revulsion. In the same description, he also accused Motecuhzoma of desiring to eat the bodies of young boys for dinner. The body that was desired above all is male; the threat of cannibalism, then, was a threat to men’s bodies. Women do not seem to have commonly been the victim of cannibalism, and thus it appears that the flesh of men was far more desirable. European accounts often indicated that the male body was the object of cannibalistic lust, while the female body was reserved for sexual desire.

While Cortés and his men might have desired to exterminate the native practices of sacrifice and cannibalism, their conquest itself insisted upon the sacrifice of Indian bodies: the men who died upon the battlefield, the women who became their lovers, slaves, and mistresses, and the countless thousands who died from their unseen army of germs. Cannibalism within European discourse was linked with conceptions of the body. In the Caribbean, the prevailing pattern insisted that all cannibals were Caribs and all Caribs were cannibals, thus erasing tribal differences and disregarding the burden of truth, but in Mexico, it seemed that accusations of cannibalism fell in line with those

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76 Díaz, 66-7.
77 Ibid., 208-9.
78 Price, 95.
whose conceptions of gender and sex failed to match with Spanish norms. In other words, the conquered body had to first be remade according to Spanish customs. The desired body was one that accommodated Spanish wants. The value of the women that Cortés was given on his journey linked directly to their relationships to sacrifice and cannibalism. The anxieties embedded in acts of cannibalism, what Ann McClintock referred to as a “dread of engulfment” shaped the events of conquest and demanded the sacrifice and incorporation of the bodies of Indian women, not as a part of a religious ritual, but in order to assert power through sexual diplomacy, violence, and warfare.

The fact that the Spaniards used cannibalism and sodomy, among other sins, as justification not only for their initial conquest, but also for centuries of exploitation and slavery, was well documented. Both the Spanish and Portuguese empires practiced widespread slavery and exploited Native labor to a degree not present in any other American imperial context. They justified this behavior, at least in part, by arguing that slavery was permissible and preferable for those Natives that resisted their imperial efforts and those that practiced cannibalism. The fact that those who resisted the Spaniards (and the Portuguese) most vehemently were often those were most vociferously accused of being cannibals, should come as no surprise.\textsuperscript{79} The “sins” of Natives were used as justification for their subjugation and the (attempted) erasure of Indigenous cultural practices. While a great number of scholars have investigated this very fact, few have acknowledged the important link between the practices used as justification and the differing understandings of sexuality and gender between the Europeans and the Indians. It was these differences that shaped the ways in which Spaniards approached the conquest of Mexico.

The act of cannibalism represented a fear of infection and corruption through contact with Others in a similar fashion to the perception of homosexual or sodomitic infection.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{79} Seed, \textit{American Pentimento}, 107.
\textsuperscript{80} Trexler, 10.
Michele da Cuneo indicated that he believed that the Arawaks had “caught” man-eating from the invading Caribs. In Spanish discourse, the presence of sodomy among a particular group of people was seen as a dangerous and contagious practice, for “once indulged in, it will prove too pleasurable to ever be resisted again, resulting in permanent and polluted emasculation.” These same fears were expressed about cannibalism. Any indulgence in cannibalism or sodomy opened the doors to depravity, savagery, and damnation.

The Spaniards felt that they faced a multitude of terrifying and infectious challenges to their civilization in the Americas. In order to ensure what they were sure was the inevitable victory of civilization they presumed that it was necessary to fight the Indians on the battlefield and in their homes. It was their duty, they believed, to help Indians along a path towards civilization and away from the disease of barbarism. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to eliminate taboo sexual practices and cannibalism. Sacrifice, though certainly not accepted by the Spanish conquistadors, did not evoke the same fears of infection and subsequent descent into barbarism.

The path from barbarism to civilization was a difficult one and writers disagreed about the best way to go about it. Sixteenth-century Jesuit missionary and writer, José de Acosta, for example, argued that the shift from savagery to civilization was a tiered process, in which a group first abandoned cannibalism and sacrifice and that practices like sodomy would follow. Therefore, according to Acosta, there existed a linear path from barbarism to civilization. Along this path, there were certain practices that had to be abandoned or overcome in order to achieve the ultimate goal of emulating the Catholic cultures of Western Europe. Cannibalism and human sacrifice were among the first practices that needed to be abandoned, followed later by

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81 Price, 102.
83 Trexler, 147-8.
inappropriate sexual behaviors. While Acosta may have believed cannibalism, sacrifice, and sexuality to be mutually exclusive cultural practices that could be abandoned piecemeal in a process of gradual cultural reformation, those directly involved in the conquest, like Cortés and Díaz, emphasized their interconnectedness and the importance of ridding Native societies of all of these barbarous vices in one fell swoop.

Spaniards denigrated the Other through accusations of cannibalism, for such accusations called the humanity of the Other into question. Interestingly, however, none of the eyewitness accounts of the conquest of Mexico strongly indicated any doubt as to whether or not the people they encountered were indeed human. For example, the eyewitness accounts of Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Andres de Tapia, and the Anonymous Conqueror, all accepted that the inhabitants of Mexico were human. They may have been a lesser kind of human, a natural slave or a barbarian, but they were human nonetheless. Just as in the Caribbean accounts, however, these writings were full of assumptions about cannibalism and sexual indecencies. Historian Anthony Pagden also pointed out that in many of the accounts of cannibalism from throughout the New World, sexual rites were a part of the cannibal ritual. Acts of cannibalism dissolved borders and boundaries, created instability in social categories such as “male/female, young/old, kin/non-kin.” Thus, cannibalism threatened the masculine order of Spanish imperialism and their ability to incorporate Indigenous bodies into the empire.

The Iberians who wrote about the New World held often contradictory, unclear, and ignorant views about indigenous practices, in particular about sex, sacrifice, and cannibalism. By the mid-sixteenth century, men like Bartolomé de Las Casas argued that sacrifice and

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84 Pagden, 81.
85 Such debates certainly continued for decades, but they tended to focus more on the status of Indians as lesser humans and/or natural slaves, not as non-humans. For example the famous Valladolid debate between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 hinged on the place of Native Americans in the natural order.
86 Pagden, 82-3.
cannibalism did not serve as a justification for conquest, however his view was most certainly held only by a minority. For many sixteenth century Spaniards, it was clear that cannibalism did provide justification.\(^87\) Bartolomé de las Casas, Peter Martyr D’Anghera, and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés each argued (to varying degrees) that cultural practices were not static nor were they representative of an innate nature. None of these men were present during the conquest of Tenochtitlan, and Martyr never even traveled to the Americas. Las Casas’s writings were not widely circulated during his lifetime. In fact, Juan de Ovando, head of the Council of the Indies, ordered his writings to be stored by the Council and all access was restricted.\(^88\) Las Casas was not alone in his ideas, but was supported by much more well-known scholars of the Salamanca school, like Francisco de Vitoria. For these men, the cultural practice of cannibalism among the civilizations of Mexico was not enough for them to be seen as inhuman, but it did represent a fundamental violation of natural law. Indians violated these laws by consuming inappropriate foods, human flesh among them; Vitoria argued that by consuming other humans, Indians not only violated the sixth commandment, but they also denied the body a proper burial and thus jeopardized its eventual resurrection. Cannibals cut a body into pieces and distributed it, thereby denying it the wholeness so important for bodily resurrection.\(^89\) Although cannibals most certainly violated natural law, according to Vitoria, this did not make them inhuman.\(^90\) Rather, the cultural practices of Indians had blinded them to rationality and thus natural law.

Although there was little doubt by the time of Cortés’s march across the Yucatán in 1519 about the humanity of American Indians, there was still much debate about the rights that non-Christian populations could enjoy. The most famous of these debates was held at Valladolid in


\(^{89}\) Pagden, 85.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 95.
1550-1 in which Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda engaged in a heated and long-winded debate about the rights of Indians and the justification for conquest.\textsuperscript{91} Díaz and Ruy González sided with Sepúlveda in their writings and railed against the apologetics of his nemesis. Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas, described four types of barbarians in his refutation of Sepúlveda’s claims. The first kind of barbarian was a “cruel, inhuman, wild, and merciless man acting against human reason.”\textsuperscript{92} They tended to be those driven by anger and lack of reason, existing primarily as isolated individuals and not part of cultural system of barbarity. The second type were those that did not have a written language and were, according to the reasoning of the time, uncultured and unlearned. Barbarians of this second type were not “natural,” but victims of circumstance.\textsuperscript{93}

True barbarians, the third kind, were those who,

\begin{quote}
either because of their evil and wicked character or the barrenness of the region in which they live, are cruel, savage, sottish, stupid, and strangers to reason. They are not governed by law or right, do not cultivate friendships, and have no state or politically organized community. Rather, they are without rules, laws, and institutions. They do not contract marriage according to any set forms and, finally, they do not engage in civilized commerce . . . Indeed, they live spread out and scattered, dwelling in the forests and in the mountains, being content with their mates only, just as do animals, both domestic and wild.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

Sociality was an important aspect of civilization. The polis was the center of learning and culture and rural life was understood as less civilized. Thus, it was easier for the Europeans to see the

\textsuperscript{91} Adorno, “Discursive Encounter of Spain and America,” 211.
\textsuperscript{92} Las Casas, \textit{In Defense of the Indians}, 28.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 32.
city-dwelling Mexica and Maya as semi-civilized and denigrate the Awaraks and Caribs as mostly barbarous. The fourth and final type of barbarian was ignorant of Christ.

Las Casas refuted the argument that Indians of the New World, and in particular those of Mexico, met the standard for any kind of barbarism. He argued that although they might have been bestial, they were nonetheless subject to law and order and with proper training and education could come to accept God and escape such ignorance.\(^{95}\) He further stated that it was impossible for the omnipotent God to have erred and filled the world with true barbarians. Las Casas acknowledged that there were plenty among them in the “old world,” who by some definition qualified as barbarians, including the so-called wild men of the forest but also heathens and foreigners. He referred to both the Turks and the Moors in this context. He argued that while everyone understood that the Turks, for example, had a well-organized political system and a philosophical nature, they were not to be lauded for their civilization because “they are an effeminate and luxury-loving people, given to every sort of sexual immorality.”\(^ {96}\) For the Friar, even if the Turks met all of the other qualifications to be labeled civilized, they could not have been afforded moral equality with the societies of Western European Christendom, because their sexual practices precluded it. He argued later on that even if Indians might have practiced human sacrifice and even cannibalism, this did not justify the conquest. The death of many in the process of saving a few from sacrifice and consumption was a prohibitive cost for Las Casas.\(^ {97}\)

In the preceding examples, Las Casas hinted at the ways in which discourses of sexuality, barbarism, cannibalism, and sacrifice intersected.\(^ {98}\) He understood that interactions between

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\(^{95}\) Ibid., 42-3.

\(^{96}\) Ibid., 51.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 191.

\(^{98}\) In the vast majority of accounts, cannibalism and sacrifice are linked. It is often assumed, sometimes without any corroborating evidence, that acts of cannibalism followed temple sacrifices. The two were often talked about as equivalently barbaric crimes. However, particularly in the context of the battlefield, cannibalism was much more of a threat. Aztecs and Mayas often sacrificed a portion of the population of the losing army, and some of them may
disparate cultures had to include some kind of recognition and respect for difference, even if the ultimate goal was to create conformity through adherence to Christianity. He called the Turks “scum” because of their refusal to accept Christianity, but even more important than their paganism were their sexual proclivities. Las Casas was willing to see that the infidels of the Americas were redeemable because they could be converted. However, their conversion not only necessitated pulling them out of a state of near barbarity (as he argued that Indians were not actually true barbarians), but the denial or erasure of seemingly aberrant sexual practices. Las Casas almost (but not quite explicitly) seemed to argue that the sexual vices of Arabs were relatively “worse” than the widespread practices of cannibalism and sacrifice among the Mexica and Chontal Maya. When compared to other chroniclers and eyewitnesses, Las Casas tended to downplay and overlook indigenous homosexual and sodomitic practices.\textsuperscript{99}

For Spaniards, cannibalism was more than simply a sign of savagery; it was a fundamental violation of the natural order. Sodomy, incest, promiscuity, and cross-dressing were among the other sins that rounded out this category of barbarous practices. Spaniards often framed their conquests, of both Americans and Muslims, as a contest over morals. They believed in their own religious, and therefore moral superiority and this superiority afforded them the right to conquer and humiliate their enemies. This belief enabled them to project their own fears of inadequacy and effeminacy onto their enemies. The conquest of Mexico was fundamentally a clash of cultures, neither of which had a thorough understanding of the other. Thus, the Spaniards observed Indian behavior and interpreted it based upon pre-existing cultural understandings of barbarism and difference. The cannibalism and sacrifice that they saw have been cannibalized as well. However, the desecration of the fallen soldier and the consumption of their bodies was recognized as singularly abhorrent. Deaths in battle were not seen as sacrifices; those were reserved for the temple, but acts of cannibalism were said to occur on the battlefield and town center.\textsuperscript{99} Trexler, 84.
reinforced the necessity of conquest, and it shored up the conquistadors sense of their own
masculine heroism. Just as Indians were perplexed by horses and speculated that they might have
been large deer, Cortés was not privy to Aztec cosmology and thus understood Indigenous rites
within a framework developed from Christian ideology and Muslim influences. These cultural
misunderstandings played out on the battlefield and in the sexual encounters between European
men and native women. Women were subjugated through sexual violence and servitude, while
Native men were killed in battles. The accusations of cannibalism both justified the conquest,
and helped to establish the gendered order of Spanish imperialism. With a thorough
understanding of the intersections between cannibalism, sex, and gender, the development of
imperial power within the conquest of Mexico becomes clearer.
CHAPTER III. CONVERTING CANNIBALS

This chapter examines discourses of cannibalism from sources of the French empire in North America. Specifically, it focuses on the discourse established by the vast textual records of the Jesuit missionaries in New France as the most prolific descriptions of anthropophagy in Canada occurred in therein.\(^1\) Despite the extensive scholarship about the Jesuits in New France, no one has yet to analyze representations of cannibalism in their records systematically. This chapter will establish the general themes about the discourse of cannibalism as presented in the Thwaites collection of Jesuit writings. Through an examination of this discourse, several important themes emerged. These themes included the fear of cannibalism as a catalyst for and impediment to imperial and missionary expansion, the connection between cannibalism and animality, and the ways in which the ritual of cannibalism functioned as a discursive trope for the negotiation of masculinity. Together, these overlapping themes construct the discourse of cannibalism in the Jesuit Relations.

As a cohesive text, the Jesuit Relations were an invention of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as they were compiled by Rueben Gold Thwaites between 1896 and 1901. Thwaites brought together the records left by the Jesuits in the Americas from 1610 to 1791 and his collection remains the definitive source of Jesuit records in English.\(^2\) The 72 textual volumes of the Jesuit Relations (the 73\(^{rd}\) volume is the index) included the yearly digests of Jesuit activities in New France, which were published annually from 1632 until 1673 by Sebastian

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\(^1\) While French missionary efforts were not limited to what is now referred to as Canada and parts of the Northern United States, it is on these regions that this chapter focuses. There were also a number of other missionary sects, including the Recollets and the Sulpicans, who were active in New France.

Cramoisy in Paris. These digests continued to be published sporadically through 1791.

Additionally, Thwaites included many documents that would have been less widely available to the reading public in France, such as personal correspondence between missionaries and their families and friends and the original letters written by field missionaries to their superiors. The latter documents were edited and compiled into the yearly digest. The earliest account included by Thwaites was that of Marc Lescarbot, published in 1610, followed by Father Pierre Biard’s relation from 1611. The documents that comprise the Jesuit Relations were written by a wide range of individuals, including priests and lay members of the order known as donné. Initially the Relations were not intended to be public documents, but as the mission efforts progressed and public interest in New France increased, they began to be written and published for a general audience.

As an organization, the Society of Jesus grew rapidly from its founding in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola to 13,000 members throughout the world by 1615.³ The Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517, had an enormous impact on politics and culture in Western Europe. For our concern, one of the important effects of the Reformation was the redefinition of masculinity that developed in its wake. In Protestantism, the seat of patriarchal masculinity shifted from the Church Fathers to the male head of household. This shift was an unspoken challenge to the masculinity of celibate Catholic clergy, as they were the leaders of their flock but not of families. By the mid-sixteenth century, Jesuit masculinity seemed at odds with the new ideas of manhood that were emerging.⁴ However, despite the rapid social and political changes that were redefining masculinity, the Society of Jesus grew quite substantially.

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⁴ Ibid., 46.
Ulrike Strasser argued that the peculiar ways in which Ignatius of Loyola expressed his masculinity provided an enticing model for his followers and drew many toward the society that he founded. In light of all the ongoing gendered theological crises, Ignatius modeled a masculinity that was neither anxious nor threatened.\(^5\) Prior to founding the Jesuit Order, Ignatius of Loyola was a soldier and this had a great deal of influence on his philosophies and practices. Drawing inspiration from the life and works of Ignatius, the Society of Jesus stressed self-reflection and homosocial intimacy that was unbridled by the hierarchical social norms which permeated other aspects of interaction between men.\(^6\) To join the order, one had to take vows of humility, poverty, and chastity. The dictates against acting on one’s carnal desires were rigid.\(^7\) Indeed, Jesuits had to redirect their sexual desires into acts of charity and compassion.

Ignatius’s autobiography modeled the process of turning a soldier into a chaste and self-sacrificing member of the clergy—a soldier for God. In his autobiography, he also indicated that men had to protect the chastity of others. Rather than exhibiting bravery while facing an enemy on the battlefield, Ignatius and his followers did battle against the sinful forces of sexuality and violence.\(^8\) Ignatius set it upon himself to remove the corrupting influences of men’s basest desires in order to harness their power in a new direction. The Jesuits stressed sexual purity and spoke out against the lax enforcement of dictates against concubinage. While Protestants sought to re-center the naturalness of sexuality and procreation by allowing ministers to marry, the Jesuits challenged this new definition of masculinity and remained steadfastly chaste. Thus, while reproduction and fatherhood were seen by many as natural masculine traits, the Jesuits

\(^{5}\) Ibid., 47.
\(^{6}\) Ibid., 48-49.
\(^{7}\) Ibid., 51.
\(^{8}\) Ibid., 53.
challenged these assumptions and sought to create a new model of masculinity that did not rely on the flesh, but on the spirit.9

At the center of Jesuit understandings of masculinity was piety. However, Ignatius also displayed a number of characteristics that would have been understood as traits associated with female spirituality, such as fasting and excessive spiritual suffering. He combined traditions of male and female mystics and became at once father and mother to his followers.10 Ignatius urged his followers to allow their bodies to be open to the divine, but not weak. They had to be physically able to fight for souls in far off lands. For example, crying enabled the soul to be open but tears were only supposed to flow from the bodies of strong men.11 Jesuit men were trained to be strong in spirit and body. They had to practice restraint in all aspects of their lives. Thus, the model of Jesuit masculinity was one in which men were deeply emotional but also exhibited the strength and self-restraint of the soldier.

In dealing with people of different backgrounds and faiths who exhibited divergent understandings of masculinity, the Jesuits demonstrated their own brand of masculinity through words and not weapons.12 However, in their missions among the Iroquois, Jesuit words often were ignored and they were forced to fight for God by suffering on the scaffold. Ignatius and the members of the Jesuit Order provided an alternative masculinity to that of the conquistador.13 Unlike Cortés, the Jesuits did not come to New France poised to incorporate women into their camp through sexual diplomacy, nor did they arrive prepared to fight on the battlefield. Instead, the Jesuits fought their war on the spirits, not the bodies, of the Indians that they encountered.

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9 Ibid., 53.
10 Ibid., 55.
11 Ibid., 58.
12 Ibid., 60.
13 Ibid., 61.
Women were officially barred from entering the Society of Jesus in 1547. They were able to support the men of the order and to serve them, but they could not play a spiritual role.\textsuperscript{14} Ignatius believed that the presence of women in the Order would have been burdensome and would have prevented Jesuit priests from successfully completing their missions abroad. They did not want to be tied down by women in any capacity. Excluding women strengthened the bonds between men.\textsuperscript{15} Ignatius’s teachings effectively incorporated the feminine aspects of spiritual life in order to physically exclude women from their ranks. Thus, the Jesuit Fathers did not need the physical presence of women in order to lead others to the path of salvation.\textsuperscript{16} The Virgin Mary was seen as the only ideal woman and the Jesuits were able to channel her power through their male bodies. Women were not entirely absent from the lives of Jesuits, as members of the Order were encouraged to cultivate spiritual and emotional attachments with them. Jesuit masculinity was not cloistered, and men were allowed to engage freely with women so long as the homo-social bonds that existed between the male members of the order remained centered.\textsuperscript{17}

The ways in which the Jesuits constructed their masculinity played an important role in their interactions with Native peoples in New France. The contest between the Jesuits and the Iroquois for dominance and influence in New France can be characterized to some degree as a contest between differing understandings of gender, and masculinity in particular. Furthermore, the threats to their masculinity that the Jesuits faced in Europe helped to shape their actions in North America as they sought to establish the Catholic faith in the region. Unlike Columbus or Cortés before them, the Jesuits did not typically engage in sexual relations with their conquests.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 64-5.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{17} While homo-sociality was important to the Jesuits, it was equally important that they actively police any hints of homosexual behavior. Juan Miguel Marín, “Heterosexual Melancholia and Mysticism in the Early Society of Jesus,” \textit{Theology and Sexuality}, vol. 13, no.2 (2007), 126.
This did not mean that they were not concerned with Native sexuality; rather, they directed their civilizing agenda more directly towards the spirit than the body. In Chapters One and Two, the discourse of sexuality played a vital role in encounters between Europeans and Natives in the Caribbean and in Mexico. However, in New France, the discursive intersection between cannibalism and sexuality worked slightly differently, but was no less important. There was significantly less focus on the ways in which cannibalism, sodomy, and other practices that were at odds with prevailing discourses about gender and sexuality intersected. Rather, the Jesuits wrote about cannibalism as a practice that indicated the existence of real savagery and evil among the Indians. Much like Columbus and Cortés, however, the Jesuits used the discourse of cannibalism to demonstrate the necessity of their intervention in Canada and the presence of cannibalism drew people to the region armed with tools for its eradication. For the Jesuits, these tools were words and faith, rather than guns, swords, or sexual violence.

The writings of Jesuit missionaries in New France revealed a complicated relationship with the emerging French empire. Their published accounts served both to reinforce Jesuit interests in converting Indians to Catholicism and to varying degrees; they also supported the desires of the French monarchy. By saving Indian souls, the Jesuits were tangibly preparing New France for colonial status. The missionaries paved the way for colonists, provincial governments, and economic expansion. The representation of Indians in the *Relations* reflected conflicting goals. The Jesuits needed to make the reading public of France understand the necessity of their efforts. They did this through rich descriptions of the savagery of the Indians. However, they simultaneously needed to demonstrate the importance of New France to the empire in order to garner funds and encourage colonists. Thus, Indians were generally represented as savage but redeemable. The horrific accounts of torture and sacrifice of Frenchman at the hands of the
Iroquois may have been a deterrent to colonization efforts and therefore, these negative representations had to be tempered with miraculous tales of savage natives who became pious Christians. The French public was eager to consume stories about the experiences of missionaries and neophytes and quickly came to view the missionaries as saintly.\textsuperscript{18} The Jesuits depended upon royal favor and private donations in order to sustain their work in New France and in order to maintain this support, Jesuit writings demonstrated a balance between condemnation of Indians and tales of redemption.\textsuperscript{19}

Pierre Biard, one of the two initial Jesuit missionaries in New France, emphasized the importance of colonization, but not outright conquest, to French successes in the Americas. He positioned the work of the Jesuits as fundamental to such a cause because it was necessary to Christianize Indians in order to pave the way for French colonists. Biard appealed to the vanity of the French monarchs assuring them that if they gave up in Canada after having devoted so many resources to these efforts, they would appear effeminate and weak to their imperial competitors back in Europe.\textsuperscript{20} Thus, from the outset, the French presence in Canada was constructed in gendered terms. In order to prove their place among the other great imperial powers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, France had to establish its ability to compete as men. By playing to the fears of being cast as feminine and weak, Biard encouraged French expansion as a matter of masculine pride. Furthermore, Biard saw the work of the Jesuits as essential to the success of French imperial expansion and thus positioned them as representative agents of imperial masculinity.

\textsuperscript{18} James T. Moore, \textit{Indian and Jesuit: A Seventeenth Century Encounter} (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1982), 11.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 44, 138.
The expansion of the French empire in North America was decidedly religious in nature, as both conversion and colonization were integral to economic success. As a whole, the French were less interested in conquest than they were in colonization and conversion.21 The particular nature of French expansion in the Americas has been characterized as a strategy of articulation.22 Unlike the Spaniards who came before or the English who followed, the French were not able to move large populations of French subjects to the Americas, although, this did not stop them from experimenting with other models. In Canada, the population of Frenchmen and women remained relatively low and Indians significantly outnumbered Europeans. However, the influence of France was felt throughout the region, often through traders and missionaries who traveled between far-flung settlements. The French empire in Canada was mostly a series of small settlements, traders, and missionaries spread thinly over a relatively large region. There was no large-scale conquest of Canada like that which occurred in Mexico, nor was there an organized effort to incorporate Indians into the French empire. Rather, the French empire was more commercial and spiritual in nature. They used their influence to obtain economic power in the Americas and in turn to convert Indians to Catholicism.

The Jesuits were unique amongst most of the proselytizing groups in the Americas as they tended to be more sympathetic towards the sufferings experienced by Native peoples after the coming of the Europeans and they were more sensitive towards Indigenous cultural practices.23 Rather than simply discounting Indigenous beliefs, Jesuit missionaries were careful to try to incorporate these traditions into their sermons. They studied native beliefs and utilized this knowledge in their conversion efforts. Unlike the protestant missionaries of New England,

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21 Ibid., 65-67.
22 Meinig, 72.
the Jesuits in New France learned Native languages and instructed Indians about Christianity in Indian tongues. Protestant missionaries, in general, expected Indians first to become civilized according to their standards, which often included sedentary agriculture, modest dress, and the guarding and policing of sexual practices. The Jesuits were more willing to allow the Natives freedom to worship and live as they desired. For the Jesuits, faith was the most important thing and from faith in God civilization would come.

Members of the Society of Jesus exhibited a kind of seventeenth century cultural relativism that enabled them to be active participants in Native worlds. They understood certain Native beliefs, such as the worship of the Sun, as simply misguided and misdirected efforts to worship the true God. In fact, some believed that Indians had lost their way on the path to God and they sought evidence of pre-existing Christian beliefs in native cultures. Even if the minions of Satan had intervened in Indian cultures and led them towards corruption, the Jesuits believed that Indians were not beyond salvation. Years of experience in missions throughout the world had taught them that day-to-day practices were less important than the possession of an unwavering belief in God and the adherence to certain principles of Catholic morality. This adaptive style allowed the Jesuits to be more successful than their Protestant counterparts in New England at converting and baptizing Indians. The Jesuits were particularly successful in these efforts among the Hurons and the Montagnais. Despite their willingness to accept and incorporate Native beliefs and practices into their proselytizing efforts, the practices of cannibalism, torture and sacrifice were not something that they could condone, look past, or incorporate. Additionally, while the Jesuits typically believed that Indians were redeemable and

24 Moore, Indian and Jesuit, 129.
25 Ibid., 82-83.
26 Ibid., 105.
27 Ibid., 130; Healy, 151.
human, they nonetheless recognized distinct differences between tribes. The differences between the Huron and the Iroquois for example shaped the way in which the Jesuits went about their conversion efforts, but did not affect their overall faith in Indian humanity and redeemability. Throughout the New World up to this point, Europeans who encountered Indians vacillated between viewing Native peoples as undifferentiated Others and recognizing what they believed to be important differences between groups, as in the Carib and the Arawak for example.

The cultural relativism of the Jesuit missionaries in New France was evident throughout the extensive published records of their exploits. However, inasmuch as the Jesuits were comparatively complimentary towards Native peoples and practices, their writings were nonetheless filled with innumerable examples of perceived Native savagery, cruelty, and heathenism. The most laudatory references to Indians were, in fact, reserved for Christian converts. Thus, while the Jesuits believed that Indians were fully human and completely capable of receiving God’s divine grace, they regarded their cultural practices as savage and believed that without Christian intervention, they would remain savage and damned. The earliest records of the Jesuits in New France tended to include more damning descriptions of Indians than the later documents. Additionally, in these earlier documents Jesuits described the Iroquois as consummate villains. In these earlier records, not only did the Jesuits have to justify their presence in New France, but they also had to entice new priests to come join them. Thus, the Indians were presented as being in great need of spiritual guidance and descriptions of their horrific practiced demonstrated this. Additionally, French power was less firmly established in

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28 Healy, 145.
29 Ibid., 149.
30 In fact, the Jesuits strongly discouraged contact between French habitants and Indians out of fear of the corrupting influence of the rabble. Ibid., 153.
31 Ibid., 155.
the early years of the missions and the region was experiencing a great deal of political and social unrest.

Cornelius Jaenen argued in “‘Les Sauvages Ameriquains’: Persistence into the 18th Century of Traditional French Concepts and Constructs for Comprehending Amerindians,” that the writings of the Jesuits (and others who wrote about Native Americans) reflected the intellectual traditions of the day. He located two primary motivations for French colonial writings. The first was the simple transmission of new information to a desiring audience. These communications were constructed according to the prevailing cultural frameworks of the time and they often invoked classical and medieval traditions. Although these tropes were less commonly invoked in the writings of Jesuits than in those of early explorers like Columbus and Vespucci, they did persist. The second important goal of French colonial writings was to use descriptions of the New World and its inhabitants in order to draw conclusions about life in Europe. Jaenen wrote, “there was a continuing preoccupation with Europe, so that the new World and its native cultures were employed to evaluate Old World society, and sometimes simply criticize in indirect fashion both church and state, European man and European institutions.” At times, Jesuits admired Indians for what they perceived as the simplicity of their cultures and the lack of artifice in their interactions, which in turn reflected their opinions on the lavishness of French aristocratic society. The Jesuits pre-figured the tropes of both the noble and ignoble savage Indian, which would come to predominate after Rousseau. While the Jesuits believed that Indians might have been devoid of true culture and true religion, they nonetheless exhibited some qualities worth emulating. The Jesuit’s comparative relativism as a

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33 Ibid., 43.
34 Ibid., 45.
whole enabled the creation of a corpus of writings which afforded its audience important insights into both sides of the Atlantic.

Together, the *Jesuit Relations* contained more than 130 references to acts of cannibalism. Overall, given the vast number of topics covered in these volumes, cannibalism was but a minor concern. There were far more numerous and detailed accounts of the flora and fauna of the region and descriptions of the conversion and martyr experiences of individuals. There was evidence that the Iroquois of New France may have been anthropophagus, however, it was the way in which French observers interpreted this practice that is at issue here. The fearsome reputation of the Iroquois was developed in part as a response to terror tactics that they employed, which in turn led to widespread mistrust of the Iroquois and exaggeration of their inhuman savagery in discourse. Their reputation preceded them in a similar fashion to the Arawak stories about Carib cannibalism. Not much is known about the practices of the Caribs before the Europeans came and whether or not their anthropophagus repute preceded this encounter, but from a European perspective, it was clear how the Iroquois became infamous. The torture and cannibalization of captives was likely to have occurred among many tribes of New France. However, the Iroquois were singled out for their cannibalistic ways by the Jesuits.

More than fifty percent of the references to cannibalism in the *Jesuit Relations* related to the Iroquois.35 Throughout all 72 volumes of the Thwaites’ collection, the Iroquois were the most consistent threat to the Jesuit efforts in New France. Just as in the Caribbean and in Mexico, the Jesuits first encountered a group, the Hurons, from whom they learned about a neighboring tribe who terrorized them and practiced cannibalism, in the case the Iroquois. According to the

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35 *Jesuit Relations*. Out of a total number of 134 references to cannibalism, 72 of these are about the Iroquois. The group with the next largest number of references is the Huron with 19.
Europeans’ own records, both of these groups engaged in anthropophagous practices, yet their allies the Hurons were not indicted to the same degree as were the Iroquois.

Member of the Society of Jesus began witnessing to Iroquois tribes in 1653, after a particularly tumultuous period of Iroquois-Huron relations. The Iroquois agreed to accept the Jesuits and made a tentative peace with the French, in part because of the increasing pressure from the Dutch. Father Simon Le Moyne traveled to Iroquoia in 1654, but hostilities broke out again and the Jesuits were forced to abandon the mission in 1658. Over the next several decades, the Jesuits maintained a sporadic, yet persistent, presence among the Iroquois, but achieved only limited success in the conversion of Indians. The majority of interested converts were captives of other tribes then living among the Iroquois.\textsuperscript{36} The first reference to cannibalism among the Iroquois was from 1640 and the last occurred in a letter from October of 1683.

The Jesuits described a number of different circumstances in which they believed that cannibalism was practiced by a variety of groups in the Americas. They mentioned its occurrence among starving shipwrecked sailors, and even among French fugitives, but these appeared as isolated incidents.\textsuperscript{37} They did not assume that starving French sailors who consumed one another would repeat their horrific actions. Descriptions of the practice of cannibalism among Indians suffering the ravages of starvation were quite common. These events were not presented as uncommon, but rather were understood as representing cultural practices and as indicators of savagery. For much of the time that the Jesuits were with the Hurons, the Iroquois were laying siege to Huron villages. According to the Jesuits, these circumstances disrupted traditional migration patterns, causing widespread starvation that drove some to cannibalism.

\textsuperscript{36} Moore, 33.  
\textsuperscript{37} Jesuit Relations vol. 34, 231-3; vol. 38, 181.
Describing the sufferings of the Huron that resulted from famine, plague, and war, Father Paul Ragueneau chronicled the depths to which they were forced to go in order to sate their hunger. He wrote that they were digging up corpses with little regard to kinship. Mothers were eating the bodies of their children and brother consumed brother. Ragueneau remarked, “it is true, this is inhuman; but it is no less unusual among our savages than among the Europeans, who abhor eating flesh of their own kind. Doubtless the teeth of the starving man make no distinction in food . . .”

In this example, Ragueneau was willing to recognize that all humans, when faced with the horrific circumstances that were experienced by the Huron, might become cannibalistic. This demonstrated the Jesuits ability to put cultural practices in context and judge them accordingly. By their own accounts, they were willing to concede that cannibalism in times of extreme deprivation was a disturbing, but sometimes necessary act, reinforcing their belief that Indians were not beyond redemption.

In the previous example, although the starving Hurons were driven to cannibalism, it was the Iroquois who appeared as the villains. Without the aggravations caused by the Iroquois raids, Ragueneau did not believe that the Hurons would have become “dying skeletons eking out a miserable Life,” nor would they have been driven to perform heinous acts of endocannibalism. The desperateness of the Hurons’ situation led them to consume carrion and even to consume one another in secret. This, Ragueneau indicated, was solidly against Huron practice. Although they may have consumed the bodies of their enemies, eating a fellow Huron was deeply taboo and elicited the same horror that the consumption of human flesh would have in France.

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38 Ibid., vol. 35, 21.
39 Jesuit Relations, vol. 35, 89. In anthropology, the consuming of individuals within one’s social group is known as endocannibalism. It stands in opposition to exocannibalism, which refers to the consuming of outsiders and usually accompanied to warfare. See Beth A. Conklin, Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).
40 Jesuit Relations, vol. 35, 89.
Ragueneau reiterated the sentiments he expressed earlier that “famished teeth ceased to discern the nature of that they ate” and that extreme starvation caused kin to consume kin. While the Jesuits reported that the Huron did sometimes kill and cannibalize their enemies, they did not readily consume their own, and it was only desperation that drove them to it. The mania induced by extreme starvation forced the Hurons to deny their kinship relations, a practice that in normal times would have been a terrible violation of cultural norms. In this example, Ragueneau hinted at the importance of Jesuit intervention among both the Huron and the Iroquois. For his example of Huron endocannibalism made it clear that they were a suffering people in great need of help, just as his villainizing of the Iroquois urged greater French intervention among them.

One remarkable feature of the accounts of Iroquois cannibalism in the *Jesuit Relations* was that, through all of their descriptions of starving Indians who were driven by their hunger to commit acts of anthropophagy, the Jesuits did not appear to be suffering quite the same fate. It was certain that the missionaries and the donné did experience much of the same suffering alongside their potential converts, yet nowhere in their writings did they indicate that they participated in acts of starvation cannibalism. This obviously begs the question of what exactly the Jesuits were eating while the Native peoples were driven to eating one another. Three possible scenarios emerge. First, the Jesuits had food that they chose not to share with the Indians or only with converts, which would have made them somewhat culpable for acts of Indian cannibalism. Second, the Jesuits were also driven to eat their fellow man but did not record it. Finally, perhaps their religious convictions and the discipline of *civilization* enabled the Jesuits to resist the temptation of sating their hunger with the flesh of man. Each of these scenarios was likely in its own way; however, the only one even hinted at by the writers

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41 For examples of Huron cannibalism in the *Jesuit Relations* see, vol. 10, 227-9; vol. 12, 255; vol. 13: 61, 79, 171, 187; vol. 15, 173; vol. 17, 75, 99; vol. 18, 33; vol. 19, 201; vol. 20, 39; vol. 23, 173; vol. 26, 57; vol. 27, 275, 295; vol. 33, 45; vol. 40, 49.
themselves is the third. Even if they were on the brink of death, their faith in God allowed them to persevere.\textsuperscript{42} In this way, the Jesuits were clearly setting themselves above their potential converts. While they could conceive of why the Indians might be driven to consume one another, they themselves were above these base desires. Jesuit masculinity insisted on control and self-sacrifice, two traits that might explain their lack of participation in starvation cannibalism.

Even when the Jesuits described Huron acts of ritualized cannibalism against their enemies, the Iroquois were still portrayed as the real adversary of Catholic France throughout the \textit{Relations}. According to the Jesuits, the bellicose tendencies of the Iroquois that encouraged the starving Hurons to consume one another (never mind that the diseases brought by the French were likely as much at fault). One Father noted that the Iroquois were crueler than anything else that the world could put upon the Indians, including famine.\textsuperscript{43} Describing the period of terror that followed the tortures of the missionaries Jean de Brebeuf and Gabriel Lallemant, Father Rageuneau indicated that the Hurons were fleeing their villages “in order to escape the cruelty of an enemy [the Iroquois] whom they feared more than a thousand deaths. . . Many, no longer expecting humanity from man, flung themselves into the deepest recesses of the forest, where, though it were with the wild beasts, they might find peace.”\textsuperscript{44} In this passage, Rageuneau simultaneously declared the pitiful state of the Hurons and the inhumanity of the Iroquois. This assertion of inhumanity was a common theme in descriptions of the Iroquois in the \textit{Relations}, especially in those volumes that focused on the Huron missions.\textsuperscript{45}

The Jesuits probably gave little credence to the idea that the Iroquois were actually something other than human. Rather, their descriptions of inhumanity positioned the Iroquois as

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\item \textsuperscript{42} \textit{Jesuit Relations}, vol. 35, 23, 97, 189.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., vol. 34, 197.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., vol. 35, 79.
\item \textsuperscript{45} A few examples of this should suffice see the \textit{Jesuit Relations}, vol. 21, 65-67, 121; vol. 22, 249, 255-257, 265, 272; vol. 31, 85, vol. 38, 47; vol. 46, 61; vol. 57, 95.
\end{itemize}
the biggest threat to the efforts in New France as well as the richest field for missionary work. The supposed inhumanity of the Iroquois resulted from cultural differences according to the Jesuits. In a similar fashion to the Aztecs and Maya of the Yucatán, the Iroquois presented a conundrum to the Europeans who came into contact with them. The Iroquois had the most sophisticated governing structure in the region, yet they were cruel, bellicose, and unyielding. Both the Huron and the Iroquois were always willing to share with members of their own tribe; in fact, the ability to give things away signaled one’s power far more than the possession of wealth. However, this kindness resulted from an intense preoccupation with group loyalty and cohesion. In modern terms, this might be thought of as an extreme version of an “us versus them” mentality. Thus, the Huron found it abhorrent to consume members of their own society, but not their enemies and the Iroquois exhibited similar characteristics. Their cruelty to their enemies was infamous. Early European visitors found the Iroquois well organized, powerful, and unimaginably cruel. These kinds of dualistic characterizations of Indians represented some of the contradictions of empire and civilization; if the Indians were capable of rationality, then what would give France the right to conquer and control a free and biologically equal people? Jesuit writings revealed this ambivalence and positioned the French presence in the New World as essential for the religious conversion necessary to make Indians viable subjects. The fundamental contradiction at the heart of European expansion in the Americas was the question of equality: if Indians were capable of being converted and civilized, did they deserve equal treatment and consideration?

The violent tendencies of the Iroquois were well known throughout much of North America, One early visitor to the continent remarked that there “are none as cruel to their

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prisoners as those of Canada . . .”

At times, the term cannibal and Iroquois were used interchangeably in the Relations and this was an interesting shift from the use of the word cannibal to signify Carib more than a century before. Their reputation for ruthlessness in battle led one Jesuit to observe that despite the horrific conditions of starvation faced by the Hurons, the wrath of the Iroquois was more feared. The Hurons were “still too happy not to have fallen into the hands of an enemy a thousand times more cruel than the wild beasts, and than all the famines in the world.” During the period of Jesuit intervention in New France, the Iroquois engaged in nearly constant warfare with their neighbors, both Indian and European. They took advantage of the chaos caused by the massive depopulation from disease, the disruption of trade routes, and territorial realignment, among others causes, to carve out a tenuous niche for themselves in the New World and to enhance the Great League of Peace and Power.

The Jesuits and other visitors to New France had difficulty understanding the nature of Indian warfare as it differed significantly from how war was practiced in Europe. As soldiers for God, the Jesuits expected to suffer greatly in their war for souls but to emerge victorious having successfully defeated their enemy, in this case Indian heathenism. They expected to gain control over the losing party and to enforce their will upon them. However, Indian warfare was not fought for the same reasons or with the same end in mind. Rather than fighting for access to resources, for which most European wars were fought, the motives of Iroquois warfare were more complicated.

War among the Iroquois, especially after European invasion, was often fought in order to assuage the grief of those who had lost a loved one, creating a kind of self-

48 Jesuit Relations, vol. 31, 175; vol. 32, 19; vol. 43, 85; vol. 44, 81, 173; vol. 49, 231.
49 Ibid., vol. 34, 197.
50 Richter, The Ordeal of the Longhouse, 50ff.
perpetuating cycle of warfare. The grieving process was potentially disruptive to the order necessary for Iroquois life. The bereaved might experience periods of intense despair or rage that could threaten the community. In order to prevent these kinds of disruptions, members of another clan would attempt to “cover the grief” of the mourners. This could be done through a variety of means including the bestowing of gifts, payments, or the giving of a feast. If these efforts failed, however, the female members of the decedent’s clan could call for action that was more drastic. They actively discouraged violence against members of their own tribe, and thus they sought to fulfill their violent desires through battle with other enemy tribes. Members of the decedent’s clan did not typically participate in the mourning war; rather, “young men who were related by marriage to the female survivors of the deceased but who lived in other longhouses were obliged to form a war party or face the women’s public accusation of cowardice.”  

Thus, women urged the men to go and raid enemy tribes. The role of women in Iroquois warfare eluded the Jesuits, who were fighting to prove their masculine dominance over others and understood war as a contest only between men. Indian warfare, however, was as much about masculinity as femininity. The Iroquois men who fought battles did so to prove their bravery, but also to reaffirm female power in the village. While the Jesuits were trying to save souls in order to protect their definition of chaste femininity, their direct exclusion of women meant that they failed to understand the full spectrum of their gendered encounter with the Iroquois.

By framing the interactions between the Jesuits and the Iroquois as a contest between competing ideas about gender, the Jesuits went to great lengths in their writings to describe the Iroquois as a formidable enemy since victory over such an enemy carried great value. Victory, for the members of the Society of Jesus, probably did not mean the same thing as it did for French bureaucrats. Instead of calculating their success in economic or political terms, success

52 Idem, Ordeal of the Longhouse, 33.
for the Jesuits was counted in souls saved. The practice of cannibalism among the Iroquois, then, made them appear more terrifying. Father Paul Le Jeune remarked in 1641 that the presence of fifty Iroquois was enough to drive two hundred Frenchman from Canada. Furthermore, he wrote,

> If these Barbarians become enraged at our Frenchmen, they will never let them sleep soundly; a Hiroquois [sic] will remain for two or three days without food behind a stump, fifty paces from your house, in order to slay the first person who shall fall into his ambush. If he be discovered, the forest serves him—for an asylum; where a Frenchman would find only a hindrance, a Savage will bound as lightly as a deer.\(^{53}\)

Le Jeune recognized that the Iroquois were adept strategists skilled in forest warfare, a trait that he seemed to find both admirable and distressing. The ability of Native Americans to hide in the forest disturbed Frenchmen and it heightened their general sense of uneasiness and mistrust of the American landscape.

The assumption that the forest was a favorable place for the Iroquois but a dangerous hindrance for Europeans highlighted the ways in which Europeans tended to see Indians as firmly connected to the landscape. Le Jeune’s descriptions of the Iroquois attack obviously reminded the reader of an animal stalking its prey, thus reaffirming the animality of the Iroquois. Le Jeune and other Jesuit missionaries reinforced this supposed animality further in their descriptions of what they presumed to be illogical and inhuman rage.\(^{54}\) The Jesuits did not understand the roots of Iroquois anger, nor did they understand the cultural meanings of anger in a society that favored group conformity. Despite all of these seeming advantages that the landscape provided the Iroquois, Le Jeune assured his readers that they would not have been

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\(^{53}\) Jesuit Relations, vol. 21, 119.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., vol. 21, 67; vol. 22, 265; vol. 25, 265-7; vol. 27, 213; vol. 41, 53; vol. 55, 275.
successful without the intervention of the Dutch and European weapons. In this way, Le Jeune subtly emasculated the Iroquois by making them dependant on the Dutch.

When recording incidents of cannibalism, the Jesuits often employed animalistic metaphors, referring to the warriors as both wolves and tigers. For example, in the following passage from Barthelemy Vimont’s 1642 relation, he de-humanized the victorious Iroquois through his description of their cruelty and fury. He wrote:

They [the Iroquois] dismembered those whom they had just slaughtered, cut them in pieces, and threw the feet, legs, arms, and heads into the pot, which they set to boil with joy as great as the sorrow felt by the poor captives who remained alive, when they saw their countryman serving as the quarry of these Werewolves. The women and children wept bitterly, and those half Demons took pleasure in the hearing their doleful chants. When the supper was cooked, these wolves devoured their prey; one seized a thigh, another a breast; some sucked the marrow from the bones; others broke open the skulls, to extract the brains. In a word, they ate the flesh of men with as much appetite as, and with more pleasure than, hunters eat that of a Boar or of a Stag.

By referring to the Iroquois as wolves, Vimont stripped them of their rationality and reduced them to beings of pure emotion and instinct. However, the strength of this pronouncement was lessened somewhat by the use of the words “Werewolf” and “half-demon.” Both of these creatures, the werewolf and the half-demon, retained something of their humanity. The werewolf might have been overcome by its animal nature at certain times or situations (on the

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55 Ibid., vol. 21, 119.
56 For example see, Ibid., vol. 22, 257, 265, 271.
57 Ibid., vol. 22, 253-255.
battlefield, for instance) but otherwise existed as a rational, thinking person. These descriptors demonstrated some of the ambivalence that the Jesuits felt towards the Iroquois; they knew that they were human beings, but they struggled to make sense of their depraved actions.

Gustav Jahoda argued in *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice* that comparing humans to animals was one of the common tropes employed to deem one a savage. Furthermore, he contended that cannibalism “still remains probably the most powerful symbol of savagery.” The fact that the Iroquois acted like animals and consumed their fellow man justified European interventions and positioned Indians as functionally inferior savages. Jesuits feared death “by the claws of these tigers, and by the Fury of these demons.” As the Jesuit missionaries struggled to make sense of the cruelty of the Iroquois, they employed older metaphors of monstrosity to express their anxiety. Unlike Columbus or Vespucci, the Jesuits did not understand the cannibalistic Iroquois to be monsters, but rather flawed human beings whose cultural practices led them astray. In order for French expansion into the Americas to succeed, they had to find common ground from which to communicate and negotiate with one other. The Jesuits hoped that through their culturally sensitive mission efforts, they could bring Indians away from savagery and towards recognizable (even if inferior) civilization. The Iroquois practice of cannibalism stood in the way of imperial and religious expansion in the North America. However, the Jesuits never explicitly stated that the elimination of cannibalism was a primary motivator, nor did they stress that it had to be eliminated prior to the onset of their civilizing agenda as Cortés did in Mexico.

At the same time that they feared consumption at the hands of the Iroquois, some missionaries expressed a perverse thankfulness for their cruelties. The Superior at Quebec,

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59 Jahoda, 97-99.  
60 *Jesuit Relations*, vol. 21, 67.
Barthelemy Vimont, recalled the capture of twelve canoes of Hurons along with Father Isaac Jogues and several Frenchman by the Iroquois in 1642. He wrote, “If those tigers burn them, if they boil them, if they eat them, they will procure for them sweeter refreshment in the house of the great God, for love of whom they expose themselves to such dangers.” Jogues further remarked that sacrifice was what enabled souls to be saved, for through his death Jesus brought the barbarians to civilization and salvation. The practice of cannibalism among the Iroquois, then, appeared to be both an impediment to the Jesuit missionaries and a catalyst for their actions. The Iroquois were a barrier and a boon to conversion efforts. In fact, Father Ragueneau remarked in his yearly relation that, “Up to the present time, the Hiroquois [sic] have done almost more good than harm in New France. They have delivered many souls from the fires of Hell, while burning their bodies in an elemental fire.” Even if thousands of Hurons were dying on Iroquois scaffolds, the Jesuits felt confident that they had given the sacrificial victims a gift. The terror wrought by the Iroquois encouraged many deathbed conversions and baptisms and brought Indian souls to God.

The ferocity of the Iroquois attacks against neighboring tribes prevented the missionaries from making much headway into Iroquoia. Yet, their cruelty and the probability of martyrdom at their hand was a strange enticement to them. Father Chaumonot wrote of his desire for martyrdom in 1649 following the sacrifices of Fathers Brebeuf and Lalement.

We all, as many Fathers as we are here, have never loved our vocation more, than after having seen that it can raise us even to the glory of martyrdom; there is nothing but my

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61 Ibid., vol. 22, 271.
62 Ibid., vol. 38, 45.
63 The last reference to Iroquois cannibalism in the Jesuit Relations comes from volume 62. Father Thierry Beschefer remarked, “It is not only the Iroquois who benefit by the labors of the fathers who dwell among them. As They never return from war without bringing some Captives with them, a portion of who are destined to the fire. There are but a few of them who have not The Happiness of being baptized before death. God’s providence seeks Them out in Their country, and makes Them come hither to find eternal blessedness amid the fires of these Man-eaters.” Jesuit Relations, vol. 62, 241.
imperfections which can make me give up my part. . . . If Your reverence ask it for me from the good Jesus, through the merits of his four great servants, Fathers Jogues, Daniel, de Brebeuf, and Lalement, I hope that you will obtain it for me; and then the good Jesus might indeed give me the grace to die for the advancement of his Kingdom.  

Chaumonot saw his missionary work as a path towards martyrdom and he desired to follow in the footsteps of other Jesuits who had been killed and sacrificed by the Iroquois. The possibility of martyrdom drew the Fathers like Chaumonot to New France. They demonstrated their commitment to God through their ability to withstand the horrific conditions and constant threat of torture and death in New France in order to assure Indians a place in Heaven (which would, in turn, lead to their own salvation as well). Catholic tradition would not have allowed the Fathers to seek out martyrdom for their own personal benefit, rather, as Chaumonot indicated, the difficulty of their work among the Iroquois and the possibility that they might be killed for their faith made their desire to “save” the Iroquois stronger. The more difficult the challenge, the greater was the reward. While the Iroquois fought bitterly to keep the Jesuits out of their territory and to obtain economic dominance in the region, their persistence acted as a draw to masochistic Jesuit priests. Suffering and dying for one’s God was the ultimate sacrifice that proved one’s commitment to the faith. Through their torture and sometimes their death and cannibalization, the Jesuits sought to prove their masculine valor to both the public back in Europe and to the Indians that they encountered.

Both Jesuits and Iroquois were well aware of the power of suffering. For the Jesuits, their suffering on Earth was the key to eternal salvation in heaven. For the Iroquois, however, the suffering of others could directly benefit their tribe. The power of captives was extracted through their torture, execution, and sometimes consumption. According to Jesuit writings, not all

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64 Ibid., vol. 34, 215-217.
captives were cannibalized, but it was not uncommon according to the Jesuit records. It is difficult, if not impossible, to figure out exactly how often and for what reason captives were cannibalized, but evidence suggests that the obtainment of the spiritual power of the victim had a great deal to do with it. Throughout the drawn out process of torture to which the captive was subjected, he was expected to maintain composure and exhibit the stoic bravery of a true warrior. The victims of torture and cannibalism were most often male, but the Jesuits did record the occasional female victim, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Often victims were made to sing throughout their torture. According to Jesuit records, those who endured the torture most admirably were the most desirable bodies to consume. The consumption of the body of a warrior imbued the tribe with all of his symbolic power and bravery. Thus, while the Jesuits were not warriors in any traditional sense, by suffering and dying upon Iroquois scaffolds, they were able to obtain access to the symbolic power of warrior masculinity. Whether or not the Iroquois viewed them as such was not as important as the reputation for warrior-like martyrdom that the Jesuits presented in their digests.

The ritual of torture was carefully calculated, and designed to extract spiritual power by prolonging the life of the victim through periods of sustained torture. These periods of torture were followed by brief periods of respite, in which the victim was revived as much as possible, but this was not always clear to the Jesuit observer and they often described it as more impulsive and savage. The Jesuits did not fully comprehend the complex social, religious, and political aspects of the torture ritual. They did observe, however, that there was some significance to the way in which the captive acted during his extensive torture. The more stoically a given captive handled his tortments, the more fervent his torturers became and, in turn, the greater their desire seemed to be to consume the flesh of the captive. The Jesuits understood that there was a
connection between the suffering inflicted upon prisoners and the bravery and stoicism he exhibited, as these were qualities that were important for masculine warriors. Vimont’s relation of 1642 described an incident in which “the Hiroquois [sic] were furious with rage on observing” the firmness of a particular captive.\textsuperscript{65} Vimont indicated that the Iroquois believed that the composure of this warrior was a bad omen and so they asked the man why he remained so silent, to which he replied, “‘I do . . . what you could not, if you were treated with the same cruelty that you show me. The iron and the fire that you apply to my body would make you cry out very loud, and weep like children, while I do not flinch.’”\textsuperscript{66} According to Vimont, this overt challenge to the masculinity of the Iroquois warriors resulted in a marked increase in the severity of the torture. Vimont described the torture inflicted on this man in vivid detail. The “tigers” removed the top of the victim’s scalp and applied hot sand to the wound. They then took him down from the scaffold and dragged him through the village until “he looked like a monster:”

Such a sight, which would have caused horror to men, rejoiced those Demons, who, as their final act of cruelty, cut open the breasts of those whom they wish to kill, tear out their hearts and their livers, which they roast; they cut off their feet, and their hands, which they cook partly under the embers, partly on a spit before the fire; in short, they roast and boil them, and then they eat them with delighted rage.\textsuperscript{67}

The more the Huron captive remained stolid, the more furiously the Iroquois tortured him. Vimont saw this response of the Iroquois as one of fear, but even if this captive did make the Iroquois afraid, this heightened the spiritual power that they could draw from his torture, death, and consumption. While Vimont may not have fully understood the gendered significance of the ritual for the Iroquois, he did interpret it as a contest for masculine dominance.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., vol. 22, 263.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., vol. 22, 265.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
Vimont closed his description of these events by comparing the Iroquois to wolves and insisting that they were under the control of demons. He wrote, “Homo homini lupus; man becomes a wolf to other men, when he allows himself to be governed by Demons.”68 This sentiment nicely encapsulated the general Jesuit views on the relative humanity of the Iroquois. They were not actual wolves, monsters, or other non-humans, but the presence of demons among them had corrupted them to the degree that they were like wolves. The corrupting nature of the devil cast a veil over the humanity that the Iroquois inherently possessed and caused them to act without human reason or compassion. Thus, the Jesuits believed that without their intervention, the Iroquois would continue to lose their humanity to the devil. For example, in 1645, remarking upon the potential peace between the Iroquois and the Hurons, Vimont wondered how people who had been so lost in cruelty could “find enough gentleness to agree together.”69 He believed that it was beyond his skill as a mere human to change their savage behavior and that without the intervention of God (and his representatives on earth, the Jesuits) they would be lost.

Just as the Jesuits struggled to find ways to deal with the level of sophistication and savagery that they perceived in the Iroquois, these conflicting representations were also common in their descriptions of cannibalistic torture rituals. At once, they wrote that these events were disordered, lustful, demonic affairs, but they also sometimes hinted at the possibility of greater cultural significance. The numerous descriptions of torture at the hands of the Iroquois in the Jesuit Relations demonstrated the importance of the behavior of the captive in determining the trajectory of their torture. The most worthy captives, those most deserving of a terrible death, were those who demonstrated remarkable composure on the scaffold and this practice seemed to have been extended to the Jesuit martyrs as well. The description of the torture and death of

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., vol. 27, 275.
Father Jean de Brebœuf showed the importance that the Jesuits ascribed to bravery in the ritualized torture and cannibalism among the Iroquois:

Another one of those barbarians, seeing that the good Father would soon die, made an opening in the upper part of his chest, and tore out his heart, which he roasted and ate. Others came to drink his blood, still warm, which they drank with both hands, –saying that the Father de Brebœuf had been very courageous to endure so much pain as they had given him and that, by drinking his blood, they would become courageous like him.\(^{70}\)

It was the Father’s ability to withstand the extremes of Iroquois torture that made his body more desirable for consumption. Despite the tortures that he endured, Brebœuf was reported to have remained stoic and even to have continued to mission to the other captives throughout his ordeal.\(^{71}\) This act reinforced the masculinity of both Iroquois and the Jesuits involved. Just as the Iroquois used the ritual torture of captives to establish their dominance over a feminized enemy, Breboeuf also reinforced his masculinity through stoic bravery, and through his commitment to proselytizing, right up until the end.

The events of Brebœuf’s martyrdom were also significant because they revealed both the adaptive strategies of Iroquois ritual torture as well as the connection to Catholic religious discourse. At one point during his torture, a man who had previously been taken captive by the Iroquois and remained with them performed a mock baptism on Brebœuf. The man remarked, “Echon [Brebœuf’s name in Huron] . . . thou sayest that Baptism and the sufferings of this life lead straight to Paradise; thou wilt go soon, for I will baptize thee, and to make thee suffer well, in order to go the sooner to thy Paradise.”\(^{72}\) The man then proceeded to pour boiling water over

\(^{70}\) Ibid., vol. 34, 31.  
\(^{71}\) Ibid., vol. 34, 27.  
\(^{72}\) Ibid., vol. 34, 29.
the Father’s head three times, remarking each time, “Go to Heaven, for thou art well baptized.”

According to the Jesuit observers, this mock baptism demonstrated not only the depravity of the Indian, but also the profound impact that their missionary work was having. Even if the Huron and Iroquois had not fully accepted Catholic teachings, the fact that they were familiar enough with the ritual of baptism spoke to the influence of the Jesuit missions. This incident revealed the ways in which the Iroquois, and the foreigner adoptees living among them, used the torture ceremony to obtain the spirit of the most worthy victims, but also to vent their anger against the French and their Jesuits. The captured man, who had previously been the recipient of Brebœuf’s Christian wisdom, directed his anger towards the Father as a representative of an enemy tribe, a warrior whose death would assuage the anger and sadness of the bereaved and prove the superiority of Indian masculinity. This particular torture experience was calculated to extract the maximum suffering from Brebœuf and was likely intended to humiliate and demoralize him.

Back in France, this incident would have horrified readers and supported the necessity of the overseas missions.

Despite the horrible tortures inflicted upon him, Brebœuf remained steadfast: “During all of these torments, Father de Brebœuf endured like a rock, insensible to fire and flames, which astonished all the bloodthirsty wretches who tormented him. His zeal was so great that he preached continually to these infidels, to try to convert them.”

Although the Father may not have intended his preaching to enrage his captors further, it did. Therefore, he played the role of the brave, long-suffering captive quite well. Thus, the records indicated that his refusal to capitulate and give in to the pain and suffering was what made his torture and ensuing consumption that much more satisfying to the Iroquois.

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73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., vol. 34, 27-29.
In the *Jesuit Relations*, Iroquois cannibalism appeared primarily in two manifestations. The first type of anthropophagy that the Jesuits described took place on the battlefield immediately after the completion of the battle/raid. Only the male warriors of the tribe were involved in this event.\(^7^5\) Thus, one type of Iroquois cannibalism appeared to have been a solely masculine affair that occurred outside of the prevailing structures of gendered power in the village. In these instances, the Jesuits did not record the presence of any particular power structures that might have dictated who received the spoils of war (in this case, human flesh). Rather the warriors were simply represented as only lustful and furious, incapable of rationality. They appeared more as ravenous monsters than as participants in a carefully calculated ritual event. For example, Vimont described the aftermath of an Iroquois attack in 1644. He wrote, “they then threw themselves on the body of the man whom they had killed; they tore his heart out of his breast, and scalped him; they cut off his lips, and the most fleshy parts of his thighs and legs, which they boiled and ate in the presence of the captives.”\(^7^6\) The cannibalistic act perpetrated by the Iroquois warriors in this passage was not a carefully crafted ritual event; rather, in the eyes of the Jesuits, it was a crime of passion and fury and evidence of dangerous uncontrolled masculinity.

The other representation of Iroquois cannibalism in the *Relations* presented anthropophagy as the dénouement of the choreographed ritualized torture of captives by the whole tribe. These acts of cannibalism occurred within the confines of the village and women, children, and the elderly were all active participants. A Christian Huron captive of the Iroquois escaped in 1659 and described the conditions of his torture in the Iroquois village of Onnontagué. In fear for his life, he contemplated using a knife that he had hidden to slit his own throat but the

\(^7^5\) Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 56.
\(^7^6\) *Jesuit Relations*, vol. 26, 33.
teachings of the Fathers reminded him of the sinfulness of this act. He then tossed his knife aside, committed his life to God, and marched towards his captors ready to accept his fate. He described the torture inflicted upon him: “All leaped upon me in a crowd on every side, some cutting off my fingers, others lacerating my flesh. . . . My poor hands were insufficient for all the women tugging at them on every side, while on of the boldest of the men tried to cut off one of the entirely.”

The effects of the Jesuit presence were made clear here. Without their influence, the unfortunate man in this example would have suffered the same torture but would not have been able to achieve salvation.

While the missionaries may not have yet been able to stop the torture and cannibalization of captives, they were still able to save the souls of the victims. After facing the gauntlet, the Huron captive was then taken to a cabin where his death sentence was pronounced. The headman of the village set forth the conditions of his execution and instructed the villages “not to touch either of my arms or my heart, as those were to be reserved and given to eat to an Iroquois of the Village who had dreamed some months before that he was to eat them.” Just as the convert was about to face torture on the scaffold, a fierce storm began that belayed his death. He remained on the scaffold and watched as dogs devoured a recently sacrificed Frenchman’s body and he hoped that he would soon join him in heaven. No evidence was given as to why the convert’s body was to be eaten by the tribe but the Frenchman’s was not. Fortuitously, the storm continued to rage and the convert was taken to a cabin until the ritual could be continued. The rain and wind of the storm prevented the Iroquois from using firebrands and burning the captive’s skin.

During this storm-induced delay, an Iroquois man whose lineage was responsible for determining the fate of the Huron captive, returned to the village from a hunt. His family was

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77 Ibid., vol. 46, 41.
78 Ibid., vol. 46, 43.
afforded the right to determine whether the captive man should be killed or adopted into the tribe. The Iroquois man decided that, “his family was not under greater obligations to avenge the public wrongs than the others, who had, despite these injuries, spared their prisoners’ lives” and the Huron convert’s life was spared and he eventually escaped and fled to the French. This might have been an inspirational tale for the European readership. Not only were the lives of the Jesuits in danger among the Iroquois, but the lives of Indian converts were as well. The success of French imperial efforts in Canada hinged upon the successful conversion of Indians and the protection of French interests. The anthropophagus practices of the Iroquois threatened to emasculate France symbolically. Examples that demonstrated Catholic triumph over cannibalistic incorporation supported the expansion of masculine imperial power in the Americas and indicated the willingness of the French to face even the most savage enemy.

The act of cannibalism, as described by Jesuit Fathers, was perpetrated predominately by men and represented an important facet of how the Father’s perceived Iroquois savage masculinity. Iroquois warriors killed and consumed their enemies in part to frighten them into submission, but also in order to assert their masculine dominance and emasculate their enemies. The importance of bravery and valor on the scaffold was necessary for the exchange of power, which was at the center of the mourning war and its rituals. Male captives were expected to brave the tortures without showing signs of weakness, which to the Jesuits meant effeminacy. In 1647, Jesuit Superior Jerome Lallement recorded an experience of Isaac Jogues in which his masculinity was called into question. Jogues was unable to hold back his tears at the treatment of “that worthy and valiant Christian Eustache,” who Lallement argued received the worst treatment of all of the captives. On seeing the Father’s tears, Eustache cautioned him against showing this elsewhere.

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79 Ibid., vol. 46, 47.
80 Ibid., vol. 31, 35.
kind of weakness for fear that the Iroquois “should regard him as effeminate.”

Eustache then spoke to his tormenters, saying, “do not suppose that those tears proceed from weakness; it is the love and affection that he feels for me, and not the want of courage, that forces them from his eyes. He has never wept in his own torments; his face has always appeared dry, and always cheerful. Your rage, and my pains, and his own love are the theme and the cause of his tears.”

The Huron captive, Eustache, went to great lengths to assure the Iroquois that Jogues was not crying like a woman, but rather that his tears were an acceptable presentation of masculinity. Jogues displayed the measured combination of emotion and physical strength that Ignatius of Loyola modeled a century earlier. Since the Jesuits did not come with swords and guns, they had to prove their masculine dominance over their subjects in a different way from the conquistadors. Thus, they linked Iroquois masculinity with the acts of torture and cannibalization that they committed. By suffering through the horrors that the Iroquois inflicted upon them, the Jesuits priests were able to fashion themselves as spiritual warriors.

The participation of women in practices such as cannibalism, which were perceived as singularly aberrant, presented a unique kind of anxiety for European men. The fear of the powerful women who would quite literally consume men with her lust was a terrifying prospect for early explorers of the Americas. The Jesuit missionaries of New France, however, had a different focus when it came to Indigenous sexuality. The competing impulses of desire and repulsion so evident in the writings of men like Cortés, Columbus, and Vespucci were far less common in the works of celibate Jesuit priests. Catholic missionaries were deeply concerned with policing Native sexuality and eroding women’s power and self-determination. In fact, they found women the most difficult to convert. They consistently remarked upon the vehemence of

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 See Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather.
women’s refusal to council their ideas.\textsuperscript{84} According to the \textit{Jesuit Relations}, women might have been obstinate, lewd, lascivious, untrustworthy, and unchaste, but they were not likely to be anthropophagi.

There were only a few examples in the documents that comprise the \textit{Jesuit Relations} in which women were reported to be the specific victims of cannibalism (in many other instances, the gender of the victim was not clear). In one case, the young woman in question escaped the kettle and was not actually killed. What is perhaps most interesting about this example, however, is that it was the only account of endocannibalism among the Iroquois in the \textit{Jesuit Relations}. In the village of Oiogoen, a man dreamed that he gave a feast of human flesh and he invited the local chiefs to his cabin and asked them to guess his dream. Finally, after many speculations, one man guessed correctly. This man then offered his brother for sacrifice and placed him in the dreamer’s hands “to be cut up on the spot, and put in the kettle.”\textsuperscript{85} The chiefs were all frightened by this turn of events, until the dreamer told them that it was a woman that needed to be sacrificed. This caused the people of the village great anxiety, but they believed that they had to follow through with the dreamer’s predictions. They adorned an unsuspecting young girl with riches and led her to the place of sacrifice.

All the people attended to witness so strange a spectacle. The guests took their places, and the public victim was led into the middle of the circle. She was delivered to the Sacrificer, who was the very one for whom the sacrifice was to be made. He took her; they watched his actions, and pitied that innocent girl; but, when they thought him about

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Jesuit Relations}, vol. 42, 153.
to deal her the death-blow, he cried out: "I am satisfied; my dream requires nothing further." Is it not a great charity to open the eyes of a people so grossly in error?\textsuperscript{86}

This passage made it clear that the Jesuits believed that the act of consuming a member of the tribe was almost unheard of among the Iroquois. Whether or not the episode was more disturbing to the Iroquois because the potential victim was a woman cannot be adequately determined from the passage, but it clearly caused the Jesuits more anxiety. In the descriptions of Carib cannibalism from chapter one, the role that women played in acts of cannibalism was emphasized. However, this was not the case in Jesuit writing. Unlike Columbus or Vespucci, the Fathers did not want to claim dominion over their lands and resources and, as such, the existence of female cannibals could not be easily mobilized in discourse to justify their actions.

Volume 52 of the Relations contained the tale of Father Estienne de Carheil’s journey to the mission of St. Joseph in Oiogouen in November of 1668. A slave woman from Andastogué had accompanied him on his journey from Onnontagué. Upon his arrival, the unfortunate woman was “offered to Heaven, as first-fruits of his labors.”\textsuperscript{87} Father Carheil had previously taught the woman about God on their two-day journey and she was baptized before being “burned and eaten by those barbarians, on the sixth of November.”\textsuperscript{88} Despite her death, her time with the Father was apparently well spent as “this journey that they made together was put to use by him in making her enter on the road to Paradise.”\textsuperscript{89} The lack of compassion for the fate of this slave woman was obvious in this passage, for her conversion had assured her a place in Heaven and death brought salvation. Her death appeared to be of little consequence and offered no impediment to the Fathers as they prepared their mission. In both the Caribbean and in Mexico

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., vol. 52, 173.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
where accusations of cannibalism were used as a justification for conquest, the presence of cannibalism was also cause for hesitation, but this was not the case among the Jesuits. They desired martyrdom and did not see cannibalism as an impediment to their efforts in the same was as Cortés. While they nonetheless believed that they had to get rid of cannibalism in order for Indians to be civilized, they also showed less fear of being cannibalized.

Despite the Iroquois’ perceived propensity towards cruelty, the Jesuits did not indicate that the Iroquois practiced sexual violence towards their female prisoners. The connections between sodomy, cannibalism, and castration seen in other contexts were not evident in the Jesuit Relations. However, there were examples of a discursive link between sex and cannibalism. One young woman who had escaped the clutches of the Iroquois related the following story of her observations of a cannibal feast to the Fathers. As she was approaching the village of Ononioté with her captors, she overheard them talking around a bonfire that they had made from her countrymen. She feared what they were going to do to her and the conversation that she heard gave her little comfort: “She had also heard, at her departure, some young men, who, not supposing that she understood their language, were asking one another which part of the body they would find the most dainty. One of them, looking at her, answered that the feet roasted under the ashes were very good . . .” The young woman was greatly disturbed that her body was violated symbolically by the Iroquois men. For the members of the Society of Jesus who sought to teach Indians about the importance of chastity and self-restraint, this incident highlighted the dangers posed by the Iroquoian savagery. The act of cannibalism, and most especially the consumption of a woman, was a violation of the purity of the body. Thus, while most Jesuit representations of cannibalism focused around masculinity and the warrior, the incidents involving women were particularly troubling for the writers.

90 Ibid., vol. 30, 259.
A final description of the cannibalization of a woman by the Iroquois comes from the account of Jean de Lamberville from 1682. Two female prisoners from Maryland were tortured, killed, and consumed after being afforded religious instruction by the Jesuits, who had not attempted to stop their cannibalization. In the same letter, Lamberville described the cruelty of the Iroquois. He recorded that they had brought 700 Illinois captives back from battle. However, they had also killed and ate “over 600 others on the spot.” Those children who were old enough to survive without their mother’s breast milk were kept alive, but “the others were cruelly roasted and devoured.” Furthermore, Lamberville said, “that they tied living men and women to the stakes, and, as fast as their flesh became roasted, they cut it off, and ate it.” Here it appeared that there occurred a mass sacrifice with little regard to the victim’s sex or warrior masculinity. The Iroquois warriors traveled into enemy territory and captured at least 1100 persons, 700 of whom they kept presumably for adoption in to the tribe. The remaining 600 were reportedly killed and eaten on the spot. This is likely an exaggeration, but as discursive example in the Relations, it effectively demonstrated the depths of Iroquois depravity to an astonished French audience. Additionally, it seems unlikely that the Iroquois would have killed and consumed a large number of women of childbearing age, as typically these women would have made up the majority of the 700 people that the Iroquois took back with them. Since they most often chose to adopt women and children, it is reasonable to assume that while women were among those cannibalized that day, they were likely in the minority.

Jesuit missionaries recorded that acts of cannibalism were linked to success in battle, indicating a direct connection between masculinity and man-eating. In addition to valuing the

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91 Ibid., vol. 62, 59.
92 Ibid., vol. 62, 71.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Richter, Ordeal of the Longhouse, 144.
flesh of the bravest captives most highly, cannibalism and masculine prowess were connected in other ways as well. For example, after requesting to be baptized, an old Iroquois man recounted an interesting story to the Jesuits. He recalled that in his youth, after fasting in preparation for a ritual, he experienced a dream apparition in which a man came down from the sky. This sky-man assured the boy that he would take care of him and guaranteed his successes in life. After offering reassuring predictions for the boy’s life, “he held out to him, a piece of human flesh, quite raw. The youth in horror turned away his head. ‘Eat this,’ said the old man, presenting him with a piece of bear’s fat.”  

The young man ate the bear meat and the sky-man departed. As the years went on, all of the predictions made by the sky-man came true and he had great successes in hunting and a prolific family. “He attributes this excellent fortune that he has always had in the chase, to the piece of bear’s fat that the Demon made him eat; and he judges from this that he would have achieved equal success in war, had he eaten the piece of human flesh that he refused.”  

The consumption of human flesh, in this example, was clearly linked to the prowess of a warrior. Consuming flesh literally gave men the ability to succeed in battle.

The set of documents that comprise the Jesuit Relations reveal a great deal about European perception of the practice of cannibalism among the Iroquois. The interpretative lens of the Jesuits allowed them to see many Indian practices on their own terms. However, cannibalism was a cultural practice of which they struggled to make sense. Rather than relying on simple observation and objective determination, Jesuit missionaries fell back on earlier tropes of animality when speaking about the practices of torture and cannibalism. They compared the Iroquois to animals, demonstrating the tension between their beliefs that Indians were redeemable, yet flawed, humans. The Jesuits faced conflicting understandings of the nature of

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97 Ibid., vol. 23, 159.
Indians; at once, they were generous and unimaginably cruel. The Fathers struggled to make sense of Indian practices and this negotiation between their ethnographic observations and their pre-formed beliefs about human nature were evident in the descriptions of the inhuman actions of the Iroquois. The Jesuits were skilled ethnographers. They expertly balanced rich descriptions of Indian life and New World landscapes alongside inspirational tales of conversion and martyrdom. Detailed descriptions of cannibalism, in the *Relations*, served to reinforce the necessity of the Jesuit presence in Canada, just as they indicated the difficulty of the work among the Indians. Reports of the horrors faced by missionaries enabled the missionaries to gain support for the cause from within the constraints of French imperial interests, and they drew some Fathers to the New World with the promise of martyrdom. Finally, descriptions of cannibalism demonstrated ways in which the Jesuits negotiated their masculinity and constructed themselves as warriors for God. Since they did not come to New France armed with guns or swords, they engaged with Iroquois warriors on the scaffold and not the battlefield. Through their torture, sacrifice, and sometimes cannibalization, the Jesuits proved that even as celibate clergy, they could still compete as men.
CHAPTER IV. LIVING WITH CANNIBALS

The preceding chapters interrogated cannibalism in the discourses of exploration, conquest, and conversion. However, in this chapter, the relationship between cannibalism and settlement in the English overseas empire in North America is be explored. The English empire differed in many ways from earlier French, Spanish, and Portuguese models, as did the discourse of cannibalism that was established in English texts. The most glaring divergence was the number of references to Indigenous cannibalism. In general, English sources contained far fewer descriptions of Native American anthropophagy. Interestingly, among these limited references, there were a striking number of accounts of European individuals engaged in anthropophagus acts. There were also several accounts written by women.

This chapter explores the discourse of cannibalism in English accounts of settlement in North America. Ultimately, however, it uncovers the ways in which English understandings of cannibalism served to support the development of an emerging frontier masculinity that defined itself through contact with, immersion in, and victory over savagery. While firmly entrenched in early modern notions of difference, which insisted that Europeans were innately superior to Native Americans, the accounts of cannibalism in British writings from Jamestown to the Seven Years War revealed that Englishmen also expressed their superiority against their European competitors in the New World. Cannibalism in many English accounts, served as a metaphor through which colonists articulated their authority over the lands and peoples of North America. The nature of English imperialism and cultural beliefs about gendered and hierarchies of humanity enabled English men in particular to develop a uniquely American masculinity, which would see its full expression in the frontier heroes of the nineteenth century.
In English texts, cannibalism served as a counterpoint to masculinity, because the reckless savagery that they saw in Indian anthropophagites contradicted the measured manliness expressed by Englishmen. Additionally, contact with and triumph over cannibalism were both essential in establishing the supremacy of English civilization. As imperial power was always gendered, the discourse of cannibalism was an integral part of establishing and maintaining English power on the North American mainland. Not only did English settlers articulate their encounters with native peoples in decidedly gendered terms, typically representing Natives in terms of feminine weakness, but these gendered relationships also affected the imposition of imperial power in North America and helped to shape the nature of English expansion in Atlantic North America.

Earlier Spanish accounts of cannibalism tended to stress the stark dichotomy between the civilized and the savage, which translated most commonly into a racialized (in that, these ideas would eventually come to be defined in terms of race) dynamic in which Europeans were “civilized” and Native Americans (and Africans) were considered “savage” and inferior. While this dynamic was still at play in English texts, the representative dichotomy between Indian savage Otherness and European civilization changed slightly. This change was particularly evident in narratives of captivity among the Indians. These writings, rather than simply underpinning the cultural divide between the European and the Indian, instead emphasized the superiority of the English men over all others. During the Seven Years War accusations of cannibalism were lodged against Indians as well as Frenchmen, thus reinforcing English cultural superiority and their claim to the North Atlantic coast, both of which helped to define a new kind of Anglo-American masculinity. The French were accused of being nearly as savage and bloodthirsty as their Indian allies, and in some cases, pious English settlers indicated that they
believed Catholicism itself to be cannibalistic. Thus, the settler dynamic created a new paradigm of cannibal discourse that reinforced English supremacy. Because English settlers were faced with a set of circumstances in which they were competing for dominance amongst not only a variety of bellicose Indian tribes, but other European empires as well, cannibalism functioned as a rhetorical strategy for establishing an Anglo-American identity. In the case of Englishmen driven to desperate acts of human consumption, the discourse of cannibalism simultaneously asserted their dominance over the land by demonstrating the lengths that they would go to ensure their success in the New World and reinforced a developing Anglo-American masculine ideal that emphasized strength, sacrifice, and piety.

There were several possible reasons why English records mentioned acts of cannibalism less often. First, large-scale English efforts of conquest and colonization in North America tended to begin later than Spanish expansion: the seventeenth rather than the sixteenth century. This is not to say that there were not many English explorers and soldiers dispatched to the New World in the sixteenth century, but that English colonization did not see a great deal of development until well into the seventeenth century, especially in North America. Another reason for the lack of textual evidence was that many Native groups encountered by the English might not have practiced cannibalism before and/or after the arrival of Europeans on their shores.

The years that elapsed from Columbus’s initial encounter with the peoples of the Americas allowed both groups to become more familiar with one another. Europeans learned about the New World, just as Native peoples learned about Europeans through trade and physical encounters. This greater awareness of one another was not always beneficial, however. Longer

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2 Elliott, xvii, 6.
exposure to Native peoples did little to change many of the stereotypes that Europeans believed about them. In fact, rather than altering many of their beliefs about Native savagery, increased interaction often allowed these ideas to have greater circulation and impact. For Indians, the knowledge that they gained about European visitors helped them to interact in ways that were more effective. Whereas the Arawaks might have believed that Columbus and his men were gods (although this is certainly debatable), no one greeted Christopher Newport in Virginia with such adulation. Groups of Natives in the interior of North America, for example, were familiar with Europeans and their goods well before they ever met them. This familiarity allowed for the interaction between these groups to be better informed, and more carefully crafted. This greater familiarity enabled European interpretations of Indian life to be far less exaggerated and fantastical. English explorers did not record that they saw mermaids, cyclopes, or cyclopes in North America. Thus, the fantastical elements that permeated the earliest accounts of cannibalism in the New World were not substantively present in seventeenth and eighteenth century English texts. The passage of time also allowed English settlers to familiarize themselves with the New World by reading published accounts. Additionally, by the seventeenth century in North America, Englishmen were not the only Europeans competing for dominance. The presence of French and Dutch settlers, missionaries, and soldiers also provided Native peoples with the opportunity to play groups against one another and manipulate the balance of power. Despite all of this, one of the most important effects of the passage of time was the ravages of disease on Native communities. The massive depopulation and social reorganization brought about by European diseases played a significant role in altering earlier Indigenous power relationships and caused rapid changes to Native societies.³

³ Elliott, 65.
It is not as easy as it might initially seem to determine whether Native North American groups actually practiced cannibalism. As this dissertation argues, descriptions of cannibalism were always about power, and there was no simple correlation between textual evidence and practice. As has been discussed throughout this dissertation, accusations of cannibalism did not necessarily reflect the actual practices of Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, it was nearly impossible to determine to what degree cannibalism was employed as a denigrating rhetorical strategy without concern for actual practice. For example, although both French and English sources contained references to the practice of cannibalism among Iroquoian peoples, the English sources did not exhibit the same preoccupation with this practice that Jesuit writings did. Therefore, there is more to the death of references to cannibalism than merely differences among Indian groups. Additionally, English authors did not always provide enough information to determine the tribe to which a particular individual belonged. Their interests in the New World did not always necessitate a keen understanding of tribal differences. The sources about cannibalism that are discussed in the following pages tended to present a homogenized view of Indians and authors were not careful in distinguishing one group from another. Thus, it became easy for captives in New England, for example, to assume automatically that their captors were cannibals, whether or not they had any evidence for this accusation. Generally, Native peoples were presented as undifferentiated Others in English writings who were simply an impediment to expansion and success, which contrasted with the discourses discussed in earlier chapters.\footnote{Ibid., 59-60.} Although the Spanish and French may have held certain beliefs about Indians in general, in relation to the discourse of cannibalism both groups were careful to differentiate between good/non-cannibalistic Indians and bad/cannibalistic Indians. Not all English writers were unwilling to recognize differences between Indian tribes, however, in general English sources
relating to cannibalism tended to describe all people that were not English with fewer nuances. For the sake of this chapter, it is not centrally important which tribe a particular author was referring to and whether or not they actually practiced cannibalism. Rather, the ways in which ideas about cannibalism were expressed in English writings and how the circulation of these ideas affected dynamics of power is fundamental.

English colonists took cues from earlier published documents; they learned tactics for survival in the Americas from these texts, but they also inherited certain tropic legacies. Thus, English writers often based their assessments of Native groups partly on empirical observation, but also on prior knowledge obtained from different imperial contexts. Many English settlers in the New World were familiar with the accusations of cannibalism lodged against Native Americans by earlier writers. By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, educated Englishmen had ready access to scores of tales of New World cannibals, and because of this, many English writers presumed the existence of cannibals without needing to prove it.

It was quite common for English people to assume that Indians were cannibals simply based upon the predominant discourses of the time. For example, John Josselyn, in his account of his voyages to New England in 1638 and 1663, indicated that he obtained information about Indian cannibalism from Spanish accounts. Not only did he believe the Spanish stories about the practices of cannibalism in the Americas, Josselyn also understood these practices in relation to

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6 “I have read in Relations of the Indians amongst the Spaniards that they would not eat a Spaniard till they had kept him two or three days to wax tender, because their flesh was hard. At Matins vineyard, and Island that lyes South to Plimout in the way to Virginia, certain Indians (whilst I was in the Countrie) seised upon a Boat that put into a By-Cove, kill’d the men and eat them up in a short time before they were discovered,” John Josselyn, Two Voyages to New England. Made during the years 1638, 1663 (Boston: William Veazie, 1865), 98.
other English ideas about alterity.\textsuperscript{7} He wrote that he believed Indians to be “of disposition very
inconstant, crafty, timorous, quick of apprehension, and very ingenious, soon angry, and so
malicious that they seldom forget an injury, and barbarously cruel.”\textsuperscript{8} He thought that they were
prone to violence, melancholy, thievery, and lechery. Additionally he reported that:

both Men and Women [were] guilty of Misoxenie or hatred to strangers, a quality
appropriated to the old Brittains, all of them Cannibals, eaters of human flesh. And so
were formerly the Heathen-\textit{Irish}, who used to feed upon the Buttocks of Boyes and
Women Paps; it seems it is natural to Savage people so to do.\textsuperscript{9}

Josselyn’s statements were quite revealing regarding the intellectual legacies about cannibalism
that seventeenth and early eighteenth century Englishmen inherited. Not only did he indicate that
he read about cannibalism in Spanish accounts, but that he took the contents of these relations to
be true. Furthermore, Josselyn equated New World cannibals with the Celtic inhabitants of early
Britain. The English conquest of Ireland was a precursor to the Americas, and men like Sir
Walter Raleigh gained knowledge about how to proceed with settlement in the New World
through trial and error.\textsuperscript{10} English descriptions of the Irish and their perceived savagery paralleled
the descriptions of Native Americans. Interestingly, Josselyn also hinted at a connection between
sexuality and cannibalism. In his example of ancient Irish anthropophagy, it was the buttocks of
boys and the breasts of women that were consumed. Thus, the cannibalization of individuals was
itself a sexual act of incorporation. The consumption of the buttocks of boys could also be seen

\textsuperscript{7} Josselyn also identified Native Americans with Tartars, which was another common legacy. Additionally, he
says the Mohawks spoke a Turkish tongue. Using earlier European models for understanding difference, which often
used Eastern Europe as a point of reference, was common in English descriptions of Indians. Ibid., 96, 97.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10} Elliott, 17, 24.
as a subtle reference to sodomy, which, as mentioned in chapter two, was another common denigrating strategy employed in conjunction with accusations of cannibalism.

Tales of Indian cannibalism had been in circulation by the eighteenth century for quite sometime. Therefore, at least discursively, cannibalism continued to be an important force in shaping imperial attitudes towards Native people, as well as the day-day interactions of settlers in North America, even if it did not function as a primary catalyst for expansion, conquest, or conversion. English writings often took the presence of cannibalism for granted and did not heed the burden of truth. Captive Jonathan Dickinson, for example, was so certain that the Indians of Florida were cannibals that he feared consumption at every turn. Yet, as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, he found very little evidence to support this assumption.

English colonists tended to assume that these lands already belonged to them, and it was their duty to occupy North America, in spite of the people who lived there, not because of them.\(^{11}\) English motives for imperial expansion were unique, and by the eighteenth century, it cannot be said that the practice of cannibalism was one of the primary justifications for settlement in the New World. Nor was the desire to convert the heathen Indians to Christianity the most important driving force behind English colonization of North America.\(^{12}\) Rather,


\(^{12}\) Obviously, there were many sincere efforts at Indian conversion throughout the English colonies and many Englishmen and women engaged in the exchange of goods and cultural practices with the Indians. Generally, however, these efforts were less widespread and were more individually based, as opposed to the imperial support for conversion in New France and New Spain. England did not export vast numbers of missionaries and priests. The unique Protestant Christianity of England (and its many divisions), rather than the Catholicism of France and Spain, set forth a different path towards colonization and conversion. Among colonists (not necessarily the planters), who often were religious dissenters themselves, religion tended to be a more individual process in which one’s relation to God and God’s community was pre-eminent. Thus, the Puritans emphasized self-examination and the personal experience of conversion. They eschewed the hierarchies and bureaucracies that allowed the Franciscans and Jesuits to have such an enormous impact in the Americas. However, I do not want to assert that the English were unconcerned with the souls of Indians. The importance of conversion and proselytization were evident from the outset in early Virginia. The writings of Richard Hakluyt make this quite evident. See David Harris Sack’s essay, “Discourse on Western Planting: Richard Hakluyt and the Making of the Atlantic World,” in *The Atlantic World and*
especially in the case of the Puritans in New England, colonists assumed that the land. Therefore, it is important to consider the particular goals of North American English colonization (which were shaped by the lands and peoples they encountered) when determining the place of cannibalism within their accounts. There is little doubt that the English would have loved to find another Tenochtitlan. Early English entrepreneurs, like Sir Walter Raleigh, were quite interested in establishing an indigenous labor force and exploiting the natural resources of their lands, much like the Spanish. Unfortunately, for their sake, the vast majority of the lands that they were able to acquire did not contain the necessary ingredients to create another New Spain. The enormous profits obtained from the slave labor and sugar production of the Caribbean colonies rendered mainland North America a virtual frontier, whose European settlers were more often than not outcasts in their home country. Students tend to learn that Jamestown was established for farming and plantations, and while this not wholly untrue, it was clear that the Jamestown patriachs were ill prepared for farming life and were often preoccupied by the search for riches. John Smith devoted a significant amount of space in his writings to the search for gold. Even as he tried to convince others of the viability of the planter colony, he nonetheless dangled the temptation of vast riches below the surface.

The English were not uninterested in the presence of Native peoples, but unlike the Spanish, they were never able to place themselves within local power structures and form a more

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Virginia, 1550-1624 edited by Peter Mancall. Additionally, as J.H. Elliot pointed out, England’s mission was to give savages what they needed: “1. civility for their bodies. 2. Christianity for their souls.” Elliot, 11-12.


14 Elliott, 8-9; for example, the Jamestown settlers included a jeweler, two refiners, and two goldsmiths. John Smith, “The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia,” in Captain John Smith: Writings with Other Narratives of Roanoke, Jamestown, and the First English Settlement of America (New York: The Library Company of America, 2007), 59.

15 John Smith, “A Description of New-England, by Captaine John Smith,” in Captain John Smith: Writings with Other Narratives of Roanoke, Jamestown, and the First English Settlement of America (New York: The Library Company of America, 2007), 133, 145. At other times, Smith made promises of great wealth to be obtained through the sale of other agricultural and natural materials; Smith, 139.
cooperative (but still quite unequal and exploitative) system.\textsuperscript{16} Once the fabled riches failed to appear in Virginia, the focus quickly shifted to planting. In 1588, Thomas Hariot traveled to Virginia and wrote a popular account of life in the New World that was meant to correct the slanderous reports of others.\textsuperscript{17} His text emphasized the potential for agriculture and he devoted much of the work to describing the different types of plants and natural resources to be found in Virginia. His descriptions of the Indians were generally quite favorable, as his work was meant to entice new settlers and investors. He made no mention of Indian cannibalism or sacrifice, but instead focused on their potential to be civilized and brought under submission.\textsuperscript{18} Hariot’s writing was published with a series of engravings by Theodore de Bry, which were based on the drawings and watercolors of John White and detailed Indian life in Virginia.\textsuperscript{19} Together Hariot’s text and the images of de Bry presented Virginia as a relatively unspoiled landscape ripe for English intervention. Unlike the descriptions of the Caribs or the Mexica that were sent back to Europe by early explorers to attempt to inspire Spanish intervention by describing the horrors of Indian practices and the necessity of civilized intervention, Hariot’s account of Virginia tried to catalyze settlement by describing an idyllic landscape inhabited by tractable people.

In the Plymouth colony of New England, which was founded in 1620, English settlers in Northern North America were set to establish more self-sufficient and independent colonies that were distinct from their homeland.\textsuperscript{20} The Plymouth settlers certainly received help from the Natives, but they were less interested in incorporating Native peoples into their society, even in a

\textsuperscript{16} Elliott, 13-14, 16.
\textsuperscript{17} Theodore de Bry, \textit{Thomas Hariot’s Virginia.} (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1966), 5.
\textsuperscript{18} Elliott., 25-7.
\textsuperscript{19} Interestingly, engravings of Picts from Scotland were also included.
\textsuperscript{20} Other colonies like Massachusetts Bay reflected a general lack of imperial interest in the early stages of American colonization. Elliott, 27.
subordinate role, than were the Spanish. New Englanders, as it appeared in their writings, would have simply preferred the Indians to move out of their way.21

The Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony brought with them a philosophy that was epitomized by Winthrop’s famous pronouncement that Puritans should create a “city upon a hill”: a shining example of industriousness, piety, and virtue for the entire world to see. Strict rules were imposed, especially regarding women’s sexuality, and fraternization with Indians was discouraged.22 They came to the New World bearing with them an understanding of their own perfection and preeminence in the eyes of God, which could not easily be taught. While the métis and the mestizo played important roles as mediators, translators, and local leaders in both New France and New Spain, this was not as much the case in the English colonies on the mainland of North America, where such hybridization was discouraged.23

English views about physical and biological differences in this period are very difficult to encapsulate, but typically, English writers believed that variations in skin color were due to the biblical curse of Ham and/or climatic differences.24 Implicit in their understandings of racialized difference was the assumption of the superiority of white skin over black skin. John Josselyn, for example, believed that underneath the external darker skin, laid an uncorrupted skin that resembled European flesh.25 However, skin color was not the primary determinant of acceptance. Rather, civility played a much larger role in English views on Native peoples. The only appropriate sexual and marriage partners were those who were comparably civilized.26

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21 Meinig, 70.
22 Josselyn detailed the punishments meted out for certain offenses in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. For example, “an English woman suffering an Indian to have carnal knowledge of her, had an Indian cut out exactly in red cloth sewed upon her right Arm, and enjoyned to wear it twelve months.” Josselyn,137.
23 Elliott, 182-3.
24 Ibid., 78.
25 Josselyn, 143.
26 Elliott, 79.
In *American Pentimento*, Patricia Seed argued that both the English settlers and the Spanish colonists distinguished themselves from the Indians that they encountered by establishing their superiority through a hierarchical understanding of humanity (the Great Chain of Being). Each possessed an understanding of Indians as not fully human. This did not necessarily mean that Indians were perceived as inhuman, rather that behaviors, norms, and practices determined access to the benefits of the highest levels of humanity. Indeed, Indians were *human*, but they were not acceptable humans. For the Spaniards, one’s moral worth as a human was determined by religion. In order to access God’s grace and therefore the proper form of human existence, one had to practice Catholicism. For Englishmen, however, the defining characteristic of their humanity was labor. Only through farming the land and hard work could one become a “real” human. For the English, access to the land was of preeminent importance. Just as God placed minerals under the surface for deserving Spaniards, God created arable land upon which Englishmen could toil. Seed argued that these two fundamental ideas shaped the ways in which Englishmen and Spaniards interacted with the Native peoples of the Americas. In turn, both empires developed discursive tropes through which they most commonly represented and understood the Indian Other. She indicated that for the Spaniards the idea of the cannibal was that against which the Spaniards defined themselves. Through their understanding of Indians as cannibals, they justified their conquest and their desire for the exploitation of Indian labor.

Englishmen, according to Seed, defined themselves in relation to the trope of the Indian as hunter. Based on prevailing medieval traditions, hunting in England was a privilege of the rich. Owning a vast hunting preserve was an important rite of passage for English aristocrats. Respectable hunting was not for subsistence, but for sport. Those who needed to hunt to survive were denied access through the creation of private preserves and the elimination of public lands.
The noblemen who first came to the Americas understood hunting to be something other than work. Despite the fact that under English law, Indian hunting grounds would have been rightfully belonged to the Indians, Englishman represented Indian hunting as characteristic of lazy, nomadic individuals who did not understand the importance of proper labor.  

Seed argued that the processes of English and Spanish imperialism in the Americas were profoundly shaped by these two general understandings of the Indian Other. Both of these stereotypes, “the cannibal” and “the hunter,” were intensely gendered ideas. Earlier chapters discussed the ways in which Spanish ideas about New World cannibalism indicated their particular preoccupation with bellicose masculinity and Indian sexuality. The English were more preoccupied with the natural world, and hunting in particular. Indigenous hunting practices, according to Seed, challenged English conventions of both class and gender. Among Indian groups of the North American Atlantic coast, hunting was almost exclusively a male practice, which meant that farming was predominantly the realm of women. Since Englishmen valued farming and one’s relationship the soil most prominently, it greatly disturbed their sense of order to see women performing these tasks. While Seed makes a convincing argument about the importance of the idea of “the hunter” to the English empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, her assumption might lead to one to the conclusion that “the cannibal” was not important in English expansion in the Americas. Even if the discourse of cannibalism was not a obvious catalyst for English imperialism, it nonetheless continued to play an important role in developing notions of race and gender in North America. An investigation of cannibalism in English discourse about continental North America reveals the ways in which acts of

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28 Ibid., 113.
cannibalism were constructed in gendered ways, and the discourses of cannibalism were used to create and reinforce Anglo-American masculinity.

In the earliest English writings about settlement in North America, there were very few references to Indigenous cannibalism. In the large collection of writings by John Smith, for example, the members of the Powhatan confederacy were never accused of cannibalism. Smith’s writings did reveal that the early years of the Virginia colony were largely a disastrous failure. There were too many gentlemen among the first group of Jamestown settlers who expected someone else to labor for them. They anticipated receiving tribute from the Indians, just as Powhatan appeared to receive tribute from surrounding groups, and they expected to insert themselves into this hierarchical system at the top. Unlike the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan, however, the Chesapeake Indians were not so readily disposed to substitute their old master for a new one. The Spanish model of conquest and colonization was unsuited for Virginia.

The only substantive mention of cannibalism in Smith’s prolific writings, was the well-known tale of the starving Jamestown settler who killed his wife, consumed her, and was then executed for his crime. Smith’s recollections of these events were actually culled from other witnesses, as he was in England during the so-called starving time in 1608. He described a dire situation in which they had run out of food and had begun trading everything they had to “the Salvages, whose cruell fingers were so oft imbrewed in our blouds, that what by their crueltie, our Governours indiscretion, and the losse of our ships, of five hundred within six moneths after Captaine Smiths departure, there remained not past sixtie men, women and children, most

miserable and poore creatures . . .”30 Smith attributed their misfortunes in part to his own absence and the cruelty of the Indians (whose bloodlust apparently required no provocation), but primarily to the ineptitude of the governors of Jamestown. He did not blame their situation on the quality of the soil; rather it was due to English failures and Indian machinations. Although he did not accuse the Indians of being man-eaters, the language that he employed (“cruell fingers,” “imbrewed with our blouds”) reinforced his perception of their savagery. Furthermore, his descriptions of their cruelty were visceral, and he made use of a variety of bodily metaphors, but stopped short of actually accusing them of anthropophagy.

In response to the pressures of life in early Virginia, some settlers turned to cannibalism. Smith described the deplorable situation as follows:

Nay, so great was our famine, that a savage we slew and buried, the poorer sort took him up again and ate him; and so did diverse one another boiled and stewed with roots and herbs: And one among the rest did kill his wife, powdered her, and had eaten part of her before it was known; for which he was executed, as he well deserved: now whether she was better roasted, boiled or carbonadoed [broiled], I know not; but of such a dish as powdered wife I never heard of.31

Two different acts of anthropophagy were recorded here. First, the starving colonists dug up the recently buried corpse of an Indian man and ate him. The colonists had likely brought about the death of the unfortunate Indian, but had probably not done so with the express purpose of consuming him. Their act of cannibalism was merely an innovative act of survival. The man who killed his wife, on the other hand, murdered her in order to eat her. This, according to Smith, was

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30 Smith, “Generall Historie of Virginia,” 204.
31 Ibid, 205.
unforgivable. Despite the seriousness of the situation, the passage ended with a joke, making light of the act of anthropophagy and the death of the nameless wife.

English women were scarce in early Jamestown; yet, it was a woman’s body that was sacrificed and eaten during the period of starvation. As in life, her body performed the role of life-giving nurturer and provider. In each of the two acts of cannibalism recorded by Smith, the dominant white male consumed the body of a presumed inferior: an Indian and a woman. Through their deaths and cannibalization, the Indian and the nameless wife supported the dominance of the Jamestown patriarchs’ ambitions. Their consumption reinforced their inferiority. For English men to consume other English men was nearly unthinkable (but not impossible).

The vast majority of references to cannibalism in English writings occurred in captivity narratives, and they provide the richest sources of evidence. The majority of English eighteenth century captivity narratives (only a small number were published in the late seventeenth century) detailed the experiences of captives in the Northern Atlantic region and the Great Lakes, and there was a significant increase of accounts during the French and Indian War. Captivity narratives of this period tended to fall into two camps: those written by Puritans and those composed by soldiers. These types of accounts differed in a number of ways, especially regarding to whom they gave credit for their redemption. Puritan writers emphasized divine providence and reserved their harshest judgments for the character of Indians. The later narratives of soldiers were more likely to recognize personal cunning and individual effort as keys to their redemption, rather than assigning all glory to God. They also began to ponder the relationship between the settler and the wilderness, positioning themselves as a part of the landscape, rather than struggling against its maddening and corrupting influences like the famous
captive Mary Rowlandson. Often, soldiers published their accounts with profit more in mind than extolling the glories of God.⁵²

Captivity narratives provide a fertile field of investigation not only because of their pervasiveness, but also because they contained consistent themes and experiences. For example, a great number of captivity narratives opened with a scene of colonial domestic tranquility that was suddenly disrupted by a seemingly unprompted attack. Home and family were dissolved as Indians destroyed buildings and broke up families. In almost every captivity narrative, the author endured long periods of starvation and grueling marches through unfamiliar wilderness. Finally, most narratives contained a tale of redemption and the restoration of domesticity.

Published in Philadelphia in 1699, Jonathan Dickinson’s narrative of his captivity amongst several different groups of Indians in Florida was a lurid tale of shipwreck, kidnapping, and redemption. In some ways it was not a typical late seventeenth or early eighteenth century captivity account, but it contained many similar themes to other writings of this genre, including cannibalism. Dickinson’s tale interlaced elements of the captivity narrative, with a tale of rescue that was infused with Quaker religious sentiment. In 1696, Dickinson left his wealthy plantation in Jamaica to move to Philadelphia with his family. The ship on which they were traveling wrecked on the eastern shore of Florida on Jupiter Island and soon they were discovered by the Jaega Indians of the nearby town of Jobe (referred to by Dickinson as Hoe-Bay). On board the ship were a motley group of sailors, slaves, and other passengers, including the Dicksons, their kinsman Benjamin Allen, and the prominent Quaker elder Robert Barrow. The majority of the drama unfolded on their journey northwards towards redemption at the hands of the Spanish at St. Augustine. Rather than captors, the Indians seemed to play the role of hostile escort.

Right from the start, Dickinson made his views on Native Americans quite clear. His preface was full of references to their “fury,” “savagery,” and “cruelty.” Furthermore, he emphasized their status as cannibals, writing, “Yet are these Man-eaters as cowardly as cruel.”

Referring to his companion Robert Barrow, he noted that, “He was more than a Conquerour over those bloodthirsty Canibals.” Barrow’s virtue and piety were important features of the narrative. He provided the voice of godly reason and confidence. Dickinson recorded Barrow’s words of wisdom and advice, stating, “that he desired of the Lord, that he might not dye by the hands of those Barbarians; For (said he) They thirsted, or longed as much after our flesh, as ever I did after Victualls.”

In the preface, Dickinson established not only his ignorance of Native practices and beliefs, but more importantly, his stubborn refusal to understand more. Before being shipwrecked in Florida, Dickinson knew that it was populated by ferocious man-eating Indians and he confirmed this by observing that, “their Countenance was very Furious and Bloody.” He needed no other evidence than a visual affirmation of their barbarity.

Dickinson’s account was given the sensationalized title: Gods protecting providence, man’s surest help and defence in the times Of the greatest difficulty and most Imminent danger; Evidenced in the Remarkable Deliverance Of divers Persons, From the devouring Waves of the Sea, amongst which they Suffered Shipwrack And also From the more cruelly devouring jawes of the inhumane Canibals of Florida. Faithfully related by one of the persons concerned therein; Jonathan Dickenson. Despite its provocative title (which was likely the creation of the publisher, not the author), no act of cannibalism actually occurred in the narrative.

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34 Dickinson, preface 5. (Emphasis in original).
36 Ibid., 5.
37 The original capitalization and spelling have been maintained throughout.
towards St. Augustine, Dickinson and his group were quartered in a town where the Spaniards informed them that not twelve months ago a group of Dutchman were cast upon these shores “and were here devoured by these Cannaballs.”

Despite this vague reference to an occurrence of cannibalism, Dickinson wove accusations of it throughout his narrative. Even when not directly mentioning anthropophagy, Dickinson littered his account with metaphors of consumption. Although he often excluded himself from feeling fear when he described the acts of the Indians (though he did not hesitate to say that others were afraid), he mentioned that they quite often worried that the Indians would eat them. Dickinson was consistently mistrustful of these “cannibal” Indians. At one point, his captors went fishing and despite the fact that this might have meant a full meal for the captives, he remarked, “but the sense of our Conditions stayed our hungry stomicks: for some amongst us thought they would feed us to feed themselves.”

Dickinson’s assumption that the Indians were cannibals led him to assume that they could not be trusted. However, even the constant fear of being eaten by his captors (who did very little physical harm to them, when compared to the experiences of captives further north) did not prevent him from mistrusting their tales of the cannibalistic practices of other groups. The Englishmen wanted to travel north towards the Spanish, but the cacique (called Casseekey by Dickinson) strongly warned against this. The cacique informed them that although Spanish controlled towns were not far, “that when we came there, we should have our Throats and scalps cutt, and be shott, Burnt, and Eaten.”

Dickinson did not trust the motives of the Indians and thought that they were simply trying to steer him from his course. This seemed to function as a reverse of the “neighboring device” discussed in chapter one. The Arawaks that Columbus first

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38 Ibid., 60.
39 Ibid., 14.
40 Ibid., 10.
encountered in the Caribbean often accused their neighbors of cannibalism as a way of diverting attention away from themselves and getting the Europeans to attack their enemies and befriend them. In this case, Dickinson believed that the Jaegas were calling out the anthropophagic practices of other groups in order to keep their captives from leaving. Dickinson’s lack of faith in the accusations of cannibalism in the Spanish controlled region are curious; why was it that he unquestioningly, and without evidence, believed that the Indians of Jobe practiced cannibalism, yet he did not believe the advice of the cacique? Perhaps, Dickinson believed that anthropophagy was not likely to be practiced in regions where the European presence was stronger. Despite his relatively low opinion of Spaniards (which changed slightly after the hospitality he was shown at their hands), his narrative suggested that he believed that a strong European presence of any kind might curb Indian anthropophagic desires.

A noteworthy feature of Dickinson’s narrative was the presence of a breast-feeding woman. His wife, Mary, was nursing their young child while they were held captive, but the hardships and starvation to which they were exposed prevented her from being able to provide adequately for her child. An Indian woman served as wet-nurse, much to Mary Dickinson’s dismay. Breastfeeding and cannibalism were interconnected in medieval and early modern discourse in a number of ways. Notably, both were conceived of as acts of incorporation. Suckling babies were believed to do more than simply receive nutrients from their mothers, they also absorbed culture. Women’s bodies were associated with food, as through their breasts they provided the most basic elements necessary for human survival. In medieval writings, breastfeeding was considered a two-way relationship in which both mother and child received nourishment from the act. This nourishing relationship was both feared and admired. Witches

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were believed to have a supernumerary nipple through which they provided sustenance, usually blood, to their familiars.\textsuperscript{42} Thus, the presence of breast-feeding in captivity narratives highlighted another way in which the discourse of cannibalism permeated a variety of relationships, including those between colonist and Indian, and men and women. It speaks to the pervasive fear of consumption by savagery, whether through literal consumption or the metaphoric cannibalistic link between mother and child.

For Dickinson’s wife Mary to allow a “savage, cannibalistic” Indian woman to breast-feed her child was to allow for the potential of contamination. The “savagery” of the Indian woman might literally pass into the child through the breast milk. However, as the Dickinsons continued to endure enormous hardships and periods of starvation on their journey, Mary was forced to beg Indian women to feed her child. She was intermittently able to breast feed throughout their journey and did suckle an Indian woman’s child, risking contamination herself.

Both Mary and Jonathan Dickinson expressed great fear that their child would become a “savage” Indian.\textsuperscript{43} Dickinson feared incorporation by the Indians, both bodily and culturally. His presumption of the presence of cannibalism among the Florida Indians led him to question their motives and remain constantly fearful of being consumed by their “man-eating fury.”

Dickinson’s account of his captivity in Florida highlighted a number of important aspects about English colonial discourse on cannibalism. First and foremost, Dickinson already presumed to know the nature of the Indians that he encountered and did not need to locate empirical evidence to back up his claims. This trend went all the way back to Columbus who was

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\textsuperscript{42} Price, 26ff, 60ff. For a discussion of the continuation of this trope in colonial New England see Carol Karlsen, \textit{The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England} (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1998).

\textsuperscript{43} “To be devoured or swallowed up is to be incorporated within an Other, transformed into an Other. This possibility, horrifying as it was, did not constitute Jonathan and Mary Dickinson’s ultimate nightmare. They were most fearful for their six-month-old son—not so much that he would be physically devoured by their captors but that he would live to become one of them.” Pauline Turner Strong, \textit{Captive Selves, Captivating Others: the Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives} (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 156.
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well aware what he would find in the New World before he set out.\textsuperscript{44} English settlers in North America were already attentive to the Indians’ presumed propensity for man-eating and thus a great number of captives, including Dickinson, expressed fear of cannibalism without any indication of its presence. Furthermore, Dickinson’s publisher was well aware of the power of employing the term cannibal in the title in order to turn a profit. It is likely that Dickinson did not write his account for public view, but that a group of Quakers in Philadelphia urged publication.\textsuperscript{45} His journal went through fifteen reprints by 1869, including Dutch and German editions.\textsuperscript{46} Perhaps even mentioning cannibalism in the title, with no actual occurrences within, was an attractive prospect to a seventeenth or eighteenth century publisher. Narratives of horrific cruelties, of which cannibalism was perceived as the ultimate sign of savagery and cruelty, were incredibly popular in early English America. In fact, Dickinson’s piece, along with those of Mary Rowlandson, John Williams and Mary Jemison, were among the best sellers of early English publications about North America.\textsuperscript{47}

The idea of providence played a key role in Dickenson’s narrative. After they crashed on the beach, they came face-to-face with people whom they assumed to be ferocious, cannibalistic savages. Dickinson commented on the ferocity of their captors and that they seemed poised to attack the shipwrecked Europeans. He remarked, “But on a sudden it pleased the Lord to Work Wonderfully for our preservation, and instantly all these savage men were struck dumb, and like men amazed the space of a Quarter of an Hour, in which time their countenances Fell, and they looked like another people.”\textsuperscript{48} Dickinson believed that through the providence of God, the once

\textsuperscript{44} Todorov, \textit{The Conquest of America}, 17.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{47} Vaughn, \textit{Narratives of North American Captivity}, xi.
\textsuperscript{48} Dickinson, 7.
“bloody minded Creatures” were rendered benign.⁴⁹ During the transformation, the design of the Indians changed as well as their outward appearance. Dickinson believed that savagery was often visible through dress, comportment, and facial expression. He remarked a number of times on his journey about the “Wild Furious Countenance[s]” of the Indians that he encountered. For Dickinson, the outward manifestation of internal savagery could be changed by the grace of God.⁵⁰ Throughout his narrative, he remained ambivalent as to whether or not God had actually intervened and brought the Indians closer towards Christianity and thus civilization, but he nonetheless put a great deal of stock in the power of God to protect and redeem true believers. Thus, his focus was on English settlement, not on the conversion and civilization of the Indians.

This theme of redemption through divine providence was quite common in captivity accounts. Unlike the Jesuit priests who sought redemption through service, sacrifice, and sometimes martyrdom, Puritan men and women believed that their redemption could come spontaneously through God’s grace. God was believed to intervene actively in the lives of Puritans in New England, and in their narratives of Indian captivity, writers often remarked upon the ways in which God helped them to survive and overcome the horrors of captivity. The belief that through God’s divine grace English people could triumph over the wilderness and its inhabitants helped to bolster their sense of superiority. Whereas the Jesuits desired martyrdom, the Puritans desired redemption and deliverance from captivity, which was seen as evidence of God’s favor. The ability to persevere in what English colonists believed was a hostile environment peopled by savages indicated the existence of divine providence. In Regeneration through Violence, Richard Slotkin argued that a central theme of the captivity narrative was the redemption of a chaste individual from the temptations of Indian “savagery.” He wrote, “In the

⁴⁹ Ibid.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.
Indian’s devilish clutches, the captive had to meet and reject the temptation of Indian marriage and/or the Indian's ‘cannibal’ Eucharist. To partake of the Indian's love or of his equivalent of bread and wine was to debase, to un-English the very soul.”

Thus, the experience of captivity was akin to Satan’s testing of Jesus in the desert: one had to make it through a series of hardships that were meant to test the soul and break the spirit in order to prove one’s spiritual worth. If one survived intact and did not succumb to the allure of savagery, then the soul was cleansed and God’s favor was assured. In many captivity narratives, cannibalism represented one of these key trials that English men and women had to face.

Prominent minister and avowed believer in Puritan superiority Cotton Mather wrote about redemption from captivity through God’s providence. In the collection of tales of redemption entitled *Good Fetch’d out of Evil*, Mather interpreted several different narratives. He wrote:

> A crue of Indians had been Three Days without any manner of sustenance. They took an English Child, and hung it before the Fire to rost it for their Supper; but that those *Cannibals* might Satiate their ----- I want a name for it, ----as well as their hunger, they would Roast it *Alive*. The Child began to Swell. A Canoe arrived at that Instant with a *Dog* in it. The *Lesser Devills* of the Crue, proposed their taking the *Dog* instead of the *Child*; They did so; And the Child is yet Living! Her name is, *Hannah Parsons*.52

While Mather might not name it as such in the above passage, it was clear in this context that he believed that God was directly responsible for the salvation of little Hannah Parsons. Rather than allowing the death of an innocent English girl, God sent a dog to act in her stead, echoing the story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac. God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son, a

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51 Slotkin, 94.
request that he unquestioningly abided. However, as soon as Abraham’s sincerity was proved, God sent a ram to sacrifice in Isaac’s stead. Mather’s allusions to the famous biblical tale of redemption would likely not have been lost on his readers and would have reminded each of them that through sacrifice they could be redeemed by God’s mercy. The lands and Indigenous peoples of the Americas were perceived as a test of the devotion of the faithful. By overcoming temptations and dangers of America, Puritan settlers could triumph and be blessed.

Mather acknowledged that there existed grades of savagery. For example, he referred to the Natives who set Parsons free as “lesser devils.” However, lesser devils were still savage, especially considering that dogs were believed to be an unacceptable food source for civilized peoples. Mather admitted to being without the words to express properly the vicious, cannibalistic appetites of the Indians; he believed that it was more than mere hunger that motivated their actions. By roasting the child alive, Mather indicated that they were also satiating a cruel blood lust. The presumption of the innocence of children heightened the horror that the reader was meant to experience and the outrage at the actions of Indians.

God’s intervention assured that Hannah Parsons survived, and it temporarily stayed the hand of her executioners, but interestingly, Mather did not indicate that this intervention had any lasting impact upon the presumed savage nature of the Indians. This pattern was repeated in several other narratives. For Elizabeth Hanson, who was taken captive near Dover Township on August 27, 1724, and redeemed six months later by her husband after spending five months with Indians and one month with the French, faith in providence helped her to survive a strenuous captivity and the threat of cannibalism. Hanson was captured with her child and together they had to endure a long march through the wilderness. Her nameless child was quite sick at first but was soon on the mend. The child’s recovery brought Hanson little comfort as her master taunted
her with threats, indicating that recuperation portended cannibalization. Her Indian master even made her locate a stick upon which the child would be roasted. Hanson was forced to undress her child so that her master could examine it. Then:

he began to feel its arms, legs, and thighs; and having passed this examination upon it, he informed me, that as it was not yet fat enough, I must dress it again, till it was in better case. But notwithstanding he thus acted, I could persuade myself he was in earnest, but that he did it with a view to afflict and aggravate me: neither could I think but that our lives would be preserved from his barbarous hands, by the over-ruling power of Him, in whose Providence I put my trust both night and day. \(^{53}\)

Hanson believed that only through faith could she endure the trials of captivity. Her acknowledgement that her master was taunting her and even that he may not have been sincere in his threats did little to bring her comfort. In her narrative, just as in Mather’s account of the redemption of Hannah Parsons and in Dickinson’s report, captives seemed to live under constant threat of cannibalization. By representing cannibalism in such a way, Mather, Hanson, and Dickinson reinforced the power of God over their destinies, but not over the souls of Indians.

Cannibalism served as a profound metaphor for the threat of incorporation into savagery. The fact that in the accounts of Mather and Hanson, the threats were directed at children reinforced the vulnerability of the young and the importance of constant vigilance against the possibility of descent into savagery and wildness. Whether or not Hanson’s master actually intended to consume her child or merely threatened to do so as psychological torture, is less

\(^{53}\) Elizabeth Hanson, “An Account of the Captivity of Elizabeth Hanson, Now or Late of Kachecky, in New England: Who, with Four of her Children and Servant-Maid, was taken captive by the Indians, and carried into Canada. Setting forth The various remarkable Occurrences, sore Trials, and wonderful Deliverances which befell them after their Departure, to the Time of their Redemption. Taken in Substance from her own Mouth, by Samuel Bownas,” in Held Captive by Indians: Selected Narratives, 1642-1836 Revised Edition, edited by Richard VanDerBeets (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 143.
important in the context of this chapter than the fact that by facing savage cannibals and surviving, Hanson’s story served as a symbol of the redemptive power of English civilization and Puritanism.

Briton Hammon and Henry Grace, both of whom wrote about their captivities and redemptions, also experienced moments of divine grace. Hammon’s captors threatened him with death and consumption, “[b]ut the Providence of God order’d it otherways . . .”. Henry Grace, on the other hand, was redeemed twice from the jaws of cannibals. The first time he feared that his captor would consume him for want of food, but just like in the tale of Hannah Parsons, the Natives chose to kill and consume dogs instead. The second time, it was another tribe, the Cherokee, who prevented him from being consumed by his captors. The common thread in all of these tales of redemption from cannibalism, or the threat of cannibalism, was that redemption was only possible through the intervention of God, and that through God’s providence, English men and women could prove their superiority over the lands and peoples of North America. In these narratives, cannibalism served the specific purpose of representing the fear of the descent into savagery through incorporation into the Other. The ability to overcome it reinforced English identity and ultimately enabled English men in later writings to assert their masculine power over the wilderness and its inhabitants.

Even in captivity narratives that did not directly describe incidents of man-eating, the influence of the discourse of cannibalism is still evident. In the popular account of his captivity,

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56 Grace, 43.
John Williams did not record any anthropophagic incidents, nor did he write much about the torture of captives. Even though he indicated that many were killed along their forced march to Canada, mostly women who were unable to keep up, he did not come upon the prolific scenes of torture and cruelty that many other captivity writers recorded. He was not brought to an Indian village and forced to run the gauntlet, nor did he record a formal adoption ceremony.\textsuperscript{57} In addition, unlike most captives, he did not experience long periods of starvation.\textsuperscript{58} The vast majority of Williams’s account was taken up by his defense of Protestantism to his Jesuit masters. The only torture that was detailed in his account happened at the hands of French Catholics who tried to force stubborn English captives to convert. However, despite the lack of ethnographic detail, his account was nonetheless quite telling. When he described the initial attack on Deerfield in 1704 where he was captured, he wrote that they were attacked by both “Indians and Macquas.”\textsuperscript{59} Interestingly, the word Macquas was an English transliteration of an Algonquian word for man-eater. Although this term specifically referred to the Mohawk, in Williams’s narrative it was unevenly applied and used to refer to members of either the Huron or Mohawk tribes.\textsuperscript{60} While it was not particularly remarkable that Williams would refer to the Mohawk as the Macquas, it was more remarkable that he divided Native Americans into two categories: Indian and Macquas, which was reminiscent of the distinction drawn by Michele da Cuneo from chapter one. Cuneo wrote that the Caribbean was inhabited by both Indians and Cannibals, thus separating them into two distinct categories. Williams did not draw nearly as sharp of a distinction about appearance, intelligence, or civility as Cuneo did, but he underscored

\textsuperscript{58} Williams, 23.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 12.
a lasting assumption about cannibalism in the Americas: that there were two distinct types of people, one of whom considered man-eating a normal practice, the other who abhorred it. The reputation of the Mohawk as man-eaters most likely came about as an epithet lodged by their enemies. Calling another group cannibalistic persisted as an insult and continued to imply barbarity, viciousness, and brutishness.

In 1634, English ethnographer William Wood wrote a tidy summary of the view that colonists held about the Mohawk in early New England.

These [Mohawks] are a cruel bloody people which were wont to come down upon their poor neighbors with more than brutish savageness, spoiling their corn, burning their houses, slaying men, ravishing women; yea very cannibals they were, sometimes eating on a man, one part after another, before his face and while yet living, in so much that the very name of a Mohawk would strike the heart of a poor Aberginian dead, were there not hopes at hand of relief from the English to succor them. . . . that which they most hunt after is the flesh of man; their custom is if they get a stranger near their habitations not to butcher him immediately, but keeping him in as good plight as they can, feeding him with the best victuals they have. As a near-neighboring Indian assured me . . . a rough-hewn satyr cutteth a gobbit of flesh from his brawny arm, eating it in his view . . .

Wood’s assertion that a neighboring Indian told him of the horrific cannibalistic practices of the Mohawk should come as no great surprise. This pattern reoccurred throughout North America. Accusations of cannibalism (and thus all its implied savagery) were lodged at rival groups in order to cement the friendship between Europeans and a particular tribe. This dynamic took on a unique character for English settlers, as the accused cannibals were quite literally their

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(unwelcome) neighbors. In order to maintain an English presence in the New World it was necessary to disavow a connection to the Indians, even as they relied on them as allies and trading partners. This complex relationship rested upon a lack of mutual understanding of cultural practices. In order for the English to maintain their sense of superiority and their “rightful” claim to the land, it was necessary to denigrate their enemies, which was a common practice throughout North America. The trope of cannibalism continued to function in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a justification for certain actions against a perceived enemy, even if it often went unspoken.

Starvation was another common theme in early captivity narratives, as almost all captives were forced to endure long periods of extreme deprivation. While they lamented their unfortunate circumstances, however, few were willing to equate their suffering with the often equivalent circumstances endured by their Indian masters. In fact, captive Isaac Hollister remarked that several of the Seneca Indians with whom he was traveling died of starvation on their journey. Captivity writers established a hierarchy of suffering in which the trials that they endured were always more awful than those suffered by the Indians. Often, this was because Puritan writers tended to see suffering as a necessary condition of human life. More importantly, however, their suffering could be relieved by Divine Providence, which was not afforded to the savage Indians. For Puritan writers like Mary Rowlandson, the suffering that she endured during her captivity was part of God’s divine plan, and from these sufferings, she could renew her faith and revel in the power of redemption. She presented the long periods of starvation and marching

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62 Thomas Abler, “Scalping, Torture, Cannibalism and Rape: an Ethnohistorical Analysis of Conflicting Cultural Values in War,” *Anthropologica* vol. 34 (1992): 4. Abler wrote, “... one hears cries of atrocity and ‘barbaric’ activity because societies justify their wars by citing the deviant behaviour of the enemy. One is justified in killing and maiming someone who is less human than oneself, so typically enemy violations of a common code will receive wide publicity while the violation made by one’s own forces will be denied or excused and justified as ‘retaliation.’”

through the frigid wilderness as natural to those who lead a savage existence. No captivity writer expressed a modern day understanding of cultural relativism or a nuanced understanding of the changes wrought by European contact. These men and women were not able to recognize that the particular circumstances which led to their captivity, starvation, and suffering, were, at least in part, of their own doing.

Dire circumstances occasionally drove Englishmen to cannibalism, and several eighteenth century captivity narratives included passages about these desperate acts. Thirteen-year-old Isaac Hollister was taken captive on the banks of the Susquehanna River on October 15, 1763. After several months of captivity, he and a fellow captive decided to make their escape. His companion, a Dutchman, convinced him that they should leave as soon as possible, even though it was still quite cold outside. The two wandered around the woods and eventually ran out of food. At one point, they survived on tree bark alone for ten days. When the unfortunate Dutchman could go no further, Hollister sat with him and offered comfort, but there was little to be had. Shortly before his death, the Dutchman told him “that if he died first, he would not have me afraid to eat of his flesh, for I am determin’d, says he, to eat of yours, if you should die before me.” Rather than balking at this suggestion, Hollister took his words to heart. He wrote,


65 Archaeological evidence indicates that the Iroquois began consolidating and fortifying their villages around 1525, yet it is not until the arrival of substantial numbers of European settlers in North America that there is any substantive evidence of the practice of cannibalism. As was discussed in Chapter Three, cannibalism amongst Iroquois and Algonquian speaking peoples of North America may have developed as a coping strategy, an element of the middle ground. These groups were confronted with unprecedented unrest and violence, and thus reacted to it in kind. The recognition of adaptive strategies, on the part of either group, was less likely to be acknowledged or given credence to by English settlers. Puritans in particular were unwilling to change their ways in order to adapt to new circumstances; rather, they attempted to bend their new homeland to their will. James W. Bradley, The Evolution of the Onondaga Iroquois: Accommodating Change, 1500-1655 (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 34-37, 54; Dean Snow, The Iroquois (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 53.

66 Hollister, 2.
67 Ibid., 2-5.
68 Ibid., 5.
And now I was left all alone, stript of every comfort of life, and knew not which way to turn myself. I thought the absolute necessity I was in, would excuse my pursuing the advice he gave me of eating his flesh as soon as dead: I went immediately about performing the disagreeable operation and cut off 5 or 6 pounds of his legs and thighs:—I left the rest, and made the best way I could down the Creek.  

After cutting apart his companion, Hollister resumed his wanderings and eventually arrived at an Indian town where he was promptly returned to his master. He then spent a year living with the Seneca. In his attempt to escape the “savagery” of his captors, Hollister turned to cannibalism, subverting the long-standing connection between cannibalism and savagery. His attempt to return to civilization led to his temporary descent into savagery. Hollister’s survival rested upon the consumption of his Dutch companion, just as English successes in the New World insisted upon the sacrifice of both Indian and European competitors. By resorting to the savagery of cannibalism (at the urging of the Dutchman) Hollister symbolically enacted the triumph of English imperial claims in North America and was a reminder that English people would do whatever was necessary to maintain their god-given right to the New World. Rather than representing weakness, his desperate acts proved his resourcefulness and reinforced the preeminence of masculine English power. The nature of English imperial power in eighteenth century North America insisted upon the domination of the wilderness; while individuals like Hollister might have been faced with the possibility of succumbing to wildness, their ingenuity and masculine prowess allowed them to triumph over savagery.

Another captive, Thomas Brown, whose scouting patrol was captured by Indians near Montreal during the Seven Years War in 1759, was also driven to cannibalism. After his capture

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 5-7.
and imprisonment in Montreal, Brown and an English companion escaped and marched towards Crown Point for twenty-two days, fifteen of which they were without food. Finally, Brown’s companion gave out and died. Brown’s desperation led him to cut the flesh from his friends’ bones and wrap it in a handkerchief. After burying his unfortunate companion, he continued on his journey. The next day he obtained three frogs to eat but this did not sate his hunger. Brown described his trepidation at eating human flesh. He wrote:

Being weak and tired, about 9 o’clock I sat down; but could not eat my Friend’s Flesh. I expected to die myself; and while I was commending my Soul to God, I saw a partridge light just by me, which I tho’t was sent by Providence; I was so weak, that I could not hold out my Gun; but by resting, I bro’t my Piece to bear so that I kill’d the Partridge.

While I was eating of it, there came two Pigeons, so near that I kill’d them both

Brown claimed not to have actually consumed human flesh, but to have merely been tempted to do so. Instead, he was divinely redeemed and able to kill birds rather than become a cannibal, another instance of redemption through divine providence. It seems unlikely that after weeks of starvation and being driven to carve up his companion, food would suddenly become so readily available, but this discursive turn of events reinforced God’s ability to triumph over savagery.

That Hollister and Brown were willing to include these rather unpleasant affairs in their published narratives speaks to an important shift in the discursive representation of cannibalism. Writing nearly a century earlier in 1574, French explorer and writer, Jean de Léry believed that acts of starvation cannibalism were worse than the kind of ritualized anthropophagic practices of the infamous Tupinambá of Brazil. Léry was horrified and sickened (which he never claims to be

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72 Ibid., 21.
among the Tupinambá) by a family who consumed their child rather than starve during a siege of
the town of Sancerre in 1573. He blamed an old woman in the household for instigating the
cannibalism and believed that being condemned to burn alive was not a harsh enough
punishment for her crimes.  

Literary scholar, Frank Lestringant argued that the religious
significance of cannibalism among the Tupinamba set their actions above those of the starving
residents of Sancerre. Human eating which was driven by desperation and not faith (even if such
faith was misplaced) was inexcusable.  

Léry’s understanding of famine cannibalism was more
complicated than simply holding Christian Europeans to a higher moral standard. It was also
decidedly misogynist. He believed that from the beginning of time, the tempter was always
female. Thus, starvation cannibalism was feminized and demonized by Léry, representing
weakness of character and lack of moral fortitude.

The narratives of Hollister and Brown offered a justification of cannibalism that
emphasized the importance of strength and self-reliance to survival, rather than presenting
accounts of horrific exploitation at the hands of tempting women. Portending the great masculine
frontier heroes of the nineteenth century, Hollister and Brown represented themselves as
survivalists who had been driven to commit atrocious acts by their encounter with savagery, but
did so only in hopes of redemption through the return to civilization. Acts of cannibalism in
these narratives appeared as unfortunate consequences of life in the wilderness, but
simultaneously demonstrated the inevitable triumph of civilization through its resourcefulness
and endurance. Much had changed since Léry’s incendiary remarks. The English settlers had

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73 Frank Lestringant, Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 75.
74 Ibid., 77.
75 Lestringant wrote, “[the] economy of vengeance cannibalism seemed to be essentially masculine . . . women
had only walk-on parts, or so Léry would have us believe. They [women] dragged the ritual down to a lower level,
towards the flesh and purely animal appetites, whereas the haughty speech of the prisoner, defying his vanquisher on
the brink of death, raised it to a symbolic level.” Ibid., 77-78.
begun to foster an understanding of themselves as part of the wilderness, and to accept that the wilderness could drive an individual to commit acts which defied the very fabric of civilization.

Despite the existence of the accounts of Hollister and Brown, historian Peter Way argued that during the Seven Years War, English soldiers participated in an act of cannibalism only once in January of 1752. This incident can be distinguished from the anthropophagus acts of Hollister and Brown, who only resorted to acts of cannibalism alone in the wilderness, far away from the discipline of military life. Way related that after a mutiny at Oswego, NY, a group of soldiers abandoned their posts and headed for New France. When their provisions ran out, they turned to one another and consumed four or five individuals. These soldiers symbolically abandoned their Englishness as they headed towards French territory and engaged in cannibalism. Unlike Hollister and Brown, the cannibalism of these soldiers did not represent the ingenuity of an individual on a quest for survival. Rather, the soldiers were cowards who shirked their duties and tried to escape to the enemy. In doing so, they succumbed to savagery.

Scholars like Ann Little have put forth the idea that the Seven Years War itself was a moment of crisis and re-articulation for Anglo-American masculinity. The years leading up to the War reflected a change from Indian to French threats against English power and dominance in the Northeastern United States. Thus, the already gendered arena of war also involved virulent anti-Catholicism; both French and Indian societies were believed by the English to be led by inadequate patriarchs who brought their people towards poverty and degradation, rather than civilization and growth. The ways in which English writers represented the French in the years

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77 Ibid.
bracketing the Seven Years War were quite reminiscent of their descriptions of Native peoples.\textsuperscript{78} Thus, the descriptions of cannibalism also reflected this shift and more French people were accused of participating in this savage act.

In some cases, English writers did not directly accuse the French of anthropophagous acts, but instead upbraided them for sanctioning Indian cruelties. John Maylem’s “Gallic Perfidy: A Poem,” contains a detailed description of “Savage Furies” and “fell Canadian Rage” which were expressed though acts of cannibalism and cruelty.\textsuperscript{79} The title of the poem itself was an indictment of French disloyalty and treachery. By allowing such cruelties to be performed on English citizens, the French were just as guilty as their Indian allies were. Maylem also mentioned that English responses to Gallic perfidy involved “the Mother’s Shrieks, and the Father’s manlier grief.”\textsuperscript{80} This poem not only asserted English superiority, but also emphasized the importance of gendered responses to threats to imperial power. Outpourings of manly grief helped to solidify community identity and foster hatred and distrust for outsiders.\textsuperscript{81}

In some cases, it was not just the French who were indicted for these actions, but all members of the Catholic Faith.\textsuperscript{82} For example, Cotton Mather wrote, “on this side they saw their Wives and Children, their Fathers, Mothers, etc. butchered daily by a Handful of Barbarous Indians; on t’other side, little or no resistance made by their armies which Commanded by those of the Romish Religion; insomuch that it seem’d rather an intended Massacre, than a desire of

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 10.
putting an End to a Diabolick and Bloody War.”

Other captives, like John Gyles, exhibited great fear of corruption by Catholics. When a Jesuit gave him a biscuit, he buried it rather than ate it because he feared that it contained a potion that would trick him into believing in Catholicism. As he was only a young child at the time, he took reports of Jesuit torture of Protestants very seriously. He was not alone in his hatred of Jesuits, for his mother remarked upon hearing that he was to be sold to them, “Oh, my dear child, if it were God’s will, I had rather follow you to your grave, or never see you more in this world, that you should be sold to a Jesuit, for a Jesuit will ruin you, body and soul!”

Her pathological hatred for the Jesuits may be difficult for many modern readers to comprehend, but the contest for imperial dominance in the Americas involved very exclusionary understandings of the right to rule. Englishmen, and therefore the English empire, solidified their power by strongly asserting communal standards and demonstrating the superiority of their moral character, for moral superiority translated into power for many Englishmen.

John Norton, who was captured during King George’s War in 1746, recorded an incident in which French and Indian soldiers consumed human flesh. He wrote:

After some Time the Indians seemed to be in a Ruffle; and presently rushed up in the Watchbox, brought down the dead Corpse, carried it out of the Fort, scalped it, and cut off the Head and Arms. A young Frenchman took one of the arms and flayed it, roasted the Flesh and offered some of it to Daniel Smeed, one of the prisoners, to eat, but he

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refused it. The Frenchman dressed the Skin of the Arm (as I afterwards heard) and made a Tobacco pouch of it.\textsuperscript{85}

In this passage, Norton underscored the important differences between Englishmen and French and Indian soldiers, as he perceived them. The Frenchman’s willingness to participate in the cannibal ritual of the Indians symbolically and tangibly connected him with savagery. The refusal of the English prisoner, Daniel Smeed, to consume flesh, on the other hand, set him above his captors. Norton further emphasized that this was not a desperate act of starvation by the young Frenchman as he carried around a tobacco pouch made out of his prey. English captives, like Norton, feared falling victim not just to the cannibal kettle of their Indian enemies, but they also feared descending into savagery by identifying too closely with American Indians. It was necessary for Norton to see himself as completely separate from the French and Indians who took him captive in order to maintain his own sense of English superiority and in order to assure that his masculinity was not corrupted. In Norton’s narrative, God’s providence ensured that the English would be delivered from the hands of savages, heathens, and Catholics.

In \textit{Making Manhood}, Anne Lombard argued that examinations of gender must include not just an understanding of the ways in which gender categories related to power by legitimating various forms of oppression and domination, but also an inquiry into the ways in which gender helped to shape relationships between individuals and groups.\textsuperscript{86} Furthermore, Lombard argued that for English colonists, “[t]he source of manhood, then, was not inside the individuals but without, in the attribution of virtues that signified a community’s agreement that


\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 10.

a man had fulfilled its expectations for the male role. Manliness was not innate. Rather, it was something that was earned through demonstration of culturally determined morality. The ways in which English colonists, especially Puritan ones, understood manhood reinforced the importance of community. While this model was quite different from the rugged individual frontier model of masculinity of the nineteenth century, it paved the way and opened up space for the frontier hero to emerge. The act of cannibalism posed a sincere threat to masculine imperial power in North America, and in order to deal with its threat to both the community and the individual, English writers negotiated their sense of self-identity in relation to competing groups. Thus, anyone who posed a threat to English dominion in North America risked being called a cannibal. In doing so, English men were able to rearticulate and reassert their masculine dominance of the American landscape and its people.

Ibid., 9.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

In each of the specific imperial and geographic contexts explored in the preceding chapters, the discourse of cannibalism played an important part in the establishment and maintenance of imperial power. Furthermore, the discourse of cannibalism was gendered in each situation. Imperial power is always gendered and cannot be adequately understood without an acknowledgment of this component. Following this then, although the nature of imperial power changed according to temporal, geographic, imperial, and cultural circumstances, what remained consistent about the discourse of cannibalism was the ways in which Europeans connected cannibalism with savagery and that the power of the binary construction of civilization and savagery insisted upon a gendered hierarchy that privileged masculinity over femininity.

European settlers, conquerors, missionaries, and explorers in the Americas constructed their encounters with Native peoples in terms that cast Natives as savage and Europeans as civilized. The construction of the idea of civilization rested upon the assumption of superiority. In order to establish and maintain their notion of their own superiority, Europeans consistently accused Indians of practices that they felt were at odds with civilization. Chief among these was cannibalism. However, these accusations of cannibalism cannot be separated from the gendered assumptions that always accompanied them. The descriptions of the earliest encounters in the Caribbean indicated that the participation of women in presumed acts of cannibalism elicited a specific fear from the male explorers. The fear of women whose appetites, both sexual and gastronomic, seemed out of order demonstrated the fragile nature of European masculine power. In the context of the conquest of Mexico, however, Cortés was much more confident than his predecessors in the Caribbean. The establishment of the Spanish empire in the Caribbean
allowed him to draw from an existing base of power and to use the dictates of the Spanish empire and Spanish cultural norms to construct himself as a virile masculine hero who had come to liberate the Maya from the tyranny of the savage, cannibalistic Aztecs. Furthermore, the formation of power in the Yucatán and the justification for his entire enterprise rested upon the assumption that the disordered practices of Indians needed to be corrected, through violence if necessary. Cortés thus fought his battle on two fronts, the battlefield and the body. Rather than fearing the appetites of anthropophagous savage women, he used his power to dominate and incorporate them, thereby undermining Native understandings of gender and sexuality and replacing them with a kind of imperialist patriarchy.

In the discussion of the French Jesuit missionaries in what is now Canada the ways in which their work supported an affirmation of their own masculinity in the face of the challenges of Protestantism was established. Just as in the Caribbean and Mexico, the threat of cannibalism drew men from Europe to the Americas. For the Jesuits their encounters with Iroquois cannibals allowed them to demonstrate their commitment to missionary work as well as to prove their status as masculine soldiers for God.

For English settlers in Eastern North America, the presence of cannibals in the lands was a hindrance, not a catalyst for expansion. Despite this, they still constructed their identities as civilized Englishmen in opposition to cannibalistic Indians. In a similar fashion to the French Jesuits, triumph over savagery allowed the English to prove their commitment and justify their presence in lands that did not belong to them. The captivity narrative in particular, demonstrated the ways in which writers positioned cannibalism as a continued threat to the empire and used anthropophagous accusations against both the French and the Indians in order to establish their rightful dominion and their superior masculinity.
The shift from cannibal women as a significant threat to the European civilizing agenda to the use of accusations of cannibalism to establish and maintain masculine power is an important one. By the start of the nineteenth century, the association between cannibalism and disordered female sexuality was no longer as prominent as the fear of bloodthirsty warriors who threatened to devour innocent settlers. Thus, as Western European patriarchal power became more entrenched in the Americas, anthropophagus men became the chief threat. Certainly the fear of women’s power and women’s appetites had not wholly disappeared, but from the perspective of imperial discourse, the control and maintenance of power in the Americas, which was supported by the assumption of the hierarchical relationship between civilization and savagery, necessitated the construction of an imperial masculinity which had to prove itself superior to Indigenous men. European imperial power in the Americas was maintained through the re-making of Indigenous ideas about gender and sexuality. Women’s power was largely eliminated through the civilizing process and as such, the fear of consumption at their hands lessened.

While this project ends in the late eighteenth century, the story of the discourse of cannibalism and its relationship to imperial power certainly does not end there. In fact, if the analysis were to continue analysis into the nineteenth, twentieth, and even twenty-first centuries, many of the established patterns would continue. However, there is an important dimension to the discourse of cannibalism that is not fully within the scope of this project, but is of the utmost importance for the discourse of cannibalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And that of course, is race. The writers that this dissertation examined, like Columbus and Vespucci for example, did not understand the differences that they observed between themselves and Indians in terms of race in the modern sense. Rather, they believed that there existed hierarchical
divisions within humanity, which were sometimes tied to skin-color, but were more closely tied to religion, geography, and cultural practices. Race, as it is predominately understood in North America today, did not come into being until the nineteenth century, and thus the racialized dynamics at play in this dissertation should not be confused with the systematic, phenotypical racism of later colonialism.¹ Racialization was a slow process in which the early imperial beliefs about civilization and savagery became linked with the biological inferiority. The factors that once differentiated between the civilized and the savage in hegemonic European discourse, such as food choices, sexual practices, gendered norms, and agricultural practices, became disassociated from culture and re-asserted as biological by the nineteenth century. However, from 1492-1763, European discourse about alterity was more mutable, and savagery was perceived by many not as something innate, but as a step in the process towards proper civilization. At the intersections of the discourses of cannibalism, gender, sexuality, and empire, it becomes evident that European writers held complex views about Native Americans that changed based upon geographic, cultural, and temporal contexts. This dissertation focused on how the discourses of gender and cannibalism together played an important role in the establishment and maintenance of imperial power, which is key to understanding later processes of racialization. Within the period to which this study is limited, the relationship between gender and cannibalism was perhaps more profound than it would be later when the discourse of race predominated.

By the nineteenth century, European empires had begun to expand to new parts of the world. They brought the intellectual legacies of the discourse of cannibalism with them to these new regions. In fact, while the proto-typical cannibal in the context of this project was Native

American, as empires grew and changed the fear of consumption by savage cannibals followed their progression and new groups were accused of heinous acts of anthropophagy. For example, while the accused cannibals of our story were the Caribs, the Aztecs, and the Iroquois, by the close of the nineteenth century, the Dahomey of West Africa were renowned for their man-eating and by the start of the twentieth century, the cannibals now inhabited the remote islands of the South Pacific.²

There are numerous more recent examples that demonstrate the continued relevance of the discourse of cannibalism. For example, the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, which was known as the World’s Columbian Exposition, drew nearly 27 million visitors and offered a never before seen gathering of amazing inventions, curiosities, artifacts, art, scholarship, etc. The Fair was, on the surface, a celebration of the discoveries made by Columbus and their legacy. By its title alone, the fair reinforced America as a conquered land with no relevant history before its discovery by Western Europeans. The exhibits were a glorification of colonialism, and of the subjugation of the land and its inhabitants. It took place in Chicago, which in the recent past would have been a “hostile” land occupied by Native Americans. By placing the World’s Fair far from the eastern seaboard in the middle of the nation, it acknowledged the successful expansion of the United States and emphasized the accessibility of the frontier. The beauty and grandeur of the Fair emphasized the resiliency of American lands and people. In many ways, the fair also lauded a newly reinvigorated sense of “Americaness,” a celebration of American spirit and culture.

² I do not want to downplay the importance of the Tupinamba of Brazil as absolutely central to understanding cannibalism in the Americas, but as our focus has been on North America, I have chosen to place my emphasis elsewhere. For another fascinating example of the discourse of cannibalism in West Africa, the trials of the so-called Human Leopards highlight the continued Western fascination with the presumed cannibalism of the Other. See: Sir Kenneth James Beatty, Human Leopards: An Account of the Trials of Human Leopards before the Special Commission Court. With a Note on Sierra Leone, Past and Present (New York: AMS Press, 1978).
The Fair's Midway Plaisance, a collection of curiosities and exhibits from around the globe, was designed to entertain and educate. It featured living displays of life throughout the world. The arrangement of these ethnological exhibits allowed the visitor to travel from displays of civilization towards those of savagery.\(^3\) Walking from west to east through the Midway was a journey through the categories of humanity.\(^4\) At the east end, there were displays of the technological innovations of mankind—the tools of civilization.\(^5\) The western end focused more on ethnological displays and war entertainment shows. At the terminus of the cultural displays was a model of a Dahomey Village.\(^6\) The exhibit emphasized their reputation for cannibalism, sacrifice, and other acts of savagery. Even Frederick Douglass remarked that the achievement of African Americans who had come “from Dahomey” should not be measured by the standards of Anglo-American culture but “from the depths out of which he has risen.”\(^7\)

The Dahomey, who lived in what is now the Republic of Benin, had recently been engaged in a series of armed conflicts with the French and tales of their reported savagery circulated throughout the Western World.\(^8\) What set them apart was not only their reputation for ferocity, but also the presence of female soldiers. These armed “Amazons” were “crueller and fiercer than most men.”\(^9\) The Dahomey, according to Sir Richard Burton reportedly practiced

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\(^4\) Ibid., 46-7. One visitor remarked about the Midway Plaisance that, “the best way of looking at the races is to behold them on an ascending scale, in the progressive movement; thus, we can march forward with them starting with the lowest specimens of humanity, and reaching continually upward to the highest stage.” Quoted in Rydell, 65.
\(^5\) I use the word “mankind” rather than “humankind” purposefully here. Although the Fair displayed the innovations of both men and women, women’s works were placed separately in their own building. Thus, the Fair reinforced the naturalness and neutrality of men as inventors and innovators.
\(^6\) Ibid., 56.
\(^7\) Quoted in Rydell, 53.
\(^9\) Isabel Burton, quoted in Bay, 278.
rampant sacrifice and cannibalism.\textsuperscript{10} Thus, the nadir of the Midway Plaisance was inhabited by a group of people that were notorious for both their cannibalism and for violating Western gendered norms. These Dahomey men and women were the inheritors of the discourse of cannibalism described in this dissertation. The French justified their conquest of West Africa by employing the same methods that we saw in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Even in the modern post-colonial world, the discourse of cannibalism continues to resonate. The contemporary discourse of cannibalism continues the traditions/contradictions of colonial discourse. Audiences are simultaneously drawn to depictions of cannibalism, and disgusted by it. In light of this, certain peoples have appropriated the cannibal trope for more empowering reasons. There was a movement, primarily located in Brazil, of writers, artists, and theorists known as the Antropófagists. This group attempted to connect people to the past as well as to connect them to one another. Begun by Tarsila do Amaral and Oswald de Andrade in the 1920s, the movement centered on the notion that cannibalism could be a culturally unifying idea.\textsuperscript{11} In Manifesto Antropófago, Andrade stated that, “only cannibalism unites us.”\textsuperscript{12} Antropófagia involved the search for a peculiarly Brazilian culture that incorporated Indigenous, African, and European elements through a process of ingestion and digestion. The act of cannibalism served as the central metaphor for the creation of a new national identity. In this way, the once abhorrent act that contributed to the near destruction of an indigenous people

\textsuperscript{10} Bay, 278; Thomas Wright, The Life of Sir Richard Burton, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1906), 67; Sir Richard Burton, A mission to Gelele, King of Dahome : with notices of the so called "Amazons," the grand customs, the yearly customs, the human sacrifices, the present state of the slave trade, and the Negro's place in nature (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1893), 303-4.

\textsuperscript{11} Luís Madureira, “A Cannibal Recipe to Turn a Dessert Country into the Main Course: Brazilian Antropofagia and the Dilemma of Development,” Luso-Brazilian Review, Vol. 41, no. 2 (2005), 97.

became the very thing that held its descendants together. Cannibalism was viewed as both a symbol of national pride and a reminder of a shameful past.

The figure of the cannibal followed the paths of imperialism and colonialism, moving from the Americas to Africa and finally to the Pacific Rim which became famous for housing cannibals after the death of Captain James Cook in 1779. Even in the twentieth century, lurid tales of cannibalism among the people of New Guinea were widespread. The fascinating tale of the discovery of Kuru (a form of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy related to Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and mad-cow disease), which was reportedly passed between members of the Fore tribe through the consumption of the bodies of their relatives after death, also intersected with the legacies of empire and gendered power in interesting ways. Dr. Carleton Gajdusek, who won a Nobel Prize for his research on Kuru is equally famous for his conviction for child abuse. Gajdusek adopted many children from New Guinea and Micronesia and brought them to the United States. He was found guilty of sexually assaulting one of these children. He remained unrepentant about his well-known dalliances with men and boys in the Pacific, believing that sex with young men was normal in such societies. While the Gajdusek tale is far more complicated than can be done justice here, it nonetheless is another example of the intersections between western imperial power, cannibalism, sexuality, and gender. Gajdusek saw the people of Papua New Guinea and Micronesia as primitive. He used their rituals and practices in order to justify his pedophilic desires. Just as Michele da Cuneo judged the Carib women as sexually available, desirous, and inferior, so did Gajdusek view the subjects of his research.

The trope of cannibalism often intervened in discourse in moments of crisis. For Europeans, encountering the Natives of the New World was an intellectual crisis, as they

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struggled to find ways to incorporate America into their intellectual lexicon. The mere existence of Native Americans created a religious crisis for the Christian European. In the modern United States, we can still witness the ways in which the trope of cannibalism is employed in moments of crisis to help make sense of disorder. After the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, the specter of the figure of the cannibal still haunted North America. The horrific conditions that were revealed as the floodwaters advanced inspired harsh criticism of local, state, and government officials. Journalist Randall Robinson was among the outraged and posted a scathing report on the online blog forum of The Huffington Post. He began with the statement, “It is reported that black hurricane victims in New Orleans have begun eating corpses to survive.”  

He followed this by sharply criticizing the administration of George W. Bush and marked this event as “the end of the America I strove for” and referred to it as the “defining watershed moment in America’s racial history.”

Robinson’s posting was met with hundreds of responses. Many people shared his frustration with the administration and blamed conservative politics for the plight of the residents of New Orleans. Others responded with disbelief and urged Robinson to cite his source for the accusation of cannibalism. Many of the responses connected the cannibal acts purported by Robinson with the notion of savagery. One respondent stated, “You [Robinson] are crazy, if people are eating dead people than they should probably be put out of their misery as it shows they are too savage to function in society.” This respondent blamed the fate of the residents of New Orleans on their savagery, which was defined by their acts of cannibalism. The comparison between the “civilized” hurricane victims and the “savage” ones was made often in the responses

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16 Ibid.
to Robinson’s posting. For example, one respondent named “Joe” said, “I refuse to give
donations unless I know it will be given to the civilized people outside of New Orleans. Fuck the
savages of N.O.” 18 Thus, it becomes clear that cannibalism is often still equated with savagery.

Some respondents pointed to the animality of the Hurricane victims as their link to
savagery and cannibalism stating, “You’ve got to be kidding me. If this had happened anywhere
but a poor, black city – there would not have been a problem because the people would have
sense enough to get out first and if they got caught, help each other, not act like animals,” 19 and
“It’s his [President Bush] fault the baboons are looting and raping of course . . . the only thing I
am angry at Bush for is not pouring soap in the oncoming floodwater to really clean every last
baboon out of New Orleans.” 20 As we have seen, referring to cannibals as animals was a tactic in
imperial discourse. In this modern context, this connection between animals and humans was
made in explicitly racialized terms, as only African-Americans were referred to in animalistic
language.

Several respondents used the presumed acts of cannibalism as a justification for the
elimination/destruction of African Americans saying things such as, “I say shoot them all….if
they will do it [cannibalism] now, they will do it again!!” 21 Thus for a number of respondents the
“savagery” of the survivors is responsible for their plight, “Many of the RESCUE
HELICOPTERS were SHOT AT by these savages, Sir. Can’t blame ‘em a bit for turning their
attention to other priorities, after that. It’s genetic. Howl ‘RACISM’ all you want, but you cannot

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change the basic laws of Evolution and Biology [sic].” Within the thread, there was a subtext of racial/biological determinism. A surprising number of respondents blamed biology for the reportedly savage practices of African Americans in New Orleans.

Some of you act as if the looting, “rape gangs,” assaults, firing at Army helicopters and ALL of the other atrocities taking place in NOLA [New Orleans, Louisiana] are a surprise. Whatever the reasons are, and they may be good ones, “ghetto folk” have ALWAYS behaved this way. Did you actually think they wouldn’t take advantage of this situation? I wouldn’t be surprised if 90% of the young black males that are currently in NOLA stayed in NOLA just so they could loot and/or rape . . .

This emphasis on the biological determinism of cannibal identity led the many of the respondents to use this discussion board as a forum for their racist agendas. Additionally, respondents like the one quoted above serve as a reminder that discourse of race, sex, and gender remain linked. This respondent assumed that the race of the individuals in New Orleans had a direct relationship to their propensity to commit acts of sexual violence. What is apparent from reading the responses to Robinson’s blog posting is that the notion of the cannibal savage is far from removed within modern discourse and that times of crisis provide a moment to witness its continuance.

Furthermore, it demonstrated that the connection between race and cannibalism has taken on special significance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As the preceding examples demonstrate, the discourse of cannibalism remains central to the ways in which difference is constructed and experienced in modernity, which affects the dynamics of power. As demonstrated in Chapter One, the ways in which Christopher Columbus

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24 Robinson later retracted his statement.
and Amerigo Vespucci understood their relationships with Indians in the Caribbean was heavily
determined by pre-existing notions of alterity. Columbus structured his interactions with the
Arawaks on his first voyage in such a way that the differences between his crew and the Indians
were important, but not the only way through which he comprehended their presence. Rather, he
viewed them as not wholly unknown and drew upon the knowledge that he gained in medieval
travel literature. Vespucci, on the other hand, described the peoples of the Americas primarily in
terms of their differences. He emphasized their exoticness, their lasciviousness, and their refusal
to abide by the tenants of civilization. As exploration and conquest in the Caribbean continued,
the differences between Europeans and Indians became an important foundation upon which
atrocities were justified and Native peoples were subjugated. In descriptions of the Caribbean in
the late 15th and early 16th centuries, the two most significant and overlapping things of which
the Natives were accused were cannibalism and violations of norms of gender and sexuality.
Through explicit descriptions of aberrant sexuality and man-eating, European writers developed
an imperialist worldview that defined civilization as powerful, masculine and European.
Conversely, Indian men and women were largely described as savages, who even if they were
brave, strong, and sometimes successful in repelling Europeans through acts of violence, did not
do so for proper reasons and therefore were unable to be access the power of civilization.

In each imperial context that this dissertation discussed, the discourse of cannibalism
functioned in a slightly different way. However, there are several unifying characteristics of this
discourse that enable conclusions about the relationship between accusations of cannibalism and
imperial power to be drawn. The most prominent of these over-arching themes was the clear
association between acts of cannibalism and savagery. In each imperial context and from the
position of a range of subjects, cannibalism was seen as a significant defining characteristic for
savagery. Following this, then, another important connecting feature was that the link between cannibalism and savagery was further strengthened by the association between cannibalism and discourses of the body. While the different writers and empires examined herein gendered the discourse of cannibalism in slightly different ways, each chapter nonetheless demonstrated a sustained connection between emerging European ideas about masculinity and patriarchy and descriptions of cannibalism. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this dissertation has shown that the discourse of cannibalism is inextricable from discussions of imperial power. Empires justified their conquest of the Americas through accusations of Indian savagery and cannibalism. Through their actions in the Americas the Spanish, the French, and the English developed a sense of their own identities and right to rule. The discourse of cannibalism was fundamental in helping to establish European imperial power in the Americas and was an important force in establishing early modern ideas about civilization, savagery, masculinity, femininity, and European superiority.
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