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CONSUMING IMAGES: REPRESENTATIONS OF CANNIBALISM ON THE AMAZONIAN FRONTIER

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This article examines how information about cannibalism was treated during the pacification of the Wari' Indians in Brazil in 1956-62. Recent academic critiques have emphasized that colonial agents promulgate self-serving images of cannibal savagery to justify the subjugation of native peoples. The Wari' case illustrates this point, but it also reveals other, more complex responses. Horror, disgust, and an emphasis on primitive Otherness were part of Brazilian public discourses about Wari' cannibalism, but so were empathy, cultural relativism, and an emphasis on the humanity of the cannibals. Some of the strongest efforts to keep Wari' from being stereotyped as savages came from the Protestant missionaries, Catholic clergy, and government officials most closely involved in pacifying them. Brazilian journalists exploited the news, but responded to pressures to downplay exploitative sensationalism by framing their stories in the language of ethnography and anthropological perspectives of cultural relativism. This story sounds a cautionary note about tendencies to represent the agents of colonialism as one-dimensional figures unswervingly dedicated to highlighting the symbolic distance between themselves and those they colonized. [cannibalism, representation, colonialism, intercultural encounters, South American Indians]

In critiques of colonial relations in anthropology, history, and cultural studies, it is commonplace to cite cannibalism as a central element in Western representations of the primitive Other. Cannibalism marks the distance between the civilized and the savage, between the colonizers and the colonized, between "us" and "them." Negative representations of native people as cannibals have served as tools of domination, providing moral legitimacy for government officials, entrepreneurs, missionaries, and others who promoted self-serving images of savage natives to justify their subjugation.

In the conquest of South America's native peoples, "[c]annibalism provided perhaps the most potent weapon for European control" (Ramos 1994: 80-81).[1] From the earliest voyages of Christopher Columbus, reports that American Indians practiced cannibalism provided the invaders with easy arguments to legitimize their conquest. The moral imperative to stamp out cannibalism could rebut any objections that might be raised about the brutalities of death, disease, misery, violence, and imprisonment that Europeans inflicted on native peoples. In 1503 Queen Isabella of Spain decreed that Spaniards could legally enslave American Indians who were cannibals (Whitehead 1984: 70). In 1510 Pope Innocent IV promulgated a doctrine that defined cannibalism as a sin that merited punishment by Christians through force of arms. Cannibalism was at the center of debates over the legal and moral status of the American Indian, as in the famous debates between the Spanish philosopher, Ginés de Sepulveda, and the Dominican bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de Las Casas, in Valladolid, Spain in 1550 (Todorov 1984: 154-157). Reports of people-eating were the linchpin in arguments that Indians were inferior, even sub-human, and thus in need of being brought under control by outsiders. This has been a recurrent idea through centuries of struggle between South American Indians and those who have sought to conquer, colonize, or convert them. For example, Whitehead (1984: 82) reports that in the Argentine in the eightennth century, it was said of certain Indians "that they ate human flesh and were, thus, held to be in need of immediate and violent subjugation." In *Shamanism, colonialism, and the wild man*, Michael Taussig's (1987) account of the torture and murder of Indians by rubber entrepreneurs and their employees in the Putumayó region of eastern Peru is vivid testimony to the lethal power of images of native cannibalism in the imaginations of twentieth-century colonizers.

The production of racist cannibal stereotypes clearly has served the ideological interests of dominant groups in a variety of colonial situations in South America and elsewhere. To focus only on prejudicial uses of representations of native cultures, however, runs the risk of reproducing another stereotype: of agents of colonialism as one-dimensional "figures of hegemony" (Weiss 1993), single-

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mindedly bent on establishing symbolic as well as political domination. In addition, cultural theorists have seldom questioned stereotypes of Western attitudes toward cannibalism, but have tended to take it for granted that public revulsion is so strong that relativism and empathy play no part in Western discourses on cannibalism, at least outside of anthropology departments.

This, however, may not be the whole story about cannibalism and colonialism. Encounters at the boundaries between cultures are complex; they seldom are reducible to the simple scenario of a unified group of colonizers confronting a unified native population. Rather, colonial situations typically are comprised of individuals and groups with partially contradictory goals and cross-cutting allegiances. A given signifier—even one as culturally and emotionally loaded as cannibalism—may be put to different uses in different hands.

In this article I look at how real cannibalistic practices were represented in one mid-twentieth century colonial situation. This case concerns the Wari' Indians of Brazil (also known as the Pakaas Novas), who practiced cannibalism until the 1960s.[2] There is no doubt about the reality of pre-contact Wari' cannibalism. All Wari' elders freely affirm that in the past they ate the flesh of both enemies and fellow tribesmembers. In the four decades since the contact, scores of Wari' individuals have given consistent, independent descriptions of how they used to prepare and eat corpses in conversations and interviews with me and the numerous other ethnographers, linguists, and missionaries who have worked with them. These indigenous testimonies are corroborated by statments from North American and Brazilian men who witnessed cannibalism at Wari' funerals soon after the first contacts. I emphasize the extensive evidence for Wari' cannibalism because some anthropologists have argued that cannibalism may never have existed as an institutionalized, socially accepted practice (Arens 1979; Steadman and Merbs 1982).[3] This perennial debate resurfaced recently in a cover story in the journal *Lingua Franca* titled, "Does Man Eat Man? Inside the Great Cannibalism Controversy" (Osborne 1997). With regard to the Wari' case, however, there can be little controversy. The data on cannibalism among the pre-contact Wari' are some of the strongest in the ethnographic record. Elsewhere, I have discussed in detail the evidence for Wari' cannibalism and its cultural meanings and social implications (see Conklin 1993, 1995, n.d.). The question to be examined in this article is not whether or why the Wari' ate human body parts, but how outsiders responded to reports that they did.

This story focuses on the years 1956-1962, the period during which the Brazilian government Indian agency established contact with the Wari' and extended the state's control over most of the Wari' population. Shortly after the first peaceful contacts occurred in 1956, several Protestant missionaries witnessed cannibalism at Wari' funerals in the Rio Dois Irmãos region, as did at least one employee of the Brazilian government Indian agency, the SPI (Serviço de Proteção aos Indios). In 1961 an SPI official observed cannibalism in the Rio Negro-Ocaia region, and another SPI official photographed the dismemberment and roasting of a corpse in the Rio Lage region. By 1962 a number of other people, including Catholic priests, journalists, anthropologists, and higher-level SPI officials, had access to information about Wari' people-eating. They all faced decisions about how to handle this information and how to represent the Wari' to the public. Each group had its own political agendas, and the ways that they treated Wari' cannibalism varied considerably.

There were moments when outsiders exploited images of cannibalism to mark the savage Otherness of the Wari' and to legitimize pacification and intervention in Wari' affairs. Yet there also were concerted attempts to keep Wari' cannibalism out of the public eye and, when it became public knowledge, to represent it in sympathetic terms that did not stereotype the Indians as barbarians. These complex, nuanced responses to cannibalism confound simplistic generalizations about the Western propensity to promote self-serving images of the primitive Other.

Pressures for Pacification

The Wari' live in the rainforest of the state of Rondônia, in western Brazil near the Bolivian border. They speak a language in the Chapakuran language family isolate. Today, they number some 1,500 people.

Before the contacts the Wari' practiced two forms of cannibalism. One form occurred in warfare: when Wari' warriors killed enemies—Brazilians, Bolivians, or members of other Indian groups—they often took body parts to be roasted and eaten. Warfare cannibalism expressed hatred and hostility; it marked the enemy victim as sub-human, and symbolically equated enemy flesh with animal meat (see Vilaça 1992: 47-130). The second, more common form of cannibalism took place in Wari' funerals.

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The Wari' traditionally disposed of nearly all their dead by eating the flesh, brains, heart, liver, and sometimes the ground bones. In funeral rites the eating of the dead expressed honor and compassion for the person who was eaten. It also expressed key religious values and affirmed social commitments between the dead person's consanguineal relatives (who did not eat the corpse) and their affines (who were the ones who ate the corpse), and between the society of living Wari' and the otherworld of ancestors, animals, and spirits (see Conklin 1993, 1995, n.d.; Meireles 1986; Vilaça 1992).

The Wari' stopped practicing both forms of cannibalism after they entered sustained contact with outsiders. This occurred in stages between 1956 and 1969, as a series of government-sponsored pacification expeditions established contact with different Wari' subgroups located north, east, and south of the town of Guajará-Mirim.[4] The bulk of the Wari' population entered contact in 1961-62. (A group of about thirty people rejected contact and lived autonomously until 1969.) The pacification teams were staffed by SPI employees who worked in cooperation with either missionaries from the Protestant New Tribes Mission (NTM) or with Catholic priests from the diocese of Guajará-Mirim.

Efforts to pacify the Wari' began in earnest in the early 1950s, spurred by pressure from businessmen and politicians who were eager to exploit the rubber, Brazil nuts, cassiterite, and other commercial resources in the large territories that the Wari' controlled along right-bank tributaries of the Mamoré and Guaporé rivers. From World War II onwards interethnic hostilities intensified exponentially.[5] In the late 1950s and early 1960s businessmen involved in the rubber trade hired gunmen to attack Wari' villages. Equipped with sub-machine guns as well as shotguns, rifles, and revolvers, these assassins typically attacked at dawn, when sleepy women and children offered easy targets. Mortality was high; of 399 pre-contact Wari' deaths, 108 (27%) were killings by Brazilians (Conklin 1989: 529-530).

Wari' warriors retaliated with bow-and-arrow attacks on Brazilians near the edges of Wari' territory. The escalating frequency and unpredictability of these Indian attacks—and the gruesome reports of mutilated corpses and missing body parts—terrified people living on isolated farms and rubber-collecting sites. Panic swept the countryside, and families abandoned their rural homesteads in droves to seek safety in town.

To the strategic intimidation of the rural populace by guerrilla warfare, one Wari' warrior added a sort of guerrilla theater. As a youth in the 1940s he had been shot, wounded, and kidnapped by Brazilians who took him to a nearby town. After he had lived among Brazilians for several years and had learned to speak Portuguese, the young man escaped and found his way back to his Wari' relatives in the area between the Lage and Ribeirão rivers. Thereafter, he delighted in using his knowledge of Portuguese to taunt Brazilian settlers and play off their fears of Indian savagery and symbolic links between sex and cannibalism. Decked out in body paint and feathers he would suddenly materialize at the edge of a clearing near a settler's house. Shaking his penis in one hand and brandishing a bow and arrow in the other, this "wild" Indian would unnerve the settlers by crying out in Portuguese, "*Traz uma mulher bonita pra mim! Quero comer!*—Bring me a pretty woman! I want to eat!" ("Eating" is a euphemism for sexual intercourse in Brazil.)

Rumors of cannibalism were prominent in the incendiary mix of images that swirled through western Rondônia in the 1950s and early 1960s, feeding the public outcry to pacify the savages. Local newspapers reported grisly details of the dismemberment and bodily mutilation of the victims of Wari' attacks. Although outsiders had no direct evidence of cannibalism, the missing body parts were widely believed to have ended up in Wari' stomachs. One particularly inflammatory rumor concerned the fate of a Catholic priest from São Paulo who disappeared in 1950, while attempting to make contact with the Wari' on his own, and who was said to have been killed and eaten.

News stories and editorials highlighted Indian mutilations of Brazilian corpses. A Guajará-Mirim newspaper published a photograph of a dead rubber-tapper who had been shot thirty-six times with arrows. As more and more rubber-tappers fled to town, rubber production plummeted and local businesses saw their fortunes held hostage by the Wari'. Public outrage reached a fevered pitch in 1960, when a ten-year-old boy riding a bicycle on the outskirts of Guajará-Mirim was shot with arrows and his arms and legs were cut off and taken by the killers. Local banks and rubber investors immediately put up 4 million cruzeiros to finance two SPI teams to pacify the Wari' and, once they were pacified, to establish commercial latex production with the Indians as workers. In this period of pre-contact interethnic hostilities images of cannibalism and Indian savagery intensified public pressure to subdue the

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Wari'.

Silence on the Subject

A far more complex response to cannibalism emerged after the first contact in 1956. This was when outsiders first learned for certain that the Wari' ate their own dead. The New Tribes missionaries and SPI personnel who witnessed cannibalism at Wari' funerals had first-hand knowledge of one of the most elaborate cannibalistic funeral rites in the ethnographic record. Not surprisingly, they were horrified. One New Tribes missionary whom I interviewed still cringed thirty years later, as he spoke of how the putrid stench of roasting flesh forced him to stay upwind from the funeral gathering. The Wari' were well aware of the outsiders' revulsion and disapproval. Older people in the community of Santo André reminisced about a funeral at which a certain S.P.I. agent "went crazy" at the sight of the corpse being eaten and ran, screaming, into the forest. The poor fellow, they said, was never quite right in the head after that.

For the missionaries and government agents who participated in the early contact and pacification efforts, the reality of cannibalism reinforced their sense of purpose and the moral righteousness of their mission. Both groups dedicated themselves to putting an end to it. Within a matter of months they had convinced and coerced most of the Wari' to abandon people-eating and bury their dead instead. This suppression of cannibalism was part of the more general extension of outsiders' intervention into the internal affairs of Wari' society. Up to this point the Wari' story fits neatly into the standard academic narrative of cannibalism and colonialism.

Less predictable, however, were the uses that these agents of civilization made of cannibalism in public representations of the Wari'. Specifically, they made little or no use of it at all. In the years between 1956 and 1961 both the New Tribes missionaries and the SPI agents appear to have kept silent about what they knew about Wari' people-eating. Neither group invoked cannibalism to justify its own activities among the Wari'. For five years after the contact the Brazilian public heard nothing more than the same old rumors that had circulated for years. The suppression of information about cannibalistic Wari' funerals appears to have extended even to news that circulated internally within the New Tribes Mission organization and the SPI hierarchy. I have found no mention of it even in the NTM's own publications and in SPI telegrams and reports from this period.[6]

Between 1956 and 1961 SPI officials strove to diffuse political pressures to immediately pacify the rest of the Wari' population, which occupied regions rich in rubber and Brazil nuts. Authoritative accounts of cannibalism would have inflamed public opinion; suppressing this information appears to have been part of a strategy to buy time to pursue peaceful contacts in the Rio Negro-Ocaia and Rio Lage/Ribeirão regions.

In the late 1950s SPI officials (probably supported by the Catholic clergy) mounted a sort of public relations campaign to buttress the legal proceedings that the SPI had initiated against the Guajará-Mirim businessmen whose hired gunmen were responsible for the massacres of Wari' that fueled the explosion of interethnic violence. SPI reports and letters to government officials documented repeated abuses and named names of the Brazilians responsible. Although the rubber barons were powerful figures in town, local press reports incorporated the SPI's perspective in articles and editorials that represented Wari' killings of Brazilians as understandable reciprocity for brutal killings of their own Indian people. Even bodily mutilation was acknowledged to be a two-way street: the *Alto do Madeira* newspaper (1957) reported that to prove that they had fulfilled their contracts, the hired gunmen sometimes took Indian body parts as trophies. The killers cut off a Wari' ear, or gouged out Wari' children's eyes.

Although news of Wari' funeral cannibalism did not reach the press during this period, a letter addressed to upper-level SPI officials invoked cannibalism to argue the cause of Catholic clergy who wanted to work with the Wari'. In November 1959 Geraldo de Rezende Martins of the Commission on Territorial Affairs of the Ministry of Justice-Rio de Janeiro visited the SPI post at Tanajura, from which the Protestant NTM missionaries had been temporarily expelled. He found the head SPI agent incapacitated by drunkenness and found the Wari' in appalling conditions of disease and poverty. Urging the SPI to let the Catholic priests of Guajará-Mirim undertake "this work of saving these our Indian brothers from the state of savagery in which they live,"[7] Rezende Martins cited Wari' cannibalism as evidence of the need for intervention by Catholic clerics:

> I also was informed that, on certain occasions, when there was great mortality of children, they were quartered,

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> roasted and eaten by the adults. This tribe, according to what is said, *is not cannibalistic but were driven to this* by the elevated degree of primitivism in which they live. When at certain times, upon leaving the [SPI] post for the malocas [Indian residences], an Indian died, he was cut in pieces, the head, the trunk and the legs and, after drying in the sun for a day, his body was burned and over the ashes his companions executed ritual dances.... All this is still very nebulous and unknown (Rezende Martins 1959, emphasis added).

Note the interpretation that Rezende Martins gave to Wari' cannibalism: that it was not the Indians' fundamental nature, but rather the misery of their condition that drove them to eat human bodies. This rhetorical move, in which the writer turned a report of Wari' people-eating into a critique of the writer's political opponent, presaged the uses that Catholic clergy would make of cannibalism in later political struggles against the SPI.

In the years 1956-61 a number of individuals in the SPI, the New Tribes Mission, and the Catholic Church had information about Wari' cannibalism, but they kept it from the public and the press. Instead of exploiting distancing stereotypes of Indian savagery, those involved with the 1956 contact seem to have been concerned with making the regional populace recognize the humanity of the newly contacted Indians. Cannibalism has been a powerful weapon for European control of native peoples. But at this historical moment, it was a weapon that these particular colonizers chose not to use.

The Selling of a Story

It was in 1961 that the reality of Wari' cannibalism became public knowledge. This was the year in which two SPI pacification expeditions established contact with most of the remaining Wari' population. In April one SPI team contacted the northern Wari' groups in the region of the Lage and Ribeirão rivers. This expedition was staffed by some of the same New Tribes missionaries who had made the 1956 contact. As before, everyone involved appears to have kept quiet about the evidence of mortuary cannibalism that they encountered.

The pacification of the southern Wari' groups in the Rio Negro-Ocaia area was a different story. This expedition was a hastily organized affair sponsored by the army and headed by an SPI inspector named José Fernando da Cruz and his second-in-command, Gilberto Gama. From the start the expedition was embroiled in political conflicts between Fernando da Cruz and Gama, and between the SPI and the Protestant New Tribes missionaries. The expedition's organizers prohibited the NTM from taking part and instead sought and received financing and logistical support from the Catholic diocese. A Catholic priest, Father Roberto Gomez, accompanied the contact team that travelled to the Rio Negro-Ocaia in June 1961 (see Gomez de Arruda 1985).

As manpower for this venture Fernando da Cruz recruited forty men off the streets of Guajará-Mirim. The kind of individuals who were willing to enlist in what was locally dubbed the "Suicide Expedition" were mostly poor, illiterate frontiersmen and as the expedition's boats made their way up the Rio Pakaas Novas, many of these men were sick, coughing and wheezing. With the help of Wari' men from the Rio Dois Irmãos area communities that had been pacified five years earlier, the expedition soon contacted a group of 164 Wari' near the Rio Negro-Ocaia. Fernando da Cruz, the expedition leader, took photographs of the Indians and returned to town. There, he sold these pictures to a local newspaper and made a dramatic public announcement in which he claimed to have discovered over 1,000 Indians. Among them, he said, were a white woman and a six-year-old white boy. Later, Gilberto Gama, the expedition's second-in-command, revealed that this white woman "captive" was a Bolivian whom Fernando da Cruz had persuaded to remove her clothes, pluck out her body hair, and pose among the newly contacted Wari' women (*Globo* 1961).

Back at the Rio Negro-Ocaia contact site the pacification team soon had infected the Indians with influenza. Wari' were dying by the dozens in the first of a series of epidemics that would claim hundreds of lives in the next two years. A group of sick Indians arrived at the SPI team's base camp and shortly afterwards a baby girl died. Gilberto Gama, who headed the SPI team in Fernando da Cruz's absence, later gave this account of what happened next. Communicating through Wari' interpreters, Gama said that he told the baby's family that the SPI workers would take care of burying her. In Gama's words,

> At that moment, the place became empty. I asked the reason for the Indians' leaving. Tiam [a Wari' man] replied, with the greatest naturalness, "They are going to eat the child." Horrified, I called the interpreter and ran to stop the act (*Folha de São Paulo* 1962: 190).

Unable to persuade the baby's relatives to desist, Gama described how he stood by and watched while the infant's flesh was eaten. Afterwards,

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> [u]pon returning to the old maloca [where the contact party was camped], I told the story of this occurrence to the priest [Father Roberto Gomez]. He grew pale, I believe that his eyes flowed with tears.... That day, we resolved to dissuade the Indians from such a primitive practice (Folha de São Paulo 1962: 191).

Sometime between June and November of 1961 Fernando da Cruz went to the Lage area and photographed the dismemberment and roasting of a Wari' girl who had died of disease. He then resigned from the SPI and travelled to São Paulo, where he sold these explosive photographs to a weekly newsmagazine, *O Cruzeiro*, for a large sum of money (CR$250,000). These pictures, however, never appeared in print. Anthropologists, Catholic clergy, and SPI officials intervened to stop them from being published.

Anthropologists got involved when the publisher of *O Cruzeiro* convened a meeting of some of Brazil's most prominent scholars—including Egon Schaden, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, Roberto da Matta, and others—to evaluate the authenticity of Fernando da Cruz's photographs. The magazine played up the scientific import of this event with this dramatic announcement:

> For the first time in the history of humanity, documentation of cannibalism was obtained. Documentation that, now, is in our possession. Anthropologists, ethnologists and renowned backwoodsmen [*sertanistas*—experts in contacting Indians] have already examined it in a memorable meeting in the Grand Salon of *O Cruzeiro*. The authenticity of the documentation is indisputable. No scientist offered the slightest objection to the validity of the photographic material, for all knew and know the cultural feature of cannibalism among the Pakaa-Novas (*O Cruzeiro* 1961: 194).

Although the anthropologists acknowledged that the pictures appeared to document cannibalism, they used this meeting with the publisher to argue that the inflammatory photographs would do irreparable harm to Brazilian Indian images in the public mind. Top officials from the SPI voiced similar concerns and urged *O Cruzeiro* to desist from publication.

In late December 1961 Dom Francisco Xavier Rey, the respected Bishop of Guajará-Mirim, brought the weight of the Church's authority to bear in the efforts to persuade the publisher to desist. Fernando da Cruz, the Bishop told reporters, was an opportunist who had persuaded the Indians to revive a practice that they had already abandoned so that he could photograph it. The Bishop's statement had a paradoxical effect. Dom Xavier Rey's accusion definitively undermined the legitimacy of the photographs, but it also indirectly legitimized Fernando da Cruz's claim by verifying to the press the fact that the Wari' really did practice cannibalism. The Bishop, however, represented this as a practice that had already been abandoned by the Wari' after the contact (Ultima Hora 1961).

Exoticism, Empathy, and the Ethnographic Stance

At this point *O Cruzeiro* found itself in an uneasy position. The newspaper had rights to one of the most sensational stories of the century, but the photographs documenting it had been discredited by the Bishop's denunciation. In addition, Brazil's scientific community and the SPI appeared poised to denounce publication of the photographs as sensationalistic profiteering at Indians' expense.

How could the magazine take advantage of this journalistic windfall without appearing exploitative? *O Cruzeiro* found an answer in presenting the story as an ethnographic investigation into the question about the truth about the existence of cannibalism. The publishers did not print the pictures, but they did break the news of Wari' people-eating with a story based on information obtained from Fernando da Cruz. This account was framed as a scientific narrative in which outsiders' interest in Wari' cannibalism was motivated not by prurient sensationalism, but by the pursuit of ethnographic facts. Contributing to this anthropological tone are a series of narrative strategies that position the writer(s) as objective outside observers, sympathetic to the Indian position. Instead of writing from a simple "us" (civilized Brazilians) versus "them" (primitive Indians) perspective, the story emphasized another, cross-cutting opposition: civilized urban Brazil versus the wild, lawless frontier. The sense of distance between urban Brazil and the Amazon is pervasive: "Really, for the inhabitant of the great Brazilian metropolises it must cause astonishment [to realize] the fact of the existence in their own Country of a true unknown world. The truth, however, is that this world exists and has a name: Amazônia" (*O Cruzeiro* 1961: 194-195).

Consistent with this "outsider" stance of impartial objectivity, the article devoted considerable space to portraying Wari' warriors' savage attacks on Brazilians as rational reciprocity for equally savage Brazilian attacks on Wari'. In the rubber-tappers' "ungodly war against the indigenous tribes ... [e]very cut on the *hevea brasiliensis* [rubber] trees represented an Indian cut down by [gun] shots" (*O*

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Cruzeiro 1961: 193). An explicit critique of "civilized" varieties of depredation balanced an implicit critique of Indian barbarism:

> At times, as there appeared invaders [in Wari' territories] ... there appeared dead invaders. Most of them without legs (severed on the upper part of the femur) and, also, without eyes and without arms. The people of Guajará-Mirim were scandalized by the execrable and cruel Indians, but they were accomplices to the criminal whites who were invading [Indian] lands and ravishing villages. All this in our Country, in the middle of the 20th century (p. 194).

Chief among the true savages in this tale, the article suggested, were the rapacious rubber barons with their machine gun-toting henchmen:

> In the capitals, in the offices of [government] Ministries, rubber investors [*seringaristas*] lamented the decline in production of latex: "the Indians don't allow it, they kill the rubber-tappers...." Ignorance and stupidity gave them [the businessmen] bloody hands, and no one told them about the rights of the Indian, constitutional rights; no one read them Article 216 of the Magna Carta, which guarantees aborigines the possession of their lands (p. 193).

This emphasis on mutual savagery resonated with the language and moral stance of cultural relativism. The writers thus positioned themselves much like ethnographers, as dispassionate commentators on Indians and their customs.

O Cruzeiro responded to the discrediting of Fernando da Cruz's photographs by dispatching its own reporter and photographer to seek the truth:

> This magazine resolved to research for proof, together with scientists and woodsmen, the problem of cannibalism in Amazônia. The reporters Bernardino de Carvalho and Henri Ballot are, at this moment, travelling [many] kilometers on the Rio Negro and its tributaries. They go in search of the reality on the stage where it is lived and from which very few whites have come out with their lives (p. 196).

In the meantime the magazine published a dramatic story based on Fernando da Cruz's account of the Rio Negro-Ocaia pacification. In this retelling the pacification team with its motley crew of illiterate, diseased frontiersmen was transformed into a scientific expedition with the noblest of motives: "A group of men who disregarded their own lives for the benefit of science" (p. 195). Their objective? Not pacification for economic or political motives alone, but a quest for scientific truth. In this guise the writer(s) could spice the tale with the gory details of juicy rumors without claiming that the Wari' actually were guilty of such barbarisms:

> They [the SPI expeditionaries] were going to prove or disprove a myth: were the stories true that the [Brazilian] natives told about the cannibal Indians...? The stories told in the capital and in the neighboring cities were astounding: rites of cannibalism and necrophagia; children murdered shot with arrows to serve as the meal at diabolical dinners. The expedition had one goal only: to discover the Pakaa-Novas and, upon confirming the feasts on human flesh, to pacify them (p. 195).

After *O Cruzeiro* broke the news, a host of other Brazilian newspapers jumped in to report their own angles on the Wari' cannibalism story (see *Correio da Manhã* 1962a-g; *Diário de Notícios* 1962; *Ultima Hora* 1961). The nation's most respected daily paper, the *Folha de São Paulo*, scored a major coup: it published Gilberto Gama's eye-witness account of the baby girl's funeral.

As a first step toward establishing credibility, the *Folha de São Paulo* article distanced itself from the accusations of opportunism that had sullied Fernando da Cruz's reputation. Gama's account began by taking the high moral ground. Expanding upon the Bishop's accusations, Gama accused Fernando da Cruz of staging the cannibalistic ritual just as he had staged the pictures of the white woman and boy purportedly held captive by the Indians. In persuading the Wari' to pose eating people, said Gama, Fernando da Cruz had "revived in the Indians' spirit the habit of cannibalism, [which had been] neutralized by the efforts of Father Roberto." For this, Gama characterized Fernando da Cruz as "the most repellent individual who has stepped on the virgin soil of Amazonia" (*Folha de São Paulo* 1962: 188).

The *Folha de São Paulo* article ran under the headline, "Sertanista [backwoodsman/SPI agent] Did Not Succeed in Stopping the Indians From Eating the Dead Girl." The message and its moral claim were clear: where the unprincipled Fernando da Cruz had encouraged cannibalism, Gama had tried to stop it.

The article based on Gama's account was a strikingly straightforward narrative whose tone was largely sympathetic to the Indian's situation and motives. Gama stated that the baby girl was eaten, but the article gave only a few details about how the corpse was cut up, cooked, and handled. It quoted Gama calling cannibalism as "this most barbarous of rituals," but otherwise, there was a minimum of labelling or moralizing about the act. Most of the account focused on illuminating Wari' reasons for treating their dead in this manner. The specific explanation that Gama presented appears misinformed; at any rate, contemporary Wari' deny it, and Gama

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described an event (throwing bones into the river) that was not standard practice in pre-contact funerals. What was notable about this account, however, was its emphasis on explaining cannibalism in terms of a culturally sensitive, indigenous explanation that made Wari' motives intelligible to Western readers:

> The bones were gathered in another pot and thrown into the river. I inquired about the reasons for this act and the interpreter explained, "It was good that you did not meddle with the Indians when it all started. They would be capable of using violence to [be able to] carry out the ceremony." The bones, they believe, were received by the divinity who inhabits the depths of the rivers, called Tuirá-Tuirá. He will revive the [dead] child who will come to live under the water and protect all who ate her (only men), when they go fishing. [She] will put the fish in reach of their arrows and their fishing will always be abundant (p. 191).

The emphasis was on empathy, rather than condemnation or sensationalism. That an eye-witness account of cannibalism should be treated in this manner by a newspaper with the prestige and mass circulation of the *Folha de São Paulo* suggests the extent to which cultural relativism—even regarding a practice as extreme as cannibalism—had become an integral part of Brazilian public sensibilities by the early 1960s.

From Savages to Victims

After the story of Wari' cannibalism hit the newsstands of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazilian anthropologists and Catholic clergy put the weight of their influence into attempting to dissociate Indian images from the practice of cannibalism. Both groups tried to use the sensationalistic publicity to direct public attention to the desperate plight of the newly contacted Wari', who were dying by the hundreds from infectious diseases introduced by outsiders. In this effort to generate public sympathy and support, images of the Wari' as the fierce warriors who had struck terror in the hearts of Rondônia's populace soon were replaced by images of the Wari' as the hapless victims of outsiders' brutality, incompetence, and indifference.

The *O Cruzeiro* journalists returned to São Paulo in February 1962, apparently without having witnessed any people-eating among the Wari', although their story was headlined, "Pakaanovas: Canibals of Amazônia" (de Carvalho 1962a, 1962b). Along with presenting a second-hand description of Wari' funeral customs, the reporter gave a detailed account of the sickness and hunger that were ravaging the recently contacted groups—a point that was driven home by a photograph of emaciated Wari' men and boys.

At the local level the priests, missionaries, and SPI agents who were working directly with the Wari' downplayed cannibalism in representing the Indians to the Brazilian public, even while they worked to stamp out the last remnants of the practice in Wari' communities. The Wari', however, were not easily persuaded to change their mortuary practices. At each of the contact sites they initially resisted the outsiders' efforts to make them switch to burial. Families tried carrying corpses into the forest to be roasted away from outsiders' eyes, but such efforts at deception inevitably failed. Ultimately, all Wari' began to bury their dead. This change did not occur all at once, however. Through 1962 and into 1963 some Wari' families in the Rio Negro-Ocaia area continued to live autonomously in the forest, and a group of thirty people from the Rio Lage area lived automously until 1969. When these people finally arrived in the villages administered by the SPI, they inevitably got sick and just as inevitably had to be discouraged from disposing of their dead in the traditional manner. The eradication of cannibalism thus was an uneven process.

When an incident of people-eating came to light in 1963, Catholic clergymen used it to criticize the SPI, just as Rezende Martins (perhaps at the Catholics' urging) had used a report of cannibalism in the Tanajura community to criticize the SPI in 1959. By 1963 Catholic clergy had had a falling out with local SPI officials, who had barred the priests from working in Wari' communities. In their battle to regain a foothold for work among the Wari' the new report of cannibalism offered fresh ammunition. Father Roberto Gomez stated that Wari' had been driven to cannibalism by the starvation imposed on them by the government Indian agency's mishandling of the situation:

> At the beginning of 1963 there was a new outbreak of influenza.... And the SPI did not have, they said, anything, neither medicines, nor food, to help in this decisive hour for the simple conservation of the *life of these unfortunate Indians.*—Note this well: Their hunger was so great that the Ororantien [Oro Waram-Xijein, a Wari' subgroup] found themselves forced to *eat the cadaver of one of their companions.* ([This] hard reality [was] known by all the [SPI] staff of the [Ribeirão village] post.) ... The Truth is that, without the intervention of the [Catholic] Prelacy, that crisis of influenza and misery would have done away with the last [Wari'] ... of Ribeirão (Gomez de Arruda n.d.: 6; emphasis in the original).

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The trajectory of public images of the cannibalistic Wari' was completed: from fiercely independent cannibal warriors, they had become wretched dependents, so hungry that they were forced—reluctantly—to eat one another.

Cannibalism died out among the Wari', and the exoticism formerly attached to their public images died out, too. By the mid-1980s, when I began fieldwork among the Wari', I often heard them referred to (by anthropologists and others) as "the poor Pakaas Novas." Transformed from savages to victims, the Wari' had acquired a reputation for being rather uninteresting ("*chato*") Indians who had lost most of their distinctive culture under the domination of NTM missionaries. The reality turned out to be quite different. Their population has grown rapidly since the 1970s, and a sort of cultural revival of traditional music, festivals, and shamanism developed beginning in the mid-1980s. Wari' are increasingly more confident in their ability to live according to many of their traditional values while selectively consuming elements of outsiders' culture—although not, as as they once did, consuming the outsiders themselves.

Conclusions

In the events surrounding the pacification of the Wari', non-Indians used representations of cannibalism to position themselves in a variety of ways that depended on specific contexts and personal political agendas. Some of these uses exemplified the idea of cannibalism as a weapon of colonialism. Before the contact rumors of people-eating contributed to images of the Wari' as ruthless savages and intensified public pressures to pacify them. After the contact the reality of cannibalism and the perceived need to stop it gave moral purpose to the work of the individual missionaries, priests, and government agents who were most closely involved in working with the Wari'.

Treatments of Wari' cannibalism were far from one-sided, however. Even in the midst of the clamor to pacify the savages, Brazilian journalists sometimes balanced the stories of Indian savagery with explicit critiques of Brazilian inhumanity. In the fuller journalistic accounts of Wari' funeral cannibalism that emerged in 1961-62, this became a pervasive theme. This transformation of public images of the Wari', from uncivilized savages to victims of civilization, resonated with a counter-tradition in Western intellectual history in which representations of cannibalism have been used in critiques of Western society. Over the past five centuries social critics from Michel de Montaigne (1991[1580]) to Ruth Benedict (1959) have invoked cannibalism in non-Western cultures as a foil to illustrate their complaints about the West and its institutions. Cannibalism, such writers typically have suggested, is no more barbaric or irrational than certain practices of our own.

One of the notable aspects of the Wari' story is that it was not just intellectuals who treated cannibalism with empathy and relativism. Rather, it was missionaries, priests, and government agents—people directly involved in the difficult work of pacifying and "civilizing" the Indians—who tried hardest to keep negative stereotypes out of public images of the Wari'. In this story the agents of colonialism do not appear as monolithic one-dimensional characters. Instead of promoting notions of Indian savagery, some of the colonizers purposefully tried to suppress or reframe information about Wari' people-eating in ways that drew a distinction between cultural traditions and innate character and affirmed the humanity of the cannibals themselves.

NOTES

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[1]On the role of representations of cannibalism in the conquest of South American native peoples, see Arens 1979; Greenblatt 1991, 1993; Hemming 1978; Perrone-Moisés 1992:124-125; Taussig 1987; and Wasserman 1994.

[2]Wari' is pronounced wah-REE. The accent falls on the final syllable, which ends in a glottal stop. This article is based on fieldwork conducted by the author in five of the eight contemporary Wari' villages in 1985-87, and a brief visit in 1991. For further information on Wari' society, see Conklin 1989, 1993, 1995, n.d.; Mason 1977; Meireles 1986; Vilaça 1992; and Von Graeve 1989.

[3]Forsyth (1983) and Whitehead (1984) have evaluated documentary evidence on cannibalism among the sixteenth-century Tupinambá and Carib Indians, respectively. Both scholars conclude that while some claims of native cannibalism are clearly false or suspect, other evidence for the historical reality of cannibalism in South America cannot be discounted.

[4]Von Graeve (1989) is the best account in English of the history of economic and political developments in western

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Rondônia and how these affected the Wari'. The synopsis presented in this article owes a debt to von Graeve's work, which I have substantiated and supplemented with my own review of the telegrams, letters, and reports by SPI agents involved in contacting and administering the Wari' in this period, which are photocopied on microfilms #042, 043, 044, 045, and 046 in the archives of FUNAI (Fundação Nacional do Indio) in Brasília.

[5]During World War II the Japanese sea blockade cut off access to Malaysian rubber for the U.S. and other Allied nations. To obtain the mass quantities of latex needed for military equipment the Allied powers turned to Brazil. This sparked a "second rubber boom" in which thousands of poor Brazilian rubber-tappers moved into areas of the Amazon basin formerly occupied only by Indians. In western Rondônia the Rio Pakaas Novas and Rio Ouro Preto regions where many Wari' villages were located experienced a heavy influx of rubber-tappers during and after WWII. Many were migrants from Ceará in northeast Brazil who had little experience in dealing with Indians. Unlike some more seasoned veterans of the rubber trade these newcomers tended to shoot Indians on sight. In the late 1940s other newcomers invaded areas occupied by the northern Wari' subgroups after the Brazilian government established an agricultural colony at Iata, on the border of Wari' territory in the Rio Lage area. In the 1950s invasions of these northern Wari' territories increased even more with the growth of commerce in Brazil nuts and mineral prospecting for gold and cassiterite.

[6]I have had limited access to publications of the New Tribes from this period; thus, it is possible that cannibalism may have been mentioned in other NTM writings from 1956-61. My statement about the NTM's efforts to keep the news quiet in this period is based on the conspicuous absence of mention of Wari' cannibalism in the NTM publications that I have seen and interviews I conducted with NTM missionaries involved in the 1956 contact. Further support comes from the fact that when information about Wari' cannibalism became public in 1961, the Brazilian media treated it as news revealed for the first time.

[7]All translations of foreign-language documents are my own.

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