

Hans Staden's Captive Soul: Identity, Imperialism, and Rumors of Cannibalism in Sixteenth-Century Brazil

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As early modern empires competed for economic, spiritual, and imperial control of the Atlantic world, Europeans brought violence upon the natives and feared retaliation for their trespasses. Of the violence they imagined facing, cannibals embodied the ritualized vengeance and physical incorporation that threatened and beckoned them far away from home when they sometimes found themselves dependent, rather than conquering, guests of Native Americans. As a result, the reality or rumor of cultural cannibalism enlivened the travel narratives of sixteenth-century explorers such as Hans Staden, who was stranded in Brazil for over ten months. Real or not, the cannibal took a charismatic and leading role in the theater of imperial violence and was used by all sides in the conflict. In addition to representing the politics of early modern imperialism, the coercion to which cannibals subjected their victims as they violently and forcefully condemned them to incorporation into a new culture and body politic was a powerful metaphor for the extreme lack of free will in the experience of identity and cultural affinity for sixteenth-century Christians torn apart by Reformation controversies. As the vessel of the soul, each individual body became a center on which to lay siege, in cannibal feast or Christian battle.

Controversy over the historical practice of cannibalism by Native Americans has occasionally flared up in academia since William Arens's 1979 *Man-Eating Myth* questioned the evidence on cultural anthropophagy and turned the ethnographic gaze upon the Western

obsession with cannibals. Among the questionable evidence, Arens challenged the veracity of Hans Staden's 1557 narrative of captivity with the cannibalistic Tupinamba of Brazil. Pointing to linguistic barriers and a notable lapse in time between Staden's adventures and the recording of his tale, Arens argued that this account offers historians access to the West, rather than to the Tupinamba.¹ Other scholars, frustrated in their desire to recover lost cultures in these European texts—among them real cannibals—have been zealous in defending the cannibal against this “crazed revisionism.” In his 1997 *Cannibals*, Frank Lestringant called Arens a “sensation-hungry journalist” and indicted such scholarship for its “misrepresentations of the Other.”² The most commonly cited repudiation of Arens's argument, Donald W. Forsyth's 1985 “Three Cheers for Hans Staden: The Case for Brazilian Cannibalism” used Staden's narrative to respond point by point to Arens's sometimes sloppy critique.³ However, other than these European travel narratives, which are fraught with imperial motivations and the undeniable Western obsession with cannibals, no evidence hard enough to convince either side of this debate is likely to appear. The reality of the practice of cannibalism on the part of the Tupinamba remains open.

Scholars have been able to provide useful and convincing analyses of the myth of cannibalism and its uses for early modern imperialism. In fact, Lestringant's *Cannibals* was more successful in reflecting upon the history of the cannibal in French culture than he was at enacting a “retrieval” of real cannibals.⁴ As Lestringant argues, cannibalism usually “represents something other than itself,” as in Michel de Montaigne's 1580 essay “On Cannibals,” in which he compared cultural cannibalism to the treatment of French subjects in the current regime and found cannibalism preferable.⁵ While he does not address Hans Staden's narrative, Lestringant does analyze descriptions of Tupinamba cannibalism by its two other main authors—Catholic André Thevet and Calvinist Jean de Léry. In these chapters, Lestringant draws con-

¹ William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

² Frank Lestringant, *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 6–7.

³ Donald W. Forsyth, “Three Cheers for Hans Staden: The Case for Brazilian Cannibalism,” *Ethnohistory* 32, no. 1 (1985): 17–36; other repudiations have been equally vitriolic. Forsyth, “The Beginnings of Brazilian Anthropology: Jesuits and Tupinamba Cannibalism,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39, no. 2 (1983): 147–178; Thomas S. Abler, “Iroquois Cannibalism: Fact or Fiction,” *Ethnohistory* 27, no. 4 (1980): 309–316.

⁴ Lestringant, *Cannibals*, p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 100.

nections between the authors' interest in Tupinamba cannibalism and the ideological animosity over religious identity and Christian values that characterized the worst conflicts of the Reformation.

Patricia Seed agrees with Lestringant's portrayal of French attitudes when she compares European ideas of "Cannibals: Iberia's Partial Truth" in her 2001 *American Pentimento*. As Seed adds, true or not, condemnations of American cannibals "were colonial accusations" that served to support the practices of imperialism.⁶ Seed touches on Spanish and Portuguese justifications for enslaving native peoples in petitions that "yoked together two entirely separate reasons for enslavement: cannibalism and military resistance to Iberian domination."⁷ Threatening and anti-Christian in their rumored practice, natives branded as cannibals were subject to the violence and fervor of religious conversion, enslavement, and death—through disease or through colonial violence.

In fact the association between cannibalism, warfare, and anticolonial resistance was intrinsic to the European interpretation that Tupinamba cannibalism was an act of vengeance upon captured members of enemy tribes. European observers admired the fierce pageantry of the ritual in which the Tupinamba bludgeoned and butchered the captive only after he or she had made a speech promising retribution. This documented display of cannibal audacity has made its mark on scholarship attempting to capture the motivations behind these rumored acts of Tupinamba cannibalism. Although his focus became the French, Lestringant's interesting goal was to recover the cannibals' "loquacity—or rather their proud and cruel eloquence."⁸ The victim's formalized speech of vengeance speaks to Westerners regretful of conquest.

Postcolonial criticism has resoundingly objected to the Western practice of giving voice to the "Other."⁹ However, interpretations like that of Lestringant do lend an appeal to the cannibals by portraying them as insurgents insisting on cultural autonomy who asserted resis-

⁶ Patricia Seed, *American Pentimento: The Invention of Indians and the Pursuit of Riches* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 112.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁸ Lestringant, *Cannibals*, p. 7.

⁹ His problematic claim to give "voice" to the cannibals answers in the affirmative Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's questioning of that practice in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313. For another interesting critique, see Donna Haraway, "Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 295–337.

tance to European imperialism by killing and eating those who would enslave them and destroy their culture. Anthropologist Neil Whitehead believes that such recent scholarship “recovers the cannibal as an anticolonialist sign, much in the manner of the Brazilian *antropofagia* movement, as a mark of liberty in the face of colonial oppression.”¹⁰ Whitehead argues that Hans Staden’s account “reveals the political and social calculation surrounding the ritual performance” of cannibalism by the Tupinamba at what may have been “a particularly intense and desperate moment” as community leaders saw their culture “disintegrating under external colonialism and epidemic disease.”¹¹ To leave aside Western prejudices about anthropophagy and uncover Brazilian resistance to imperialism is admirable. However, cultural relativists such as Lestringant, Whitehead, and other scholars who have professed a belief that the Tupinamba were “real” cannibals overlook the possibility that the brilliance of Tupinamba resistance may not have been in eating the enemy. Rather, it was their use of rumors that fed the European obsession with dreaded cannibals that earned them respect in the colonial contest.¹² The fear of cannibals and the practice of anthropophagy went to the heart of Christian identity in a time of religious turmoil taking place in Europe, which at times was played out on the Brazilian coast among the Tupinamba.

The strategic deployment of the rumor of Tupinamba cannibalism, whether grounded in truth or not, lends important insight into the cultural politics of European–Native American contact. If it is not possible to prove or disprove the existence of cannibals, the use of the rumors that they did exist, by Europeans and Tupinambas alike, reveal strategies for survival in a violent and transformative period of world history. To understand the use of these rumors, it is necessary to uncover the authors of Brazilian cannibalism and their motives. Historians know of the Tupinamba through the travel narratives of three main authors: from France, André Thevet and Jean de Léry; and from

¹⁰ Neil L. Whitehead, “Hans Staden and the Cultural Politics of Cannibalism,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (2000): 733. Whitehead is also critical of Lestringant’s characterization of Arens.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 750.

¹² Rolena Adorno, “The Negotiation of Fear in Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufragios*,” *Representations* 33 (1991): 163, noted that “fear of the other was a weapon employed by both sides, the native American and the European. Both groups created, managed, and manipulated it, depending on who had the upper hand.” The Western obsession with flesh-eating “Others” dates back to Herodotus in the fifth century B.C.E., see Colin Ramsey, “Cannibalism and Infant Killing: A System of ‘Demonizing’ Motifs in Indian Captivity Narratives,” *CLIO* 24, no. 1 (1994): 55–68.

the German province of Hesse, Hans Staden. While Staden's account appears to be that of a simple soldier stranded in Brazil, the narratives of Thevet and Léry are charged with controversies over transubstantiation and the Eucharist, a mutinous conspiracy theory and accusations of cannibalism in a badly run colonial effort. For all three authors, Tupinamba cannibals provided a useful Other against which to define their own values and imperial alliances.

It was against the backdrop of competing empires and Christianities that Staden, Thevet, and Léry encountered the Tupinamba. Although Brazil was claimed by Portugal in 1500, the French had continued to develop trade relations with natives on the east coast, such as the Tupinamba. As a result, alliances with rival native groups were fostered by the Portuguese and French as they competed for trade in brazilwood, which produced a desirable red dye, along with other resources, including slaves. The contest of empires and Christianities played out in the accounts of all three experts on the Tupinamba. Hans Staden appears to have acted as a free agent on both sides of these conflicts. He traveled to Brazil in 1547 on a Portuguese ship ordered to "seize as prizes any French ships which he might find in Brazil trading with the savages."¹³ His second voyage in 1549 with the Spanish was shipwrecked near a Portuguese colony while en route to Rio de La Plata in present-day Uruguay. After living among the Tupinamba, allies of France, Staden then returned home in 1555 on a French ship.

That same year, Frenchman Nicholas Durand de Villegagnon founded the Fort Coligny colony on the east coast of Brazil. Driven by a combination of paranoia and miscommunication, Villegagnon soon embroiled the colony in the violence of religious turmoil taking place in Europe when he began murdering Protestants who later claimed to have come at the request of Villegagnon himself. Within five years, the Fort Coligny colony folded under the pressure of Portuguese military attacks. However, Franciscan friar André Thevet blamed the Calvinists for its failure in his 1575 *Cosmographie Universelle*. Thevet had come to the colony with Villegagnon early on in the role of chaplain. Though he spent only ten weeks in Brazil, he published two accounts describing Tupinamba culture. Thevet was not an eyewitness to the culture he described; scholars believe he consolidated the reports of Frenchmen who lived among the Tupinamba. While he was an entertaining and imaginative storyteller, he was also known to be "careless

¹³ Hans Staden, *The True History of his Captivity, 1557*, trans. and ed. Malcolm Letts (New York: Robert M. McBride & Company, 1929), p. 34.

and credulous” as an ethnographer. His most valuable contribution to the history of the Tupinamba was probably to inspire Calvinist Jean de Léry to publish a response to his accusation that Léry and the other Calvinists were plotting with cannibalistic Tupinamba and French-born Brazilians to overthrow the colony.¹⁴

Calvinist Jean de Léry had arrived at Fort Coligny in 1557. After eight months, several of his fellow Protestant missionaries were murdered by Villegagnon. The remainder were violently exiled from the island colony and forced to live on the mainland, where they depended on the natives for survival for the two months until a ship came that would return them to France. During this brief period, Léry was able to observe many aspects of everyday life among the Tupinamba. However, like Thevet, Léry relied on Frenchmen who lived with the Tupinamba in order to comprehend their language and the more complex and sacred aspects of their culture. Though motivated by a desire to contradict Thevet, Léry reiterated much of Thevet’s description of Brazilian practices. According to Janet Whatley, “in the reportage of the two men there is more overlap than Léry would like to admit, even in anecdote and wording.”¹⁵ This agreement suggests the possibility that neither Léry nor Thevet’s knowledge of Tupinamba cannibalism was based on eyewitness experience.

When he returned to France, Léry became a Calvinist minister as well as a witch-hunter in the violent Wars of Religion that swept through his homeland. Among those who suffered under his examinations, a family he claimed resorted to eating their dead baby during the siege of Sancerre was put to the torch at his orders.¹⁶ Léry did not publish an account of his time in Brazil until he became enraged by Thevet’s accusations. In response, his 1578 *Histoire d’un Voyage* accused Villegagnon of cannibalism in a classic Protestant argument against transubstantiation in the Catholic Eucharist, claiming “they wanted not only to eat the flesh of Jesus Christ grossly rather than spiritually, but what was worse, like the savages named *Ouetaca*, of whom I have

¹⁴ Janet Whatley, “Introduction,” in *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America: Containing the Navigation and the Remarkable Things Seen on the Sea by the Author; the Behavior of Villegagnon in That Country; the Customs and Strange Ways of Life of the American Savages; Together with the Description of Various Animals, Trees, Plants, and Other Singular Things Completely Unknown over Here*, by Jean de Léry, trans. Janet Whatley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. xix, xxi.

¹⁵ Regarding Léry’s witch hunting, see Lestringant, *Cannibals*, p. 70; on his use of interpreters, see Whatley, “Introduction,” p. xxi; Léry, *History of a Voyage*, pp. 29, 140, 161–164, 170.

¹⁶ Léry, *History of a Voyage*, p. 41; Lestringant, *Cannibals*, pp. 71–72, goes into depth about the connections between the Eucharist and cannibalism.

already spoken, they wanted to chew it and swallow it raw.” Just as Thevet had accused the Calvinists of collaborating with cannibals to raid and rob the French colony, Léry identified the French Catholic opposition with the most degrading form of anthropophagy in the consumption of the raw flesh of their saviour. The slanderous accusations between Léry, Thevet, and Villegagnon reflect European religious controversies and warn of the possibility of death as a consequence for the wrong cultural and religious affinity.

This leaves Hans Staden, who wrote his *Veritable Historie and Description of a Country Belonging to the Wild, Naked, Savage, Man-Eating People, Situated in the New World America* with the authority of an eyewitness held captive among the Tupinamba. Trained as a gunner, Staden left his native Hesse in 1547, during the years when Landgrave Philip of Hesse, Staden's prince and the leader of the military arm of the Lutheran movement in Germany, was defeated and imprisoned by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Though nothing is known about Staden's military career, he may have been a gunner in Philip's Lutheran army. It is also possible that he was part of Charles V's reorganization of that army when it was defeated in 1547. Staden traveled by way of Charles V's homeland, Holland, to Portugal and then to Brazil with a Portuguese ship carrying convicts to labor in the colony. When his second voyage with the Spanish ended in shipwreck, he was rescued by the Portuguese and put to use defending their colony as a gunner. From there he was taken in by the Tupinamba where he stayed for ten months until they allowed him to leave with the French.

Upon his return home to Hesse in 1555, Staden was questioned by agents of the recently liberated Landgrave Philip, who was again involved in the Protestant contest for control of France and Germany. Writing to Landgrave Philip in the original introduction for Staden's text, Dr. Johann Dryander attested to this careful interview, reporting that Staden “has long before been by His Highness our gracious Lord, and in my presence and in that of many others, examined and thoroughly questioned upon all points of the shipwreck and imprisonment . . . of which I have often spoken and narrated to Your Highness and to other Lords.”¹⁷ Staden's narrative was the product of that interrogation. Given this close examination, Staden's account must be read as

¹⁷ Hans Staden, “Veritable Historie and Description of a Country Belonging to the Wild, Naked, Savage, Man-Eating People, Situated in the New World, America,” in *The Captivity of Hans Stade of Hesse, in A.D. 1547–1555, Among the Wild Tribes of Eastern Brazil*, trans. Albert Tootal and annotated by Richard Burton (New York: Burt Franklin, 1874), p. 13.

a strategic offering to an interested and politically powerful audience. As a simple soldier, Staden did not stray from his narrative to take sides in the ideological battles of the Reformation. However, during his travels, Staden had survived by acting as an agent employed to the uses of his master of the moment. As a result, his seemingly simple text is intricate—concealing and disavowing allegiances with both Catholics and Brazilians for the benefit of his Protestant audience.

By his own admission, Hans Staden was a practiced chameleon; his narrative moves through scene after scene in which he demonstrated his willingness to lie and perform an identity not his own. As Malcolm Letts notes, “he obviously expected to be classed among the lying travelers” for he insisted repeatedly that his account was true.¹⁸ Believers in Tupinamba cannibalism have defended the truth of his account, citing his careful attention to each encounter he had with a European who, as Dryander wrote, might “return home, and if Hans Staden’s story be false or lying . . . put him to shame and denounce him a worthless man.”¹⁹ In fact, Staden was careful to detail each European encounter, not only to support his claims, but to explain away evidence that he had set aside his Christian roots and been assimilated by the Tupinamba. Just as the religious wars divided the French colony in Brazil and devolved into the murder of Calvinists by Catholics, Staden’s experience in Brazil had not liberated him from the Christian contest for souls. Hans Staden’s soul was captive to the violence of culture wars and cannibals not in Brazil, but at home in Europe.

While he seems to have willingly shifted affinities and played with cultural identity in order to survive, Staden never exhibited a sense of agency. Instead, he was “tied,” “captive,” “obliged,” or a “slave” to a new “master.” Staden’s sense of captivity and obligation rather than free will is evidenced in the early parts of his account by his identification with slaves under Portuguese control. For his Lutheran audience, Staden was openly critical of the Portuguese use of slaves. He described natives who had “become rebellious against the Portuguese,” explaining, “they had not been so before, but they now became so on account of the Portuguese having enslaved them.” Staden identified with these people, observing that they simply “desired peace.”²⁰ After he returned to Portugal, Staden signed on for a second trip to South America, this

¹⁸ Malcolm Letts, introduction to Staden, *True History*, p. 12.

¹⁹ Most defenders cite the scholarship of Donald Forsyth. Dr. Dryander is quoted in Staden, *Captivity of Hans Stade*, p. 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

time with a Spanish fleet. In this part of his narrative, he again commented on Portuguese slavery at the island of Sainte Thome. Stating that "it is an island rich in sugar, but unhealthy," Staden elaborated, saying, "in it live Portuguese with many black Moors, who are their slaves." These observations suggest that Staden was especially sensitive to the Portuguese use of slave labor, possibly because he could identify with those coerced into serving them.

Staden's criticism of Portuguese slavery makes more sense when juxtaposed with his own service for the Portuguese after he was shipwrecked and stranded in Brazil at their colony of Brikioka. Upon learning he was trained as a gunner, the Portuguese assigned him to stay there for four months to defend a fort on a nearby island where "no Portuguese gunner would stay," until ships arrived with reinforcements. The duty he described was miserable and dangerous; he remembered that "during most of the time, I was in the blockhouse with three others and some guns, but we were in great danger from the savages, for the fort was not strong, and we had to keep perpetual watch lest the savages should slip past in the darkness." When the ships from Portugal arrived, Staden recalled simply, "I desired my release." However, the Portuguese pressured him to stay on until Staden yielded, as he recalled, "on the condition that when this time was at an end they would then without hindrance set me on the first ship for Portugal." Whether he emphasized this obligation for the benefit of his Protestant audience or he truly found himself bonded to the Portuguese against his will is concealed within the convolutions of Staden's narrative. Paired with his emphasis on Portuguese slavery, the "hindrance" Staden referred to suggests that he may have been kept against his will, for he had expressed a strong desire for his "release."²¹ If Staden was forcefully held by the Portuguese, the scene of his capture, while foolishly hunting alone in the woods, is better interpreted as an escape to the Tupinamba. This also explains why each of the five times the Portuguese and their Tupi-ikin allies come looking for him, Staden found an excuse to either hide, decline rescue, or shoot back.

Often seen resisting rescue, even shooting at the Portuguese, Staden had to have a story to explain this resistance and deny physical evidence that suggested his soul was willingly captive to the Tupinamba.²² Much of Staden's narrative of captivity among cannibals was structured around explaining his apparent preference for the Tupinamba over the

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55, 75, 77, 89–90, 113.

Portuguese. Despite appearances, he professed loyalty to the Portuguese and denied having gone Tupinamba; he portrayed his actions as a mere performance of identity in order to survive. In one such scene, Staden told of an attack on the Tupinamba by Portuguese allies. Here he claimed to have pretended to sympathize with his captors in order to get them to relax their guard: "Then I said to them, 'You take me for a Portuguese, your enemy, now give me a bow and arrows and let me go loose, and I will help you to defend the huts.' They handed me a bow and arrows; I shouted and shot and acted as like them as I possibly could, and encouraged them to be of good heart and valorous, and that no harm would come to them. And my intention was to push through the stockade which surrounds the huts, and to run towards the others, for they knew me well, and also were aware that I was in the village."²³ From the viewpoint of the Portuguese, when Staden took up arms and joined the Tupinamba in battle, he performed as a member of the Tupinamba. He knew they would have witnessed him in his Brazilian alliance and feared they would report that he had dangerously denied Christian aid. In anticipation of such reports, Staden's narrative may have been an elaborate revision of actual events that concealed his assimilation into that Tupinamba community.

According to Staden, this performance of identity was necessary because Staden's association with the Portuguese made him the mortal enemy of the Tupinamba. They told him that the Portuguese had tricked a number of them onto their ship and "then attacked them and bound them." Though those captured were probably enslaved, the Tupinamba were convinced that the Portuguese had then "delivered them up to their enemies who had killed and eaten them."²⁴ Anthropophagy became a metaphor for Portuguese slavery. Believing he was Portuguese, the Tupinamba also asked Staden to explain his time spent as a gunner for the Portuguese, in which he had been called upon to shoot at them. Staden's strategy was to deny his alliance with the Portuguese, recalling that he "said that the Portuguese had stationed me there and that I was obliged to do so."²⁵ Staden was most frank about his strategy of shifting national and religious identity in order to survive when he recalled attempting to convince the Tupinamba that he was with the French rather than the Portuguese. To explain his ignorance of French, Staden told the Tupinamba, "Yes it is true, I have been so long out of my country that I have forgotten my

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

language.”²⁶ However, the Tupinamba were wise to this strategy and spoke of other enemies who had posed as French in order to survive. In fact, the evidence suggests that Staden was telling the truth not to his Protestant audience in Germany, but to the Tupinamba with whom he stood and fought, shouting, encouraging, and acting “as like them” as he could. Staden had escaped captivity among the Portuguese and was relying on Tupinamba animosity toward them to defend him from reassignment to a dangerous indentured service defending their fort.

There is good evidence that Staden was initiated or at least living freely among the Tupinamba. As Malcolm Letts explained in the introduction to the 1929 translation of Staden's narrative, “Staden was to some extent now an honoured guest among the Tupinamba.”²⁷ There came a time when he “went about unfettered.”²⁸ He secured gifts for the community from a Portuguese rescue attempt (again refused), and the Tupinamba decided to “henceforward treat him better.” Though he cast his time among the Tupinamba in the same terms he had used to explain his service for the Portuguese, Staden found a useful role when, as he wrote, “they led me now and again into the forest, and when they had work to do, I was *obliged* to help them.”²⁹ Later, the Tupinamba strategically took him on a reconnaissance mission to Brikioka, the colony where he had served the Portuguese as a gunner.³⁰ Toward the end of his ten-month stay, Staden was given to a new master, a king who Staden claimed even “called me (his) son.”³¹

Staden's strategy of making himself useful to the Tupinamba in order to escape the Portuguese and survive being stranded in Brazil may seem unproblematic. However, as Ramie Targoff has argued, his Protestant contemporaries held “a profound conviction in the transformative power of public performance.” According to Targoff's research, early modern critics of the theatre were concerned that even a “purely hypocritical performance” would be “unwittingly internalized” and evolve into a sincere expression of cultural affinity that mirrored the Protestant expression of faith.³² In other words, Staden's Protestant audience might believe that his performance for the Tupinamba could have truly transformed him into an anti-Christian cannibal.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Staden, *True History*, p. 8.

²⁸ Staden, *Captivity of Hans Stade*, p. 81.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 96–100.

³¹ Ibid., p. 108.

³² Ramie Targoff, “The Performance of Prayer: Sincerity and Theatricality in Early Modern England,” *Representations* 60 (Fall 1997): 50, 52–53.

Against this suspicion, Staden demonstrated his further willingness to be flexible with his religious and cultural identity. The part played by Staden for his examiners in Germany was that of the persecuted Calvinist surviving torment in the wilderness among cannibals.³³ Though he was freed and working in the community, Staden denied the hospitality of the Tupinamba and dramatized his mistreatment in their hands. He described a frightening capture, torture, and interrogation at the hands of the Tupinamba in an initial period that he associated with the preparation of captives for the cannibal feast: "When they first bring their enemies home, the women and children beat them. Thereupon, they paint the captive with grey feathers, shaving his eyebrows from above his eyes; they dance with him, tie him securely that he may not escape them, and give him a woman, who takes care of him, and who also has intercourse with him."³⁴ Whether his experience broke from the agreed upon description of Tupinamba cannibal rites or Staden also had the opportunity to cohabit with a Tupinamba woman remains unclear. His experience seems comparable to those described by white captives in North America who were initially beaten, then treated with such "tenderness" that many refused to receive rescue.³⁵ According to Richard Slotkin's analysis of North American captivity narratives, "in the Indian's devilish clutches, the captive had to meet and reject the temptation of Indian marriage and/or the Indian's 'cannibal' Eucharist."³⁶ While Staden did fixate on the important ceremonial role played by women in rites he believed were cannibalistic, if he did take a wife, he denied facing that temptation before his Protestant audience.

Instead, Staden made sure that his audience knew he had refused to eat the food offered to him by the cannibals, claiming that "one of my teeth began to ache so violently that because of the pain I could

³³ There are mentions of praying with the Spanish in Staden, *Captivity of Hans Staden*, pp. 29, 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³⁵ James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

³⁶ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1500–1860* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973). As the literary analysis of North American captivity narratives has shown, captivity among "savages" was a formula used for reifying Christian affinity, a test passed in a tempting wilderness; see Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of American Frontiers, 1630–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); also, June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); and Richard Van der Beets, *Held Captive by Indians: Selected Narratives, 1642–1836* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973).

not eat and I began to lose flesh." When his "master" tried to pull the tooth out "by force," Staden "resisted so vigorously that he desisted." In doing so, he took the position of martyr, suffering physical pain willingly in order to diminish his flesh and prevent incorporation. When he remembered that scene, Staden recalled fantasizing that the infected tooth might kill him, thinking, "God knows how much I wanted to die in peace if it was His will, before the savages could have their way with me."³⁷ His refusal of food signalled the purity of his Christian affinity. This was not an uncommon strategy used by European visitors who faced starvation for fear of physical transformation into savagery by the food and climate of the Americas.³⁸ By starving himself, Staden also assured his audience that he had not eaten human flesh and referenced the religious controversy over the Eucharist and its association with cannibalism.

Like his show of resistance to Tupinamba food and hospitality, Staden's refusal to participate in cultural ceremonies demonstrated his resistance to incorporation by the Tupinamba. Claiming he was "obliged" to dance "in harmony" at a ceremony celebrating his arrival, Staden refused to fall in step with the Tupinamba. Here again he called upon the suffering of his body, complaining that "the leg in which I was wounded pained me so badly that I could hardly stand." Rather than abandoning his cultural ties, Staden used his suffering body to speak of his Christian resistance. In his performance as Christian captive, Staden assured his readers that pain enabled him to remain true to Christian values. He described his ten-month stay as a witness to one anthropophagic feast after another, against which he entreated the Tupinamba to stop and prayed to a god who brought storms and sickness upon the cannibals. Thus Staden kept knowledge of his cultural betrayal from his examiners and critics in Germany.

Staden's performance of Christianity among cannibals convinced his interviewer, Dr. Dryander, of the purity of his motives and resistance to Americanization. To those who might have believed that Staden "wished hereby to gain glory and to make a transient name," Dryander argued that Staden was motivated by a desire to "praise and

³⁷ Staden, *Captivity of Hans Stade*, pp. 69–70.

³⁸ Martha L. Finch, "'Civilized' Bodies and the 'Savage' Environment of Early New Plymouth," in *A Centre of Wonders: the Body in Early America*, ed. Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tarter (London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 43–60; and Jorge Canizares Esguerra, "New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America," *American Historical Review* 104 (February 1999): 1–39.

to glorify God.”³⁹ Staden had shown himself subject to God’s “will” and passed a test of faith by rejecting the hospitality of the Tupinamba and refusing to participate in their culture. Indeed, Staden’s account of Calvinist martyrdom was so compelling that when his narrative was rereleased in 1593 by the Protestant Theodor de Bry, the new engravings illustrating the account served to strengthen Staden’s claim of Christian virtue in a hellish wilderness.⁴⁰

Staden was not the only character to use rumors of Tupinamba cannibalism to serve his own ends. Just as Staden used the myth of the cannibal to play Christian captive, the Tupinamba played cannibal to further their own ends. The Tupinamba met Staden’s performance of Christianity with humor and further encouraged his fear of being eaten. When he would fall into prayer or break into a desperate hymn, they were amused and laughed at him, saying “how he howls, he dreads death.” There is evidence that the Tupinamba threatened death and cannibalism as part of the ceremonial language of initiation and for a good joke on the frightened Europeans. With Staden, the Tupinamba “played cannibal” and “pretended to bite at their arms.”⁴¹ They circled around him and laid claim to his body parts and “called mockingly after me that they would not fail to appear at my master’s hut, to drink over me and to eat me.”⁴² Staden was not alone in being the butt of Tupinamba cannibal humor. In one terrified moment, Jean de Léry recalled, “my one consolation was the great hoot of laughter they sent up—for they are great jokers.”⁴³ “Great jokers” that they were, the Tupinamba kept European visitors at a disadvantage through their own anxiety about being eaten.

This Brazilian sense of humor intoxicated even those whom the Europeans believed would be killed and eaten. In one encounter with a man, “on the eve of the day when they intended drinking to his death,” Staden “said to him, ‘Everything is prepared for thy death.’” In response to Staden’s dramatic reference to death, the victim “laughed and said, ‘Yes.’” Staden was confused because the “victim” seemed more concerned with the details of his upcoming ceremony and complained that the people of this village had bound him with a cord “not quite long enough.” As Staden recalled, “he spoke in such a manner

³⁹ Staden, *Captivity of Hans Stade*, pp. 11–12.

⁴⁰ I have written about these images in my dissertation; see Heather Elaine Martel, “Contact: Christianizing the Soul, Disembodying Science, Americanizing the Flesh, 1498–1627” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 2001), pp. 204–71.

⁴¹ Staden, *Captivity of Hans Stade*, p. 52

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 75

⁴³ Léry, *History of a Voyage*, p. 164.

as if he were going to a festival.” According to Léry, “prisoners consider themselves fortunate to die thus publicly, in the midst of their enemies, and are utterly untroubled.”⁴⁴ In his account of a very similar encounter, a female prisoner also mocked and laughed at Léry’s Christian concern: “There was a woman prisoner all ready to be slain. I approached her, and trying to adapt my speech to hers, told her to entrust herself to the care of [God]. . . . Her only response was to shake her head, and say to me in mockery, ‘What will you give me if I do as you say?’ I answered, ‘Poor wretch, soon you will need nothing more in this world, and therefore, since you believe the soul to be immortal . . . think what will become of it after your death.’ But she merely laughed again and was felled with a blow and so died.”⁴⁵ The humor of the Tupinamba and their “victims” in the moments before the ceremony was confusing for both Léry and Staden who were obsessed with cannibals and dreaded being eaten.

In this almost formulaic encounter, both Léry and Staden revealed deep-seated and complex cultural misunderstandings that the Tupinamba seemed to find amusing. Whether these misunderstandings included the real practice of cannibalism by the Tupinamba remains unknown. They did seem to enjoy exploiting the European fear for their own amusement and had disease not weakened them, the dread of cannibals might have kept the empires at bay for longer. It is worth noting that—though he was threatened—Staden was not murdered and eaten by the Tupinamba. Instead, he was brought into the community.

In addition to those Tupinamba comedians nibbling on their arms while they entertained themselves with European hysteria, the true authors of Brazilian cannibalism were Frenchmen who had been assimilated by the Tupinamba. In the first European encounters with the Americas, contact and colonization was intense with the risk that Christians would let go that identity and “go native.” Unlike Staden, many did. In sixteenth-century Brazil, relations between the French and Tupinamba were facilitated by “‘*truchements de Normandie*’ or Norman interpreters” (as Jean de Léry called them), Frenchmen who lived among the Tupinamba, intermarried with them, raised children by them, learned their language, and adopted their practices.⁴⁶ Jean de Léry described them as “certain Normans, having escaped from a shipwreck, [who] had remained among the savages, where, having no fear

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Letts in Staden, *True History*, p. xix.

of God, they lived in wantonness with the women.”⁴⁷ Through captivity, necessity, or choice, these men and women became loyal to the native communities and families that provided them with new homes and status. Though ostracized by colonial authorities, Indianized Europeans maintained trade relations with other Europeans and offered valuable services as mediators and translators. It is difficult to capture the experiences and motivations of these men, for they are usually mentioned in the historical record only as interpreters for travelers, such as Jean de Léry, who claimed firsthand knowledge of native cultures.

Though valuable to the French colonization effort led by Villegagnon at Fort Coligny on the coast of Brazil, 1555–1564, the French authorities were highly critical and mistrustful of the Norman interpreters because of their ability and willingness to adapt to Brazilian culture. It was these nativized Frenchmen who were singled out by André Thevet in his 1575 *Cosmographie Universalle* when he mentioned “certain conspiracies against our company by Norman Frenchmen, who, because they understood the language of this savage and barbarous people (who are so brutish as to possess almost no reason), were plotting with two petty kings of the country, to whom they had promised the few goods that we possessed, to kill us all.” Léry, who had relied so heavily on these interpreters for mediation and cross-cultural diplomacy with the Tupinamba, turned against them in his narrative, calling it “praiseworthy” that “Villegagnon, by advice of the council, forbade on pain of death that any man bearing the name of Christian live with the savages’ women.” Léry recalled a Norman interpreter “convicted of fornication with a woman.” If a friend had not softened Villegagnon toward the interpreter, “instead of having him punished merely by being chained by the foot and among slaves, Villegagnon would have had him hanged.”⁴⁸ Though Villegagnon had betrayed Léry and killed some of his fellow Calvinists, Léry admired such brutality against those Frenchmen who had gone Tupinamba.

Motivated by the same religious coercion that shaped Staden’s use of those rumors, the Norman interpreters might have been inclined to tell tales of Brazilian cannibals to Léry, Thevet, and the French colonial authorities and thus solidify their privileged access to those trade alliances. It was these cultural intermediaries who delivered the rumors of cannibalism to early European ethnographers. They used the Chris-

⁴⁷ Staden, *Captivity of Hans Stade*, p. 144.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

tian fear of cannibals against them and nurtured their dread through rumors and misinformation about the Tupinamba. Allied with the Tupinamba in giving this impression, the Norman interpreters solidified the European myth of the Brazilian cannibal, pretending to participate themselves. Léry claimed that, "surpassing the savages in inhumanity," some of the French-born Brazilians had "even boasted in my hearing of having killed and eaten prisoners."⁴⁹ When Staden had struggled to assure the Tupinamba that he was a friend, not one of the Portuguese who had tricked them with trade, kidnapped their members, and used them for slavery, he counted on religious affinity from a Frenchman, thinking, "in all events he is a Christian, and he will say everything for the best." However, the Frenchman who arrived to verify his identity had new loyalties. He lived among the Tupinamba not four miles away, spoke fluent Tupi, was called in their language Karwattu Ware, and refused to be complicit in Staden's story. Showing solidarity with his Tupinamba allies instead, Karwattu Ware "said to the savages in their language, 'Kill him and eat him, the villain, he is a true Portuguese, my enemy and yours,'" thus condemning Staden to death and worse, consumption by cannibals.⁵⁰

Later Karwattu Ware again confirmed Staden's fear that he would be eaten. When Staden begged him to "tell them not to eat me," Karwattu Ware replied, "they want to eat you," sending Staden into a dramatic fit of despair in which he ripped off his clothes and exposed himself to the scorching sun, saying "If I am to die, why should I preserve my flesh for another?"⁵¹ Léry also admitted that he "did not understand their language perfectly at that time." He recalled a song wherein "they had said several things that I had not been able to comprehend, and I asked the interpreter to explain them to me." In response, the interpreter told him that the singers "pronounced violent threats against the Ouetaca . . . , to capture and eat them."⁵² Just as the Tupinamba had used Staden's fear of cannibalism as entertainment or possibly to break down his Christian affinity and turn him toward a new Tupinamba master, the Norman interpreters proliferated rumors of the Tupinamba cannibal for European visitors.

Anthropologists and historians have argued that agreement between Thevet, Léry, and Staden proves the veracity of their accounts and the existence of cannibals in sixteenth-century Brazil. However,

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 126.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 67–68

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁵² Léry, *History of a Voyage*, p. 144.

information given to all three of them by French-born members of Brazilian communities during a brief sixteen-year period from Staden's first encounter in 1548 to Thevet's departure in 1564 may have come from the same unreliable source. In fact, the three major chroniclers of sixteenth-century Brazilian culture—Hans Staden, Jean de Léry, and André Thevet—studied the Tupinamba and their supposed practice of cannibalism with the aid of French interpreters such as Karwattu Ware. Léry and Thevet's dependence on these Norman interpreters is well documented. Staden also had contact with French-born Brazilians in his interactions with the Frenchman Karwattu Ware and through his escape on a French ship. Even though Staden demonstrated a good command of the Tupinamba language, he often misunderstood the more subtle meanings of their words, actions, and symbolism.⁵³ While many have found Staden's Christian narrative of captivity among cannibals believable, it is possible that either he or his sources intentionally misrepresented the Tupinamba.⁵⁴ The Frenchmen who aided Staden may well have provided him with the same details on Tupinamba cannibalism that were given to Léry and Thevet. In need of a good story for his return to German Hesse, Staden would have been a captive audience.

Perhaps after a time among them, Staden had been remade by the Tupinamba. He had felt the fluidity of his identity and his ability to adapt himself. He had pretended to be a healer, to interpret the heavens, and to speak for God in order to stay alive, and was labeled a "bad wizard" by the Tupinamba.⁵⁵ Just as the Spanish explorer Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca had endured for years in the arid lands of eastern Texas and northern Mexico by offering his services to the natives as slave, trader, and healer, Hans Staden had played soldier for both the Portuguese and Spanish conquest; performed as a soldier, trader, sorcerer, and scout for the Tupinamba; and returned home to Germany where he presented a tale of Protestant devotion among bloodthirsty cannibals. But Staden's willingness to play with his cultural identity also reflected a sense of necessity born of surviving conflict at home through his native alliances.

Unlike Cabeza de Vaca, Staden did not speak up for the natives

⁵³ Forsyth ably defends Staden's ability to speak Tupi against Arens's claim that Staden could not have had a good enough command of the language to understand their descriptions of cannibalism. Forsyth, "Three Cheers for Hans Staden," p. 18.

⁵⁴ Whitehead, "Hans Staden"; Forsyth, "Three Cheers for Hans Staden", Lestringant, *Cannibals*.

⁵⁵ Stripped of the cannibal myth, Staden's experience of being stranded in the Americas and dependent on native hospitality was much like that of Cabeza de Vaca.

who had taken him in and as a result he would also not return home in chains and be suspected of treason.⁵⁶ Hans Staden's motivations were not questioned by his fellow Christians, for far from defending the natives or telling a tale of bravery and personal "glory," he exhibited no free will. Though his body was captive to various masters, his soul was ultimately obliged to a Christian God. Unlike the Norman interpreters who, "having no fear of God," moved freely between cultures, Staden was forced to choose a Calvinist identity. To protect himself from corporal punishment and assure the vigilant enforcers of religious affinity, he condemned the Tupinamba to a history as cannibals.

In the end, Staden's account met no critics because the Tupinamba and their French-born members kept their story straight; they fed the misrepresentation of themselves as eaters of human flesh. As Neil Whitehead has observed, "in other contexts, the cannibal sign was quite overtly manipulated by indigenous populations, in the face of colonial obsessions."⁵⁷ The Tupinamba and some of their French allies used the Western fascination with cannibals. They took advantage of Reformation controversies surrounding the Eucharist that facilitated the spread of rumors about Brazilian cannibalism among their Portuguese competitors and the Catholic and Calvinist missionaries who came to colonize their homeland.⁵⁸ If so, the real story is about the subversive power of rumors in resisting imperialism. Just as Staden played with identity to preserve himself, the Tupinamba and the nativized Norman interpreters "played cannibal" to European expectations. Though they were overcome by disease in the end, the myth of the cannibal earned the Tupinamba notoriety that lasts to this day and may have been effective in frightening and sometimes even freeing Europeans from their imperial purpose.

⁵⁶ Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America*, trans. and ed. Cyclone Covey (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1961). Cabeza de Vaca's travels (1527–1537) led him to advocate for native Americans subject to the Spanish conquest and, when he was appointed governor of Rio de la Plata in 1540, he "systematically prohibited enslaving, raping, and looting of the Indians;" as a result, he was deposed, returned to Spain in chains in 1543 and then exiled to Africa from 1551 to 1556; see pp. 14–16.

⁵⁷ Whitehead, "Hans Staden," p. 750.

⁵⁸ As historian Gregory Evans Dowd has shown in *War under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations & the British Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 168–173, "rumors and misinformation" were a subversive strategy used by those facing colonial subjugation.