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Examining, Deconstructing and Decolonizing the Word Cannibal**

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"In a little time I began to speak to him, and teach him to speak to me; and, first, I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life. I likewise taught him to say master, and then let him know that was to be my name".

Robinson Crusoe, *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (1719) pg. 121

"You taught me language, and my profit on't Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you For learning me your language!"

Caliban, *The Tempest*, by William Shakespeare (1610) Act I, Scene 2 lines 363-365

"The time for change is always and will always be right now!"

Samantha Booke, *The Great Debaters* (2007)

The colonization of the Americas began with the word cannibal. A mispronunciation of a Taino Arawak word, uttered in a moment of dialogue between strangers, it contributed to one of human History's most important turning points and it changed the worlds that existed at the time of this meeting between the Taino Arawak and the Spanish. The word cannibal was among the first to enter the lexicons of Europe following contact between Europeans and the indigenous people of the Caribbean via European colonialism's most recognizable man, Christopher Columbus. With the use of this new word, Columbus was able to create the image of a world that did not exist and then to justify its invasion. It is true that Columbus is not singularly responsible for Spain's incursion into the Americas and the atrocities perpetuated during colonialism that followed, but he is responsible for introducing a false world vision of the continent's peoples to Europeans. I say that he is responsible because the word cannibal, as he first used it in the courts of Europe, carried embedded within it a belief in an

entire world that was at best the invention and at worst the manipulation of Spanish colonists and belief in this world became the foundational paradigm for attack and colonization in the Americas. What this means then, by extension, is that belief in what the word cannibal signifies also reinforced beliefs in superiority, savagery and enlightenment, brought down great empires and inspired acts of such barbarity that descendants of those forced to endure these acts are still in the process of recovering from them. The process of psychological and cultural recovery from these acts of barbarity, which Europeans committed against others, is sometimes referred to as decolonization (Smith 1999). When critically examining the process of decolonization, language is a crucial aspect of the equation that needs to be properly deconstructed (Smith 1999). Therefore, the process of decolonization in the Americas ought to include an examination, deconstruction and decolonization of the word cannibal. This paper proposes to do just that and will argue that the word cannibal acts as both sign and signifier for a signified that only exists in the European imagination and thus it is a crude vestige of European colonialism that needs to be deconstructed.

The word Cannibal exists in several modern European languages and their derivatives in the form of nation languages. While it may seem appropriate to begin an examination of the word with a definition furnished by an authority on a European language, I would argue that we must begin at the beginning. The root of the word cannibal is not of European origin and we must begin with the Arawak root of the word and move historically forward.

Like the history of the indigenous people of the Caribbean, the history of the word cannibal has been shrouded in controversy. The word cannibal is believed to come from the Arawak word caniba. In the Arawakan language the word caniba means brave or bold (Keegan 1996: 18). However, there is another similar word that was usually used in juxtaposition with this word caniba and that was the word caribes (Keegan 1996: 18). When Columbus first conversed with the Taino Arawak on their island of Guanahani, they are believed to have spoken to him about people they called caribes (Keegan 1996: 18). We know this

because Columbus' wrote extensively about his meetings with the Taino on his first voyage in 1492 (Ife 1992). The caribes were an aspect of Taino mythology that denoted the antithesis of what was considered proper Taino behavior (Keegan 1996: 21). The Taino were speaking to Columbus about "creatures who only existed in Taino mythology," but because of their inability to understand the Arawak language, the Spanish understood the term caribes to denote real people (Keegan 1996: 18). Further, Columbus' reason for sailing westward was to find an alternate trade route to the east where he sought an audience with the Gran Can through his subjects, whom Columbus also called the Caniba (Keegan 1996: 18-19). Upon seeing the brown skinned Taino, Columbus believed that he had reached the east successfully and hearing the Taino use the words caribe and caniba led him to believe that he had found people who knew the Gran Can. In his diary, Columbus states this himself and writes, "and thus I say again how other times I said that caniba is nothing else but the people of the Gran Can" (Keegan 1996: 21).

Interestingly, the Taino believed that the Spanish were caribes because of the direction they were sailing when the two groups first met. The Taino believed that people who sailed in the direction that the Spanish had been sailing in were trying to reach a place called Caribata, the place where the caribes were believed to live (Keegan 1996: 21). This is because in Taino cosmology, spirits (cemis) were associated with geographical places (Keegan 1996: 23). The Taino described these caribes as entities who took Taino away, never to be seen again (Keegan 1996: 20). For his part, believing them to be one and the same, Columbus used the words caribes, caniba and canibales interchangeably in his travel diary (Keegan 1996: 19). Ergo, the words caribes, caniba and canibales became linked for Columbus and the Europeans who followed.

This, in itself, is not problematic, but the fact that Columbus believed that the caribes/canibales were real people most certainly is. Columbus, the Taino described the caribe as "one eyed men, and others, with snouts of dogs, who ate men" (Keegan 1996: 19). Since Columbus was not a fluent speaker of the Arawak language, nor was any of his crew, it is difficult to believe

that this is an accurate transcription of what the Taino told him. Moreover, as scholars like Peter Hulme and Neil Whitehead have pointed out, these characteristics are more in keeping with the European travel literature of Columbus' time. Dating as far back as the Odyssey we can find examples of Europeans writing about encounters with one-eyed strangers and those who ate human flesh. Thus, the motif was by no means original. Additionally, as early as 1520 it was believed that the word cannibal was rooted in the Latin word *canis*, meaning dog (Hulme & Whitehead 1992). Coupled with the travel literature motifs, this may explain why Columbus characterized the people he believed the Taino to be speaking about in this way. When these one-eyed, dog-snouted men failed to materialize, the Spanish managed to find a group of people to graft the word cannibal onto: the Kalinago.

The Kalinago are another group indigenous to the Caribbean, but their society is markedly different from the Arawak and this became a significant reason for their becoming associated with the word cannibal. In contrast to the Arawak, the Kalinago are a society that predicates social status on militancy. By the time that the Spanish first come across the Kalinago, the word *canibales* had already made its way to Europe through the publication of the diary Columbus presented to Queen Isabella in 1493 (Keegan 1996: 18). When the Spanish encountered this warrior society, which was in no way as hospitable as their Arawak neighbors, they believed that they had found the caribes/canibales of whom the Taino had spoken. Building on earlier reports of "men who ate men", the Spanish grafted their beliefs about *canibales* onto the Kalinago (Boucher 1992). It is interesting that they disregarded the "one eyed, dog snout" characteristic, but held onto the "consumer of flesh" aspect of what the Taino are said to have told them.

Although there has never been any archaeological evidence to support this belief that the Kalinago consumed human flesh and contemporary research continues to disprove this (Whitehead 1984, Davis & Goodwin 1990, Davis 1992), the Spanish believed definitively that the Kalinago did because it suited their purposes to do so. Thus, the Spanish had now 'found' their

canibales. The result of this can be seen in the fact that following the establishment of the *encomienda* system, a legal framework instituted by Spain where colonists were given a parcel of land complete with indigenous slaves to work it, the Spanish crown issued a proclamation in 1503 that “permitted the taking of ‘cannibals’ as slaves” (Keegan 1996: 27). The Kalinago, because of their refusal to be colonized, were termed cannibals. The Kalinago became known as the Caribs, a corruption of the word caribes, and the belief that they were consumers of human flesh, or cannibals, continues to this day as can be seen in contemporary European language definitions of the word cannibal. The Oxford English Dictionary (2008) defines the word cannibal as “a man (esp. a savage) that eats human flesh; a man-eater, an anthropophagite. Originally proper name of the man-eating Caribs of the Antilles”. El Diccionario de la Lengua Española (2005) defines the word as “canibal: Se dice de los salvajes de las Antillas, que eran tenidos por antropófagos (trans. the savages of the Caribbean who ate human flesh)”. In the Dictionnaire de L'Académie française (2008), the word is also canibal and is defined as “nom sous lequel les insulaires anthropophages étaient désignés par les premiers Américains que rencontra Colomb” (trans. name by which the human flesh eating islanders were called by the first Americans who met Columbus). Thus, the word cannibal has made its way into contemporary usage as a word which defines a signified “other” who does not actually exist except in the imagination of European colonists. The original Arawak use of the term is conspicuously absent from its definitions and the connection between the Kalinago people and the eating of human flesh remains intact even in modern European language use.

The reason this is so is directly related to the colonization of the Americas. Europeans needed indigenous slaves to provide the labour force for their budding plantation economies and the Kalinago's refusal to be colonized and Christianized gave Europeans an excuse for their enslavement. European Christians were not entirely comfortable with the idea of enslaving human beings, but by describing the indigenous people of the Caribbean as eaters of flesh who needed to be redeemed, invading Europeans managed to circumvent this moral dilemma. This

moral justification for slavery set the precedent that Europeans would later draw on in the enslavement of Africans and as we shall see, the word cannibal factored significantly into that process. The way that Europeans were able to transpose this word used to signify indigenous people onto Africans who were brought to the new world is better understood through a linguistic history of the word cannibal and how it came to be understood for colonizers and for the colonized.

The connection between the sign for cannibal, the signifier cannibal and the Kalinago people demonstrates the way that language was used in this aspect of colonization. To justify colonization, the Spanish attached the signifier canibales to the people they most wanted to prevent from impeding their appropriation of the islands of the Caribbean: the original inhabitants. The British and French followed suit because they had the same colonial objectives. As a sign and a signifier the word cannibal denoted the signified Kalinago, and later all indigenous people, as humans who consumed humans. The fact that the sign and the signifier did not match what was signified did not matter. Europeans ensured this by imposing their own signs and signifiers during colonization and by silencing all voices opposed to this. This meant that only their signs and signifiers to describe the indigenous people of the Caribbean remained. In essence, they constructed a word and a meaning for the word that assisted with the colonization of this ‘new’ world that they had ‘discovered’.

The word perpetuates beliefs about Kalinago people as consumers of human flesh in order to maintain a view that Spanish colonialism, and the wider European colonialism that followed, was in the best interest of the people who now live in the Americas. This is especially important because the people of the Americas still live in a world where European values, culture and languages are privileged. Except for those who are oriented to the frames of reference associated with decolonization, it is often taken for granted that the languages of the colonizing Europeans, which are still used institutionally and socially today, are sufficient to describe the world that people in the colonial Americas experience, the real world so to

speak. This is not so. The languages of the colonizers reflect only the colonizers' reality.

To understand why the word must be deconstructed and decolonized it is important to understand the impact that it has on colonized people as a word from a colonizing language. Almost fifty years ago, the French Caribbean psychiatrist and decolonization thinker Franz Fanon wrote in his seminal work *Black Skin, Whites Masks* that "a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language" (18). Sexist terminology aside, Fanon's idea about language is interesting because it suggests that users of language have power. Later, Michel Foucault, in his work *Discourse on Language*, would examine the boundaries and fallacies of this power (216), but at the time that Fanon was writing he was looking specifically at the way that European colonialism created hierarchies of being through language. Fanon argued that for colonized peoples, language and oppression go hand in hand (18). This is because one of the most significant aspects of colonization is the forced adoption of a language that is not indigenous, nor in most cases culturally relevant, to a people who have been colonized by others. The impact of this forced adoption is made far worse by the forced acceptance of the world that this new language implies. As Fanon writes:

Every colonized people finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. (1967: 18)

That is, every person who has been colonized by another culture must at some point come to the realization that the language he/she speaks is not his/her own and therefore, does not inherently represent him/her, but rather represents him/her as "other" (Fanon 1967: 18). They understand that something in their being is missing, displaced, forgotten, but tantalizingly remembered. They feel a fracturing in their thought as they grasp for words that are no longer there. With only the words that they were given to describe the world around them there is a profound sense of incompleteness. The signs and signifiers that make up their reality are somehow disconnected from what these words signify. This is because the

power of the colonizing language lies in its ability to reshape the world through owning the signifiers and signs used to represent it (Fanon 1967: 19). Language, therefore, has a political dimension that allows for one group to have power over another through the imposition of the dominant group's language on the subordinate group (Volishinov 1929: 98).

This ability to use language to describe the world as one sees it equates to a type of power, but this power is dependent on social acceptance of the fact that the language has meaning. Anyone can have a view of the world complete with language specific to this world, but the language only becomes relevant if it can be shared and understood. If a view has only a singular viewer and a single speaker of the language needed to describe it then this phenomenon is labeled insanity or genius, economic success being the discerning factor between the two labels. When everyone sees the world the same way, an abstract concept that has yet to exist in human history, then this is referred to as common knowledge, but more accurately this term means that a common person, that is the non-elite person, accepts this knowledge as accurate and true. This knowledge of the world is anchored to the reality of the language user. The language that is needed to describe this perceived reality is an inseparable part of this process since without the language to ground the world view, reality has no real meaning. When the worldview no longer has any basis in reality, then the language used to describe it becomes arbitrary at first, then dated and finally historical which means that as language evolves common knowledge changes with it, as does reality. Examples of this can be seen in the evolution of knowledge whereby new information about the world leads to the creation of new terms and to paradigm shifts.

Saussurian structural linguistics theory is helpful as a means of understanding this shift in language from an idea used by a few to a concept used by all and back to a term used by a few. For Saussure, there is a marked difference between *langue* and *parole*, between language and speech. According to Saussure, language is a social fact and no single individual can change the system of language. A change in language occurs in *parole* "and if eventually a given speech community accepts the change, the system moves to a new

state, a new langue (Joseph 2004: 48). For Saussure, langue does not carry with it the ability for one speaker to manifest power over another because it has no individual dimension; this is the providence of parole. Langue represents collective expression and this is important to this discussion because of the way that the word cannibal shifted from an aspect of parole to an aspect of langue within the speech communities of Europe.

With respect to the word cannibal, the term was initially an aspect of parole, spoken only by those who had a vested interest in colonialism. However, as with other words created during colonization, the word cannibal became so inseparable from ideas about this “new world” that eventually it became an aspect of langue. The initial parole of mariners and colonists was re-injected into the langue of European speakers because these new words were the only known words to describe a world that Europeans at that time had never seen. Thus, Columbus changed the world he and the indigenous people of the Caribbean lived in when he introduced the word canibales to the courts of Europe. The word was meant to act as both a noun, to denote the people he believed to exist in the Caribbean, as well as a representative symbol describing the nature of that world. The modern word Caribbean is rooted in the word caribe, which was an interchangeable word for canibales. Thus the world that Columbus was bringing back with him through his description of the world he had ‘found’ was inseparable from the word canibales. Even though it denoted a group of people that were a part of his imagination, although not entirely of his own invention, Columbus was able to persuade the courts of Europe that cannibals existed and who could challenge him? This means that from the time the second European explorers ever reached the Caribbean, a world where cannibals existed was already in existence for Europeans. The Kalinago people provided the necessary ‘signified’ group to further ground this into reality. The word became taken for granted as truth and facilitated the construction of European superiority over the indigenous people of the Americas. Theoretically, before ever meeting Kalinago people a European person could believe he/she already knew one thing about them, which was that they were cannibals, meaning they ate humans.

European colonists were so convinced of the truth of this misguided belief that even those who had never actually ventured to the ‘New World’ included descriptions of indigenous people as cannibals, using the word as a synonym for native Caribbean persons, in their writings. The men credited with introducing the word cannibal into the English imagination were Richard Eden and Richard Hakluyt. Eden’s works, *A treatyse of the newe India* and *The decades of the newe worlde or west India* extolled the virtues of Spanish colonization and urged the British to follow suit. In his first work, when discussing the indigenous people of the Caribbean, it is clear that Eden is not speaking about a first hand encounter, but rather is repeating what he has learned from Columbus. He writes,

Columbus..sayled toward ye South, and at ye length came to the Ilandes of the Canibals. And because he came thether on the Sundaye called the Dominical day, he called the Iland..Dominica. Insula Crucis..was also an Ilande of the Canibales. (1553: 30)

However, the fact that he is relying on the accounts of others is not as apparent in his later writing where he gives a relatively authoritative description of the indigenous people of the Caribbean as “the wylde and myscheuous people called Canibales or Caribes, which were accustomed to eate mannes flesshe” (112). By this point in colonial history the vision of the Kalinago as savage “other” was firmly in place, but it was Richard Hakluyt, who explicitly connected, in an English tract, the image of cannibals to the need for colonization by superior Europeans.

Like Eden, Hakluyt never actually went to the Caribbean, but gathered his information from his friends, who were captains of ships, Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh among them. As an ardent supporter of the colonialist project and adviser to Elizabeth I, his first work *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America* gave descriptions of the people of the Caribbean from the point of view of a colonist and not an impartial observer. Coming from a scholar and member of the elite, his words were nonetheless believed to be factual. Thus, his support for colonizing this new land came complete with

descriptions of cannibals and built on beliefs in European superiority begun by Columbus. What is most important about Hakluyt's work is the fact that it characterized the people of the Caribbean as inferior and this had a serious impact on the way that the word cannibal came to be understood by Europeans.

Hakluyt's work inspired another author of travel literature, Daniel Defoe, and Defoe's work demonstrates how the word cannibal moved from the European imagination to an aspect of mainstream colonial thinking regarding the inferiority of indigenous Caribbean people. Defoe's work *Robinson Crusoe* is perhaps one of English Literature's classics and excerpts from this work illustrate how Europeans thought of the people they expected to meet in the Caribbean a little over one hundred years after Columbus. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe writes that the main character Crusoe, "had heard that the people of the Caribbean coasts were cannibals, or man eaters" (1719: 73) and "for the dread and terror of falling into the hands of savages and cannibals lay so upon [his] spirits, that [he] seldom found [himself] in a due temper for application to [his] Maker, at least not with the sedate calmness and resignation of soul which [he] was wont to do" (96).

Defoe goes into gruesome detail about a fictitious scene involving indigenous Caribbean people and his writing is an elucidation of exactly how Europeans of his time had come to believe that the people of the Caribbean lived. He writes that:

Indeed, it was a dreadful sight, at least it was so to me, though Friday made nothing of it. The place was covered with human bones, the ground dyed with their blood, great pieces of flesh left here and there, half-eaten, mangled and scorched; and, in short, all the tokens of the triumphant feast they had been making there, after a victory of their enemies. I saw three skulls, five hands, and the bones of three or four legs and feet, and abundance of other parts of the bodies... (122)

By including the words, "at least it was to me, though Friday made nothing of it" Defoe suggests to the reader that this was a normal feature of the culture of the people of the Caribbean, but abhorrent to Europeans, further polarizing the two cultures.

The aspect of Defoe's work that is most telling regarding European attitudes towards indigenous people is the way that Robinson Crusoe treats the character he names "Friday". The audience is never actually told if "Friday" has an indigenous name nor anything about him prior to his meeting Robinson Crusoe and this is perhaps analogous to the way that Europeans of this period viewed indigenous culture and history, as beginning with European encounters. All of "Friday's" culture, language and history are erased in the moment that he meets Robinson Crusoe. Crusoe never attempts to learn anything about "Friday" or his culture and instead becomes intent on making him into a servant who views Crusoe and Crusoe's culture as worthy of imitation. Additionally, it is never clear which indigenous group "Friday" belongs to and this suggests that at this point in colonial history the indigenous people of the Caribbean were all seen as indistinguishable. This point is further strengthened by the fact that Crusoe says that "the people of the Caribbean were cannibals, or man eaters...". By this point the people of the Caribbean were all seen as cannibals and not just the Kalinago. Additionally, as is evidenced by this work, in the worldview of the colonists their culture and language were seen as superior and worthy of emulation while indigenous culture was seen as the antithesis of everything that made one civilized.

The nature of the cannibal was, by this point in the evolutionary history of the word, seen as synonymous with savage indigeneity that needed to be remodeled to imitate European values and culture. Thus, in European languages the word cannibal also reflected beliefs that Europeans were imposing onto the indigenous people of the Americas, and this represented an evolutionary departure from the initial misunderstanding between Columbus and the Taino. By this point the word cannibal came to denote everything that was un-European and, therefore, uncivilized about the Americas.

When the indigenous people of the Caribbean began to dwindle in their numbers, Europeans sought new labour for their plantations and it is at this point that the signifier cannibal was again further removed from what it initially signified. Turning to the African continent, Europeans again grafted the world cannibal onto a non-European group of people they needed an excuse to enslave; the people of Africa. This change is important because it was what the word had come to denote in European languages. For Europeans the word conjures the image of the uncivilized in need of European intervention, both culturally and religiously. This intervention is predicated on the excuse that this person needs to be saved in order to save him/her/ from himself/herself. Ironically, this intervention on the part of the Europeans was paid for in the form of the enslavement and subjugation of those being “saved”.

Now it was Africans who were believed to be cannibals and for the second time, enslavement was justified by the belief that the people being enslaved were lesser humans who ate human flesh. This belief has been persuasive and pervasive that it has even made its way into modern works of academia as can be seen in this unpublished dissertation from Oxford University which reads:

To many minds, black Africans were people who were in the habit of eating each other for dinner and on special occasions added a missionary to the menu. Therefore, many gross stories about African tribal cannibalism exist. (Lukaschek 2001: 8)

This reference illuminates an important aspect of the need for the deconstruction and decolonization of the word cannibal because it highlights an often ignored problem; the place of academics in furthering the colonial view that the word cannibal signifies a type of savage indigeneity. The work of Eli Sagan (1974) entitled *Cannibalism: Human Aggression and Cultural Form* demonstrates this as he writes:

cannibalism is found only in those societies we call ‘primitive’- simple, preliterate cultures that are studied by

anthropologists...cannibalism is practiced only by primitive societies. No evidence of cannibalism appears in the early history of Egypt or the Aegean. (2)

It is obvious that Sagan’s “we” refers to Europeans since the cultures he exempts from cannibalism are those that are believed to be the forerunners of European elite culture. Sagan’s work is meant to highlight cannibalism as a primitive act practiced by the uncivilized and divorced from European cultural values. His work is an example of the way that the word cannibal was defined and has become so firmly inscribed in colonialist thinking that it is assumed that it should automatically be connected to societies that are or were “primitive”.

However, it is puzzling what exactly Sagan means by the phrase “no evidence” since there is evidence regarding both of the civilizations he mentions to support an argument that they could have practiced human consumption- or at least that they were familiar with the concept. Both the Egyptians and the Greeks understood eating one’s own kind both in terms of the human and the divine. An inscription on the tomb of the Pharaoh Unis (2378 - 2348 BCE), commonly referred to as *The Cannibal Hymn to Pharaoh Unis* reads, “Pharaoh is he who eats men and lives on gods” (van der Dungen 2008). Additionally, the work of Wim van den Dungen directly contradicts Sagan’s assertion that cannibalism was unknown in the “great civilizations” of Egypt:

Siculus Diodorus, born in Agyrium in Sicily in the latter half of the first century BCE, relates in his history that Osiris forbade the Egyptians to eat each other. After having learned the arts of agriculture, it would seem that the habit of killing and eating one another ceased. According to him, the primitive Egyptians from time to time resorted to cannibalism. (2.1)

The Greeks also give descriptions of eating one’s own kind in both their religious and cultural beliefs. In one of the earliest works of Greek culture, *The Theogony of Hesiod*, the God Kronos is said to have eaten his own children

(Lombardo 1993: 74). Additionally, one of the most famous family feuds of the Greek world, between the sons of Pelops, involved cannibalism. According to Greek myth, Atreus wishing vengeance on his brother Thyestes, cooked and served Thyestes' children to him as a part of a feast. Atreus' and Thyestes' grandfather Tantalus also committed a similar act of cannibalism when he cooked and served his own son Pelops to the Olympian gods during a feast. Clearly the concept of eating human flesh was not as unfamiliar to either civilization as Sagan would like to suggest. Additionally, neither society is characterized as primitive. These counterarguments to Sagan's demonstrate the fragility of European beliefs in cannibalism as an act confined to the "primitive".

What is perhaps most intriguing, when one considers Europe's colonial beliefs in superiority, is the evidence of cannibalism both in the social and religious history of Europe itself. With respect to religious history, one of the foundational tenets of Catholic Christianity is the ritual consumption of the body of Christ in the form of the communion host. In Catholic Mass, the priest intones the words "this is my body" and "this is my blood" when the communion host and wine are drunk during the aspect of the communion ritual known as the Eucharist (The Order of Mass, Communion Rite). The ceremony is meant to remind Christians of the sacrifice that Christ made for all people, but the fact that he encourages people to ritualistically eat his body and drink his blood cannot be ignored. For devout Catholics, the belief that the communion wafer and the wine actually become the body and blood of Christ is integral to the ceremony as is the consumption both. This would mean then that every Christian, by virtue of the Eucharist, is also a cannibal, an aspect of discussions on cannibalism that is conveniently ignored by scholars wishing to continue the belief that cannibalism belongs to the realm of the "primitive".

The act of taking communion is meant to be a metaphor however, so perhaps we need a more concrete example drawn from European history. Acts of human consumption are also found in the history of the Crusades. The siege of Jerusalem by Christian crusaders and the acts of cannibalism that occurred there also demonstrates

an aspect of European history that is rarely mentioned in conjunction with their right to civilize other, more "primitive" cultures. The Christian chronicler Radulph of Caen, an eyewitness to the first Crusades in 1098, wrote, "In Ma'arra our troops boiled pagan adults in cooking-pots; they impaled children on spits and devoured them grilled" (Rothschild 1984: 39). Thus, divorcing European culture from that of more "primitive" cultures using cannibalism as the basis for the division is not without its problems.

These instances of human and divine consumption in the history of Europe implicate European Christians in the same practices from which modern academics have tried to distance European culture and society, believing instead that the word cannibal reflects a type of savage indignity. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that when applying the word cannibal to world cultures, European elitism has a very specific agenda in mind and this agenda is grounded in colonial beliefs. The word cannibal acts as a facilitator to create continuity between colonialist beliefs in superiority as applied to themselves and inferiority as applied to others. The word cannibal cannot be separated from beliefs imposed during colonialism and the way that users of European languages see themselves in relation to what the word signifies because the word was meant to buttress a specific paradigm. The problem with this is that the word signifies something that only exists in the imagined world of the colonizing Europeans and this needs to be addressed. If decolonization is ever really to be achieved then that vision of the world and the words used to describe it must be dismantled.

This colonial worldview as is represented by the sign and signifier cannibal is an example of what Baudrillard discusses in his work *Simulacra and Simulation* when he argues that the sign and the symbol have become more real than the signified that they represent. As Baudrillard argues, "The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth- it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true" (166). The signified Kalinago are therefore not important in the equation any more, nor is colonial corruption and manipulation of what this signifier implies, but rather the sign and the signifier have overtaken the signified as what is real rather than

as what was created. Decolonization then must reinsert both the indigenous understandings of the word and the history of its use as a means of oppression back into the equation so that the sign and the signifier cannot overpower what was originally signified.

To conclude, this essay has argued that the word cannibal signifies a signified that does not exist except as a fiction to further colonialist claims to superiority and to justify the atrocities committed under European colonialism. The deconstruction of the term requires recognizing that the simulated cannibal cannot supersede the truth about the Kalinago nation and their place in the history of the European colonialism. There is another word that can signify the concept of human consumption by humans that does not carry with it beliefs in the superiority of Europeans; *anthropophagi* from the Greek words

anthropos or human being and *phagein*, meaning to eat". Perhaps this word ought to replace the word cannibal in the lexicons of Europe, since it is a word that is of European origin and does not imply a cultural judgment or one that directly relates to colonialism. There are other words that relate to colonialism, like the derogatory words *nigger* and *American Indian*, that have been examined and revised within European languages, and this means at the very least that revision is possible. Further work can be done in this area to explore how specific terms can shift from being negative to positive to further the decolonization process. By insuring that the sign and the signified match, the word cannibal can be rehabilitated, and the people who suffered under colonialism, can be will be better able to move forward into a new and better world where language does not function as a tool of oppression.

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