...when the pirogues [i.e., a dugout canoe] were finished, I embarked, and on the same day that we commenced our journey God was pleased to send us guides, in the form of two pirogues of Caribs, who were stealing people for their cannibal feasts and food, and who came with me for presents. They were Caribs of Barima, towards which I travelled in their company down the Orinoco as far as the dwellings of the River Caroni, which will be more than 350 leagues; and during this voyage we experienced much friendship, and two of their Chiefs came into my pirogue, and I gave them a Spaniard, and they disclosed to me great secrets of the country, and confirmed all the information that I had received above, and I found all that had been told me true [emphasis added].

Potential lies in the possibility that we may have gotten it wrong. It is important to build on that potential. Social anthropologist filmmaker, Dennis O’Rourke, in his film Cannibal Tours, a visual ethnography of tourism in Melanesia, puts forward the persuasive thesis that ‘cannibalism is not the eating of human flesh, but an asymmetrical system of cultural appropriation and consumption’. The film follows tourists who have travelled from Europe and America to the Sepik River Valley to encounter the exotic, to come into contact with what they term primitive peoples, who they believe until recently lived in a state of nature and practiced cannibalism. O’Rourke’s film, however, shows how, by ‘fashioning experiences and images out of the alterity of the Melanesians, tourists become cannibals. [Tourists’] dehumanizing practices literally eat up these people’, and thereby advances the proposition that ‘we [i.e., tourists] not they are the cannibals’. Other thinkers, such as Dean MacCannell who argues that ‘contemporary capitalism is neocannibalism’ or Deborah Root who

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1 *GWB* 1593-1613, Item 1. Don Antonio Berrio to The King of Spain, January 1, 1593. Don Berrio described his circumstances to the King as follows:

It is twelve years ago since I set out from Spain to inherit the Indians and estates that the Adelantado Don Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada possessed in the New Kingdom of Granada, with the desire for rest which my age demanded. And the estates yielded more than 14,000 ducats income, which would suffice for one who had travelled and laboured as much as I. And being come to that kingdom, and hearing the great news there is about the expedition to El Dorado … I determined to hasten and set out in search of it…


3 Ibid. p. 112.

in her work ‘rethinks Western civilization as cannibal culture’;\(^5\) are sympathetic to O’Rourke’s position.

From being a mystified ‘man-eating myth’, therefore, Richard King in an illuminating summary of the contemporary cannibalism debate, writes, cannibalism ‘has become subject to serious debate and lingering doubt’.

What does this dissertation have to do with cannibalism? Literally, I would like to argue, everything. As David Salisbury writes in his review of Beth Conklin’s study, *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society* (University of Texas Press), ‘historically, charges of cannibalism were used by European nations to help justify their colonization efforts’. After the work of William Arens, scholars have looked with a sceptical eye on the veracity of such charges, but that does little to dislodge the centrality of the myth of consumption to the founding of the Americas, i.e., a mission to civilize the ‘natives’ out of cannibalism. The post-abolition colonial project, on the other hand, was an endeavour to cultivate the inhabitants of ‘British Guiana’ into capitalism, what MacCannell would describe as ‘neocannibalism’. The culture that has emerged in the Caribbean, exemplary examples of which are Carnival and the Barbeque, shows, in its replay of the consumption motif, signs of the influences of both strains of cannibalism. Building on this historical continuity, I would like to suggest that not only can cannibalism serve to adequately describe culture in ‘British Guiana’ but more importantly it possesses the potential to be the source of further emancipatory transformation. The cannibal may never have existed, but as the subject of indigeneity it may yet.

Before expanding on the last point, a few comments on the evolution of the cannibalism debate are in order. Familiar as this debate is, it may be best to start with criticisms of our understanding and deployment of the cannibal trope in the debates’ latest round, i.e., since the making of O’Rourke’s *Cannibal Tours*.

Richard King’s earlier mentioned article offers if not the final word on the present round, then its most comprehensive. King is critical of the use, in O’Rourke,

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MacCannell and Root among others, of the cannibalism metaphor because it 'resurrect[s] the negative connotations and dehumanizing stereotypes associated with more conventional, even colonial, formulations'.\(^6\) As he correctly points out, whenever it is invoked, however laudable the intentions, 'it retains the moral and political core of more familiar formulations. Cannibalism still carries negative connotations'.\(^7\) While agreeing with King that cannibalism continues to retain its negative moral core, I do not believe that it necessarily has to be so. That it does is a reflection of another negative stereotype of which King may himself be guilty: the Euro-centricism of the origin of 'complex' ideas.\(^8\) Cannibalism, from stories told by 'natives', suggest that it may have been, from its outset and with a genealogy of its own, a sophisticated 'primitive' theory of colonial intent. King overlooks this possibility despite citing Arens' work to highlight the point that 'many contemporary Africans believed Europeans to be cannibals, vampires, or other sorts of unsavoury consumers of human flesh'.\(^9\) On the same point he writes, Mary Weismantel has traced the ways in which the representations of whites (nakaqs) fashioned by indigenous peoples throughout the Andean region of South America link power, race, and anthropophagy in their accounts of difference, asymmetry, and exploitation.\(^10\)

The objection that these African and Amerindian 'ways of seeing' are the product of a contemporary analysis requires further research lest it reinforces the earlier alluded to point regarding racist assumptions about 'native' modes of knowledge production. King also cites instances in which Amerindians, such as the Shoshoni of Wyoming and those forced to sign the 1863 Treaty of Ruby Valley, describe the actions of the white man as cannibalistic. The impulsiveness of early colonial contact make it so that the incident contained in the opening quote of Don Berrio giving a Spaniard to the

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\(^6\) King, "(Mis)Uses of Cannibalism", p. 121.
\(^7\) Ibid. p. 112.
\(^8\) On a related but distinct note, for an account of the history of cannibalism in Europe, see, Richard Stephen Charnock, "Cannibalism in Europe". *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, Vol. 4. (1866), pp. xxii-xxxi, where the author argues that though the subject of European cannibalism may be 'unpalatable' to many, 'when, however, it is taken into account that the inhabitants of Europe were at one time quite as savage as those who have practiced, or who still practice this crime, surely the present generation need not blush to admit this fact'.
\(^9\) King, "(Mis)Uses of Cannibalism", p. 111. See also, E. J. Alagoa and C. C. Wrigley, "Cannibalism and the Slave Trade". *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 25, No. 4, (1984), pp. 463-464, where Alagoa makes the point that while cannibalism may have been used to justify the slave trade, it was also the case that 'the fear [of the Africans] appears to have been that he [the white man] planned to gobble him up.'
\(^10\) Ibid. p. 111.
Caribs in 1593 in exchange for knowledge can either remain a puzzle or else it can make perfect sense.

Between Columbus and Carnival, there were others who also saw the links between colonialism and cannibalism. Take for example the following incident that was reported in India in 1863 as an example of ‘absurd alarms, endangering the peace of the country’:

A report that Government intended to boil them down for their fat, cleared Simlah of Hill men! A clever rogue in Goruckpoor is said to have made his fortune by preceding Lord Hastings’ Camp as purveyor of fat little children for the Governor-Generals Breakfast!11

Similarly, the following story circulated among Africans in a labour recruitment camp in Sierra Leone in the 1840s. After the abolition of slavery, when recruiters attempted to entice Africans to proceed to the West Indian plantations as indentured labourers they found few who were willing because of the Africans’ belief that,

they [i.e., the Africans] are well fed and taken care of on their passage to the West Indies, so as to make their blood rich; that on the ship’s arrival they are taken ashore to a large house, where they are hung up by the heels, and their throats are cut; the blood being used in colouring the soldiers’ coats, causing them to be so brave, that whenever they make war they are sure to conquer. The heads are cut off and boiled to make medicine for high white men, which causes these high white men to be so very clever.12

The belief that whites were cannibals was not a matter of gossip among the ‘natives’; in some instances, it was felt strongly enough, as the above examples demonstrate, to change the way people lived their lives. While King cites early examples of non-Europeans reading colonial intent as cannibalistic, he fails to see this as a valid theory of colonialism and instead finds fault with MacCannell and Root for agreeing with these early non-European theorists of colonial intent.

This denial of cannibalism as a non-European theory of European colonization has also found a voice in the work of scholars whose sympathies clearly lie with the so-called cannibals. This work generally falls into two categories, one that questions the very existence of cannibalism and the other that attempts to locate cannibalism as a

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12 1847-1848 XLIV Accounts and Papers: Twenty Eight Volumes. (6.) Colonies: West Indies and Mauritius; Session 18 November 1847 – 5 September 1848.
complex practice within communities that practiced anthropophagy. The work of Gananath Obeysekere is an example of scholarship that brings together both approaches. For example, he writes, 'Maori discourse on cannibalism was compounded by the ludic and the serious: the ludic, since they seem on occasion, to enjoy the discomfiture of the Europeans; and serious because it was a weapon to terrify them in the context of unequal power, where their real weapons were nothing in comparison to European guns'. While not denying that weapons embody theories, much of the scholarship on cannibalism fail to accord theories to weapons, especially when those weapons are in the hands of 'savages'. Of equal significance in this debate is King’s sensitive objection to making the question of cannibalism a moral one. In vehemently objecting to the metaphor, however, he reveals his mistaken misunderstanding of the critique of capitalism as a moral critique.

Practitioners of anthropophagy, whites or otherwise, it is believed, consumed the other in order to gain their strengths and good qualities, as MacCannell writes, ‘Classical cannibals ... believed that they had assimilated the courage and the strength of their enemies, and through eating them the powers of all his own ancestors that they (the enemies) ate’. What is fascinating here is not whether humans consumed human flesh neither is the similarity between the Amerindian understanding of the anthropophagy of which he is charged and his understanding of what his accusers are doing to him, i.e., the nature of European colonization, but rather the striking coincidence between what the ‘native’ understood then and what is being theorized in the early twenty-first century. The ‘native’ did not wait for MacCannell and Root to explain that capitalism is the absorption of difference, the ‘socio-economic formation that is late capitalism’.

This is of course a matter of interpretation. I have deliberately chosen to interpret the ‘British Guiana’ archive through the lenses of indigeneity and cannibalism because these metaphors pervade the archive, which in turn gives them the added appeal of being familiar. But, also because of what appears to be the strong force that the capitalist commodity bears on culture as it developed in ‘British Guiana’. They were

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14 Dean MacCannel as quoted in King, "(Mis)Uses of Cannibalism". p. 114.
chosen bearing in mind that the ‘the historian’s interpretation of the past, his selection of the significant and the relevant, evolves with the progressive emergence of new goals’, what Carr calls the ‘dialogue between the events of the past and progressively emerging future ends’.

King, by pointing out that MacCannell and Root perpetuate the negative and then failing to show that there is a lot that is positive in the use of this metaphor, agrees with the body of scholarship that is unable to see the liberatory potential of cannibalism. While cannibalism as a description of consumption driven society has been extensively theorized, its potential for undoing capitalism has not been explored. Recall MacCannell’s description of the effect of cannibalism:

Cannibalism in the political-economic register is the production of social totalities by the literal incorporation of otherness. It deals with human difference in the most direct way, not merely by doing away with it, but by taking it in completely, metabolizing it, transforming it into shit, and eliminating it.

Or as King acknowledges, ‘in myriad domains, consumption [read, cannibalism] absorbs difference, simultaneously appropriating and nullifying it’. Is this not the only weapon with which to destroy the hold of the capitalist commodity on society? What if the commodity were made the target of cannibalism, were to replace the cannibal as the ‘other’? Could it not absorb, appropriate and nullify the commodity? Would it not have the effect of ending/extirpating the commodity? Is this not what, in some instances, worship does to property? What, for example, in the case of (but not restricted to) the ‘prostitute’, love does to work? Are those not the same effects as those engendered by the much decried acts of piracy, deemed illegal when done by the have-nots while fatly-funded and named ‘cloning’ when done by the have? Such acts are productive of what I call the cannibalistic effect. While not offering an opinion, moral or economic, on any one of the above (or for that matter, on eating human flesh), what is important to reflect on is their effect on the commodity, the cornerstone of capitalism. To that end, we must ask, why, unlike other forms of ‘deviance’, was cannibalism not appropriated as a tool of governance? More research in needed on ways to multiply that effect, if not through love or worship or ‘social

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16 Dean MacCannell as cited in King, ”(Mis)Uses of Cannibalism”. p.113.
17 King, ”(Mis)Uses of Cannibalism”. p. 114.
18 Piracy is used here as it is presently practiced and constructed in the age of copyright while keeping in mind its history as explored, for example, in the work of Marcus Rediker, Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.)
banditry', then in some other way, so that enough creativity is preserved from which a workable alternative to the capitalist commodity can emerge.

The idea of indigeneity in 'British Guiana' as it has emerged in this dissertation, through the themes of land, culture, labour, health, etc., suggest that two cannibals are opposed in this land of many waters: the cannibal privileged by the idea of the modern state and the cannibal privileged by the idea of indigeneity. The challenge is to preserve and expand the space of the latter not so much to prevent their confrontation, but to win.
Contemporary MĀori politics reflects the beginnings of a liberal theory of indigeneity as an alternative to both biculturalism and undifferentiated liberal egalitarian citizenship as philosophical frameworks capable of providing MĀori with a just share in national sovereignty, both as indigenous citizens and collectively through membership of the modern New Zealand state. Further development and practice of a liberal theory of indigeneity, through differentiated citizenship, is important to liberal democracy, which succeeds only when people have reason to share confidence in the systemâ€™s capacities. The Politics of Indigeneity: Challenging the State in Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand. Publisher: University of British Columbia. Date Issued: 2011. Description: However, in post-Soviet Siberia, like elsewhere in Asia, distinctions between indigenous and non-indigenous are not straightforward, and articulations of indigenous identity are fraught with complications. This dissertation examines the social processes that link globally circulating images and practices of indigeneity with Sakha cultural politics, and argues that articulations of indigenous identity are not only contingent and heterogeneous, but are also partial and uneven. In this context, indigeneity coexists alongside other kinds of identity, especially ethnonationalism.