Why “Tapuya?”

The title of our new journal invokes the name given to the indigenous groups from the inland countryside of South America by the Tupi, another large denomination of indigenous nations that inhabited the shores. In Tupi language, “Tapuya” means the enemy and barbarian, a connotation popularly associated with “cannibalism.”¹ We decided to name our journal after these purported cannibals² since doing so draws attention to three aspects of Latin American science and technology studies (STS) that we would like to nurture.

First, popular understandings of the Tapuya and their relation to anthropophagy provide an example of both the typical colonial construction of ignorance about the west’s Others, and of the symbolic violence that often marks postcolonial encounters. It turns out that literal anthropophagy is not an exclusive practice of “savages” from the New World. While some authors have contested the existence of any sound evidence that such practices have actually existed (e.g. Arens 1979, 1998), Bill Schutt (2017) argues that instances of cannibalism are in fact well-documented in a number of contexts in human history (and they are widespread across animal species). For example, whenever there is severe stress on a community’s survival, such as famine or excessive crowding, anthropophagy will often seem a more rational practice than dying, and a more moral one than watching ones’ children starve to death. He points to the well-supported cases of the Donner Pass disaster, and the siege of Leningrad in World War II.

The figure of the cannibal also contains a feminist dimension that is often overlooked. For example, Sylvia Federici (2004) argues that the emergence of the figure of the cannibal in the context both of famines and of increases in infant mortality has often been associated with witches. This association thereby is used to justify the systematic murder by hanging or burning of elderly single and widowed women – women who have no male relatives to protect them – and the consequent transfer of their property to the persecutors.

Recent writings from literary and cultural studies have also indicated that the figure of the cannibal as metaphor and cultural symbol has a long history in Western societies, and is still relevant today (See Barker, Hulme, and Iversen 1998; Avramescu 2009). Fascination with

¹”Cannibals” is the term used by colonizers of the Americas to refer to the indigenous peoples they were about to exploit and even exterminate. It is unredeemably colonial when used about people. Here we use that term to refer to that particular figure of the colonial imagination. In contrast, we use “anthropophagi” to refer to peoples who do actually engage in such cultural practices in ways very different from what the colonialists imagined. Yet the term cannibal is also used by biologists to refer to a widespread practice in many other species – a practice that has evolutionary benefits. Here we retain that use also.

²Note that the word originates in the linguistic migration from “Carib” to “Canib” of the term that the Europeans first used to name the indigenes whom they encountered in the Caribbean in the early sixteenth century. Subsequently, the term came to apply to indigenes that the Europeans encountered down the coast of Latin America to southern Brazil.

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diverse forms of the cannibal, such as with “sexy” vampires and with zombies, continues to satisfy what are evidently continuing anxieties among Northerners. A representation of anthropophagy is also a centerpiece of the Catholic liturgy, as the consumption of wine and bread, symbolically transmuted into Christ’s blood and flesh, is an integral part of the Eucharist.

The appeal to cannibalism has been one of the main defining features that shaped colonial western understandings of the separation between the civilized and the non-civilized worlds from the Enlightenment up through the present day (Barker, Hulme, and Iversen 1998; Avramescu 2009). The sixteenth-century Europeans misunderstood the role of anthropophagy in the societies with which they interacted. In fact, in many of those societies this practice was ritualized in ceremonies intended to respect the extraordinary abilities of a culture’s defeated enemies. In other cases, its ritualization provided a respectful and morally preferable alternative for dealing with the bodies of one’s deceased parents than leaving the latter to be eaten in the earth by its worms and bugs.

Thus in this first aspect of Tapuya that the journal wants to nurture, the name draws attention to the dual process characteristic of European colonialism. The global North creates ignorance about those they colonize through the false and fetishistic presentation of anthropophagy as an animalistic form of cannibalism that can only be found in the global South, and thus, second, through the infliction of symbolic violence on the victims of colonial powers. We will be asking how such practices have similarly characterized mainstream STS. What are the best ways to move past such practices?3

Second, the Tapuya, and the relation to the Tupi, represent a case of the Other within the Other and of the heterogeneity of postcolonial relations. As mentioned above, the term Tapuya was coined by the Tupi from the coastline in order to refer to a wide group of non-Tupi indigenous groups that lived mostly in the internal countryside. As such, the Tapuya were defined by the Tupi as their opposites in every way: as nomads who did not cultivated manioc or make and drink cauim (an alcoholic beverage made from manioc and corn), as monstrous creatures that eat their own dead (not only their enemies), as fierce enemies who exterminated the defeated, and as incomprehensible foreigners who spoke exotic languages. As such, even before the colonial encounter, the Tupi-Tapuya relations were charged with prejudices and fear of the Other (Pompa 2003; de Almeida 2010). Following the arrival of European settlers and their creation of alliances (often through marriage) with different Tupi groups on the shores, the binary Tupi-Tapuya became the basis for distinguish the “good” from the “bad” Indians. This distinction became even more marked following the forced “de-jaguarization” of the Tupi (and the Guarani in the South), that required the abandonment of anthropophagy and of indigenous cosmologies, the imposition of Christian cosmologies (Fausto 2005). Thus, the title of our journal is a Tupi term that was absorbed by the west already in the sixteenth century, where it acquired new meanings.

In few places is the opposition clearer between Tupi and Tapuya as a marking of the closer and the more distant forms of Otherness than in the paintings of Albert Eckhout. Eckhout was brought to Brazil as part of a (failed) attempt of the Dutch to colonize the Northeast of Brazil. His paintings were remarkable for their combination of realism and an emphasis on the exoticism of the New World. He made a series of paintings of the types of inhabitants of Brazil, following a pattern similar to recordings of the country’s fauna and flora. In these, he showed side by side the male and female exemplars of black slaves, Tupis, Tapuyas, and mulatos/mamelucos with mixed racial backgrounds.

3In this first issue, we already have published some articles and book reviews that highlight the value of Amerindian perspectives to the intellectual and political agendas of STS in general, as well as to the flourishing of Amerindians. We plan to publish many more. Yet, see Kimberle S. Lopez’s (1998) illuminating account of “Modernismo and the Ambivalence of the Postcolonial Experience: Cannibalism, Primitivism, and Exoticism in Mario de Andrade’s Macunaima.”
In the two images presented here in Figure 1(a) and (b), the Tupi woman is depicted with a white skirt, exposed breasts, carrying a son on her right arm, and a basket on her head. The Tapuya woman, by contrast, is depicted with only a few leaves covering her intimate parts; she also carries a basket. While both women are clearly not European, a closer look reveals the cultural proximity of the Tupi to the Europeans in contrast to the perceived distant exoticism of the Tapuya. While the Tapuya has a native manioc plant by her side and is depicted in a wild landscape, the Tupi stands next to a banana tree, a species brought by the Portuguese from Africa. She is posed on a hill, overlooking a farm with cattle and plantations. This implies that she might be working there, and that maybe the baby she is carrying also has European blood. Most importantly, while the Tupi is carrying a basket of manufactured products (some of them probably imported from Europe), the Tapuya is carrying the still fresh human parts of a defeated enemy that will probably be part of her next meal (Chicangana-Bayona 2008). The wide gap between being a Tupi and a Tapuya represents the multiple layers of Otherness that can be found in many postcolonial contexts. However, this heterogeneity is often glossed over by the Northern STS literature. For this reason, in our journal, we intend to provide a space for making visible both the multiplicity of the global Souths, and of the Souths within the global North.

The third and final aspect of these _Tapuya_ that the journal values is related the special meaning that the term “anthropophagus” has gained amongst Brazilian intellectuals since the early twentieth century, and that has been debated in a long and rich literature. At the 1922 meeting of the founding moment of the Brazilian modernism, the Week of Modern Art (Semana de Arte Moderna), the poet and activist Oswald de Andrade struggled to find a new way to conceptualize Brazil’s position both in relation to the global North and to its Southern groundings. De Andrade’s subsequent 1928 poem, “Manifesto Antropofago,” invoked this trope.

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Figure 1. (a) Albert Eckhout, Tupi woman, ethnographic collection. (b) Albert Eckhout, Tapuya woman, ethnographic collection. The National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen, 1641.

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4As a start, see Arens (1979, 1988), Barker, Hulme, and Iversen (1998), and Lopez (1998).
of self-recognition, which was also a model for incorporating difference, and would become a keystone starting point for defining Brazilian and Latin American identity (Jauregui 2012). As Lopez (1998) points out, it was Mario de Andrade (no relation) who put into practice Oswald de Andrade’s theory.

Oswald de Andrade opens his famous manifesto by “eating” Shakespeare’s famous question (see p. 1). But while the Bard’s soliloquy ponders the end of an individual’s life, de Andrade is calling Brazilians to consider the beginning of the country’s identity. De Andrade also departs from Hamlet’s indecisiveness by providing a decisive answer to his own question. For him it was clear that Brazil is not simply an example of cultural transposition, a non-Tupi nation where the global North simply replicates its own genes, culture and practices in a new Southern context (such as occurred in Australia). At the same time, Brazil is not simply Tupi, a pre-Columbian indigenous culture that has been tainted with Europe since the colonial encounter. Instead, he boldly claims that “anthropophagy alone unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically”. Brazil was formed by “eating” the social and cultural bodies of Indigenes, Europeans and Africans, and transforming them into a single new body that cannot be reduced or purified to any of its original components. Here de Andrade calls attention to the importance for Brazilians to conceive the engagement with the North as an active and generative process, rather than a passive and destructive one. As such, anthropophagy and anthropophagi should not be considered exotic, distant and dangerous Others, as they were for the European conquistadors and remain for their still colonial legacy even today. Rather, they were Brazil’s historical primitive past and utopian future. For de Andrade, this was Brazil’s greatest strength as well as a powerful source of Brazilian optimism. Yet critics have argued that far from a “utopian” future, such postcolonial projects must always exist only in ambivalent relations to their colonial pasts (Cf. Lopez 1998).

Recently, Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004, 2014), among others, has re-energized the anthropophagus in a different direction (Rajão and Duque 2014; Ferreira 2015; da Costa Marques 2016). Viveiros de Castro invokes it to generate “the ontological turn” in contemporary anthropology. This movement insists that relying only on epistemic strategies to counter colonial thinking still is committed only to “including” non-western thought within the dominant western knowledge regime. It is doomed to failure in its attempt to counter colonial thought for it does not address the fact that different cultures live in different “reals.” Reality is plural, not singular, and thus such ontological differences cannot be ignored in relations between the west and its historically ‘other’ non-west (See also Blaser 2013; de la Cadena 2015).

In significant ways Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society is concerned with a project similar to the one that inspired de Andrade’s invocation of the figure of the anthropophagus. Despite Latour’s assertion that we have never been modern, a substantial share of the Northern and Southern STS literatures still tries to exorcize the South from the North by, in the North, simply ignoring the former’s supposedly non-modern presence, and in the South by proposing radical forms of decoloniality. We recognize that every postcolonial project must exist in only an ambivalent relation to colonialism; the decolonial innocence of participating in colonial thinking is not possible. For this reason, we believe that the question and answers provided by de Andrade in 1922 are relevant to the field of STS today more than ever.5

In sum, by naming our new journal Tapuya we have attempted to put in practice our own principles. We have cannibalized the earlier trope to showcase Latin Americans’ historically important role as subjects, not just objects, of international social studies of science and technology – and to advance new directions in such projects in today’s worlds.

5For a discussion of purism, hybridism, and STS in the global South, see Rajão and Duque (2014).
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