

Nuku Hiva: An Ambiguous Paradise

The Western representation of Pacific Islanders as “cannibals” has its long lasting history, yet despite the emancipatory movements of the nineteenth seventies and post-colonial criticism, it still finds its contemporary continuation. Probably the best word to characterize the popular image of the Pacific inhabitants is “ambiguous”. In this article I will attempt to describe and criticize dynamics of international, mostly Western, public discourses imposing representation of the islanders as peculiar combination of beauty and monstrosity. In order to do so I will describe the so called “Ramin affair”. Between the seventeenth and the twenty-first of October 2011, headlines all over the world reported “a cannibal act” had happened on Nuku Hiva, one of the islands in the Marquesas in French Polynesia. They were referring to the murder of German globetrotter, Stefan Ramin. The rumor of cannibalism spread after the victim’s body was found dismembered and burned in a bonfire, though there was no evidence that the murderer might have feasted on a human flesh. Although worldwide announcements of cannibalism were purely speculative, they caused serious discussions and involvement of local politicians, police, “experts” and cultural activists. This text is a critical analysis of the media stories, linking them to colonial European and contemporary global public imaginations of the Pacific “Other”. In this context, it offers a sort of external view and focuses solely on Western textual manifestations rather than on locally constructed insights. Two contradictory popular images of the Marquesas are discussed: a paradisiac fantasy coexists with a frightening cannibalistic image. Both were created during the first European encounters and subsequent colonial domination of the Pacific. This ambiguous colonialist discourse re-emerges in tourist industry and news media today, feeding a pop-cultural craving for sensation and fascination with dark stories. I will also refer to the local, public reactions and resistance to the cannibal allegations that have offended the Marquesan community and culture.

A murder case and the cannibalistic press

On the ninth of October 2011, a German tourist went missing in Nuku Hiva, the largest island in the Marquesas. Ramin and his girlfriend, Heike Dorsch, in their third year of a voyage around the world, had anchored their sailing yacht on Nuku Hiva mid-September. In October, Ramin left their anchorage to go goat hunting with a local guide named Henri Arihano Haiti. Ramin never returned. Instead, Haiti returned alone and told Dorsch that her partner was hurt and needed help. He urged her to follow him into the forest, where, according to news reports, he tied her to a tree and sexually abused her. Dorsch later told reporters for the German tabloid “Bunte” that he had threatened her with a gun. Fortunately, she managed to escape and call for help¹.

Twenty-two officers were delegated to search for the Marquesan hunter, who had fled to the mountains. After hiding for about seven weeks he turned himself in to the police. He was then charged with murdering Ramin and kidnapping and sexually assaulting Dorsch. Haiti claimed he got into a fight with Ramin, in the course of which he shot the German with a hunting gun. He admitted sexually assaulting Dorsch. His reasons for dismembering and burning the body have not been revealed to the public. The exact circumstances and motives of the fight and shooting are not yet clear. At the time of writing this article, Haiti is in custody and the trial is proceeding.

Initially the story of a murder in French Polynesia did not attract the attention of the international press. Only local media reported the event. A popular French Polynesian daily newspaper, “La Dépêche de Tahiti”, published a “call for witnesses” on the tenth of October. Editors of the magazine asked local residents to reveal any information that would lead to finding Ramin, still assumed alive at that point. On the twelfth of October, dismembered and partly burned human remains were found in the ashes of a bonfire in the mountains. Teeth and part of a jaw matched Ramin’s dental records. The physical remains were transported to France for further analysis; DNA testing confirmed Ramin’s identity. Only at that point did international journalists become interested in the case.

From the sixteenth to the twenty-first of October, tabloids and prominent news services carried headlines stating that “a cannibal act” had happened in

¹ Heike Dorsch, *la compagne de Stefan Ramin: “Il m’a menacé avec un pistolet”*, “La Dépêche de Tahiti”, 4 November 2011, www.ladepeche.pf/actu/heike-dorsch-la-compagne-de-stefan-ramin-il-ma-menace-avec-un-pistolet (the date of access: 28.11.2011).

French Polynesia². Many of these articles emphasized that numerous cases of cannibalism have been recorded in the Marquesas Islands. Authors of these articles did not state where or from whom this information was obtained. There was no evidence of cannibalism in the Ramin murder, yet the international media eagerly claimed not only that cannibalism was possible, but implied that it might be taking place in the twenty-first century in French Polynesia.

News purporting cannibalistic activities spread rapidly worldwide despite immediate refutations by Marquesan and French Polynesian authorities. Internet portals published the story online. “Experts” of all types were flooded with telephone calls; somewhat tardily, internet users began addressing the issue online. This curiosity from “the far seas” was enhanced with shiver-inducing details. It was claimed that a tattoo on the left side of the suspect’s chest marked him as a member of a “cannibal Marquesan clan”: “The local hunter suspected of killing and eating a missing German tourist has a tattoo of a notorious cannibal tribe on his shoulder, it emerged yesterday”³.

Another round of comments and speculations about the renewal of cannibal rites followed this revelation. International articles insinuated that the horror of cannibalism was to be expected at this geographical location because of

² B. Dubuc, *Polynésie: Un touriste allemand disparaît, la thèse du cannibalisme avancée*, “20 minutes.fr.”, 17 October 2011, www.20minutes.fr/societe/807466-polynesie-touriste-allemand-disparait-these-cannibalisme-avancee (the date of access: 27.11.2011); *German yachtsman Stefan Ramin eaten by French Polynesian cannibals*, “The Australian”, 18 October 2011, www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/german-yachtsman-stefan-ramin-eaten-by-french-polynesian-cannibals/story-e6frg6so-1226169130705 (the date of access: 27.11.2011); A. Hall, *Teeth found among charred remains on South Sea island are those of missing German sailor who was “eaten by cannibals”*, “Mail Online”, 17 October 2011, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2049910/Stefan-Ramin-eaten-cannibals-Charred-bones-search-missing-sailor.html (the date of access: 27.11.2011); *Polinezja Francuska: Podróżnik zjedzony przez przewodnika?*, “Wirtualna Polska”, 17 October 2011, <http://turystyka.wp.pl/kat,1,title,polinezja-francuska-podroznik-zjedzony-przez-przewodnika,wid,11249196> (the date of access: 27.11.2011); *Porabane ciało w ognisku. Kanibal zjadł turystę?*, “TVN24”, 17 October 2011, www.tvn24.pl/12691,1721110,0,1.porabane-cialo-w-ognisku-kanibal-zjadl-turyste,wiadomosc.html (the date of access: 27.11.2011); J. von Wehmeyer, C. Weingärtner, *Gibt es auf der Todesinsel noch heute Kannibalen?*, “Bild.de”, 17 October 2011, www.bild.de/news/ausland/kannibalismus/gibt-es-heute-auf-der-todesinsel-noch-kannibalen-20508340.bild.html (the date of access: 27.11.2011).

³ *Hunter suspected of killing and eating missing German tourist has tattoo of notorious cannibal tribe who ate victims*, “Mail Online”, 20 October 2011, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2051431/Henri-Haiti-suspected-eating-Stefan-Ramin-tattoo-cannibal-tribe.html#ixzz1jxFFKGeb (the date of access: 09.01.2012).

its history and culture. Although some authors noted that the regular practice of eating human flesh had ceased over one hundred years ago, they insisted that the act was still contemporarily possible. Evidently the Euro-American imaginations of the Pacific that originated in early colonial discourses remain unforgotten.

By the twenty-second of October, the world press had shifted attention in new directions and dropped the subject, while local media continued to monitor the story. The international discussion drifted away from following the actual events of the crime and turned into a struggle over representations of the Marquesas and French Polynesia as a whole. Inhabitants of Nuku Hiva reacted as if they had been personally insulted and accused of the crime. The reputation of the Marquesas as a touristic destination was also feared impaired. French Polynesians defended their identity, their values and cultural features of their society. They were especially concerned about being misrepresented as a people.

The outrage of French Polynesians towards being characterized as cannibalistic manifested on internet forums. For example, Juliana from Papeete commented on an on-line news article entitled *Teeth found among charred remains on South Sea island are those of missing German sailor who was "eaten by cannibals"*⁴.

HOW CAN THEY PRETEND THIS GUY WAS EATEN BY "CANNIBALS"? I'm from Tahiti and in Tahiti a lot of horrible things happen every day (like everywhere in the world): "one child received a knife by his own father right in the head", "one old man had been cut in pieces" (...). This is the FIRST time we, as Tahitian people, read this kind of thing, otherwise we never heard about Nuku Hiva, this time of "CANNIBALS" IS FINISHED! So please, do not think that because it happened once so they will do it again. Marquesans are in pain, they don't understand how came that horrible event. So please, don't judge French Polynesia just because of this event, it can happen ANYWHERE! Thank you for reading⁵.

For French Polynesians, the idea that cannibalism was taking place in the islands was ridiculous. This paper asks why cannibalism was not just unthinkable in international media representations of the murder case.

⁴ A. Hall, *op.cit.*

⁵ www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2049910/Stefan-Ramin-eaten-cannibals-Charred-bones-search-missing-sailor.html (the date of access: 27.11.2011).

Colonial discourse: humor, death and beauty

Before addressing the public strategies that Marquesan and Tahitian authorities and activists undertook to deal with the situation, it is useful to take a closer look at the colonial roots of cannibal discourse. This history casts light on the eagerness with which contemporary media chose the least probable explanation for the tragic events in the Marquesas.

Many anthropologists, historians and postcolonial theorists have described the ambiguities characteristic of imagery and discourse surrounding the colonized “Other”. These scholars address the strategies used by European empires to “domesticate” the subaltern nations they were exploring and exploiting. European colonizers also defined themselves by projecting the worst behaviors onto different, distant societies as opposite to Westerners:

The figure of “the Other”, banished to the edge of the conceptual world and constructed as the absolute opposite, the negation, of everything which the West stood for, reappeared at the very centre of the discourse of civilization, refinement, modernity and development in the West. “The Other” was the “dark” side – forgotten, repressed and denied; the reverse image of enlightenment and modernity⁶.

European colonizers simultaneously feminized, sexualized and to a certain extent glorified the exotic nature and beauty of other places and cultures⁷. Undermining local notions of masculinity and pugnacity by calling native men “feminine” was part of this strategy⁸. However, this feminine male “Other” was at the same time imagined as physically and sexually dangerous, even cannibalistic. It was as if the dark, exuberant forces of newly subordinated lands were incarnated as cannibals. The prospect of cannibalism not only induced fear among Europeans, it was also a subject for humor, mockery and erotic fantasies. As Paul Lyons remarks in *American pacificism* (a play on Edward Said’s

⁶ S. Hall, *The West and the Rest. Discourse and power*, [in:] S. Hall, B. Gieben (eds.), *Formations of modernity*, Cambridge 1992, p. 314.

⁷ M. Jolly, *From Point Venus to Bali Ha’i. Eroticism and exoticism in representations of the Pacific*, [in:] M. Jolly, L. Manderson (eds.), *Sites of desire. Economies of pleasure. Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, Chicago 1997, p. 99-122; F. Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, New York 1967.

⁸ S. Hall, *op.cit.*; T. K. Tengan, *Native men remade. Gender and nation in contemporary Hawai’i*, Durham, London 2008.

1978 *Orientalism*)⁹, “[m]uch of the nervous humor and eroticism plays around ‘cannibalism’, around male anxiety about whether Islanders want to love you or eat you, or whether the latter is the sign of the former”¹⁰.

Such fantasies were visible in nineteenth and early twentieth century texts. For example, on the eighteenth of September 1858, the Poet’s Box in Glasgow published a ballad entitled *The King of the Cannibal Islands*. The popular song soon spread across the Atlantic; even today, various artistic interpretations are uploaded to YouTube¹¹. Though not located in any particular place, the song tells about the daily life of “a cannibal king”. The king feasts on human bodies and takes the lives of any person he wishes; he is also a highly sexualized figure who interacts with “filthy” local women: “One hundred wives he had / and every week he was a dad, / Upon my word it was too bad / For his smutty dears soon drove him mad”. Sounds of a foreign or native language are bizarrely mimicked while incanting the following refrain that includes “cum”, a slang word for orgasm: “Hokee pokee wonkee fum, / Puttee po pee kaihula cum, / Tongaree, wougaree, ching ring wum, / The King of the Cannibal Island”¹².

Cannibalistic terror coexisted with erotic fantasy in humorous and exaggerated colonial constructions of the exotic. Such mockery is not so far from that seen in a number of unrefined comments made by international internet users in response to news articles on the Ramin case. Some inquired if the meat was salty, if it had been grilled, or if “cannibals” were likely to deal with politicians in a similar manner. To be fair, the majority of internet users reflected more seriously and assumed the story was untrue, either because they considered cannibalism so horrifying that it was unimaginable or because there were demonstrable historical inconsistencies in the news reports. Whether international readers believed the story or not, I argue that such cannibal talk continues because it is entertaining and provokes curiosity. Thus colonial dark representations of “the Other” sustain today in diverse forms, using the same strategies of depicting distant societies.

Another example of nineteenth century discourse on cannibalistic natives in the Pacific came from a globetrotter Herbert Tichborn “Sundowner”, a writer

⁹ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1978.

¹⁰ P. Lyons, *American pacificism. Oceania in the U.S. imagination*, New York, London 2006.

¹¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3xOMbBXk6M (the date of access: 20.01.2012).

¹² *The King of the Cannibal Islands*, “Saturday Morning”, 18 September 1858, National Library of Scotland, <http://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/16439> (the date of access: 27.11.2011).

for such periodicals as “The Weekly Telegraph” and “The Colonies and India”. He described Pacific islanders as gentle, jovial inhabitants of paradise and as cruel, blood-thirsty beasts. In the preface to *Noqu Talanoa. Stories from the South Seas* he wrote:

I had a pleasure of communing during my wanderings among those earthly paradises known vaguely on this side as the South Pacific Islands. I have enjoyed many a breezy *talanoa* over the *yaqona*-bowl with those splendid Polynesians, whose genial and kind natures have always challenged my warmest admiration and gratitude. (...) Forgiving their sometimes waywardness, I shall always remember their sterling qualities, their large hearts, their lovable natures and their genial humor. My tongue may cleave to my mouth if ever I cease to sing the praises of those bright and cheerful people¹³.

Just a few pages later, Sundowner reported being invited to a banquet by cannibals who were preparing a human body for consumption (he did not state which island exactly, but placed the story on Fiji). He described the corpse as that of a “fully-grown warrior (...) as dead as the proverbial door nail and was tied up and properly hamstrung, awaiting the preparation of the *lovo*, or oven, which was to receive him”¹⁴. He also reminded readers of famous white victims of presumed cannibals, including Reverend Baker, who, according to one of Sundowner’s interlocutors, tasted as salty as a Fijian¹⁵.

The modern discourse of cannibalism seems to have been inherited from early European sailors and travelers who claimed to have discovered earthly paradises in the tropics, albeit inhabited by cannibalistic monsters. Humor, death and beauty emerge from these popular texts conceived by Western authors for Western audiences. Today’s consumers of popular media are just as fascinated by the juxtaposition of the beauty of tropical islands with the sensational threat of cannibalism, though neither feasting on human flesh nor untouched exotic beauty still exist.

¹³ Sundowner/H. Tichborn, *Noqu Talanoa. Stories from the South Seas*, London 1896, p. v-vi.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

Herman Melville's Nuku Hiva, tourism and pop-culture monsters

Cannibalism marks colonial and pop-cultural discourses of the Marquesas. Nuku Hiva may owe both its cannibalistic infamy and fame as a paradisiac jewel to Herman Melville. In his 1846 novel, *Typee*, Melville juxtaposed Marquesan beauty with fantasies and fear of bloodthirsty “savages”. It is very unlikely that Melville observed any cannibalistic practices personally. However, Arthur Rice reported that Melville discovered dismembered human bones under “a wooden vessel in the shape of an inverted canoe” when he secretly visited a ceremonial site and some human skulls tied to a ridge pole at one of houses in Nuku Hiva¹⁶. He took it for an evidence of cannibalism. Greg Dening and Paul Lyons argue that Melville could never have witnessed or found proof of anthropophagy during his stay on Nuku Hiva because he would not have been permitted to view any such rituals. Therefore, his writings were not based on experience but rumor and imagination¹⁷. Lyon writes that

The cannibalism in *Typee*, then, is imagined, tropic and tellingly citational; from first to last Melville’s “cannibal talk” is a troubled and troublesome performance, unrelieved by attempts at humor, with the conventional single and delayed scene of witness fulfilling a generic requirement without exactly parodying it¹⁸.

This does not mean human sacrifice and anthropophagy did not occur (as I address below), but that Melville popularized cannibal representations of Nuku Hiva based only on his assumptions about the Polynesian “Other”.

The pattern of mingling idyllic images of the South Seas with frightening images of humans consuming human corpses was repeated throughout popular travel and adventure literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Robert Louis Stevenson (who also visited Nuku Hiva and is buried on Samoa), Jack London and George Lewis Becke all drew heavily on a formula established by Daniel Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe*, which was published in 1719 before the South Seas had even been rediscovered by Europeans. Today,

¹⁶ A. P. Rice, *Cannibalism in Polynesia*, “American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal”, 1910, nr 32, p.77-84.

¹⁷ G. Dening, *Islands and beaches. Discourse on a silent land. Marquesas 1774 – 1880*, Chicago 1980.

¹⁸ P. Lyons, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

the places these writers sensationalized are marketed for tourists, including Taipivai, where Melville lived on Nuku Hiva, and a bay that was Stevenson's favorite. Tourists are willing to consume it all: cannibals, island beauty and the "civilized" writers who depicted them.

Tourists and consumers of popular culture apparently crave ambiguity. Seemingly contradictory concepts – love and fear, beauty and death, sex and monsters – together constitute a sensational unity, electrifying the senses and imagination. Why else do people consume with such interest stories about zombies, mass murderers and criminals? Why do crowds of fans camp in front of movie theaters to get tickets to the opening night of the movie *The twilight saga. Breaking dawn*, the fourth installment in a vampire versus werewolf love story? Why do news media outstrip themselves to provide their audiences with ever more striking, more terrifying reports? This consumption and popular admiration for bloodthirsty monsters is not merely a kind of recklessness and it is not meaningless. Perhaps it is a way of domesticizing death and the unknown "Other" in a way little different from that of the first European navigators' fantasies of cannibalism. Reports of cannibalism feed the pop-culture hunger for monster stories today as in the past. In Gananath Obeyesekere's words, "[t]he impossibility of monsters in the actual world as it expanded before the European consciousness had one notable exception. The anthropophagi of the medieval world were converted into the cannibal. The term 'cannibal' replaced the term 'anthropophagi' and became a sign of savagism"¹⁹.

In a contemporary context, savagism (others take on Said's "orientalism") is the only construct of "real" monstrosity, since medieval monsters only exist in the virtual worlds of television and videogames. The Ramin murder is inscribed with savagism and the search for a monster. The whole story counts far more than whether or not he was really eaten. The narrative of his murder follows the same paradigm of an ambiguous paradise that has been exercised since Christopher Columbus arrived in the Lesser Antilles and reported about the Caribs (an indigenous tribe) that later have been enslaved, displaced, contaminated with foreign diseases and hunted to extinction. Europeans memorialized their tribal name by deriving new words: "Caribbean", applied to a tropical paradise of the Atlantic archipelago, and "cannibalism", for the practice of people eating people. The Ramin story is another narrative of a monster that preys on human and therefore should be hunted; only this time it is presented

¹⁹ G. Obeyesekere, *Cannibal talk. The man-eating myth and human sacrifice in the South Seas*, Berkeley 2005, p. 14.

as a “true” story about a modern-day tourist. The question remains if the story is a reflection of past reality. To address this, I look into ethnographies of the Marquesas²⁰.

Ethnographies of cannibalism in the Marquesas

Did Marquesans ever eat human body parts? According to numerous records, they did. However, it is important to distinguish cannibalism from anthropophagy. According to Obeyesekere, the former is imaginary, a manifestation of the dread of being eaten by a man, while the latter refers to actual practices of consuming a human body²¹. As part of the European discourse of “the Other”, cannibalism was far more frequently reported than actual anthropophagy occurred. The author notes that “[c]annibalism is like sorcery in this regard: the imputation of sorcery to others is common cross-culturally but the practice of sorcery is rare”²².

Works of some early ethnographers nourished the cannibalism narrative. For example Arthur P. Rice described Marquesan cruelty in detail. He wrote that they broke the legs and hands of their victims and crushed their chests so they could not speak before actually killing them²³. Such macabre reports contrast with the deep social and religious meanings attributed to the actual consumption of human body parts throughout Polynesian cultures. For example, Teuira Henry depicted rituals of human sacrifice in the Society Islands. She noted that the corpse of a sacrificial victim was taboo to all except chiefs and priests, who actually or symbolically consumed just a small part, usually an eyeball²⁴.

Douglas Oliver classifies “cannibalism” (i.e. anthropophagy, following Obeyesekere’s distinction) into four types: assimilative (eating literally or symbolically a part of a human body in order to acquire the deceased’s qualities or

²⁰ I do realize that some ethnographical and historical texts follow the same logic of representation of “the Other” which this paper takes as its subject of critique. But, considering that oral traditions in the region have been undergoing mass extinction, those materials remain the only accessible data on pre-colonial and/or first European encounter periods in the islands’ history. I therefore analyze them not to show the ultimate “truth”, but more in terms of alternative interpretations.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 15.

²³ A. P. Rice, *op.cit.*

²⁴ T. Henry, *Ancient Tahiti. Based on materials recorded by J. M. Orsmond*, New York 1971 (1928).

abilities); punitive (consuming the flesh of dead enemies during warfare or to exercise revenge); commemorative (eating a part of the corpse of a relative); and alimentary (feeding on human flesh during times of scarcity of protein resources or for the sake of the taste of human meat, though usually only at ceremonial occasions)²⁵. In the Marquesas “cannibalism seems to have occurred frequently and was well institutionalized; it was practiced in warfare both for revenge and as a means of enjoyment of a highly favored food – many instances of the former also serving as token offerings to cooperative patron gods”²⁶.

Dening states that Marquesans went raiding to secure human sacrifices during periods of social crisis or for ceremonial occasions such as when a *haka'iki* (chief) or his family members were going through life transitions (e.g. birth of the first child, onset of puberty of a chief's daughter, or a funeral). Such raids were called *e ika ta* (fishing). Marquesans would “fish” among their enemies, poor people, servants and women that were not taboo. At the temple, captives were hung from hooks in their mouths with baskets of bait assembled around their limbs; their bodies were painted red. They were sacrificed to the gods during important occasions such as the death of *haka'iki* or *tau'a* (priest); *heana* (sacrificial victims) were taboo and therefore not eaten. Only people who had not been sacrificed to the gods might be eaten²⁷.

The structural analysis of Fijian and Polynesian cannibalism proposed by Marshall Sahlins gives more input into symbolic meaning of human sacrifices and consuming corpses. Firstly, he argues that there were no generic differences between an animal and a human sacrifice since world of nature and man was part of the same cosmological order united by mutually shared mythical genealogy. Furthermore, Sahlins elaborates more in-depth theory of exchange between people and gods, or local islanders and their king – a dangerous outsider from the sea, who was at the same time perceived as a divine descendant²⁸. Such an approach certainly offers an interesting insight into historical reflection on indigenous societies. It does not explain, however, the origins of Western representations of Pacific “cannibalism”.

In the case of Marquesas, Dening mentions that although practices of anthropophagy seem to be historically well-documented, the accounts are not reliable. William Pascoe Crook, an eighteenth century British missionary, and

²⁵ D. Oliver, *Polynesia in early historic times*, Honolulu 2002.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 102.

²⁷ G. Dening, *op.cit.*

²⁸ M. Sahlins, *Islands of history*, Chicago 1985.

Edward Robarts, a deserter from a whaler ship, were the only European travelers who claimed to have seen *heana* being eaten. The rest of reports were imagined products of the “psychohistory of the nineteenth-century voyager’s preoccupation with cannibalism”. In other words, if anthropophagy took place, it was usually in a ceremonial context restricted by taboo. Only for a short period between 1855 and 1880, after the ritual traditions had been destroyed, did Marquesans eat humans within violent acts “as if they were a food of hate”²⁹.

In any case, Dening emphasizes that

Enata (Marquesans) certainly did not kill *Aoe* (white foreigners) with the same ritual and perceptions with which they killed themselves. [Although a few dozen European] beachcombers were killed from 1798 – 1880, almost all died because they flaunted some taboo, stole *Enata* property or quarreled in their drunkenness. (...) *Aoe* were fair game when they stood outside the system of obligation and right and, in so far as they controlled their relations with *Enata* violently with guns, were subject to the same violence. (...) but being a *heana* belonged to *Enata*³⁰.

This contrasts with nineteenth century European fantasies of being eaten by “the Other”. Therefore it is useful to appreciate Obeyesekere’s distinction between cannibalistic narratives and anthropophagical ceremonies. Stoked by the popular press, such fantastic narratives contribute to touristic fascination with cannibalistic natives today. In this respect the only cannibals are international press and tourism.

Tourist talk

Thus far, each of my divagations has led back to the problem of representation of the Pacific Islands, including the Marquesas. I have shown how an ambiguous fantasy of tropical islands, comprising both paradisiac and monstrous components, has been rooted in early European beliefs, colonial fears of the indigenous, political and economic interests, and a literary genre of travel adventure writing. Constructed over the last few centuries, this representation of Pacific peoples has become the basis of a pop-cultural hunger for eroticized terror stories. Such a formation is not trivial; it provides cultural strategies for dealing with problems

²⁹ G. Dening, *op.cit.*, p. 249.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 247.

of otherness, danger and death by domesticating, mocking and eroticizing them (similar to Mikhail Bakhtin's interpretation of carnival³¹).

Unfortunately, when a true drama (such as Ramin's murder) occurs, the cannibal narrative feeds into the commercial market for sensational entertainment to become part of news and tourist discourses. Real people who feel they have been accused of cannibalism must assert their own voices and agency to refute being represented according to the mythology of monsters. This effort, however, appears problematic when the public image formed for tourists by French Polynesia's tourist marketing is rather ambiguous.

To draw tourists, local and territorial French Polynesian authorities label Nuku Hiva and the Marquesas "a land of mystery", "a land of people" (*Henua Enata* – the Marquesan name for the archipelago) and a true Polynesian cultural and natural preserve. In 2010 the *Délégation Permanente de la France Auprès de l'UNESCO* (Permanent Delegation of France to UNESCO) submitted an application to appoint the Marquesas Islands a place in the UNESCO World Heritage List. They described the Marquesas' priceless archeological sites, great natural beauty and the traditional life ways of a people connected to the land and the sea³². The Marquesas have also been depicted as a place of repose by artists such as Paul Gauguin and Jacques Brel, where they wished to be buried.

Despite such official and artistic representations, the islands have not been as efficiently marketed to tourists as Tahiti and the Society Islands. To encourage more tourism, two institutions responsible for advertising the archipelago, the *Comité de Tourisme d'Atunoa* (Committee of Tourism at Atunoa) and the *Comité de Tourisme de Nuku Hiva* (Committee of Tourism at Nuku Hiva), put out leaflets underlining the unique character of each island³³. This strategy of branding every island is characteristic of French Polynesia's tourist institutions³⁴.

In Nuku Hiva, the second largest island in French Polynesia, visitors are promised stunning views of Anaho Bay, the Hahau waterfall and unusual basalt rock formations. Taipivai village (where Melville lived for a short time) and Stevenson's favorite Hatiheu Bays are featured attractions. In French Nuku Hiva is referred to as a *Terre Déserte* (lonely land), famous for verdant

³¹ M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, Bloomington 1984.

³² *Tentative list, description of the Marquesas*, "UNESCO" 1992-2012, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5564/> (the date of access: 29.11.2011).

³³ *Les Iles Marquises. Te Fanua Enata. Le terre des hommes*, Comité du Tourisme d'Atuona and Comité du Tourisme de Nuku Hiva 1997.

³⁴ M. Khan, *Tahiti beyond the postcard. Power, place, and everyday life*, Seattle 2011.

endemic flora and wild horses. On a website devoted to tourism in French Polynesia, Nuku Hiva is described as a “Mystic Island (...) known for towering spire-like peaks; secluded, lush valleys; ancient religious sites; fjord-like bays; and waterfalls so high that most of the falling water evaporates as it descends”³⁵. Brochure texts are accompanied by “characteristic” images of the Marquesas: lush green valleys, Marquesan horses, craftsmen at work on paintings or *tikis*³⁶ sculptures, and dancers in *tī*³⁷ leaf skirts surrounded by tropical scenery. A number of adventurous activities are offered to tourists: helicopter flights, boat trips, horse rides, submarine adventures and goat hunting.

Advertisements cover the flyers. An advertisement for Keikahanui Inn offers “vacation or adventure! We can plan it for you in the land of the Tattooed Warriors”. The advertisement is decorated with a well-known drawing, originally published in 1812 by Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff, of a tattooed Marquesan warrior carrying a spear and dangling a skull from a string³⁸. This figure brings up an association with cannibal imagination because it is accompanied by a short description of the cannibalism formerly practiced on the islands (presented as a historical curiosity). The same image is a very popular design on *tapa*³⁹ paintings the Marquesas are famous for. They are sold to tourists on the archipelago and in Tahiti.

Examples of tourist advertisements might be multiplied, but they are usually constructed of the same elements: natural beauty, unique culture, Gauguin paintings and sometimes depictions of a warrior holding a skull. Although the emphasis is on the beauty and history of the archipelago, thrilling cannibal talk is also included. However, in these media, cannibalism has been commercialized, hence domesticated, so perhaps it is not dangerous enough. The tattooed warriors and accounts of past cannibal customs do not seem offensive or controversial, at least to the local public, when inscribed in tourism. This touristic image of Nuku Hiva is nevertheless as ambiguously sweet and sour as the colonial discourse of the Pacific Islands.

³⁵ www.tahiti-tourisme.com/islands/marquesas/marquesas.asp (the date of access: 27.11.2011).

³⁶ *Tiki* or *ti'i* was traditionally a wooden or a stone sculpture depicting an anthropomorphic design. It was said to host spirits of ancestors and it played important role in the religious life. Today it is a common motif of arts and crafts.

³⁷ *Tī* (*Cordyline fruticosa*) is a popular plant growing in the islands.

³⁸ G. H. Langsdorff, *Bemerkungen auf einer Reise um die Welt. Nebst ausführlicher Erklärung*, vol. 2, Frankfurt am Mayn 1812.

³⁹ *Tapa* is a cloth made from beaten bark.

Two different stories of cannibalism, built upon the same colonial pattern, emerge from the touristic and sensational news narratives. Although they seem similar, their meanings and consequences differ. No touristic leaflet depicting a tattooed cannibal has engaged the attention of the president of French Polynesia, the Marquesan community, human rights activists, or international journalists. In the next section, I discuss these public struggles over the cannibal talk surrounding the Ramin murder case.

Official, familial, festival and expert discourses

The Ramin murder provoked a discursive storm involving many actors: political authorities, scholarly experts, cultural activists, festival organizers and international and local journalists. Local media such as “La Dépêche de Tahiti” constantly monitored each development in the inquiry and every public statement made about *L’affaire Ramin* (the Ramin affair). At the same time, the Marquesan community had to deal publicly with the wave of international allegations of cannibalism. Denying the accusation has been their strongest response. The prosecutor, José Thorel, was the first to deny the cannibal theory, emphasizing that cannibalism was not even being considered in the investigation: “Cannibalism, I don’t even want to hear about that. It’s some kind of delusion”⁴⁰. Déborah Kimitete, the deputy mayor of Nuku Hiva, was quoted as saying: “We feel very angry and hurt. (...) What they did with this story is racism; it’s an insult to all Marquesans. (...) People are afraid. Something like that normally doesn’t happen on this island”⁴¹. Even Ramin’s father appealed to the media to reduce the emotional rhetoric and stop the accusations of cannibalism that had shocked both him and the people of Nuku Hiva: “At

⁴⁰ *Disparition d’un touriste allemand aux Marquises. Le procureur de la République réfute la thèse du cannibalisme*, “Tahiti Press”, 16 October 2011, www.tahitipresse.pf/2011/10/disparition-dun-touriste-allemand-aux-marquises-le-procureur-de-la-republique-refute-la-these-du-cannibalisme (the date of access: 28.11.2011).

⁴¹ *P. von Bethge, Menschenjagd im Paradies*, “Der Spiegel”, 2011, nr 43, p. 128-130, www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-81136869.html (the date of access: 09.11.2011), english translation available in *Tahiti. Racism concerns rose over mysterious Marquesas death of German*, “Pacific Media Center”, 30 October 2011, www.pmc.aut.ac.nz/pacific-media-watch/tahiti-racism-concerns-raised-over-mysterious-marquesas-death-german-7694 (the date of access: 09.11.2011).

this point, I think it was more of an accident and believe that the situation and emotions distressed the murderer [so he lost control]”⁴².

Ramin’s parents traveled to the Marquesas to visit the place where their son’s life had been ended. They attended a number of receptions and received condolences from local inhabitants and authorities. In November 2011 Oscar Temaru, the President of French Polynesia, received the couple in Papeete to express his condolences. At this occasion he called on Haiti (still in hiding) to surrender. He also made a general statement assuring of the hospitality of French Polynesia: “We wish, the government and the whole country, to express our sincere condolences. All that has been said in the newspapers belongs to the media and is their affair. We are a hospitable nation”⁴³. His words followed a pattern typical for locally prominent personalities: first deny any possibility of cannibalism and describe the harm and offensiveness of such allegations, then depict the Marquesas as part of a law-abiding and welcoming country. Such statements were a key aspect of the public struggle to wrest control over representations of French Polynesian identity and society.

Calls for Haiti to turn himself in flew from different directions: his brother and other family members, local leaders and festival organizers (see below). Since the fugitive was hiding in the mountains, probably cut off from any source of information, these appeals seemed to be of a more social nature. People made their positions on the crime public in these statements. Particularly, they publicly disavowed the cannibalistic reputation of Marquesans. In most statements asking Haiti to surrender and insisting that the case be investigated properly, the primary concern seems to be that the colonial cannibal talk be negated.

Such public statements were made during preparations for two Marquesan cultural festivals. An association of artisans and dancers from the Marquesas *Te onui o te Hana Enana*, organizes *Le Salon des Marquises* (The Trade Show of the Marquesas) in Tahiti twice a year. The festival promotes the region and its arts to French Polynesians and tourists. The thirty-fourth festival took place between the twelfth and twenty-seventh of November 2011 at Tefauroa (Pointe Venus). The dance groups *Taki Toa* and *Te Toa vii o te Henua Enana* performed. Marquesan cuisine was served. Roughly one hundred Marquesan artists displayed and sold

⁴² “*Je pense plutôt à un accident*” dit le père de Stefan Ramin, “La Dépêche de Tahiti”, 24 October 2011, www.ladepeche.pf/actu/je-pense-plutot-a-un-accident-dit-le-pere-de-stefan-ramin (the date of access: 27.11.2011).

⁴³ *Oscar Temaru demande à Henri Haiti de se rendre*, “La Dépêche de Tahiti”, 16 November 2011, www.ladepeche.pf/article/faits-divers-justice/oscar-temaru-demande-a-henri-haiti-de-se-rendre (the date of access: 27.11.2011).

wood, horse bone and basalt sculptures, and crafts made of *tapa* or coconut fiber. Tattoos were also displayed, traditional sports played and a beauty contest staged. Before the festival began, the president of the association, Toa Raphaël Taiaapu, called a press conference to assure the public that Marquesan people are hospitable and peaceful; he also called Haiti to surrender:

The community of the Marquesas feels very concerned. We would like to express our sympathy to the Marquesan community of Tahiti, to Stefan's family and, at the same time, send our words of support to the family of Haiti (suspected murderer) because when we are described like that [in press], all the family and Marquesans are concerned⁴⁴.

Another festival was launched on the fifteenth of December 2011. The *Festival des Arts des Marquises* (The Art Festival of the Marquesas Islands) is organized every fourth year on Nuku Hiva. Intended to support the cultural rebirth of Marquesans, it is the most important cultural event in the archipelago. To give a sense of its scale, nearly two thousand dancers performed in the 2011 program (the eighth time the festival was held). Delegations from top political echelons attended, including the High Commissioner of French Polynesia. According to Joseph Jaffé, one of the festival's organizers and public speakers, the 2011 festival was especially concerned with culture renewal. When rumors spread that it would be canceled because of the murder, Ramin's father was reported as saying, "I'm afraid that they'll cancel the festival. I asked them not to do it. These people are trying to regain their culture"⁴⁵.

Cultural events managers were visibly engaged in defining and defending the undermined reputation of Marquesan culture. They persuaded audiences that cannibalism was not part of the culture represented and being revived in the festivals. The fact that Nuku-Hivans went ahead and held the festival in December demonstrates their willingness to take political and public control over their cultural narratives and visual representations. The festivals were counterpoised against international cannibalistic discourses in the public struggle over the Marquesan public image. Unfortunately, the message of the festivals was not noticed or recognized worldwide. This discourse, though important, could only play a local role in dealing with the international allegations.

⁴⁴ *Mini festival des Marquises à Mahina. Un programme riche en événements*, "Tahiti Press", 21 October 2011, www.tahitipresse.pf/2011/10/mini-festival-des-marquises-a-mahina-un-programme-riche-en-evenements (the date of access: 28.11.2011).

⁴⁵ P. von Bethge, *op.cit.*

Another group of actors that had a little more international influence in the public discussion over supposed Marquesan cannibalism were the “experts”. They were usually ethnographers, historians and travel writers. Jaffé, for example, is an anthropologist who served as translator when Dorsch was questioned by police about Ramin disappearance and her assault. He was subsequently interviewed by a journalist for “Der Spiegel”, where he established himself as a specialist on the cultural context of past cannibal practices in Nuku Hiva. Other “experts” were consulted by international journalists. A German tabloid interviewed Dr. Gundolf Krüger as a “cannibal expert”. John Gimlette, a travel writer, referred to early twentieth century writing on cannibalism:

It’s true that French Polynesia once had something of a reputation for cannibalism, but that was a long time ago. In 1910, the American anthropologist, A. P. Rice, described how the people of the Marquesas Islands ritualistically killed their captives. (...) Such rituals have passed into Pacific mythology. But, in South America, the practice appears to have endured into at least the second half of the twentieth century⁴⁶.

The words of “experts” seem to have been accorded greater validity and objectivity than the statements of local officials such as the prosecutor who denied the “cannibalism act”. Although majority of “experts” defended Marquesan culture and assured journalists that cannibalism was only of historical interest, their opinions were read as confirmation in international media that cannibalism may exist today in the Marquesas.

Narrative realities

The international public is not interested in the rebirth of cultural practices and identities in the Marquesas or reconstructing an accurate contemporary image of Marquesans. Based on international press, it seems more important to continue feeding the public with previously established myths of dangerous and fascinating cannibal otherness in the South Seas. Cultural festivals and identity revival in Nuku Hiva is not newsworthy compared to charred bones and pieces of (possibly eaten) human flesh. The surrender of Haiti was barely noted in

⁴⁶ I. Hollingshead, *Tales of cannibalism from the South Pacific*, “The Telegraph”, 18 October 2011, www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/travelnews/8831702/Tales-of-cannibalism-from-the-South-Pacific.html (the date of access: 27.11.2011).

the international media. The German tabloid “Bild” reported the suspect had been captured⁴⁷, as did a French internet news portal, “20 minutes.fr”⁴⁸. Neither source could resist mentioning cannibalism and the possibility of being eaten in their reports. The article in “Bild” was entitled *The South Seas murderer: I didn't eat him*⁴⁹. No international media clearly stated that the “cannibal act” accusations had no bearing in reality, even after it became obvious that cannibalism was definitely excluded from the investigation. International journalists seemed interested only in sustaining the cannibal myth. The cannibal discourse is maintained internationally (in news and tourism) simultaneous with contemporary representations of Marquesan culture in local events such as festivals.

Why did the story of the murder trigger such an avalanche of reactions even though it was built around the same colonial logic of ambiguity broadly accepted in tourist brochures? What does this tell us about tourism besides that it is a part of the contemporary, modern discourse and net of meaning we all live in? One explanation is that tourism is a performance of a collective imagination; it is a fraud that audiences are all aware of and have agreed to enjoy. Since one knows it is fake, whatever it produces, it is taken lightly. When something serious and real happens, not only it is not touristic; it requires a strong reaction, as in the case of cannibal accusations. This explanation raises further questions about reality. How can it be possible that touristic events and narratives are not “real”? The tourist industry produces representations of people and places inscribed in human biographies all over the world, whether a person is a host or a guest. Edward Bruner convincingly argues that tourism and touristic culture are real, authentic, modern cultural creations. Tourism and its products, including cultural narrations, are actual facts within our contemporary reality⁵⁰.

However, the authentic murder in Nuku Hiva is not what triggered the Ramin's affair and avalanche of international articles. Although the tragedy should not be forgotten, it was not the act of taking a human life that distin-

⁴⁷ *Südsee-Killer Henri Haiti stellt sich*, “Bild.de”, 30 November 2011, www.bild.de/news/ausland/mord/suedsee-killer-henri-haiti-stellt-sich-21299758.bild.html (the date of access: 08.01.2012).

⁴⁸ N. Beunaiche, *Polynésie. Le suspect du meurtre du touriste allemand se rend*, “20 minutes.fr”, 29 November 2011, www.20minutes.fr/societe/833166-polynesie-suspect-meurtre-touriste-allemand-rend (the date of access: 09.01.2012).

⁴⁹ *Südsee-Killer. Ich habe ihn nicht gegessen*, “Bild.de”, 3 December 2011, www.bild.de/news/ausland/kannibalismus/suedsee-killer-ich-habe-ihn-nicht-aufgegessen-21363978.bild.html (the date of access: 08.01.2012).

⁵⁰ E. Bruner, *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of travel*, Chicago, London 2005.

guished the event. The distinctive feature of the Ramin affair was the purely narrative and speculative cannibal talk. People did not react to the murder itself, but to the narrative realities of the Polynesian “Other”, as it is the case in tourist marketing. Both the international press and tourist promotions imply that cannibalism is part of Nuku Hiva and the South Pacific. We Westerners seem to live in the multi-linear, discursive reality of these stories. They intertwine with each other and we maneuver between them by assigning them different levels of importance. They are real (not to confuse with true) and entail real actions. Thus they enable switching to different dimensions of authentic experience. The modes of vacationing, imagining the world, touristic marketing and identity creation are part of our everyday real experiences. They are all interconnected. Only when these modes clash, as when encountering the Ramin case, do they become visible. The same story, the same logic, the same discourse suddenly engenders different reactions and consequences. The mode of a colonially-driven touristic discourse crashes into the self-identity and self-representation of contemporary Marquesans. An event in the international arena is dealt with at the local level.

As long as the narrative of cannibalism stays within the tourist mode of reality, it is agreed upon and the local public remains indifferent. However, anthropophagy accusations at the global scale overstep the bounds of acceptable ways of representing people. These had to be responded to with counter-narratives and activities that confirmed cannibalism is not part of the reality of the local community. Unfortunately, such local responses do not matter globally.

Conclusion

The narrative I have analyzed in this article displays two contradictory components coexisting in the popular imagination of the Marquesas: one is a paradisiac fantasy, the other is a frightening, monstrous image. Both components were created by early European navigators and voyagers. Both are part of the colonial discourse of an ambiguous “Other” that mingles with a contemporary popular craving for sensation and fascination with dark stories of erotic vampires and cannibalistic zombies. The same components are refigured in the tourist and information industries. The search for erotic, beautiful and deadly people and places is rooted in contemporary Western popular discourse.

The drama on Nuku Hiva was twisted to fit into this discourse. It provoked a storm to be dealt with on personal, local and international level. The real-

ity of the murder told through physical evidence (which did not include anthropophagy) was juxtaposed against a narrative reality of cannibalism (in Obeyesekere's terms). The tourist industry commits cannibal talk every day, but only when it interferes with local identities in such an extreme way, we are able to recognize it.

Streszczenie

Nuku Hiva: niejednoznaczny raj

Najpewniej najlepszym słowem charakteryzującym popularne wyobrażenie o mieszkańcach Pacyfiku jest „ambiwalencja”. W artykule postaram się skrytykować i opisać dynamikę międzynarodowych, głównie zachodnich, dyskursów budujących reprezentację wyspiarzy na osobliwej kombinacji piękna i potworności. W tym celu odniosę się do sprawy morderstwa niemieckiego globtrotera na Nuku Hiva w 2011 r. Światowe media, niezależnie od materiału dowodowego, okrzyknęły je „aktem kanibalizmu”. Mimo spekulacyjnego charakteru tych oskarżeń, wywołały one poważne dyskusje i reakcje wśród lokalnych polityków, policji, aktywistów kulturowych i międzynarodowych „ekspertów”. Artykuł jest krytyczną analizą tych medialnych doniesień, które łączę z szerszym kontekstem współczesnego, globalnego wyobrażenia o pacyficznym „Innym”. Przyjrę się dwóm przeciwstawnym wizjom archipelagu Markiz: rajskiej fantazji współistniejącej ze strachem przed pożeraniem ciał. Obie reprezentacje zostały stworzone w dobie europejskich spotkań z wyspiarzami i następującej po nich kolonialnej dominacji. Ten osadzony na ambiwalencji dyskurs dziś przejawia się w przemyśle turystycznym i medialnych „newsach”, karmiąc tym samym popkulturowy głód sensacji i fascynację mrocznymi historiami. W tym kontekście odniosę się również do reakcji i oporu lokalnej opinii publicznej wobec kanibalistycznych oskarżeń, obrażających markizjańską społeczność i kulturę.

