"Of Cannibals and Frenchmen: The Production of Ethnographic Knowledge in Early Nineteenth-Century Brazil."

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This paper addressed the methodological challenge of studying the culture of indigenous peoples who practically no longer exist. Jê-speaking tribes of Minas Gerais who once occupied a Brazilian coastal forest that filled European observers with fear and awe, either were exterminated or forcibly acculturated over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These people were, in the words of historian Cynthia Radding, “wandering peoples,” non-sedentary foragers who lacked a written language and whose contact with the state was sporadic at best. The remnants of these groups that have survived to the present now find themselves turning to anthropologists and historians in their efforts to reconstitute their own identities. Yet scholars, in turn, are hampered by the limitations of sources written by krai, or non Jê outsiders.

Scholars of Brazil’s native peoples often rely heavily on travel narratives produced in Brazil during the early 19th century by German and French naturalists as canonical texts. Engravings depicting Jê-speaking tribes were widely reproduced and fundamental to the portrayal of indigenous peoples within Brazil and a broader Atlantic world. They were photographed as early as 1844. However, the authorship and authority of these texts, both written and visual, demands critical interpretation. Most foreign observers spent only brief spans of time with indigenous groups and had to rely on sources of local knowledge to interpret what they saw. These sources range from powerful statesmen to frontier soldiers to indigenous or bi-cultural guides and interpreters.

In addition to the superficiality of the encounters most Europeans had with native Brazilians, their accounts are also tainted with obvious racial and cultural biases. In particular, the most celebrated French and German naturalists were strongly influenced by the racial theories of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Blumenbach’s association of racial types with psychological

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and cultural tendencies very much shaped what these travelers thought they saw. They also tended to privilege physical anthropology and material culture over ritual, spiritual, and linguistic components. Although these travelers often described native rituals, they seemed more concerned with their outward form than their inward meaning. However, a critical reading of these sources can sometimes reveal a deeper understanding of indigenous mores and motivations.

This paper highlights some of the limitations of these sources. It will also demonstrate the utility of a more humble sort of ethnographic informant: the bureaucrat. A more nuanced although by no means complete, understanding of Jê culture, can be obtained through a close reading of documents left by military officials posted on the eastern frontier of Minas. A number of soldiers remained long enough to learn indigenous languages and obtain some knowledge regarding cultures, kinship practices, spiritual beliefs and social relations. In this talk, I will highlight a specific individual, Guido Thomas Marlière, a Frenchman who served the Portuguese and Brazilian crowns in Minas Gerais from 1813-1829. Although Marlière was exceptionally prolific, producing thousands of pages of documentation, he was not unique. Rather, he represented a broader category of soldier-ethnographer active in the early decades of 19th century Brazil. Additionally, I argue that much of the more concrete and specific cultural information articulated by foreign observers can be traced directly or indirectly back to him.

Historical Background:

This presentation is part of a book-length project about the integration of Jê territory into the Brazilian state during the 19th century. That region had been left largely undisturbed by the state until the latter decades of the 18th century. The Jê were reputed to be cannibals and their presence served to deter contraband trade in gold from central Minas to the coast. However, in the final decades of the 18th century, land hungry settlers had begun to penetrate the region despite official prohibitions and unofficial fears. Increasingly, the Crown came to sanction violence against Jê peoples in the interests of promoting agrarian settlement, trade, and hopefully, new mining opportunities. During the Brazilian Empire (1808-1889), the state used a series of agents including soldiers, missionaries and entrepreneurs to “pacify” and settle the nomadic Jê tribes. This policy, from the point of view of the state, largely failed. State weakness, inadequate financial resources and sustained resistance by the Jê, enabled them to maintain some autonomy through the end of the nineteenth century.
The period of 1808-1831, a critical time both to the fortunes of Jê peoples and the production of documentation that permits a reconstruction of their history. The year 1808 was a watershed in both indigenous policy and intellectual production about Brazil. Portuguese Prince Regent, Dom João VI, fled Portugal with the royal court in 1807 as Napoleon invaded his country. Upon arriving in Rio de Janeiro in 1808, he set up a parallel government and opened Brazilian ports to other European nations. During the colonial period, Portugal had sought to maintain secrecy about the sources of Brazil’s wealth. However, with the ending of Brazil’s formal isolation, foreign scientists, artists and travelers began to visit Brazil in significant numbers. Some took long-term employment with the Portuguese crown as court painters or mining engineers. These foreign travelers were part of a broader European intellectual and imperialist current in post-colonial Latin America exemplified by the explorations of the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt. They were also part of an intellectual generation that melded artistic production with meticulous scientific observation.

The year 1808 was also significant for the implementation of a new, aggressive policy towards indigenous tribes residing in relatively close proximity to Rio de Janeiro. In that year, D. João VI passed three royal decrees that sanctioned just war against nomadic Jê speakers, permitted their enslavement, and established seven military divisions to promote Brazilian settlement of Jê territory. The crown referred to the Indians in question as Botocudos. The name Botocudo derived from the Portuguese word *botoque*, a round wooden disk that some Jê tribes inserted in pierced ears and lower lips. However, in practice the war indiscriminately came to affect semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers who neither sported botoques nor practiced cannibalism. Manuscripts from the era document over twenty different tribal designations, the most common being Coroado, Coropó, Puri, Naknenuk, Jiporok, Maxacali, Pataxó, and the catch-all Botocudo. Over time, the law began to offer physical protection and economic benefits for Jê speakers who were willing to settle in state-sponsored villages (aldeias), adopt agriculture, and live in peace with Portuguese “colonists.” As a mobile way of life was central to Jê culture and subsistence patterns, few Indians complied. Meanwhile, settlers poured into the region to take advantage of tax exemptions and land grants for those willing to incur the risks of frontier settlement. The war remained in effect through 1831.
The implementation of indigenous policy during this era fell to a French soldier named Guido Thomas Marlière (1769-1836). Marlière had joined the Portuguese army in 1802, at age 33, after having served some fifteen years in the French military. He accompanied the Portuguese court in its flight to Brazil in 1807 and was posted to Minas Gerais in 1811. According to his principal biographer, he requested posting to the eastern frontier after being accused of and tried for being a spy for Bonaparte, charges that proved to be unfounded. He rose rapidly in the hierarchy of the Rio Doce military divisions and retired with the rank of colonel in 1829. He spent the remainder of his life amongst indigenous populations at his estate, Guidowald, where he died in 1836.

Correspondence between Marlière and his superiors suggest that he was an energetic and capable administrator. He devoted much of his attention to curtailing violence and resolving land disputes. Establishing the peace required resolving conflicts among rival tribes as well as antagonisms with settlers. Shortly before his retirement, he documented the existence of twenty native settlements housing 4,300 Indians employed in agriculture, as day laborers, and in gathering wild plants, especially the medicinal root, poaia (ipecacuanha), the active ingredient in the purgative ipecac syrup. An additional 15,000 Indians maintained peaceful relations but continued to pursue a largely migratory existence.

Over time, Marlière developed a system of protective paternalism, which although not without flaws, was certainly an improvement over war. His correspondence documents an uphill battle in his efforts to curb violence by both soldiers and settlers. In an era when Jê Indians were described as “more terrifying than wild beasts,” Marlière reported only a handful of cases of indigenous attacks on settlers, and those typically resulted from due provocation. Instead, he catalogued a host of abusive practices instigated by soldiers and colonists including the capture or murder of sleeping women and children under the cover of darkness, deliberate attempts to infect Botocudos with disease, theft of Indian lands, exploitation of labor, corporal punishment, enslavement, sexual abuse, and cheating Indians by plying them with liquor or other subterfuges. His abhorrence of gratuitous violence was such that he advocated the imposition of the death penalty for any Brazilian who killed an Indian except in self defense.

Marlière’s emphasis on non-violence resulted from first hand experience of inter-tribal and indigenous-settler patterns of revenge. The tendency of Jê groups to subdivide and maintain low levels of endemic warfare is well
documented and was emphasized by Brazilian policy makers as proof of Jê barbarism. This pattern of retribution extended to settlers who kidnapped Jê children, stole or raped Jê women, and killed Jê men. Marlière, then, had to address violent conflict on a variety of fronts. Eventually he adopted the Puri custom of hanging ears of corn on game trails frequented by the enemy; eating the corn signified accepting peace.\(^{20}\) He also endorsed the policy of attracting Indians to state-sponsored villages by providing trade goods and selectively used Indians as middlemen, either as línguas (interpreters) or by elevating tribal chiefs to “capitães” (captains).

Towards the end of his career Marlière summed up his approach as the following: “I always tell them the truth, I do good for them whenever possible and no ill, using their language to communicate my thoughts, console them in their afflictions and promise them justice from the government.”\(^{21}\) Yet, we should not be too quick to portray Marlière as a saint, as some of his biographers have done. His paternalism could yield to condescension: he claimed to love the Indians “as if they were his children,”\(^{22}\) viewed them as being in a “permanent state of infancy,”\(^{23}\) and even once likened Botocudos to “imbeciles.”\(^{24}\) He sometimes used animal imagery, comparing the Botocudo to “inhabitants of an anthill”\(^{25}\) or bees that always returned to the hive.\(^{26}\) Marlière’s cultural relativism allowed for leniency towards polygamy (or perhaps this was due to his own de facto polygamous arrangements) but he decried the imató (botoque) as a “ridiculous ornament” and saw abandoning its use as one of the first steps towards “civilization.”\(^{27}\) However, Marlière was the best advocate for Jê speakers during the early decades of the 19\(^{th}\) century. His passionate defense of indigenous physical security and land rights remained steady to the end of his lifetime.

Marlière arguably was the most significant behind-the-scenes ethnographic informant to European naturalists who traversed Brazil’s interior in search its native inhabitants. His influence extends beyond the French and Austrian naturalists of the 1810s and 1820s as subsequent travel accounts often relied heavily on earlier texts to describe indigenous peoples. He provided access to Jê-speaking tribes for most of the travelers described here by arranging for guides and interpreters, determining which communities they would visit, providing first hand information about indigenous customs and languages and commenting on indigenous policy. \(^{28}\) Marlière directly influenced the canonical narratives of Ludwig Wilhelm von Eschwege (1777-1855), Georg Wilhelm Freyreiss (1789-1825), Johann Baptist von Spix (1781-1826), Karl Friedrich Philipp von Martius (1794-1868), and Auguste de Saint-Hilaire (1779-1853).\(^{28}\)
French and German scientific travelers with whom Marlière had contact expressed considerable sympathy for the abuses that Indians endured. Although they typically depicted native Brazilians as racially and intellectually inferior, their plight as victims in an aggressive war waged by state agents and private citizens inspired pity, protectionism and paternalism. These views contrast starkly with those of earlier travelers like British mining engineer John Mawe whose travels through Brazil in 1807-8 predated Marlière’s tenure. Mawe’s introduction to the Jê went through the Count of Linhares, war minister to D. Pedro I, and a firm advocate of violent solutions to subdue the eastern tribes.  

Of a group Mawe visited briefly, he commented, “they are loathsome in their persons, and in their habits, but one remove from the anthropophagi; for they will devour almost any animal in the coarsest manner, for instance, a bird unplucked, half-roasted with the entrails remaining.” Mawe blamed the inherent barbarism of the “Bootocoodies” for frontier hostilities and concluded, “They are untamable, either by stripes or kindness.”

Race and Culture

Most European travelers of the 1810s attributed their thinking on race to the theories of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), a German physician and anthropology professor of the University of Göttingen. They took great pains to describe precisely skin color, whether it was more white, yellow, or copper-colored, and whether the color was natural or a result of exposure to the elements. The size and shape of heads, limbs, and muscles, stature, sexual attributes, facial features, and hair quality also came under scrutiny. Based on these assessments, they made assumptions about indigenous psychological and cultural traits that probably had more to do with these theoretical biases than objective first-hand, or even second-hand information.

Blumenbach was one of the most influential racial theorists of his day. His interest in comparative anatomy and physiology led him to develop theories about race that challenged the notion of an immutable “great chain of being.” He articulated these ideas in several editions of a work entitled “On the Natural Varieties of Mankind” from 1775-1795. Blumenbach argued that all human beings comprised a single species and that racial distinctions merely represented varieties within it. He arrived at this conclusion through comparative study of skulls and anatomical difference as well as observing that all people shared the capacity for reason, emotion, and spoken
language that distinguished them from other animals. He also asserted that there was as much variation within the Caucasian, American, Mongolian, Malayan and Ethiopian types as existed among them. Moreover, he saw these varieties along a continuum, claiming that "innumerable varieties of mankind run into one another by insensible degrees." He concluded, "... color, whatever be its cause, be it bile, or the influence of the sun, the air, or the climate, is, at all events, an adventitious and easily changeable thing, and can never constitute a diversity of species."36

Blumenbach, therefore, did not see race as fixed or immutable. Rather, he believed that exposure to different environments, diets, and "modes of life," could alter one's racial appearance, physical and psychological characteristics. Karl Marx lauded him for these ideas, writing: At the time when the negroes and the savages were still considered as half animals, and no one had yet conceived the idea of the emancipation of the slaves, Blumenbach raised his voice, and showed that their physical qualities were not inferior to those of the European, that even amongst the latter themselves the greatest possible differences existed, and that opportunity alone was wanting for the development of their higher faculties.38

However, before we heap too much praise on Blumenbach for his evolved thinking on race, we must remember that at least some of the raw material used to develop his theories came from grave robbing. Over his lifetime, Blumenbach amassed a collection of 247 skulls, 7 of which came from Brazil.39 German and Austrian travelers took great pains to acquire physical specimens of Jê Indians, both dead and alive, for their intellectual mentor. Typically they congratulated themselves on their cleverness in concealing their actions from so-called "superstitious savages."40

Guido Marlière and other division commanders, by providing guides and interpreters, also provided the opportunity for Europeans to acquire living souvenirs. Spix and Martius reported that upon their arrival in Minas Gerais, they happened upon a Botocudo boy in the home of their friend, Count von Langsdorff. They were told that a district commander of the Indians "not having an opportunity to obtain a dead specimen, sent the Count two living Botocudos, who had been taken in a sudden attack by his soldiers. M Von Langsdorff obtained one of them, to whom he soon became much attached, and who served him not only as a living cabinet piece, but as a collector of objects of natural history."41 Most naturalists boasted at least one Jê-speaking guide and Wied-Neuwied brought his Botocudo guide back to Europe with him.42
Blumenbach’s theory also linked physical characteristics and psychological traits. To this end, European travelers speculated endlessly about the racial origins of Brazil’s native peoples, again using physical characteristics like skin color, facial features, hair characteristics, and stature to determine whether they were unique to the Americas or a branch of an Old World race. The ornithologist Georg Freyreiss, for example, concluded that Jê tribes were original to the Americas rather than having migrated from Asia. The German physician Herman Burmeister, on the other hand, argued that Puris conformed more to the “Mongoloid type” while the Coroados were more like North American Indians, due to the shape of their respective noses.

Some travelers applied the discipline of philology to determine racial or genealogical relationships. However, their analyses of indigenous languages were usually limited to comparing brief vocabulary lists. In contrast, Marlière’s deep knowledge of indigenous languages points to the absurdity of some of the racial claims made above. Based on his study of the Coroado and Puri languages and their oral traditions, he concluded, convincingly, that the two groups were closely related and had probably split into different peoples only a few generations previously. They still spoke mutually intelligible languages. Moreover, the word “Puri” simply meant thief or aggressor such that the “Puris” referred to the “Coroados” as Puris. Similarly, Jiporok and Naknenuk were descriptive terms (meaning “wild” or “fierce” and “people of the land” respectively) and probably did not signify people who were ethnically dissimilar.

Most European travelers made much of Jê “indolence” or “indifference,” a character trait they associated generically with Amerindians. This applied especially to the Coroados, with whom foreign naturalists and Portuguese settlers had the most sustained contact. Eschwege, Freyreiss, and Spix and Martius all agreed that they were passive, incapable of displaying higher emotions, limited to jealousy, vengeance, or anger inspired by drink. The latter two travelers characterized them as: “Strangers to complaisance, gratitude, friendship, humility, ambition, and, in general, to all delicate and noble emotions which adorn human society; obtuse, reserved, sunk in indifference to every thing... Cold and indolent in his domestic relations, he follows mere animal instinct more than tender attachment; and his love to his wife shows itself only in cruel jealousy, which, with revenge, is the only passion that can rouse his stunted soul from its moody indifference.”
Few travelers considered that the supposed passivity of the Jê might be grounded in legitimate extenuating circumstances rather than being an inherent racial tendency. Spix and Martius exceptionally identified fear of military conscription as motivation to avoid contact with whites.\textsuperscript{52} Unwillingness to interact or to trade might well have stemmed from the history of theft, cheating, violence, and labor demands that most travelers documented but that few connected to the air of suspicion or passivity many Indians displayed. Similarly, women had good reason to hide other than natural timidity or awe of “civilized” men who traveled with no women of their own.\textsuperscript{53} Jê women frequently suffered rape or kidnapping.

The Coroados also might have merely been so unimpressed with the visitors that it was not worth their effort to rise from their hammocks or fetch them water.\textsuperscript{54} The qualities that most inspired European observers were precisely the ones that these travelers lacked. From the Jê perspective, European scientists were physically weak, they fell back during the hunt, they were probably poor trackers, and certainly must have made a racket as they proceeded through the forest. The amount of stuff they lugged around must have been puzzling as well. Only women burdened themselves so while traveling. Europeans generally used male porters and seemed to lack female companionship. In short, they might have been seen as peculiar or deficient sorts of men.

European perceptions of indolence also attest to the efficiency of indigenous subsistence practices. Despite growing population pressures, hunting and foraging must still have been viable in the 1810s because European naturalists documented a great deal of idleness, particularly among the partially acculturated Coroados. Eschwege, like others, encountered men lolling about in hammocks, staring off into space, with little effort made at conversation. The women, despite having more time consuming labor demands seemed to spend most of their time painting themselves and their children or sitting in front of their homes doing nothing. Eschwege concluded that their “indifference to everything, even novelties,” was the main barrier to their “civilization.”\textsuperscript{55}

**Cultural Interpretations:**

Foreign observers catalogued a number of ritual practices in varying degrees of detail. Birth, marriage and death rituals, the sexual division of labor, subsistence methods, forms of bodily decoration and adornment, healing
practices, and spiritual beliefs. Descriptions of Jê material culture bear some similarity to 20th century ethnographic accounts of surviving Jê peoples in western and northwestern Brazil. European scientists perceived simplicity: agriculture only sufficient to make fermented beverages for festivals, a few domesticated fowls and dogs, and subsistence based largely on foraging. Jê tribes went trekking for long periods of time in search of game, vegetable foods and marketable forest commodities like the ipecac root, wax, honey, and animal pelts. Material goods were limited: primitive huts, hammocks, earthen jars, various kinds of bows and arrows, baskets, beads, natural dyes, and tools procured from the Portuguese. Most went about naked, or nearly so, and clothing tended to be prized more for the status of owning it than for its utility. Labor and resources seemed to be distributed collectively within the group.  

Where these accounts and more contemporary studies based on extended fieldwork part company is in their descriptions of Jê ritual and spiritual life. A number of present-day ethnographers of Jê peoples maintain that their social organization was as complex as their material possessions were simple. That complexity, if it existed among the Jê of 19th century Minas Gerais, has yet to emerge fully from the documentation available to historians. However, the interpretations of European naturalists, used critically in combination with archival and other primary sources, provide some limited understanding of Jê cultural practices and beliefs. In this presentation, I will limit myself to three areas: indigenous festivals and dances, gender relations, and spiritual beliefs and practices associated with death.

The observation of native dancing became virtually a stock theme in the travel literature from this period. Much like today’s eco-tourists, a number of European naturalists gained entry into semi-acculturated tribes and convinced them to dance on command in exchange for alcohol or trade goods. We can assume that the act of performing for material gain probably changed the meaning of celebrations that customarily were performed to celebrate victory in combat, the harvest of certain foods, or to pay homage to spirits. Moreover, the Puris and Coroados that underwent the most external scrutiny were relatively more acculturated, having been under nominal missionary tutelage for at least a half century.

The German geologist and mining engineer, Wilhelm Ludwig von Eschwege, provided one of the more detailed descriptions of Coroado ritual dances. Eschwege resided in Brazil from 1810-1821 and served as a member of the
Royal Corps of Engineers. He also developed a long-term friendship with Guido Marlière and credits him with much of his knowledge of indigenous customs. Eschwege described dancing in one of its proper contexts, to celebrate success in war. Prior to the festivities, the Coroados fasted for 24 hours. The women prepared a corn-based alcoholic beverage to be consumed during the party. Throughout the evening, the severed arm of a slain enemy was dipped into this beverage and sucked upon by those present. A master of ceremonies oversaw the rhythm of the songs, dances and games of the participants who decorated themselves elaborately with feathers and body paint. Eschwege found the singing and chanting monotonous but added that if the rhythm of the songs, games and dances did not please the participants; the master of ceremonies would be replaced. Even the children played a role, imitating the sounds of wild animals as part of the proceedings.57

Subsequent accounts added little to that documented by Eschwege, and in most cases, are even less detailed. This may be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that by the mid 1810s a number of groups were willing to dance on command. For example, the Austrian naturalists, Spix and Martius, who traveled through Brazil from 1817-1820,58 acquired a letter of introduction from Guido Marlière that enabled them to visit Coroado and Puri communities. Both groups were willing to dance in exchange for alcohol, food, and trade goods. The Coroados prepared the traditional fermented corn beverage, which the travelers likened to their “malt liquor.”59 A less acculturated Puri group spontaneously began to dance upon being presented with trinkets and sugar cane brandy. Spix and Martius commented on how much their chanting, stomping and melodies resembled those recorded by the sixteenth-century chronicler Jean de Lery, thereby imparting a false quality of timelessness to their actions. They also characterized the singing and dancing as monotonous. The Coroados who danced for St. Hilaire sang in a “lugubrious and melancholy tone” with the women positioned to the rear.60

As late as 1850, a visit to the Puri and Coroado Indians of the Pomba and Paraíba rivers was still on the itinerary of foreign travelers. 61 The military physician Hermann Burmeister (1807-1892), described men dancing single file chanting “a very nasal song consisting of guttural monosyllabic sounds.”62 The women remained in the background, keeping time by stomping their feet and chanting. According to Burmeister, their songs were limited to hunting exploits and aspects of every day life. His own prejudices prevented him from assigning any deeper meaning to their lyrics.63
Compare now, the impressions of Guido Marlière. His most complete
descriptions of native dancing appear in two places. The first is a report that
he wrote to Eschwege that was partially transcribed in the latter’s travel
narrative. The second was in a serialized article that he wrote in 1825, “to
fill the pages” of the official newspaper of Minas Gerais, O Universal. Marlière
described a number of motives for singing and dancing among the
Botocudo, Coroadó, and Puri: to honor their Creator God; as sacred
performances to the sun, moon and stars; and for more profane ends, to
celebrate battles, benefactors, and loves. Dances provided an opportunity to
show one’s cleverness by coming up with witty spontaneous lyrics. In
response, those assembled would applaud, dance in cadence, and offer the
refrain, “ere-huy,” meaning very good, very beautiful. Clearly, monotony
was not the object.

Marlière’s account also parts company from European naturalists who
emphasized male participation and leadership. He provided lyrics of two
songs, both invented by women. Their words belie images of timid, modest,
retiring, and slavish Jê women that foreign visitors universally described. In
one, a young, unmarried woman addressed a young man, “you who say I’m
ugly, why do you come at night after my fire is lit, and slowly climb upon my
back?” Marlière earlier informs the reader that such actions could imply an
offer of marriage. Another verse offered by the wife of Captain Nhó-ene was
frankly sexual: “I can’t dance anymore. I’m sitting down. My kijóh is
sweaty, and it’s already crying out.” Kijóh, which Marlière did not translate
in the state’s official newspaper, referred to female sexual parts.

A common refrain within the travel literature states that indigenous women
were slaves to their men. In large measure this was due to perceptions
regarding the gendered division of labor among many Jê peoples. Historical
and contemporary accounts universally depict female duties that were more
time consuming and burdensome then men’s. The disparity was particularly
evident while on long term hunting and foraging treks: the men traveled
lightly, bearing only their weapons, while women lugged along children,
household goods, and any game the men secured. Physical abuse, including
scarification of women believed to be sexually unfaithful, was also practiced
among some groups. There is also one brief description of a Puri custom,
provided by Eschwege/Marlière, that resembles the wai’a or ritualized rape
still observed among some Jê groups in western Brazil at the mid 20th
century.
The German ornithologist, Georg Freyreiss cited the Coroado proverb: “men were created to die in battle, and women, to produce new men” to sum up gender relations. At times, the emphasis on Jê women’s physicality (and nakedness) made them seem almost animal-like. Consider, for example, the image provided by Spix and Martius of a woman delivering alone, concealed from the light of the moon, and then biting or tearing the umbilical cord with her teeth. Eschwege observed that girls began sexual activity as young as age eight, “led solely by instinct, like animals,” while St. Hilaire similarly opined that Coroado women “had amorous relations as indiscreet as those of animals,” and assigned no more importance to sexual relations than drinking water to assuage thirst. These travelers asserted that girls matured young, married young, and assumed a life of unremitting toil. However, there is evidence that Jê women spaced their children and never had more than one very young child at any given time, a pattern commonly observed among hunter/gatherers. External observers invariably commented on reduced fertility, attributing it variously to extended lactation, polygamy, excessive work demands, or frequent bathing in cold water.

Marlière similarly pointed to the heavy physical demands faced by Botocudo women and the severe reprisals that could fall upon the unfaithful. However, he, as well as Eschwege, also suggested avenues of potential social and spiritual power potentially available to women. They indicate that women dominated in healing rituals and practices that included application of hot stones to draw out infection, the use of human saliva, bleeding and cold baths to combat fevers, the draining abscesses or tumors, and the use of various plants. Freyreiss mentioned casually that women were also responsible for carrying live coals from place to place but does not mention if responsibility over fire brought status. Marlière also suggested that some single women among Jê tribes had the opportunity to exercise sexual choice, could divorce relatively easily, and, on occasion, successfully defied parental authority. Women also could perform funeral orations and some were known as powerful public speakers.

Marlière’s and Eschwege’s accounts of rituals and beliefs associated with death among Jê speakers were also considerably more detailed than those found in much of the canonical travel literature. Eschwege, for example, described elaborate burials, fasting, speeches and lamentations. Most tribes buried the dead inside their huts and subsequently relocated to new homes. The unappeased dead were believed to cause disease, misfortune, or death. Fear of ghosts and apparitions was widespread and shamans were respected.
for their ability to communicate with spirits of the deceased. The Coroados mummified dead chiefs in large earthen jars.\(^{75}\)

Subsequent travel accounts were more or less derivative of this general description. Foreign naturalists emphasized indigenous belief in malevolent spirits associated with death but rarely gave them credit for a belief in a creator God. Spix and Martius, for example, suggested that the figure of Tupan, a supreme deity, had probably been introduced by Jesuit missionaries.\(^{76}\) They concluded that Jê life was “monotonous and has no higher purpose.”\(^{77}\) Jê spiritual beliefs were often reduced to mere superstition, with proper funeral rites serving as much to protect the living as to assure the wellbeing of the spirits of the dead. Some even assigned an odd randomness to ceremonies associated with the dead as did Spix and Martius in their comment: “Long after death, if they accidentally come near the place where one of their people is buried, they celebrate his memory by lamentation.”\(^{78}\) Degrading Jê spiritual beliefs as superstition also probably made it easier to justify robbing their grave sites.

Marlière, on the other hand suggests that there was little random about dispatching the dead. A detailed description of burial practices among the Botocudo described elaborate preparation of the body included wrapping the deceased like a ball of string with strong cords, with his cap on his head, his knife suspended around his neck. The cadaver was then secured with thick cords around his neck to a stake or tree.\(^{79}\) Until the body was properly interred, it was guarded by the group’s most valiant warriors in order to defend it from the Nants-hone (malevolent spirits). Grave goods consisted of food, water, and useful tools; men got honey and weapons, women had to make good with water and cooking pots. A house was then constructed over the grave, this structure being larger and more durable than their ordinary dwellings. Around the hut, squashes, manioc and corn were planted and forest cover was burned to the east to allow the sun to enter. The area was then abandoned. So essential were these rites to the group’s spiritual safety, that the Jê would bury dead Brazilians if they came across them.

On one occasion a group of Coroados even ritually buried Guido Marlière’s dog. Marlière had been traveling and in his absence his dog was killed and partially eaten by wild pigs. Upon his return, the Coroados informed him that even though his dog had not been baptized, its remains had been buried correctly - complete with a cross on its grave.\(^{80}\) This story was told by both Eschwege and Freyreiss as an illustration of the Coroados’ limited understanding of Christian doctrine and, at the time that it occurred,
probably around 1814, Marlière might well have drawn the same conclusion. Yet an article he published more than a decade later suggests deeper significance to what seems on the surface to be an amusing anecdote. He commented that chiefs and warriors were buried with their dogs, which were slain and given a mouthful of meat after they were dead to sustain them on their journey. In this context, the Coroados’ actions may be seen not as a product of deficient intellect, but rather, as an attempt at religious syncretism. They honored Paquejú, the Botocudo name for Marlière signifying great leader, by blending his religious beliefs with their own.

Death also served to fuel a cycle of retributive vengeance endemic among the Jê tribes of eastern Minas Gerais. Marlière observed that following a death, the Botocudo alleviated their suffering by going out to kill an enemy Puri. Their term for mourning, é-ré-ré also signified anger and hatred. Brazilian ethnohistorian, Isabel Missanga de Mattos, has made a compelling case for shamanistic beliefs governing relations among Jê groups and contact between the Jê, settlers, and missionaries. According to this belief, death, disease or other misfortunes were not random occurrences, but resulted from the malevolent intent of one’s enemies. Redress required killing the agent of misfortune, or on occasion, an animal as a surrogate.  

Constant low-level warfare among the Jê and sporadic attacks on settlers, soldiers, and livestock, were likely the bases on which the notion of cannibalism rested. However, although there is compelling evidence for the early colonial period for the practice of ritual cannibalism among coastal Brazilian tribes, particularly Tupi speakers, much less documentary support exists for the nineteenth century. At best, European travelers provided second or third hand accounts of the practice and, lacking direct evidence, concluded that cannibalism probably no longer existed and was invoked by settlers, soldiers, or rival tribes to dehumanize particular Jê groups.

If the Portuguese demonized the Jê as cannibals, one can easily imagine that the Jê found soldiers and settlers similarly barbaric. The French engineer, Victor Renault, informs us that the Giporok referred to white men as “wild beasts.” The records of the frontier divisions as well as the accounts of European travelers catalog a variety of atrocities that the Jê suffered. Often they responded in kind. For example, shortly after the war was declared against the Botocudo, some soldiers of the fourth division killed and beheaded two Indians and took their heads as trophies back to their village. Shortly thereafter, the Botocudo retaliated, killing a number of Portuguese settlers and beheading them as well. Given this context, we can well
appreciate the terror expressed by a young indigenous interpreter when he witnessed a staged decapitation during a play at a Rio de Janeiro theatre.”

However, cross-cultural exchanges did occur that were considerably more benign. The German physician Hermann Burmeister described his attempts to wind down a long evening of singing and dancing among the Puri by singing some songs from his native land. One can only wonder what a group of Puri Indians made of Burmeister and his friend Dannewitz singing the duet from Mozart’s Don Juan, and airs from their student days including a drinking song called my bottle and I shall never be parted.” What did a Puri mother make of his attempt to quiet a fussy toddler with a traditional German lullaby, “the spotted cow?”

European visitors also commented that Jê tribes, particularly those that had experienced less contact, seemed fascinated with racial difference. Fair-skinned, blue-eyed men reputedly amazed them. What significance they ascribed to race is unclear. However, many naturalists commented that the skin color of Jê peoples became lighter when they were sick or had not been exposed to the elements. This was likely speculative and derivative of Blumenbach’s work. If true, however, European whiteness might have been seen as an additional sign of physical weakness.

Finally, in a few rare moments, the reader can discern situations where the observers operated at a distinct disadvantage to the observed. Georg Freyreiss for example, related an anecdote that conveyed both his fear and embarrassment. One night he was forced to stay overnight in a Puri community after being caught in a storm. He was drenched and feared for his safety. As no spare clothes were to be had, he removed his soaked clothing to dry, revealing his pale naked skin to the eyes of the curious Puri. A young girl finally offered him her garment but he refused, either from an unwillingness to cross dress or out of modest reluctance for her to disrobe. Clothing was one of the main signifiers that separated the civilized from the uncivilized. In that moment, that difference was erased, much to Freyreiss’s discomfort.

However, such moments involving the lowering of cultural barriers, were few. Even more rare were individuals in the early 19th century who had the knowledge to bridge distinct cultures and exercised the opportunity to write about them. Obviously, Guido Marlière was one such individual. His writings, long buried in poorly documented archival collections or transcribed
in obscure historical journals, deserve incorporation into a long line of
canonical sources written by French nationals. To my mind, one of the most
important aspects of Marlière’s work was his insistence on the Jê’s essential
humanity despite being bounded by the notions of race that prevailed in his
day. Consider these words written towards the end of his life: “Of the
Botocudos whose name fills Minas with fright and terror! Physically and
morally, they are the most beautiful and honorable Indian nation of my
acquaintance, superior to other nations, more valiant, and of a color that
approximates white more than copper. They are terrible to their enemies
and loyal to their friends.” This statement is ambivalent and arguably
offensive to modern readers. On the one hand, it esteems their personal
loyalty, courage, and beauty. Yet to convince his readers of their virtues, he
had to ascribe to them whiteness. However, Marlière’s assessment born of
twenty years of intimacy was a far cry from the phlegmatic, indolent,
passive Indians described so condescendingly by most European observers
of his day. Local knowledge and experience enabled him to see them as
complex beings first and racially predetermined stereotypes second. In
contrast, less than two decades later, in the Academy of Sciences in Paris,
learned men would debate whether or not the Botocudo were human at all.

1 This paper was originally presented as the Snead-Wertheim endowed lecture in History &
Anthropology at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, USA on April 28, 2006.
2 Cynthia Radding, Wandering peoples: colonialism, ethnic spaces, and ecological frontiers
3 Regarding early photographs, see Marcos Morel, “Cinco imagens e múltiplos olhares: 'descobertas' sobre os Índios do Brasil e a fotografia do século XIX,” História, Ciências,
Saúde – Manguinhos, 13 (supplement), (2001), 1039-58. John M. Monteiro concisely
summarizes the role of the “Botocudo” in the European imagination in Tupis, Tapuias e Historiadores: Estudos de História Indígena e do Indigenismo. (Tese de Livre-Docência,
IFCH-Unicamp, 2001).
4 Harold Lawrence Langfur, The Forbidden Lands: Frontier Settlers, Slaves, and Indians in
Minas Gerais, Brazil, 1760-1830. (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Texas-Austin, 1999).
5 Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation. (London and New
York: Routledge, 1992). On Humboldt’s importance to other naturalist travelers of his era
see Ana Maria de Moraes Belluzzo, Um lugar no universo, volume 2 of the three volume
series O Brasil dos viajantes (São Paulo: Fundação Oderbrecht, 1994). Lorelay Kury,
“Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, o viajante exemplar,” http://www2.uerj.br/~intellectus/textos/Lorelai.pdf
(Consulted 10-22-2005) addresses this French traveler’s connection to Humboldt and and
the bases of his scientific authority.
6 On Jê tribes during the 19th century, see Maria Hilda Boqueiro Paraíso. O tempo da dor
e do trabalho: A conquista dos territórios indígenas nos sertões do leste, (Ph.D. diss., Univ.
7 Oliam José, Indígenas de Minas Gerais. Aspectos Sociais, Politicos e Etnológicos (Belo
8 Aviso sobre as reflexões a respeito das Divisões do Rio Doce, especialmente da 7a. e
civilização dos Botocudos, 11 Dec. 1811 and Decreto n. 31 - Império - Dá regularmento
interino para o aldeamento e civilisação dos Índios do Rio Doce, e ordena a concessão de
esmarias aos indivíduos civilizados que as pedirem, 28 Jan. 1824 in Cunha, Legislação, 79-
80, 111-114
10 Lei – Revoga as Cartas Régias que mandaram fazer guerra, e pôr em servidão os índios, 27 Oct. 1831, in Cunha, Legislação, 137.
11 “Guido Thomaz Marlière,” Revista do Arquivo Público Mineiro (hereafter RAPM) 12 (1907), 524.
13 “Guido Thomaz Marlière (Noticias e documentos sobre a sua vida),” RAPM 11 (1906), 13-26.
14 José, Marlière, o civilizador, 36-39.
15 RAPM 10 (1905), 391-2, 393-4, 396-8, 401, 403, 407, 416, 423-5.
16 RAPM 12 (1907), 498-509.
18 RAPM 11 (1906), 113-116.
19 RAPM 11 (1906), 83.
20 This suggests that the giving and acceptance of food had social significance beyond utilitarian ends. Indians that approached military installations and settlers asking for food, may also have been trying to affirm or cement social alliances. Indian directors often reported that when the food ran out, the Indians became angry, left, or avoided them altogether. Thanks to Margaret Connell-Szasz for suggesting that I think more about food.
22 q.’ os ama como filhos.” RAPM 10 (1905), 425.
23 RAPM 12 (1907), 510.
24 RAPM 11 (1906) 116.
25 RAPM 12 (1907), 510-512, 530.
26 “No meu tempo, Aldéamentos inteiros, seduzidos por Brazilianos ambiciosos de poalha tem desaparecido; mas, como as abelhas, elles se reunem em outro, e mesmo ao seu primeiro Director.” RAPM 12 (1907), 526.

30 John Mawe, Travels in the interior of Brazil, particularly in the gold and diamond districts of that country by authority of the Prince Regent of Portugal including a voyage to the Rio de la Plata, and an historical sketch of the revolution of Buenos Ayres.  (Philadelphia: M. Carey and Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1816), 132.
31 Mawe, Travels, 200.
34 Blumenbach’s 1775 thesis, De generis humani varietate nativa (On the Natural Varieties of Mankind) posited the existence of five independent races and linked physical characteristics with psychological traits or tendencies.  His influence was very evident among the Austrians and Germans who visited the Jê tribes of Minas.  
36 “On the Natural Variety of Mankind,” (1795), 264.
37 “On the Natural Variety of Mankind,” (1775), 113.
39 Blumenbach, The anthropological treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, 350-1.
41 Spix and Martius, Travels in Brazil, vol 1, 143.
42 O Brasil dos Viajantes, vol. 2, 99, Saint Hilaire, Rio de Janeiro e Minas Gerais, 35.  Additional Jê Indians ended up on display as exhibits in Europe, including a Botocudo couple at the Museum of Man in Paris and a family at 23 Bond Street, London.  Marcos Morel, “Cinco imagens e múltiplos olhares,” X. Chabert, A Brief Historical Account of the Life and Adventures of the Botocudo Chieftain, and family, now exhibiting at n. 23, New Bond Street, together with, a faithful description of the manners and customs of the savage inhabitants of the country they come from.  (London: C. Baynes, 1822). Another group of 16 was sent
43 Wied-Neuwied, Viagem ao Brasil, 323-4.
45 Hermann Burmeister, Viagem ao Brasil através das províncias do Rio de Janeiro e Minas Gerais. Trad: Manoel Salvaterra e Hubert Schoenfeldt. (São Paulo and Belo Horizonte: Itataia, 1980), 173-4
47 Eschwege, Jornal do Brasil, 79-80; Freyreiss, Viagem ao interior do Brasil, 106.
48 Izabel Missagia de Mattos, Civilização e Revolta: os Botocudos e a catequese na Província de Minas. (Bauru, SP: EDUSC, 2004), 93.
51 Spix and Martius, Travels in Brazil, vol. 2, 225.
52 Eschwege, Jornal do Brasil, 116.
54 Burmeister, Viagem ao Brasil, 142-178.
56 “em perfeita comunhão de bens,” Eschwege, Jornal do Brasil, 102.
57 “These Indians have never had the barest vestige of civilization and never will have through adopting Christianity. They are and always will be what they were, savage and brutish, for the simple motive of not being able to understand the value and necessity of Culture, in which social life is based.” quote on 175.
59 Guido Thomaz Marlière, O Universal, 21 Nov. 1825, 220. Translation in Vocabulário português-botocudo, 1835. BN, 01,1,003.
62 Freyreiss, Viagem ao interior do Brasil, “entre eles há o provérbio de que o homem foi criado para morrer na peleja e a mulher para dar novos homens.” 92.
63 “conduzidas unicamente por seu instinto, como os animais.” Eschwege, Jornal do Brasil, 105, St. Hilaire, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais, 32-3
71 Marlière, O Universal, 28 Nov. 1825, 231-2; Eschwege, Jornal do Brasil, 100,105; Freyreiss, Viagem ao interior do Brasil, 84; APM SG 592, Relatório sobre as aldeias por Director Musqueira, 24 July 1877.
72 Eschwege, Jornal do Brasil, 114-115. Freyreiss, Viagem ao interior do Brasil, 100.
73 Freyreiss, Viagem ao interior do Brasil, 95
74 Eschwege, Jornal do Brasil, 89-91.
75 Eschwege, Jornal do Brasil, 84-85, 104. Eschwege reported that while he was procuring a skull to send to Professor Blumenbach, his young Coroado guide refused to participate in the exhumation out of fear that the spirit of the corpse would torment him or kill him at night.
76 This in fact, was a term used in the colonial Tupí missions but was commonly used among the Jê by the 19th century.
77 Spix and Martius, Travels in Brazil, 252-3, 261.
78 Spix and Martius, Travels in Brazil, 250. Emphasis mine.
79 Marlière, O Universal, 21 Nov. 1825, 219-20. “amortalhar o defunto á modo de hum novo com fortes embirras, sua carapuça na cabeça, faca pendente no pescoço, e segur o o cadaver atado com grossas cordas no pescoço a hum Mour o ou Arvore.”
80 Eschwege, Jornal do Brasil, 103, Freyreiss, Viagem ao interior do Brasil, 96.
81 Izabel Missagia de Mattos, Civilização e Revolta, passim
82 Wied-Neuwied, Viagem ao Brasil, 126-7, 309-315.
83 “bichos bravos.” Mattos, Civilização e Revolta, 41.
84 GTM, O Universal, 7 Dec. 1825, 248.
86 Burmeister, Viagem ao Brasil, 175.
88 Freyreiss, Viagem ao interior do Brasil, 88-90.
89 “Dos Botocudos, cujo nome so enchia Minas de terror - e do espanto! Quanto ao fisico e ao moral são eles a mais bela e louvavel nação de Indios que eu conheço; detalhe superior ao das outras nacoes, mais valorozos, e de cor que mais aproxima a branca do que a cobre, são terriveis para com os inimigos e leais para os amigos.” Guido T. Marliere to João Sturtz, Guido-wald, 20 Dec. 1833. Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, RJ, Lata 12, doc. 15.