
Josep Martí
CSIC, Barcelona

*Resurrecting Cannibals*, a book written by Heike Behrend, professor of Anthropology and African Studies at the University of Cologne, is a dense text, an accomplishment that is only possible when the anthropologist has carried out a long and intensive fieldwork. The author did her research in Tooro, Western Uganda, through intermittent stays during the years of 1998 to 2005.

Having cannibalism in Tooro as a core subject, the author gives us an account of witchcraft beliefs, the vitality of Christian groups in this African region, and intercultural narratives as they emerged in the colonial encounter, narratives which are indispensable in order to understand the issue of cannibalism.

The book is articulated in three different parts. In the first one the author centers her efforts on an ethnography of eating. She deals with local aspects of incorporation, acts of eating and shared substances. The author understands the pre-colonial cosmology of Tooro as a vast machinery of consumption and digestion. Linking body, food and society she speaks of food and power, paving in this manner the way for the introduction, also in this part of the book, of the issue of cannibalism in Tooro. But just before tackling this issue, Behrend dedicates one chapter to dealing with Western images of the Cannibal and explores the similarities between Christian theophagy (Eucharist) and the ritual of “eating the king” in pre-colonial mortuary cannibalism of African kings.

The second part of the book enters into the question of occult powers in Tooro. Witchcraft, a local theory of power, is very often linked to cannibalism. The author associates the rise of occult forces that Tooro has experienced in the last decades with the strong increase of death rates through firstly AIDS -but local wars as well- and also with the struggle of Christians against witches,
which in fact has had the opposite desired effect of reproducing and strengthening the occult world. Heike Behrend is undoubtedly right when she states that the recent rise of witchcraft in Africa can be explained through the many Christian fundamentalist movements and churches who understand witchcraft as the result of satanic powers, among other reasons. Doing this they recognize in one or another way the “reality” of witchcraft. But above all we must also not forget that many of these religious movements are the first interested in the continuity of witchcraft beliefs among the population. Given the always bigger concurrence among different Church groups, offering protection against witchcraft will always be a good means of having assured parishioners. Fear is a very strong reason to search for alliances in anything that can afford protection. In this part of the book, Beherend gives a very good idea of the enormous dynamism of Christian movements in Western Uganda which gave rise to the emergence of new groups. An entire chapter is devoted to the *Uganda Martyrs Guild*, a lay movement of the Catholic Church, and its organized witch and cannibal-hunts in Tooro.

In the last part of the book, framed within the Christian missionary activity in colonial times in Tooro, Heike Behrend centers her attention on how important elements of Christian ideas such as the inversion of the resurrection and the holy supper are integrated into the local witchcraft discourse. The author again takes up the issue of the relationship between cannibalism and the Eucharist as form of transcendent cannibalism. I would dare to say that too much importance is granted to this issue given its very relative help in understanding cannibalism in Africa. Throughout this part of the book the author manages very well to show how the cannibal in Tooro, far from being a mere local imagination or a Western phantasmagoria, is the result of interlocking images of alterity which Westerners as well as Africans attribute to each other.

The general interest of the book is clear -and beyond the cannibalism concern- it may be very useful for anyone interested in witchcraft and religious movements in Africa. Perhaps I would have given more attention to how the highly negative view of witchcraft and cannibalism which today is found among the African population may have been partially mediated precisely through the
colonial encounter. We know that occult powers may be intended for good and for evil, and so cannibalism in Africa as well as in other places of the world must not always be understood as a destructive manifestation but also as a means for social cohesion, one aspect that does in fact also appear in the book of Heike Behrend.

The book is accompanied by a very opportune half an hour long DVD of a video film: *Satan Crucified. A Crusade of the Catholic Church in Western Uganda*. Based on the text of Heike Behrend, the elaboration of the film has been carried out by Armin Linke (camera), Margaret Köll (audio) and Fabian Bechtle (montage). This visual document filmed in 2002 shows the *Uganda Martyrs Guild* in its activity of detecting and cleansing purported witches and cannibals in the rural area of Kyamiaga.