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"There is no meat that tastes better than human flesh!" Christian Converts' Tales of Cannibalism in Late Nineteenth-century Sekhukhuneland

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In Sekhukhuneland, during the 1860s, sixteen converts to Christianity told Missionary Alexander Merensky and Mission Director Hermann Theodor Wangemann horrific tales of their lives as "cannibals" prior to them having been saved by the Lord.[1] The Berlin Mission was impressed with these testimonies of salvation and published a number of them. The publications were enthusiastically received by readers in Germany. Most likely as a result of a combination of its subject matter and the fact that his position as director ensured him a wider readership, three editions of Wangemann's tractate were produced in a series designed for supporters

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1. Merensky had come to South Africa in 1858. Accompanied by Heinrich Grützner, he had been responsible for founding the first mission stations in the Transvaal. He was stationed at Gerlachshoop from July 1860 to August 1861, at Khalatlolu from August 1861 to May 1864 and at Ga Ratau, in the lands of the Bapedi *Kgoši* Sekhukhune from May to November 1864. When Sekhukhune acted to halt the spread of Christianity, he fled with his flock of Christians and founded Botshabelo Mission Station in February 1865. In 1867, he was appointed Superintendent of the Berlin Mission in the Transvaal. With the division of the Transvaal into two synodal regions in 1878, he became Superintendent of the Southern Transvaal Synodal Region, a post he held until his departure from the Transvaal in 1882 [Acta der Berliner Missionsgesellschaft betreffend Personalia: Merensky, Alexander, Abt.II, Fach 3, Nr.19, 1855 – 1912; S.P.P. Mminele, "The Berlin Lutheran Missionary Enterprise at Botshabelo, 1865-1955: An Historical-Educational Study", Master of Education thesis, University of the North, 1983, p 32; S.W. van der Merwe, "Die geskiedenis van die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap in Transvaal, 1860-1900", *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis*, I (Staatsdrukker, Pretoria, 1984), pp 10-11, 18, 28-41]. Wangemann was Mission Director from 1865 to 1894. He visited South Africa, touring the Berlin Mission Stations there in 1866–1867 and 1884–1885 [*Berliner Missionsberichte*, 1894, p 278; D.J. Richter, *Geschichte der Berliner Missionsgesellschaft, 1824-1924* (Buchhandlung der Berliner ev. Missionsgesellschaft, Berlin, 1924), pp 176-207].

of the work of the mission. This was a sign of great success. Merensky's tractate was published in a series geared towards those attending Sunday school.[2]

The tracts

Some idea of the scale of influence of these publications may be gained from their large print runs. Between 1890 and 1895, 28 754 copies of the *Berliner Missionstraktate*, 149 893 copies of *Missionsschriften für Kinder* and 10 257 copies of *Neue Missionsschriften* were produced.[3] Prior to being accepted as candidates for training in the Society's seminary, aspirant missionaries were required to have "thoroughly" read its publications.[4] The presence of tractates in the mission library also strongly suggests that they were used in teaching. Alexander Merensky's youthful target audience were the group most likely to internalise the bloodthirsty tales of African depravity and rebirth in Christ.

Earlier historiography used to accept tales of cannibalism during the *mfecane* / *difaqane* uncritically as being "true". In recent years, many historians have argued that they should rather be read either as racist justifications for conquest and land seizure, or as symbolic commentaries on social dislocation.

Many of the Berlin Mission accounts are so wild and apparently far-fetched that they lend themselves to the latter reading. However, I argue that one cannot merely assume that these tales are pure missionary

2. H.T. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser im Bapedilande*, Berliner Missions-Traktate, Neue Folge, Nr. 5, Dritte Auflage (Selbstverlag des Missionhauses, Berlin, 1883), [Auflage 1 - 1871, Auflage 2 - 1876]; A. Merensky, *Die Menschenfresserei in Afrika*, Missionsschriften für Kinder, Nr. 25 (Buchhandlung der Berliner Evangelischen Missionsgesellschaft, Berlin, n.d. [1895]).
3. R. Bodenstein, *Die Schriftenreihen der Berliner Missionsgesellschaft* (Berliner Missionswerk Bibliothek, Berlin, 1996), p 7. In comparison, Rider Haggard's works *King Solomon's Mines* (first published in 1885), *She* (first published in book form in 1887) and *Allan Quatermain* (first published in book form in 1887) were the blockbusters of their day. *King Solomon's Mines* sold 31 000 copies in its first year of publication, *She* sold 30 792 copies in June 1887 and the author received payment for 29 403 copies of *Allan Quatermain* in the first year of its publication. See G. Ching-Liang Low, *White Skins / Black Masks*: *Representation and Colonialism* (Routledge, London, 1996), p 6; B.V. Street, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of 'primitive' society in English fiction, 1858–1920* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1975), p 13.
4. *Berliner Missionsberichte*, 1880, p 272.

fantasy. It is likely that the converts, in fact, told these stories to Merensky and Wangemann, presenting them as their own personal life-histories. This raises the question of why the informants told the missionaries the tales that they did. This forms the core issue of this article.

As sources for *Die Menschenfresser im Bapedilande*, Wangemann relied on oral tradition and oral testimony collected from converts and "heathens" by Alexander Merensky, as well as his own interviews with converts at Botshabelo and with Mochayane (a former "cannibal" living there) made during his first mission visit to South Africa. The work began with an examination of the early history and unification of the Bapedi, together with a discussion and condemnation of what the missionaries interpreted as the bloody succession disputes which characterized this process.

Tales of cannibalism

Wangemann argued that, because of incessant wars of succession after the death of kings, fighting with the "Matable" [Ndebele] and Zulus, and the wars surrounding the unification of the Bapedi Kingdom, famine broke out from time to time in the years before the state-building paramount Sekhukhune had come to power.[5] During the first four decades of the nineteenth century, a shortage of food was made worse by the activities of "plundering bands" and "groups of starving people" who seized whatever food was available. Wangemann concluded that, under such conditions, "it is not surprising that some groups [of Bapedi, or who operated in Bopedi, the area of the Bapedi,] made human flesh their food. What they first did out of need, they later did out of enjoyment."[6]

In July 1867, on his visit to Botshabelo, Wangemann had met a man by the name of Mochayane "who had been dragged into this way of life." He was reluctant to tell his life-story "out of shame for his past deeds and out of fear that he would be punished for them by the Director." However, two years later, when he was being prepared for baptism, Mochayane had filled in the missing details to Missionary Nachtigal. The latter then communicated these to Wangemann.[7]

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5. See also Appendix: Skeleton Genealogy of the Maroteng Royals. The missionaries recorded Sekhukhune as "Sekhukuni" or "Sekukuni".
6. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, pp 2-3 (quotations, p 3).
7. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, pp 7-8.

As Mochayane told it, in his youth, he, his brother and one other were taken prisoner by a band of cannibals. His brother was immediately eaten but the ringleader of the band was from the same "tribe" (clan) as him. This man, Khulong, commanded the others to leave Mochayane alone as he was "his brother".[8]

Mochayane, his companion and a large group of other prisoners were taken back to the lands of the *Makgema* (cannibals).[9] When one of them wanted to take him home as a farm-labourer, the others objected because he was so nice and fat. After considerable discussion, during which time it seemed likely that he would end up as a meal, he was finally allocated to a family who lived in the Leolu Mountains at Ga Ratau as a labourer.[10]

Living with, and working for this family, he was forced to eat human flesh with the others. At first he did not do so but, as time went on, he became used to it. He also married Malesako, a woman who had been captured in the same raid as him. She had also become used to eating human flesh. They later had a daughter together, whom they named Mporeng.[11]

Mochayane became scared by the violence that was common among the *Makgema*. On one occasion, he and a companion were scaring birds away from the fields. His companion was struck dead by his master for roasting and eating one of the mealies from the field. On other occasions, a woman sent out to scare birds away which had been damaging the corn and another who had been sent to fetch water were both killed by their master for not carrying out these tasks.[12]

Because of his fear, Mochayane looked for an opportunity to escape. He did not manage to do so and was forced to live amongst the *Makgema* for about six years. He was forced to act as they did and do all that they did or they would certainly have strangled and eaten him.[13]

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8. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 8. In other words, he was from the same clan.
9. Wangemann recorded the Northern Sotho *makgema* as "Makchema". Missionary sources, especially Merensky, also used "Makhema".
10. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, pp 8, 10. Ga Ratau was written as "Cha Ratau" in the mission sources.
11. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 10.
12. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 10.
13. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 10.

Eventually, one of Sekwati's brothers waged war on the cannibals.[14] Two years later, Sekwati (Sekhukhune's father) himself led an offensive against them. He forbade the eating of human flesh on pain of heavy punishments, or even death. He massacred many cannibals but gave others places to settle in his kingdom. According to Merensky and Wangemann's informants, this meant that, even at the time that the tractate was being written, there were still a great number of people living in the lands of the Bapedi who "formerly had human flesh as their main food." It also "freed" Mochayane "from cannibalism and enabled him to return to his home area." His daughter was the first to convert to Christianity. Mochayane himself subsequently followed suit, and was baptised in 1870. His wife, "the former female cannibal [*Menschenfresserin*]" also found salvation.[15]

For Wangemann, this life-history raised the question of how cannibalism had originated in the lands of the Bapedi. Here he again turned to the testimony of converts. According to Martinus Sewushane and Josef Kathedi, two deacons from Botshabelo, in the time when Morwamotse (Thulare's father – see genealogy) was fighting a war of succession with his brothers, cannibals came into the land. They were collectively known as "Madimo", after "Ledimo", the "storm-wind that destroys all in its path." They were from the "Bapedi tribe" and lived in the Leolu Mountains, which gave them ample place to hide themselves.[16]

From their "mountain nests", they made raids in the region of Ga Ratau. As time went on, these raids increased in frequency. Then there came a great famine in the land and many people died. This was partly caused by the fact that they could not work the land because of the great unrest at the time. In addition to the raids from the mountain-dwellers, many enemies, both from inside and outside the lands of the Bapedi, came and raided the area. Another "band of blacks", the "*Makchalakana a masoanya* [sic]", came from the north.[17] Armed with firearms, which they had possibly obtained from the Portuguese, they

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14. Kgabe was recorded as "Khabe", and Sekwati was recorded as "Sequati" in the mission sources. Wangemann identified this brother as Kgabe (recorded by the missionaries as "Khabe"), however, it will be seen from the genealogy that Kgabe was the son of Sekwati's brother Makgeru.
15. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, pp 10-11.
16. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 12. The missionaries wrote Sewushane as "Sewushan", Morwamotse as "Moroamotse" and Thulare as "Tulare".
17. According to the linguist, Doctor M. Makgopa (personal communication), there is no such term in Northern Sotho. Perhaps the missionaries were attempting to use the term "*matšhalakana a masogana*", namely the "few survivors".

"robbed, murdered and plundered", adding "new horrors" to the hardships already suffered by the "remaining people".[18]

In this time, many fled to the "Madimo" as a means of survival. People who fell prey to these raiders were either strangled with a thong or had a sharpened stake pushed through their body from the rectum. They were then cooked and eaten.[19]

In telling a number of stories that he had heard from his father and other people about the doings of cannibals, Josef Kathedi told the following story about a man who had gone to pick fruit:

> When he was sitting among the trees and looking around, he saw one of the Madimo who was calling him by name. He said to him: "Come, stand closer [to me], I will do nothing to you. You know that people call us Madimo and say that we eat people. This is true. We have even attacked your kraal and destroyed everything. Only you and your wife and your child, who were with you, have escaped. So that your tribe does not die out completely, flee now as quickly as you can ... and do not allow yourself to be seen in this area again!" Of course, the man did not have to be told to do this twice.[20]

In time, even the Madimo women went out on these "robbing raids", armed with spears. Selelekele, daughter of King Thulare, had related that when she was still a child, her parents had frightened her by using the name Dipupudu. This was the name of one of the most feared of the female cannibals. When children, particularly girls, were squabbling among themselves, their parents used to tell them that "it seemed as if they wanted to become Dipupudu." The "abominations" of the Madimo caused King Thulare, who himself had lost a wife and child to these cannibals, to stamp out cannibalism in the area under his rule.[21]

> The later cannibals were of the tribe of the Bakoni [Ba Koni]. They were called the Makchema [*Makgema*], that is "those who gnaw (on human bones)"or also Majabatho, that is cannibals.

On his journey through Sekhukhune's lands, Wangemann had been shown what his informants told him were the former homes of these cannibals. He had also been told "two different stories ... about how they started their gruesome handiwork." The first of these stated that:

> During the time of famine, a Kaalkaffir [sic] came from the lands of

18. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 12.
19. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 12.
20. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, pp 12-13.
21. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 13.

> the Swazis.[22] He called out to the people: Why are you hungry? You have enough food! Capture your enemies and eat them; there is no meat that tastes better than human flesh! They answered: That we really want to try on you!, took the advice-giver himself, slaughtered him, and found that he had [indeed] reported correctly.[23]

The other tale also sourced the origin of these later cannibals to the time of famine. During these times:

> ... a certain Mokoni (one of the people of the Koni) had the idea of exhuming a recently-dead woman and cooking the flesh at home in a hiding-place. His comrades from the same kraal noticed that he had gone home and was staying there for so long. They looked for him and eventually found him busy eating this terrible dish. They angrily asked him [why he was doing this]. He answered: "Have you still not heard that human flesh tastes better than beef or goat-meat?" They tasted this new food, and found it so tasty that they slaughtered their wives and children, and then their parents, at night. When there was nothing more to slaughter, they went out to obtain other people.[24]

Wangemann argued that the tales that were told about the life of the *Makgema* illustrated "that once Satan has begun his work, there is no stopping it, so that Man, the mirror of God, sinks deep, deep into the bestiality of the beast." This was illustrated by the reports of his informants that "for a time, the Makchema [*Makgema*] did not bury their dead, they ate them." They did not regard their captives as "people – they were their cattle, sheep and goats, from whom they lived." When going on a journey, mothers "did not dare to leave their children at home" out of fear that, in their absence, "the tiger-father ... [would] choke and butcher them". The *Makgema* made their drinking-vessels from the skulls of their enemies. The children also played with these "as with toys, and scooped up water with them in imitation of their elders." Dice were made "from the bones of the joints". Human fat was mixed with ochre and used to anoint the bodies of the cannibals.[25]

The *Makgema* also had a hierarchy of preferred meats. "The meat of the old men was of the lowest status" and had to be "cooked for longer" than that from other sources. The "most highly-prized" was "that of young girls and children ... it was immediately roasted on the fire."

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22. The term "Kaalkaffir" was used to refer to Zulu, Swazi or Ndebele raiders.
23. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 13.
24. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 13.
25. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, pp 13-14.

Other "delicacies" were the feet of men who had run a lot in their lives, the hands, the breasts of women and the brain. Some parts were reserved to be eaten by the Chief. Other parts were reserved for men, and still others for women. The children "only got the dry leftovers, and often spoke enviously of the fat that their elders ate."[26]

> If the warriors who were sent out had a large catch, then it became very lively in the kraals of the Makchema [*Makgema*]. Even the children became very excited, because they could expect this time also to get some of the most tasty bits. While the flesh was roasting, all [of them], big and small, again became extremely talkative and happy, wishing that they could have roasts of this nature all the time. They then compared the tastiness of the various parts to each other, saying that the Baroka [Roka] screamed so much and worried so much about their deaths that their flesh had a nice wild taste. The Bapedi were recognised as people that allowed themselves to be choked without uttering a word. These they loved [to eat] more than all others. There was noisy and loquacious talk when their flesh was cooked, and then it was eaten noisily with greater relish than anything else in the world.[27]

Their captives were only allowed to live for as long as they could use their labour or if they incorporated them into their robbing bands, making them the same as themselves. Those in their service who were disobedient were punished with death. Women in particular were willing to become their servants, rather than be strangled and eaten. According to Wangemann's informants, only one name was remembered of a chief of the *Makgema* who had "retained some human feelings." This was Khulong, who saved Mochayane and many other captives from death. He also "made certain that the children born to the Makchema [*Makgema*] did not lose all traces of humanity".[28]

For years, the *Makgema* inspired terror in their neighbours. People were too scared to go out in the rainy periods in case they were tracked and hunted down by the *Makgema*. However, even living together in kraals did not provide much protection. Often, entire villages were attacked and plundered, and their inhabitants slaughtered or carried away as victims.[29]

Eventually the day of reckoning came. The Bapedi people again came together. Just as had been the case under Makgeru, Thulare's son,

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26. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 14.
27. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 14.
28. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, pp 14-15.
29. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 15.

under Makgeru's son, Kgabe, and Morangrâng "the Makchema [*Makgema*] were crushed and forbidden to carry out their terrible handiwork on pain of death.[30] Two years later, Sekhukhune himself came and annihilated the chiefs of the cannibals, the Bakoni [Koni]: Maanecha, Mochari, Mabi, Tehokûng and Matachane and many others." Because the *Makgema* had taken many captives from other "tribes" and forced them into joining them in their cannibalistic way of life, many members of other "tribes; such as the Bapedi, the Baroa and others;" were found among them. "These Sekwati did not kill. Instead, he divided them up amongst the different kraals, so that they could be kept under observation. Many of these" people were reportedly living at these places at the time of writing of the tractate. "With this, this abominable state of affairs was brought to an end."[31]

Turning to *Missionsschriften für Kinder*, Merensky's *Die Menschenfresserei in Afrika* examined tales of cannibalism, and offered descriptions of the horrific lifestyles and practices of the cannibals in different parts of Africa. These were gleaned from the reports and tales of missionaries and African converts in various parts of Africa, including the area of work of the Berlin Mission Society in South Africa.[32]

Merensky explicitly argued that cannibalism was a feature of "heathen societies", not only in Africa, but also in other parts of the world, such as the South Sea Islands. In a situation where people knew nothing about God, where no authority or religious commands could reign in mankind's base desires, the "horrific sins and evils of the flesh" discussed by St. Paul in his Letter to the Galatians as "rage, squabbles, conflict, gangs, hatred and murder" could freely flourish. "The hatred and seeking after murder of the heathens was so great ... that they did not stop at killing them, they also ate them. ... People were reduced to the level of meat."[33]

In order to illustrate just how evil these people were, and how much they needed the work of missionaries and the interference of white colonial officials, Merensky was prepared to accept the most far-fetched and horrific tales of culinary debauchery from the interior of Africa. He reported that in the large villages of the interior, some of which were large enough to be called cities, some of the "heathen ways" were "truly horrifying". At public festivals, people were slaughtered as offerings to

30. The missionaries recorded Makgeru as "Makhêr".
31. Wangemann, *Die Menschenfresser*, p 15.
32. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 1.
33. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 1.

appease the gods. The houses of many chiefs were plastered with human skulls.[34]

Merensky cited reports from "the great Missionary Livingstone" about markets in the vicinity of Lake Tanganyika and the Kongo River, where people were bought and sold to be eaten. In one such market, Livingstone had come across a man whose chest was decorated with a string of human jawbones. When questioned about this, "he replied with smirking laughter: 'I have eaten all of the people from whom these jawbones came.'"[35]

Merensky also accepted Stanley's description of having to use force to escape from people in the vicinity of the Kongo River who rejected his gifts and wanted to eat him and his bearers as the "wild meat" that they lusted after.[36] Similarly, he also gave credence to the German explorer Schweinfurth's accounts of the Mambattu or Mombuttu – cannibals who lived in the vicinity of the Nile River. Although they built impressive houses, carried out extensive agriculture and worked artistically in iron and copper, they were capable of "horrific" practices.[37] They waged wars and plundering raids to satisfy their demand for human flesh. The flesh of enemies killed in battle was divided up and dried so that it could be carried home. Living captives were driven home by their captors and kept for later slaughter. Captured children served as "delicacies" for their king, Musa, who devoured children daily.[38]

In the interior of Africa, God had ordained that the first voyages of exploration by missionaries and explorers would be followed by the establishment of European authority in wide areas where cannibalism had formerly flourished unchecked.[39] The first missionaries had not been powerful enough to stop these "terrible and gruesome" practices. However, with the establishment of European authority, they and their secular counterparts could act together to suppress cannibalism. They had not yet succeeded entirely in doing so, but one could only pray that the Light of the Gospel would eventually lead to success.[40]

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34. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 3.
35. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 2.
36. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 2.
37. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 3. For a strong attack on the veracity of Schweinfurth's accounts of cannibalism, see C. Marx, "Der Afrikareisende Georg Schweinfurth und der Kannibalismus", *Wiener Ethnohistorische Blätter*, 34, 1989, pp 69-97.
38. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 4.
39. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 2-3.
40. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 3-4.

In South Africa, the Berlin Missionaries also had "dealings with heathens". The latter had also practised cannibalism from time to time.[41] In writing up this section of the tractate, Merensky relied mainly on his own interviews with the former cannibals living at Botshabelo, other converts in the area, and another unnamed missionary (apparently Nachtigal).

Merensky argued that cannibalism had started further south. As a result of the wars and disruptions caused by the wars of Shaka and Mzilikazi during the first decades of the nineteenth century, many "tribes" were broken up. The scattered refugees living in mountains and other places of refuge were forced into cannibalism in order to survive. Merensky reported that he himself had visited the ancient ruins of a cannibal camp in the lands of the South Basotho and found the broken and charred bones of their victims.[42]

According to the old missionary living in the area at the time of this visit, this group had survived by preying on wanderers and refugees. Once they had captured their victims, they no longer viewed them as humans. Instead, they referred to the men as oxen, the women as cows and the children as calves.[43]

As the dislocation spread further northwards, so did cannibalism. In the lands of the Bapedi, cannibals were referred to as "*Makhema*" [sic – *Makgema*], that is, "biters". They formed raiding bands who usually captured people who were alone, but when they felt strong enough, they also attacked villages, taking captives who were subsequently either eaten or incorporated into their bands.[44]

In order to explain the origins of this practice, Merensky presented identical accounts to those related by Wangemann about the man from the lands of the Swazi and the Mokoni.[45] He also related the life-stories of a number of people who had had encounters with cannibals or been forced to live among them.

An old woman told him that, when she was about fifteen years old, she and a friend had narrowly escaped becoming a meal for cannibals.

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41. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 4.
42. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 5.
43. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 6.
44. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 6.
45. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 6-7.

As a result of the "Zulu-Kaffir [sic]" raids, her parents, and others had hidden themselves and their dwellings away. They had no cattle, and not even enough chickens to eke out a meagre existence. Their lives were made even more unbearable by the depredations of wild animals. They could not cultivate their lands, out of fear that their enemies would discover their hiding-place. Instead, they had to survive on berries, roots and wild fruits, which they collected in the forest.[46]

One day, she and an older comrade went into the "wilderness" to collect wild fruits. On their return, they saw a thick plume of smoke arising from the direction of their "huts". Approaching carefully, they saw, in her words: "... a band of wild men dancing around the fire. Cannibals had attacked those who had remained behind." Investigating the burning remains of their village after the cannibals had left, they found "the gnawed bones of our parents and relatives. The pots in which these foes had cooked their flesh were still standing on the fire."[47]

Many other people had told Merensky similar tales. In many cases, his informants had been forced to join cannibal bands. Their tales of the lifestyle of the cannibals, the terrible deeds that they were forced to perform and the horrors that they were forced to witness in order to avoid being eaten themselves, reflect those given in the Wangemann account. So too does his description of the unification of the Bapedi and the suppression of cannibalism by Sekwati, Sekhukhune and other chiefs.[48]

In spite of the fact that local rulers had suppressed cannibalism, as Merensky saw it, conditions in South Africa reflected those in the South Sea Islands and other parts of "Darkest Africa". The only way that cannibalism would be completely rooted out, was through the spread of the Gospel.[49] This was clearly demonstrated by the life-stories of the sixteen former cannibals and "hundreds of former heathens" at Botshabelo, whose lives showed that people become "new beings in Christ".[50] Among these was the "faithful Verger" at Botshabelo, Jan Maputle and another man by the name of Zebedäus Lefula.

Maputle's father was Khulong, who at one time, had been the "chief of the cannibals in the lands of the Bapedi ... wilder and more gruesome than many of his comrades". Having inherited this way of life

46. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 7-8.
47. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 8.
48. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 8-9.
49. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 9-10.
50. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 10-11.

from his father, he continued to follow it until it was eventually suppressed among the Bapedi peoples.[51] First having heard the Word of God at Khalatlolu in 1860, he went through a period of great internal struggle with the "superstition" and "darkness" of heathenism and polygamy. In November 1864, when Sekhukhune moved against the Christians, he had all of his cattle confiscated by the king. This proved to be a turning point. Thereafter, he left his homelands to settle at Botshabelo, where he was baptised on 25 June 1865.[52] For fifteen years,

51. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 11.

52. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 11-13. Relations between Sekhukhune, the missionaries and converts suffered periodic tensions. On his enthronement, Sekhukhune suspected them of collaborating with dissident factions within the Bapedi state, especially supporters of his brother Mampuru. Once he was securely on the throne, there was a lessening of tensions for a time. The Christians' rejection of local rituals and observances nevertheless continued to provoke widespread hostility, as they were seen as undermining both the metaphysical and the physical order. The king could not afford to ignore these tensions, especially in the face of drought, disease and threats from Swazi and other raiders. Coupled with this, the Christians' rejection of polygyny and bridewealth was widely interpreted as an attack on basic social institutions. Defections to Christianity by some of Sekhukhune's wives and brothers intruded further on areas which were fundamental to the paramount's power, namely control over royal wives and their offspring, and managing tensions between royal agnates. In addition, the missionaries proved less useful in serving as intermediaries with the Boers and the British than Sekhukhune had hoped – indeed there were signs that, under certain conditions, they would possibly side with them against him. Against this background, in the latter half of 1864, Sekhukhune and his inner circle began a determined campaign to halt the spread of Christianity. In November 1864, he dramatically increased the pressure against Christians. They were forbidden to work the land or to cut wood. Their grain supplies, cattle and guns were seized by the state and they were ordered to leave the capital. When missionaries Merensky and Nachtigal attempted to intervene, the paramount told them that he had no fight with them, only with those of his subjects who had converted to Christianity. At this stage, Merensky decided to leave the Pedi domain together with the converts from the capital. Mission writings, and historians who have used them as sources, have portrayed this flight as "the inevitable consequence of the actions of the paramount." However, Delius has argued that an alternative argument is "that these events prodded Merensky further along a path upon which he was already set. Any notion that the missionaries were personally at risk is not borne out by the evidence and there appears to have been no consensus amongst them that flight was the only feasible option." Nachtigal would later recall that Merensky had told him and missionary Endemann that "He wanted to be the scapegoat. In this way he would emerge as a martyr … [and his actions] would be well received in Berlin." Faced with the impossibility of creating his dream, namely Christian community in a still-independent African state, there is strong evidence that, had Sekhukhune not given him the excuse that he did, Merensky would have moved to Natal.

this "serious but friendly man" served as Merensky's "beloved Verger", playing an extremely active role in the life of the Christian community. He was also "well-loved and held in honour by the congregation." This love was made particularly poignant because "none of us ever forgot that the first loyal Verger of Botshabelo was the son of cannibals and throughout his childhood had participated in the dreadful meals of the cannibals."[53]

Lefula's mother, a woman named Mamossadi, her brother and some of their relatives were taken prisoner by "the cannibals". Mamossadi and her brother had been captured first and their mother had given herself up to share the fate of her children. Having witnessed their mother being strangled, butchered, cooked and eaten, they were given the choice of joining the cannibals or of suffering a similar fate. They decided to join the cannibals in their "terrible meals".[54]

In time, Mamossadi's "heart became hard and feelingless". The terror of new captives "no longer made any impression on her or her comrades, who said: 'Can a hunter allow his wild animal to live, if he himself does not want to die?'"

After some time, her only brother was murdered. Mamossadi, her son Lefula and some others went back to her old home. There they lived on human flesh.[55]

"Once Lefula had grown to maturity and taken a wife, the first rays of the Word of God began to lighten this heathen land." Two men from this area who had left and learned to know about God returned "and

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Instead, he was able to portray himself and the Christians as innocent victims fleeing in fear of their lives. In marked contrast, according to Delius, there is clear evidence that Sekhukhune (and Nachtigal) wished for the Christians to return. It was only in December 1865 and January 1866, in the face of further defections by Christians to Botshabelo and increasing fears that the missionaries could act as spies against the illegal arms trade between sections of the Boer community and the Pedi, that missionary Knothe (who had taken over from Merensky at Ga Ratau), Nachtigal and Endemann were ordered to leave Bopedi. Thus: "The closure of these stations came to shape the reality and the mythology of the development of the B.M.S. in the Transvaal and the growth of Christianity within Pedi society." [P. Delius, *The Land Belongs To Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers and the British in the nineteenth century Transvaal* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983), pp 112-123 (quotations, pp 121, 122 & 123).

53. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 13.
54. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 13-14 (quotation, p 14).
55. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 14.

began to awaken many heathens from their slavery to sin." The seed that they had sown was eventually nurtured and brought to fruition by Merensky when Lefula entered instruction for baptism.[56]

Like other converts in Sekhukhuneland, Lefula's faith was also tested by Sekhukhune in its early days. When threatened with death by the king for his Christian belief, he replied:

> You are my King, I am your dog, you can kill me whenever you want. But I will not leave my belief and, when you kill me, my soul will go home to God and only my body will remain here on earth.[57]

On 19 April 1863, Lefula was baptised with the name Zebedäus. Having been forced to leave the lands of his fathers because of his belief, he also settled at Botshabelo. There, he continued to grow in strength in his belief and to act as a faithful helper of the missionaries and an evangelist.[58] He also led his mother to Christianity. On:

> ... her baptism, she took the name Kitile, that is, "I have come." She had come from the darkness to the light of our God and all her children [had come] with her... We all will never forget that among the first Christians at Botshabelo were some who had been saved from the horrors of cannibalism by God, and that the oldest member of our congregation [still living], Zebedäus, had been forced to take part in such horrors as a child. Pray with me, dear reader, that God will make it possible for the message of peace of the Gospel to be explained to those cannibalistic tribes that still live in their old darkness and blindness.[59]

Common threads

Close reading of these accounts reveals common threads running through them. The strong picture that emerges is that of the horrors unleashed in a society suffering serious dislocation. Cannibalism arose during times of social upheaval caused by succession disputes, the activities of raiding bands associated with what other authors have called the *difaqane* or "times of trouble" on the highveld, and the wars surrounding the rise of the Swazi and Bapedi Kingdoms. The accounts state that plundering bands seized the little food available and communities were too scared to plant crops. Devastation interacted with famine in a vicious circle where

56. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 14-15.
57. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 15.
58. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, pp 15-16.
59. Merensky, *Menschenfresserei*, p 16.

the consumption of fellow humans seemed to provide the only alternative to starvation. Having originally turned to cannibalism out of necessity, groups soon discovered the succulent delights of human flesh, continuing their consumption because of lust for its taste. With the exception of the fact that some of the raiding bands used firearms purchased from the Portuguese, the process outlined in the accounts was one of black-on-black violence in which colonial settlers were portrayed as saviours, rather than participants.

The life-histories of former "cannibals" all followed the same basic pattern. They began with the forcible induction of the informant into the rampaging bands. This then led to horrific tales of the lifestyle of the "cannibals", the terrible deeds that they were forced to perform and the horrors that they were forced to witness in order to avoid being eaten themselves.

The alternative to joining the consumers was to be consumed. One often had to witness terrible atrocities being perpetrated against one's companions, neighbours or relatives in the process. One could be drawn in as a labourer, a warrior or a concubine. Violence (both random and carefully planned), harsh punishments – including death for insignificant offences – and the ever-present threat of the cooking pot reportedly kept conscripts in line. Eventually, so too did the now shared taste for human meat. This was ranked in a scale of preference by cut, degree of plumpness and the ethnic group, gender, age and lifestyle of the victim.

Victims were put to death in extremely painful ways. They were completely dehumanized by their captors, who viewed, treated and slaughtered them like livestock. In a perversion of traditional structures, even women could join the raiding bands as warriors. Demonstrating the total absence of paternal bonds, children were in danger of being consumed by their fathers. In these depraved societies, human remains were used as utensils and playthings and human fat as an unguent. Even the dead were eaten, rather than buried.

According to these accounts, amidst the dislocation, a frightening new normative structure was emerging. In cannibal society, prowess at hunting and butchering humans gave status. Ringleaders of bands and cannibal chiefs could command their followers, even if it was only by being more terrible than them. Human flesh was distributed according to the rank of the cannibal receiver. Certain body parts were reserved for the chiefs, others for men and others for women. Children were at the bottom of the social hierarchy and were lucky to survive to adulthood.

Perhaps as terrifying as the atrocities and perversions, is the fact that cannibals were capable of random acts of kindness. In some cases, this arose from the perverted social structure. On occasion, prisoners were spared from being consumed because of a clan relationship with their captors – apparently cannibal logic suggested that one would eat outsiders more easily than insiders. At least one group of survivors of a cannibal raid were reportedly told to flee to escape total annihilation of their lineages. Thus, even to cannibals, these basic building blocks of "normal" society were important. Khulong attempted to instill some vestiges of humanity into the children and saved many captives from death.

Sometimes tales of cannibalism were used to frighten children into obedience. According to the tracts, these tales were nevertheless based on fact. Moreover, fact was often worse than fiction.

To introduce a frisson of horror, the texts emphasised that many of these former cannibals were still alive. Who knew what lusts lay concealed beneath their relatively placid exteriors? Even Christians had taken part in these terrible feasts in their dark pasts. They had been saved (and persuaded to tell their tales) by rebirth in Christ, but what about their "heathen" counterparts?

The missionaries admitted that cannibalism had been brought under control as a result of the actions of local rulers. However, they stated that the potential for a reawakening was always there. Sekhukhune's turning against the Christians demonstrated that there was no real safety and lasting stability under indigenous rule. As in other parts of Africa and in other non-Christian societies, cannibalism was the work of Satan and a natural product of "heathenism". Outward signs of cultural sophistication could mask a dark hidden core. The practice would only finally be eradicated by the imposition of colonial rule.

Interpretations

The remarkable uniformity of the tales could be read either as indicating an element of veracity or as signifying missionary editing and missionary fantasy. In attempting to make sense of these tracts, I will first examine accounts of cannibalism in general. This will lead to a discussion of tales of cannibalism in the context of the so-called *mfecane / difaqane*. Next, I will look at the tales in more depth, in the context of the local

missionaries and the possible reasons that the converts may have had for telling them. I will conclude with some possible alternative explanations.

In recent years, progressive scholarly works have tended to debunk the notion of the widespread existence of cannibalism in African and other societies. The anthropologist William Arens may probably be ranked as the scholar most vociferous in this regard.[60] Arens' analysis covers most societies which have been accused of cannibalism, including prehistoric humans, the Aztecs, North American, New Guinean and African societies. In attempting to find credible witnesses who had actually seen the acts that they were describing, he found that these so-called witnesses were merely recounting what they had been told. In dismissing these "second-hand" accounts of explorers, missionaries and anthropologists, he noted that they fortuitously seemed to enter areas just after the inhabitants, or – more usually – their neighbours, had given up cannibalism. Only a handful of the masses of second-hand accounts purported to be by direct witnesses of cannibalism. In each of these cases, and in the case of modern anthropologists who claimed to have witnessed cannibalistic rituals, he found reasons to cast doubt on either the credibility of the witness or the accuracy of the observation.[61]

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60. W. Arens, *The Man-eating Myth*: *Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979). The analysis which follows presents a number of the poles in the ongoing debate about cannibalism. It does not pretend to be an exhaustive analysis of the treatment of the topic in anthropological theory. A useful starting point for such an analysis is S. Lindenbaum, "Thinking About Cannibalism", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33, 2004, pp 475-498 (especially pp 480-485).

61. Arens' argument has provoked a lively debate among anthropologists. Some of his detractors have described his denial of, or what he calls his deep scepticism about cannibalism as a crime similar to holocaust denial. He has nevertheless since forcibly reiterated his original argument, stating that he sees no reason to revise his "original premise concerning the mythological nature of these creatures." In doing so, he particularly dismisses allegations that the viral disease kuru was spread by cannibalism among the Fore of Highland Papua New Guinea. Research on the disease has often been used to justify the "reality" of cannibalism and won the scientists who originally studied it the Nobel Prize. See W. Arens, "Rethinking anthropophagy", *in* F. Barker, P. Hulme and M. Iversen (eds), *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988), pp 39-62 (quotation, p 40; kuru is discussed on pp 48-54). Allegations of holocaust denial are discussed by Peter Hulme in the introductory chapter of the same book. See P. Hulme, "Introduction: the cannibal scene", *in* Barker, Hulme and Iversen (eds), *Cannibalism*, pp 10-14. For contributions to this debate, also see M. Sahlins, "Artificially maintained controversies: Global warming and Fijian cannibalism", *Anthropology Today*, 19, 3, June 2003, pp 3-5, together with comments by G. Obeyesekere on p 18 and W. Arens on pp 18-19.

Similarly, in discussing what he calls "the myth of cannibalism", the sociologist Agner Fog has argued that:

> The belief that primitive peoples habitually eat one another for nutrition, leads to such a high degree of psychological excitation that this myth has been told and retold for centuries and until recently has been believed by even the most reputable scientists, despite the fact that no anthropologist or ethnographer ever has seen the alleged cannibalistic act.[62] Most tales about cannibalism can be traced back to demonising images that a people have created in order to bring disgrace upon their enemy … These accusations have often been used to justify war, slavery, and colonialism …
>
> The imaginary cannibal is not only a bogey but a perfect model for how not to behave – a prototype on barbarism and wickedness. Humans need such negative identification models, and therefore the myth is kept alive.[63]

In attempting to explain how these myths work, Richard Buckhorn has argued that:

> In the era of colonisation, "They are cannibals" could be loosely translated, "We want their land". The perception of indigenous peoples as primitive, savage and inferior helped justify both the process and its brutality.[64]

This question of myth-making has also been explored from a radical perspective by Michael Taussig. Drawing on examples from Amazonia and the Belgian Congo, he argued that their confrontation with desperado rubber traders was very often the first contact that the local people had with Westerners and their auxiliaries. Out of this grew a "culture of terror". Central to this were images of the indigenous people as savages and sub-humans. Horrific tales of cannibalism were used to dehumanize

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62. For attempts at producing a cultural materialist account of cannibalism based on nutritional requirements and available food resources, see M. Harris, *Cannibals and Kings*: *The Origins of Cultures* (Fontana / Collins, Glasgow, 1978), especially pp 110-125, 134-136 and M. Harris, *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture* (Vintage Books, New York, 1980), especially pp 188-190, 333-341.
63. A. Fog, *Cultural selection © 1996*, Chapter 8: Sociology of deviance, at http://announce.com/agner/cultsel/chap8.html, accessed 25 November 1997, pp 4–5.
64. R. Buchhorn, *A Taste for Chinese*, [first appeared in *the Skeptic*, 14, 1], at http://www.skeptics.com.au/journal/canib-chinese.htm, accessed 15 February 1999, pp 3–4.

locals and justify the terrible tactics used against them in the collection of rubber.[65] Thus, as Peter Geschiere has summarized it, "cannibalism … became a central motif in a complex mirroring of images between Westerners and Indians; it served as a convenient vehicle for projecting the Westerners' fears and hidden obsessions on the Indians."[66]

Joan Smith also raised issues such as these in an essay in *Granta*. Here she argued that, for most Europeans during the nineteenth century, cannibalism was "an index of savagery" and that the belief in "the widespread existence of cannibal tribes in the non-European, 'uncivilized' areas of the world" was shared by a range of authors. Thus:

> Cannibal narratives … are one of the ways in which colonial cultures differentiate themselves from other races – particularly ones they regard as troublesome or unwilling to accept their subject status … This is not to argue that cannibalism does not exist but to suggest that its unacknowledged function in supporting an otherwise dubious hierarchy of racial superiority has predisposed too many commentators to believe almost any anecdote, no matter how vague or unlikely the details.[67]

Moreover, for Smith, these "credulous and strikingly similar narratives" reveal far more about "a prurient curiosity within *developed* cultures about cannibalism than of its widespread practice outside them".[68]

Smith's comments about the suspension of normal critical facilities when it comes to accounts of cannibalism, are particularly clearly borne out in the South African context. Here, the debate about cannibalism has focused largely around the so-called *mfecane / difaqane*.

Wangemann and Merensky's accounts firmly situate cannibalism in the Bopedi area in the supposed disruption and devastation caused by this process. According to them, the basis of cannibal society was a raiding band, rather than a stable, settled group. Not only did these bands begin eating people, but the devastation that they sowed left the groups that they attacked with no other means of subsistence than cannibalism.

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65. M. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study of Terror and Healing* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1987).
66. P. Geschiere, "Rubber and Cannibalism: The Germans, the Maka and the Rubberboom in South Cameroon (1900-1914)", paper presented at the seminar "Fantasy Spaces – The Power of Images in a Globalizing World", Amsterdam, 27-29 August 1998, p 4.
67. J. Smith, "People Eaters", Granta, 52, Winter 1995, pp 73, 76.
68. Smith, "People Eaters", p 78.

As the dislocation spread further northwards, so did cannibalism. Having begun eating human flesh out of necessity, they later continued doing so out of choice. These missionary ideas were in turn picked up by Mönnig, the ethnographer of the Pedi, who presented an identical argument, and included sources by Wangemann and Merensky, in his discussion of cannibalism.[69] They thus became part of the whole corpus of *mfecane / difaqane* literature. With varying degrees of bloodthirstiness, and underlying racism, accounts of skeletons littering the veld and cannibalism have been recurring themes in discussions of this presumed holocaust of wars and destruction. Even liberal historians like Leonard Thompson and John Omer-Cooper fell into this trap.[70]

Conversely, in dismissing the whole concept of "The 'mfecane", Julian Cobbing has argued that allegations of cannibalism played an important role in building up the alibi which was used "to legitimate South Africa's racially unequal land division". In particular, cannibalism was used in the construction of the concept of the Mantatees – "a word deliberately used to convey at once the idea of terror, and that of the black man as *Untermensch*." Through the use of this stereotype: "Genuine refugees from the slave raids were converted into marauding bands of semi-demonic women and children, as well as men, who ravaged the countryside like locusts and threatened the entire colonial civilization."

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69. H.O. Mönning, *The Pedi* (J.L. van Schaik, Pretoria, 1967), pp 20, 23. Mönnig's sources for his discussion of cannibalism during the *mfecane / difaqane* were: D.R. Hunt, "An Account of the Bapedi", *Bantu Studies*, 5, 4, 1931, pp 286-287; A. Merensky, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Bapeli", *Berliner Missionsberichte*, 1862, pp 333-334; A. Merensky, *Beiträge zur Kentnis Süd-Afrikas* (Evangel. Missionshaus, Berlin, 1875), p 114; C.W. Prinsloo, "Klank en Vormleer van Sekoni", M.A.-tesis, Universiteit van Pretoria, 1936, pp 12-13; T.S. van Rooyen, "Die verhouding tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle in die geskiedenis van die Oos-Transvaal tot 1882", *Archives Year Book for South African History*, 14, I (The Government Printer, Pretoria, 1951), p 92; D. Wangemann, *Geschichte der Berliner Missionsgesellschaft und ihre Arbeiten in Südafrika* IV, *Die Berliner Mission im Bassuto-Lande* (Evangel. Missionsgesellschaft, Berlin, 1877), p 45; J.A. Winter, "The Tradition of Ra'lolo", *South African Journal of Science*, 9, 1912, p 99; J.A. Winter, "Hymns in praise of famous chiefs", *South African Journal of Science*, 9, 1912, p 331.

70. See, for example, F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Caxton, London, 1912), pp 217–226; J.D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* (Longman, London, 1966), especially pp 96, 100, 102; L. Thompson, "Co-operation and Conflict: The High Veld", *in* M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa* I: *South Africa to 1870* (Oxford University Press, London, 1969), pp 391-405.

As cannibals, "Mantatee hordes had to be subject to laws of behaviour and motion completely mysterious to rational people". Moreover, "Black 'irrationality' became 'truer' with each repetition".[71] Later, he argued that "Many of the cannibal stories belong to the genre of European fairy tales and represent the export into Africa of fantasies historically embedded in the collective European unconscious." After examining African tales about white slave-hunters as cannibals, he concluded by arguing that it was extremely likely that local accounts of cannibals were, for the most part, records of the raiding for "labourers" and slaves which he saw as the driving force of the destruction and devastation.[72] Also casting doubt on accounts of cannibalism at this time, John Wright has argued that many of the so-called cannibal bands "were probably bandits".[73]

Peter Delius has argued that accounts of cannibalism in the lands of the Pedi at this time should be approached with caution. The practice was used in traditions as "a way of showing the dire consequences of the destruction of properly constituted authority". Missionaries used talk about cannibalism as "evidence which confirmed their suspicions that these societies teetered on the edge of barbarism". In marked contrast to the picture painted by these traditions and, particularly, the missionary accounts: "A close examination of the evidence suggests that it was restricted to relatively few groups who were principally distinguished by the fact that they secured their subsistence almost exclusively through raiding, and were thus seen as living on their fellows."[74]

More recently, Norman Etherington has argued that:

> When people spoke of losing cattle unfairly they spoke of having been "eaten up". If order generally broke down and people were "eating others up" on all sides, it was said that cannibals ruled the land. This evocation of the most powerful taboo in human society should not be taken literally. So great was the horror of the very idea that people avoided the flesh of sacred animals "for fear of eating an ancestor". Eye-witness accounts of people eating people are extremely rare in the

71. J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo", *Journal of African History*, 29, 1988, pp 487, 499-500, 519.
72. J. Cobbing, "Grasping the Nettle: The Slave Trade and the Early Zulu", unpublished paper privately circulated by the author, September 1990, p 15.
73. J. Wright, "Political Transformations in the Thukela - Mzimkhulu Region in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries", *in* C. Hamilton (ed), *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg and University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1995), p 176.
74. Delius, *The Land*, p 24.

> historical record, and there are good reasons for doubting the few that do exist. It is often said that cannibalism was a new horror brought by widespread violence in the nineteenth century. However, rumours and tales about cannibals had been circulating for decades, if not centuries earlier. The best way to understand these tales is as a metaphor for disorder. Ferocious warriors were described colourfully as "eaters of men". Fear of cannibals and cannibalism was instilled at a very early stage. Mothers warned disobedient children that the cannibals might get them. If you fell into their hands, they would cut off your third finger and keep the blood flowing until you died. They would tear off your hands and feet. They would make a drinking cup of your skull. They would cut out your bladder, blow it up and wear it as a trophy. The moral? Stick together. Do not venture into dangerous places. Uphold the established order of things.[75]

Focusing on the situation in Bopedi in particular, the linguist Doctor M. Mokgopa noted in personal communication that the Northern Sotho terms for cannibalism, *makgema* and *majabatho*, occurred most frequently in folktales. So too did the storm wind analogy *ledimo* (plural, *madimo*). He emphasised that, in these folktales, rocks and trees could talk and complain that they had been standing in the same place too long and now wished to go exploring. He attached the same veracity to tales of cannibalism as to conversing and perambulating rocks and trees.[76] Similarly, numerous informal conversations with colleagues and friends, and class discussions with students, have touched on the idea of cannibalism in Africa as a racist stereotyping by Europeans.

Wangemann and Merensky were clearly influenced as much by European pre-conceptions about the nature of cannibal bands as by whatever their informants told them. Much of the style used in writing the tracts mirrors that used in the cannibal yarns in the works of adventure writers such as Daniel Defoe and H. Rider Haggard.[77] As with the

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75. N. Etherington, *The Great Treks: The Transformation of Southern Africa, 1815-1854* (Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, 2001), p 17.
76. Makgopa, personal communication, 18 April 2005.
77. In a recent work, Gananath Obeyesekere examines two sets of supposedly eyewitness accounts of cannibalism in the Fiji Islands that have been used by anthropologists to demonstrate the veracity of the practice. Using internal evidence from the source itself, he convincingly demonstrates that William Endicott could not have witnessed "A Cannibal Feast in the Fiji Islands" on the particular occasion that he claimed. Instead, Obeyesekere sees it as being based on seamen's yarns and having been fabricated thirteen years after the events supposedly occurred to meet a growing demand in Europe for stories of cannibalism. Similarly, while they are more problematic to dismiss outright, he makes a convincing case that the accounts of John Jackson ("Cannibal Jack") are at least bad ethnography and more probably adventure yarns in the

tractates, the works of these authors focused on the dreadful customs of the wild cannibal bands. Recurring themes included the cannibals' devouring of strangers and enemies killed in warfare (rather than their kin) in orgiastic feasts, victims being treated like livestock (sometimes even fattened) before being killed in extremely cruel ways, rituals surrounding the butchering and dressing of the meat, the relative merits of various cuts and types of human meat, victims being forced to watch the butchering and devouring of their companions before being consumed themselves, and the presence of cannibal authority structures.[78] In addition, as Peter Hulme has pointed out, descriptions of coming across the remains of a cannibal feast, such as those which abound in the tractates, are a recurrent trope in cannibal literature.[79] The tone of some of the tales in the tractates seems to suggest the possibility of replacing "Mantatee" by "Makchema" and applying Cobbing's argument to the Bopedi case. It is also clear that the missionaries firmly believed that cannibalism was a characteristic feature of "heathen" societies. Gruesome tales from other parts of Africa and the South Sea Islands could uncritically be tacked on to buttress the local horrors.[80] A further tractate even mentioned cannibalism in the distant "heathen" past of the Germans themselves.[81] Dehumanizing and brutalizing their subjects, the

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genre of Defoe. See G. Obeyeskere, "Cannibal feasts in nineteenth-century Fiji", *in* Barker, Hulme and Iversen (eds), *Cannibalism*, pp 63-86.

78. See, for example, D. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, at http://www.deadmentellnotales.com/onlinetexts/robinson/crusoe6a.shtml, especially pp 94-98, 103-104, 112, 113-115, 116-117, 126-127, 129-134, 136 of 173; D. Defoe, *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, at http://www.deadmentellnotales.com/onlinetexts/robinson/further5.shtml, especially pp 26-27, 33-34, 36, 37-42, 44, 47 of 135, full texts, originally published in 1719, accessed on 18 April 2005 [for both texts, see http://www.deadmentellnotales.com/onlinetexts/robinson/crusoe.shtml]; H.R. Haggard, *She* (Penguin Books, London, 1994), pp 81, 99-105, 107, 172. The latter was first published in 1887.
79. Hulme, "Introduction", p 3. See also Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, pp 94, 104, 116-117 of 173.
80. See also A. Merensky, *Wie die Menschenfresser auf Tongoa Christen wurden*, Missionsschriften für Kinder Nr.23 (Buchhandlung der Berliner Evangelischen Missionsgesellschaft, Berlin, n.d. [1895]). Chirstoph Marx's strong attack on the veracity of Schweinfurth's accounts of cannibalism has already been mentioned in footnotes. Mana Musa is today remembered for his bureaucratic reforms, including the use of literate clerks, rather than for any culinary debauchery. See B. Davidson, *The Search for Africa: A History in the Making* (James Currey, London, 1994), p 74.
81. Anonym, *Etwas aus der Heidenzeit des deutschen Vaterlandes. Die Bekehrung der Sachsen in der Gegend von Hermansburg*, Neue Missionsschriften Nr. 6, (Buchhandlung der Berliner Evangelischen Missionsgesellschaft, Berlin, 1890). This discussed the conversion of the Saxons in the vicinity of

missionaries described in gory detail the absence, or distortion, of what their readers (and, I would strongly suggest, Africans too) would have seen as normative behaviour and its replacement by a Satanic normative structure made even more incomprehensibly terrifying by random acts of kindness, or at least a random lessening of cruelty.

In addition, Merensky had already demonstrated his lack of scruples about myth-making in portraying the flight from Ga Ratau as a flight from persecution and almost certain death, rather than a premeditated decision. Moreover, it suited the mission as a whole to emphasise the idea of martyrs for the faith in heathen Bopedi. No strangers to myth-making if it served their cause, the missionaries clearly interpreted the testimony of their informants in the worst possible light and were prepared to accept the wildest possible details as literal accounts. Indeed, they may even have (consciously or unconsciously) encouraged their informants to present the wildest and most horrific details imaginable.

In this regard, it is significant that they only managed to gain testimonies about allegedly cannibalistic acts from those already converted. Mochayane, for example, would only tell his story once he was in the process of being prepared for baptism. The other informants gave their stories even later in their careers as Christians. This raises the question of the motivation of the converts in giving the testimony that they did. I will consider the possibility of these tales describing the "actual" life experiences of the converts shortly, but before this, examine possible alternative explanations. There is a big difference between saying that "people were eaten" and testifying that: "I ate people." While the first statement may be interpreted as a comment on social dislocation, and missionary prejudice, the second is far more complicated.

The most obvious answer, and one that seems plausible, is that the informants simply told the missionaries what they thought the latter wanted to hear. Asked to tell tales about "cannibalism" by white missionaries, who stood in a paternalistic relationship to them, they presumably did just this, inventing and embellishing where necessary. Moreover, it is likely that they would have played on the horror and excitement of the missionaries and shaped their tales to get the best

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Hermannsburg. In doing so, the author argued that in their distant heathen past, the Germans had also performed human sacrifices of enemies captured in battle and eaten some of their body parts to give themselves power and courage.

reactions from listeners who wanted to hear – and believe – the worst that they could tell them.[82]

A second, less obvious, influence on the content of the tales would presumably have been the desire of converts to show just how far they had been transformed by Christ. At the most crass level, it is likely that they were showing that, before their conversion, they were "uncivilized heathens", and thus behaved as such people did. According to contemporary stereotypes, one of the things that such people did, was to eat human flesh. However, with their conversion, they had become "civilized" and thus turned their back on even fondly remembering such things – they were repelled by their past. It suited their audience (their fellow converts, the missionaries and their readers), and probably even the informants themselves, to believe these tales.[83]

If one accepts this argument, it is possible to conclude that the most crucial task is not that of deciding whether or not the Pedi (or any other group) "really" ate human flesh. What is important is the fact that the missionaries and some of their converts said that they had. Rather than trying to look at which of the cases had "actually" occurred and which had not, one may spend one's time far more usefully in deconstructing the missionary accounts and seeing what they tell us about the missionaries, the Pedi and their interaction. In a similar way to Luise White, one may set out to see the unexpected aspects of their interaction, not beneath, but through, tales about anthropophagy.[84]

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82. I return to this interpretation later in the context of Obeyesekere's work.
83. A similar situation prevails at Pentecostalist revival meetings today. In presenting their conversion testimonies, few, if any, speakers will speak positively about their lives before they were reborn. Many report that they had to defeat the demons of drink, drugs, violence, sexual perversion, Satanism or other self-destructive behaviour through the power of God. Confessions of witchcraft are common. In one such testimony a few years ago, a former *muloi* told a packed tent how she had flown to Johannesburg on a loaf of bread to strike her victims. Partly as a result of testimonies like this, membership of the church soared and they now occupy a huge church complex instead of their former tent. They are considering starting their own television station. For me, one is as likely to confess to indulging in a *braaivleis* ball of human flesh as flying to Johannesburg on a loaf of bread. Similarly, if the audience wants to believe it, they will. [Locally, no distinction is made between witches, wizards, warlocks and sorcerers. They are all described as *vhaloi* and singular as *muloi*].
84. L. White, "Cars out of place: Vampires, technology and labor in East and Central Africa", *in* F. Cooper and A.L. Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (University of California Press, Berkley, 1997), pp 436–460; L. White, *Speaking with vampires*: *rumor and*

A third, probably heretical, possibility can be introduced. This is that at least some of the accounts were true. People were eaten.[85] If one dismisses the inherently racist conception that this was out of some kind of lust for human flesh, the question then becomes whether this was out of necessity, whether there was some kind of symbolic reason for this, or whether it is possible to offer a combination of explanations. In engaging these issues, following the lead of Gananath Obeyesekere, I differentiate between cannibalism and anthropophagy. The former term indicates "cannibal talk" in the wider context of contact and othering, the latter a complex ritual practice.[86]

What if they were "real"?

Whichever version of the "*mfecane*" debate / myth one subscribes to – black-on-black violence, white labour-raiding, or a combination of the two, it is clear that the period under review was an extremely violent one in South African history. The possibility of scattered groups being forced to turn to cannibalism as a desperate survival measure in times of famine, warfare and social dislocation, is at least theoretically possible. If cannibalism existed, it is clear that the practice was one associated with bands, rather than states, and was suppressed with the rise of the Bapedi and Basotho kingdoms.[87] In addition, for me, the possible existence of

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history in colonial Africa (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2000).

85. My late Professor of African History at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Albert Wirz, informed me on a number of occasions that he could never understand the Western horror of cannibalism. As sexual beings, we freely ingest the bodily secretions of others. We chew our fingernails and eat our bogies. We use the organs of others in life-saving transplants and extracts from the deceased in synthesising compounds which are then ingested by, or injected into, the living. In America and, possibly to a lesser extent, in Europe, the home birth movement of recent years has on occasion given rise to the practice of consuming the placenta by the mother or close family members. So, where does one draw the line? In an argument which reflects some of these points, Shirley Lindenbaum has suggested that "we may now be in a position to exorcise the stigma associated with the notion of the primitive. If we reflect on the reality of cannibal practices among ourselves as well as others, we can contribute to dislodging the savage / civilized opposition that was once essential to the formation of the modern Western self and Western forms of knowledge." [Lindenbaum, "Thinking About Cannibalism", p 475.]

86. See G. Obeysekere, "'British Cannibals': Contemplation of an Event in the Death and Resurrection of James Cook, Explorer", *in* K.A. Appiah and H.L. Gates (eds), *Identities* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1995), pp 7-32.

87. See Ellenberger, *History*, pp 32, 34, 54, 89, 122, 137, 144, 146, 150, 158, 161-163, 190, 191, 192, 203, 217-226, 233, for a completely "over the top" account of murder, mayhem and cannibal feasts; as well as Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu*,

"survival cannibalism" raises the question of whether or not anthropophagy could have been operating at a deeper, more symbolic level too.[88]

For example, in the context of Shaka and the Zulu kingdom, Carolyn Hamilton has drawn attention to E.V. Walters' argument that Shaka's autocratic and harsh rule – frequently seen as a sign of his madness – can be interpreted differently, namely as "the effective use of terror as a principal means of government".[89] In another intriguing (albeit disturbing) argument, in her study of the Aztecs, Inga Clendinnen has looked at warfare, anthropophagy and the violence of ritual killings as forms of performance art intricately bound to the creation, maintenance and expansion of the state and social existence.[90]

Re-reading the tales of the former "cannibals" in this light, the case may be made that raiding bands used anthropophagy as a force of social cohesion and "cannibalism" as a weapon against outsiders. Some studies of the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya have drawn attention to the manner in which ritualized oath-taking transformed a "traditional" institution in ways which were seen as abhorrent both by colonists and Kikuyu conservatives. The new ritual put participants beyond the pale of gentile society, be this colonial or "traditional", thereby serving as a potent unifying source and a stepping-stone in the creation of a new identity. After one had taken the oath, there was no going back and the only way

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pp 96 (note 3), 101, 102, for a more restrained account of the supposed existence of cannibal bands among the Basotho and their suppression by Moshoeshoe.

88. Except in this case, I stick with the opposition between "cannibalism" and "anthropophagy". Following the lead of Peter Hulme, I do not differentiate between "survival cannibalism, ritual cannibalism and mortuary cannibalism" [Hulme, "Introduction", p 4]. For a discussion of typologies of cannibalism, see Lindebaum, "Thinking", pp 477-480.

89. C. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1998), p 18; E.V. Walters, *Terror and Resistance*: *A Study of Political Violence with Case Studies of Some Primitive African Communities* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1969).

90. I. Clendinnen, *Aztecs: an interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991).

forward lay in the creation of a new society.[91] It is possible that during times of social dislocation in the first half of the nineteenth century, anthropophagy provided such a force of unity among people scattered by warfare and slave-raiding or raiding for *inboekelinge*.[92] Not only could horror and terror have been used as a way of incorporating new members into the group, they could also have been used as weapons of terror against other groups.

Analyses of "cannibalism" and "anthropophagy" among the Maori provide possible support for this argument. In a paper engaging issues surrounding "British Cannibals" and "the Death and Resurrection of James Cook", Gananath Obeyesekere has focused on the question of how, during their first periodic confrontations, both Polynesians and the British managed to stereotype the other as cannibals. The British were obsessed with finding out whether or not the Islanders were "really" cannibals. Unable to speak the local languages, and in the absence of interpreters, the zealous explorers and scientists pointed to their own limbs, or those of the local people, sometimes making biting motions. It is not surprising that, in attempting to make sense of this bizarre behaviour, the Hawaiians concluded "that these half-starved people were asking questions about cannibalism because they were cannibals themselves and might actually eat" them. In addition, frequent asking of what the local people saw as the "absurd question" of whether they ate their enemies killed in battle led them to infer "that since the British had slaughtered so many Hawaiians, it is they who ate their slain enemies."[93]

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91. See, for example, J. Beattie, *Other Cultures: Aims, Methods and Achievements in Social Anthropology* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1964), p 261; F. Cooper, *Africa since 1940* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002), pp 71-74; P. Curtin, S. Feierman, L. Thompson and J. Vansina, *African History* (Longman, London, 1978), p 580; B. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium* (Paladin, St Albans, 1975), especially pp 264-268.

92. For raiding for *inboekelinge* (forced labourers, especially women and children, formerly called "apprentices") during the nineteenth century, see for example, J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton, *The Native Policy of the Voortrekkers: An essay in the history of the interior of South Africa – 1836-1858* (Maskew Miller, Cape Town, 1928), pp 169-195; J. Boeyens, "'Zwart ivoor': Inboekelinge in Zoutpansberg, 1848-1869", *Suid-Afrikaanse Historiese Joernaal*, 24, 1991, pp 31-36; J. Boeyens, "'Black Ivory': The Indenture System and Slavery in Soutpansberg, 1848-1869", *in* E.A. Eldredge and F. Morton (eds), *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labour on the Dutch Frontier* (Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford & University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1994), pp 187-217; Delius, *The Land*, pp 35-36, 37, 95, 103, 136-147, 149, 162; Etherington, *Great Treks*, pp 48-49.

93. Obeyesekere, "British Cannibals", p 11. As Geschiere has pointed out, "this last inference was to have many parallels in the proliferation of rumours on the

For Obeyesekere, this mirroring did not provide sufficient reason to deny the "reality" of cannibalism. While this may not have been practiced by Hawaiians before contact, it probably occurred in other Pacific societies, for example among the Maoris. Anyway, this was not the most crucial issue. Stories about cannibalism are necessarily stories about contact. This is because they distinguish cannibals from others. Thus, there are always two parties involved and each of these has their own discourse about cannibalism. Thus, in addition to examining Polynesian conceptions of cannibalism, we also need to look at Western tales of the practice – be this in children's stories, in shipwreck survivor stories, in religion, or in fantasies about the wild.

In addition, Obeyesekere argued that cannibalism in the Pacific evolved with contact. On one level, this was pretence. On another, it was very real. As pretence, in addition to imputing cannibalism to them, some Hawaiians "perhaps more in fun than seriousness, threatened the British with their (feigned) cannibalism." As reality:

> Maoris it seemed employed a similar threat: they admitted their cannibalism, but emphasized and exaggerated it and, like the Hawaiians and the Northwest Coast Indians, seemed to enjoy the European reaction of disgust and fascination. Cannibalistic discourse then was a weapon, one might say, employed by all the parties.[94]

Seen in this sense, in a situation where "real" local weapons were no match against the guns of the Europeans, Maori and other Polynesian tales of cannibalism may be interpreted as "a defense against the European", and also as a "counterattack, an employment of one form of terror against another."[95]

At another level, very corporeal weapons were also made available. The British presence in the area considerably escalated both the frequency and the violence of local wars. Firearms "escalated the killing to a degree unprecedented in Maori history." With the resulting glut of corpses, a practice closely associated with human sacrifice and religious meaning was transformed into "conspicuous anthropophagy" on a much larger scale.[96]

Westerners as cannibals (or at least as bloodsuckers in nearly all colonized areas." [Geschiere, "Rubber", p 5]. In comparison, see White, *Speaking with vampires*.

94. Obeyesekere, "British Cannibals", p 23.
95. Obeyesekere, "British Cannibals", p 23.
96. Obeyesekere, "British Cannibals", p 31.

Engaging the same issues, in her account of Captain Cook's three voyages to the South Seas, Anne Salmond examines the descriptions of Maori cannibalism in exhibition members' writings. Some of these were obviously designed to shock and titillate the intended readers, portraying an image of "fearless ferocious cannibals" who hunted "each other casually, for meat." However, other accounts attempted to find scientific explanations for the practice, examining issues such as the supposed propensity of societies lower on the evolutionary ladder to practice cannibalism, the importance of "custom" or a desire for "revenge" in perpetuating the practice, and the observation that only enemies were eaten. Sometimes arguments portraying the two different approaches were even contradictorily presented in the same source.[97]

In her interpretation, Salmond draws attention to the fact that sailors sometimes confusedly interpreted the gods' "eating" of human sacrifices as evidence of cannibalism. She also discusses cases where local groups described their enemies as cannibals, but denied practising this themselves – a form of othering already discussed.[98] She is nevertheless convinced of the "reality" of the practice, describing supposedly eyewitness accounts. In explaining these, she supports the view that enemies or "outsiders" were the victims of anthropophagy, which had much in common with the practice of human sacrifice and the sacred offering of human jawbones (and other body parts) in other areas. For the Maori, a victory could not be completed without rituals of this nature:

> In battle, the *mana* [sacred power] of both gods and their descendants was at stake. If they gained the victory, warriors fed the life force or *hau* of their enemies to their ancestor gods … offering up body parts such as the head, liver and heart, where the life force was concentrated, or ritually eating them. This avenged the insult that had sparked off the conflict, and at the same time nullified the power of the enemy gods, who might otherwise spiritually attack them.[99]

Against this background, she interprets conspicuous anthropophagy in the presence of the British, and the consumption of members of a boat crew sent ashore from Cook's companion vessel during the second Pacific voyage, as mocking them, issuing a challenge to them and their gods. By their lively interest in trading for human bones and trophy heads as

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97. A. Salmond, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog: Captain Cook in the South Seas* (Penguin Books, London, 2003), especially pp 2, 125, 136-137, 141-145, 190, 222-226, 228-230, 248 (quotations on pp 142 & 190).
98. See especially Salmond, *The Trial*, pp 125, 136-137.
99. Salmond, *The Trial*, p 225.

souvenirs, their continual questioning about cannibalism, and at least one incident where they cooked flesh from a local war casualty and persuaded locals to eat it in their presence, crew members and officers played into this interpretation. In terms of local cultural practices, the failure of Cook and his officers to respond appropriately to these challenges was seen as being inexplicably and unutterably cowardly, as seriously diminishing their own power and that of their gods, and as a studied insult to local people and local deities.[100]

Peter Geschiere has argued that doing field-work among the Maka in South Cameroon "means being pursued by cannibalism: jokes, allusions, ethnic stereotypes and gruesome rumors." Since the brief rubberboom at the beginning of the twentieth century, at the time when Cameroon was colonised by the Germans, the Maka have been "known as *the* cannibals of the country." Moreover, even the "Maka themselves often play little games with their fearsome reputation."[101]

When Geschiere first encountered tales of Maka cannibalism, he attempted to explain them away in terms of stereotyping. As the accounts kept on coming to light, in an argument similar to that of Taussig discussed earlier, he began to introduce an historical dimension. He argued that, in the desperate and violent struggle for control over rubber resources, "the *Makka* [sic] became the prototype of *Menschenfresser* (cannibal) to the Germans." So closely did they associate the people and the practice that, in time, "any *Menschenfresser* was supposed to be a *Makka* [sic]." This reputation has stuck to the Maka ever since.[102]

However, this did not obliterate the question of the degree to which the German obsession with Maka cannibalism was based on actual incidents. Much as he wished to deny the "reality" of the practice, Geschiere encountered mounting evidence of at least a limited number of cases where people had been killed and eaten. There was also a convergence between details contained in the colonial files and local oral history.[103] This convinced him of the "futility" of attempting to deny that any acts of "cannibalism" had ever taken place. Instead, following the

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100. Especially see Salmond, *The Trial*, pp 223, 225, 248. Note that Obeyesekere also discusses the question of the collection of "curiosities", including human heads and other body parts by the British sailors. [Obeyesekere, "British Cannibals", especially pp 14, 19-20.]
101. Geschiere, "Rubber", pp 1, 2.
102. Geschiere, "Rubber", p 3.
103. In at least one case (in 1910), a German rubber trader was killed, dismembered and eaten by the Maka. [Geschiere, "Rubber", pp 14-18].

lead of Taussig and Obeyesekere, he set out to examine "how the rubberboom and the brutal confrontation of the Germans and the *Makka* [sic] shaped the imaginary [imagery] of cannibalism of both parties" and why this image proved to be so "sustainable".[104] For Geschiere, part of the answer lies in the conception that:

> ... cannibalism is not just a dialogue, but rather a more polyphonous conversation. Reducing these fantasies to a confrontation between Westerners and natives might mean to overestimate the role of the former. The West certainly has no monopoly on the use of the cannibalism trope for purposes of "Othering" … cannibalism is … such a powerful image because a much broader array of varying meanings and associations can be fused within it.[105]

Thus, on the one hand, tales of Maka cannibalism were a "violent 'othering' of the natives" by the Germans. This had sound economic roots. Traders and their representatives in Germany used tales of cannibalism, and the horror that they evoked, as a means of putting pressure on the government in their ongoing struggle to obtain further privileges and increasing support from the colonial authorities for the development of the trade in rubber.[106]

From the perspective of the Maka, stories of "hostility", remain central to the tales of elders even to the present day. Cannibalism is a recurrent element in these tales and eating "the slain warriors of hostile groups was the ultimate victory." It was spoken about by Geschiere's informants "as a transfer of force that meant the supreme humiliation of the losing group." A number of them also suggested that they had eaten human flesh themselves, something which was possible in view of their age at the time. More importantly for Geschiere's main argument, cannibalism had strong normative limits. The most basic was that one did not eat one's kin – only witches did this. Cannibalism was thus "a kind of counterpart to witchcraft". Rather than being "a sign of uncontrolled wildness", it remained "a fixed element in a discourse on rivalry and revenge between non-related groups and it is circumscribed by notions of kinship and witchcraft." Moreover, as Obeyesekere had noted for the Pacific, contact with Europeans and their much more destructive weapons brought about "an intensification of cannibalist practices" among the Maka during the rubberboom. With increasing violence and killing, there was a corresponding rise in the opportunities to eat human flesh.[107]

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104. Geschiere, "Rubber", pp 3, 6, 19 (quotation on p 6).
105. Geschiere, "Rubber", pp 6, 7.
106. Geschiere, "Rubber", pp 7, 10, 11, 13-14.
107. Geschiere, "Rubber", pp 20, 21, 22.

Lastly, "othering" was not confined to the relationship between the Maka and the Germans. The cannibalism trope came also to be employed "for 'othering' *within* Cameroon." In contrast to the Maka, the so-called "Grassfielders" do not see cannibalism as being limited to those from outside.[108] Instead, they see it as being "inextricably intertwined with witchcraft." For them, branding the Maka as cannibals thus automatically means also associating them with witchcraft. In doing so, they are branding the East Province (the area where the Maka numerically are the largest group) "as a particular dangerous place, full of hidden aggression."[109] Thus, in essence:

> To Westerners, cannibalism is about the distinction between humans and savages (or even animals); to the Maka, it is rather about the opposition between kin and non-kin; with the Grassfielders it seems to fit in with yet another mental map: to them the cannibalism trope rather distinguishes witches from normal people. These different perspectives imply different forms of "othering".[110]

Applying insights from these arguments to the situation in Bopedi, cannibalism is indeed polyphonous, or polysemic. Tales of cannibalism certainly served as a vehicle for "othering" by both missionaries and Africans, a metaphor for disorder (coupled with a celebration of hierarchy), and a way of emphasising rebirth in Christ. Missionaries used tales of cannibalism to show how desperately in need of the Gospel (and of colonisation) the Bapedi were. Africans used these tales to emphasise the barbarity of other groups who had attacked them in the past and the violence and disorder which had characterized local societies prior to, and in the early stages of state formation. With the formation of the Bapedi kingdom – strong, centralized political authority – anarchy had given way to order, and the practice had reportedly been eradicated. Christians may have partly told the missionaries what they wanted to hear – cannibalistic queries provoking a local counter-discourse. There is also the strong likelihood that they used tales of their cannibalistic past to demonstrate just how dark the darkness of heathenism from which they had been saved, was. As a result of their conversion, they had become "saved" and "civilized". This also differentiated them from their "heathen" counterparts who, even if they no longer consumed human flesh, could still lust after it in their hearts.

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108. The so-called "Grassfielders" are the people of the highlands, the francophone Bamlikele and the anglophone Bamenda.
109. Geschiere, "Rubber", pp 24, 26.
110. Geschiere, "Rubber", p 28.

At another level, these were extremely violent times. Many South African societies were going though a period of severe upheaval. They suffered from the consequences of the wars surrounding state formation and labour-raiding by settlers, had to fend off foreign intruders such as the land-grabbing white settlers, or were involved in wars of succession. The availability of firearms escalated the scale of the devastation. Hence the importance of rituals of approbation, retribution and bonding – of building a shared identity, of preventing succession, and of terrifying, excluding and humiliating outsiders. As among the Maori in similar times of upheaval, and as with the rituals and oaths of the Mau Mau fighters, anthropophagy could indeed have fulfilled such a role. This in turn supplied enough horror stories to those who had an interest to denigrate some people and to frighten others.

Summary

During the 1860s, a number of converts to Christianity in Sekhukhuneland told Missionary Alexander Merensky and Mission Director Hermann Theodor Wangemann horrific tales of their lives as "cannibals" before they were saved by the Lord. The Berlin Mission published a number of these testimonies of salvation. These were received extremely well by readers in Germany.

Earlier historiography used to accept tales of cannibalism during the *mfecane* / *difaqane* uncritically as being "true". In recent years, many historians have argued that they should rather be read either as racist justifications for conquest and land seizure, or as symbolic commentaries on social dislocation.

Parts of the Berlin Mission accounts are so graphically written in the style of adventure literature that they seem to lend themselves to the latter reading. However, I argue that we cannot merely assume that these tales are pure missionary fantasy. It is likely that the converts, in fact, told these stories to Merensky and Wangemann, presenting them as their own personal life-histories. This raises the question of why the informants told the missionaries the tales that they did. This forms the core issue of the article. In engaging it, I explore issues of "othering", cannibalism as a metaphor for disorder (at the same time, a celebration of hierarchy), cannibalism and its eradication as an assertion of identity, and the probable "reality" of anthropophagy in the region.

Opsomming

"Daar is geen vleis wat lekkerder smaak as mensvleis nie!"
Christen Bekeerlinge se Vertellings oor Kannibalisme
in die Laat Negentiende-eeuse Sekhukhuneland

Gedurende die 1860's het 'n aantal bekeerlinge tot die Christendom sendeling Alexander Merensky en sendingdirekteur Hermann Theodor Wangemann gruwelike stories vertel oor hulle lewe as "kannibale" voordat hulle deur die Here gered is. Die Berlynse Sending het 'n aantal van hierdie getuienisse oor hulle bekering gepubliseer. Dit is besonder goed deur die lesers in Duitsland ontvang.

In vroeëre historiografie is verhale oor kannibalisme gedurende die *mfecane / difaqane* onvoorwaardelik as "waar" aanvaar. In die afgelope paar jaar het baie historici aangevoer dat dit eerder as rassistiese regverdigings vir verowerings en grondbesetting, of as simboliese kommentaar op sosiale ontwrigting gelees moet word.

Sommige van die Berlynse Sending se weergawes is so beeldend in die styl van avontuurliteratuur geskryf, dat dit sinvol is om laasgenoemde beskouing daarop van toepassing te maak. My argument is egter dat ons nie bloot kan aanneem dat hierdie verhale suiwer sendeling-fantasie is nie. Dit is ook moontlik dat hierdie stories wat die bekeerlinge aan Merensky en Wangemann vertel het, inderdaad hulle persoonlike lewensverhale verteenwoordig het. Dit laat die vraag ontstaan waarom die informante juis dit vir die sendelinge vertel het. Hierin lê die kernvraagstuk van die artikel. In my ondersoek daarna, verken ek kwessies van "othering", kannibalisme as 'n metafoor vir wanorde (en terselfdertyd, 'n viering van hiërargie), kannibalisme en die uitroei daarvan as 'n bevestiging van identiteit, en die moontlikheid dat antropofagie 'n "realiteit" in die streek kon gewees het.

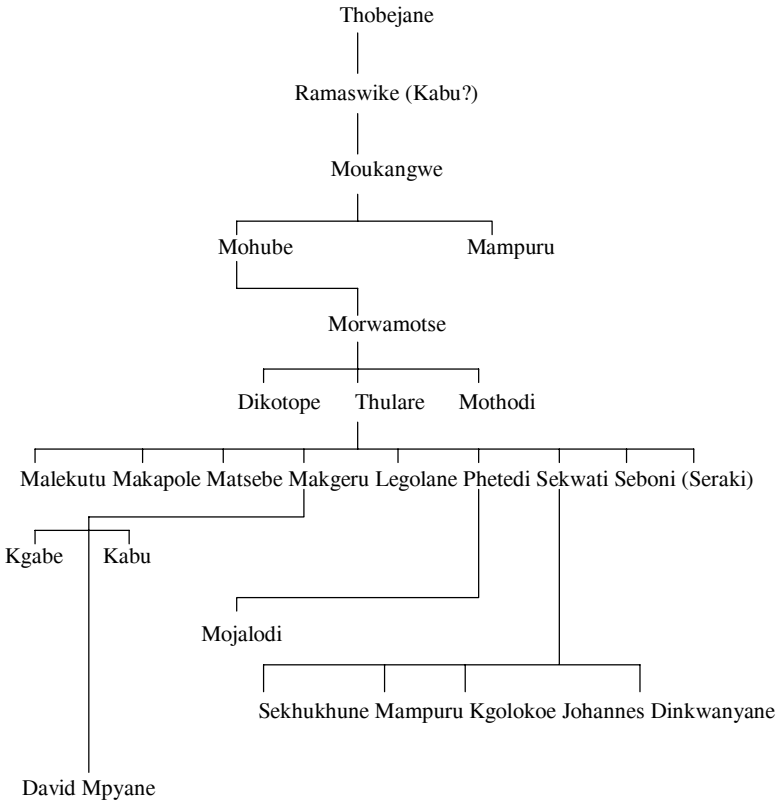
Key words

Anthropophagy, Berlin Mission Society, Bopedi, cannibalism, Christianity, conversion, *difaqane*, *mfecane*, missionaries, Pedi, tracts, violence.

Sleutelwoorde

Antropofagie, Berlynse Sendinggenootskap, Bopedi, kannibalisme, Christenskap, bekering, difaqane, mfecane, sendelinge, Pedi, traktate, geweld.

Skeleton Genealogy Of Maroteng Royals[111]



111. Delius, *The Land*, p 16. Also see Mönnig, *The Pedi*, p 15.