

tion of informal settlements in Cape Town explain the gendered character of survival strategies in these areas. More important, Bähre could have taken account of the literature on poor women's credit cooperatives. While he notes that the members of the mutuals are mainly women, he does not ask why this was so, and how this gendered shift has given new meanings to the term *abakhaya*. Catherine Higgs's historical study of women's self-help organizations in the Eastern Cape would have provided a much needed historical context for this study ("*Zenzele: African Women's Self-help Organizations in South Africa, 1927–1998*," *African Studies Review* 47, 3 [2004]). Margaret Snyder's study of Ugandan women as economic actors would have provided him with comparative insight into how gender blind financial policies tend to exclude women's particular financial strategies (*Women in African Economies: From Burning Sun to Boardroom* [Fountain Publishers, 2000]).

The strength of this book lies in Bähre's portrayal of poor people's—and particularly poor women's—struggles as economic actors and his emphasis on their attempts to mitigate their impoverishment within a context of everyday violence. His willingness to interrogate his experiences of violence in the field is a welcome contribution to our understanding of power, inequality, and a researcher's personal vulnerability.

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Ferdinand de Jong. *Masquerades of Modernity: Power and Secrecy in Casamance, Senegal*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. xi + 228 pp. Photographs. Maps. Figures. Plates. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$39.95. Cloth.

Ferdinand de Jong's book *Masquerades of Modernity: Power and Secrecy in Casamance, Senegal* constitutes a major contribution to anthropological and art historical literature about rituals, masquerades, and identity in postcolonial West Africa. Building on the work of Appadurai (on the social life of objects) and van Binsbergen (on commodification of rituals), this study represents the very best of cultural anthropological writing informed by postcolonial theory. The book also makes a significant contribution to the ever-growing literature on Casamance culture and history.

The book is structured as a somewhat diverse body of case studies. While the organization could be seen as somewhat arbitrary, I believe it works. A central theme in this book is the idea that rituals serve "to perform secrecy." The author shows how, in the Casamance, the secret is transformed into an ethnic marker. Arguing convincingly that old rituals gain new roles as identity markers in the modern world, he observes that "secrecy creates boundaries between those who know that nothing special is concealed and those who do not know this." This is priceless; I like the formulation.

Nevertheless, no matter how trivial these secrets may seem from the

perspective of the viewer who stands outside the culture, their contents are highly significant from the viewpoint of those who are initiated. Having worked extensively among some of the same people as the author—in fact, we have collaborated on a study of Jola “bukut” initiation—I would (half-jokingly) point out a small contradiction in this argument: as outsiders, we do not have access to initiation secrets, whether or not they exist. Hence, it is difficult to render a definitive judgment about their existence.

De Jong’s study of the initiation retreat, and specifically of who has access to the sacred forest and who does not (that is, who qualifies as a potential adult member of local Jola society), incorporates an excellent discussion of the limits of categories: who defines an individual’s identity? The author offers wonderful examples of people who think they are in one category but who are ultimately defined, at least by other members of their own society, as belonging to quite a different category. Parenthetically, might not the same observation be made for individuals in other cultures and at other moments, including some for whom the consequences were far more serious than simply being excluded from the sacred forest?

The book also incorporates an insightful analysis of the changing role of Kankuran, a masquerade found both among the Gambian Mandinka and among some Jolas. Kankuran is documented and illustrated at least as far back as the 1830s, and, as de Jong observes, quite likely to the 1730s. With such historical depth among the Manding of The Gambia and eastern Senegal, de Jong’s assessment of changing roles for the masquerade assumes a slightly different significance. We may view it as but the latest in a long process of evolving roles.

A critical point is that the author maintains that modern Jolas distinguish Islam (religion) from local ritual (tradition). I do not agree; de Jong and I have discussed this at length. I believe that the difference in our perception of the Jolas’ understanding of their own complex spiritual and ritual world is partly linguistic. De Jong uses the French terms, “religion” and “tradition.” His Jola informants apparently apply these French terms differentially, with a distinction that does not exist—so far as I can tell from my own field work—when they speak in the Jola language. This underlines the important role of words, in the sense both of choice of terms and choice of languages, in intercultural sociocultural anthropology.

The above comments are intended as a means of engaging in dialogue with concepts presented in the book. I offer them in the spirit of respect due from an older scholar to a younger colleague who has demonstrated, in this work and elsewhere, both analytical insight and conceptual innovation. *Masquerades of Modernity: Power and Secrecy in Casamance, Senegal* is, in my estimation, an excellent work by an author who has earned a position of respect among cultural anthropologists of the contemporary Upper Guinea Coast.

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