

Life as a Hunt was produced with the humane intention of documenting vanishing practices, calling out disastrous interventions into historic life ways, and contributing to efforts to reform policy. Marks provides a wealth of material that leads the reader through many facets of Bisa society. The greatest value of the book lies in the middle chapters focused directly on hunting practices and featuring the conclusions Marks drew from his own fieldwork. Environmental historians and policymakers should pay attention to these lessons.

Nancy J. Jacobs
Brown University
Providence, Rhode Island
nancy_jacobs@brown.edu

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Kathryn M. de Luna. *Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. xvii + 332 pp. Maps. Table. Photographs. Illustrations. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$35.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-0300218534.

Collecting Food, Cultivating People is the history of central Africa from the time people speaking Bantu languages first set up home there three thousand years ago to the eighteenth century. As Elizabeth Colson notes in her foreword, this survey alone is a major contribution to the field. But Kathryn de Luna also presents a compelling argument against a linear understanding of the history of food production and forms of politics outside of states. Hunting and fishing were not remnants of a primitive economy that supplemented a diet grown in fields and in the bodies of domesticated animals. Instead, food production led to innovation in hunting and fishing technologies and to new categories of fame and reputation for men. Thus, especially talented men could cultivate communities of followers through gifts of bushmeat and skins and through their fame as hunters.

Three further aspects of the book deserve particular attention. First, in the introduction de Luna presents a useful summary of literature that demonstrates the persistence of evolutionary models in approaches to subsistence. The subsequent chapters offer a valuable historical approach to the history of food procurement that scholars will be able to adopt for other contexts. Second, de Luna shifts our perspective on the organization of “subsistence” economic activities. Hunting and fishing were not relegated to the dry season after people began growing cereal crops because they were of marginal importance. Rather, people made strategic decisions about how to distribute labor across seasons. In this, de Luna puts people back at the center of their economic history and argues against environmental or technological determinism. Third, de Luna argues that the “bush” is a socially constructed space, not a primordial one. This is a radical

argument, and we are presented with compelling evidence in support of it. Botatwe speakers in the late first millennium created a new vocabulary for the “bush,” naming it as a space they acted upon through new spear technologies. Thus, they made the bush in relation to other spaces they inhabited and used.

In the first chapter de Luna sets up the chronological and methodological framework for the book, including a clear and succinct discussion of the role of comparative linguistics in reconstructing the deeper history of oral societies. Chapter 2 sets the baseline for the key arguments she presents in the following chapters, from the social world of proto-Botatwe speakers to their cultivation of cereal crops and first knowledge of metallurgy before 750 CE. She then moves in chapters 3 and 4 into a discussion of fame and of bushcraft and social incorporation from 750 to 1250 CE. Finally, in chapter 5 she develops her argument about this region as a central frontier rather than a backwater from 750 to 1700.

The broad spans of time reflect a particular challenge de Luna faced, because the conservative nature of speakers of Botatwe languages often made intermediate reconstructions impossible. One way she overcomes the limitations of the sources is through the work of historical imagination. De Luna has written elsewhere about the importance of narrative in writing about the distant past, especially when individual actors are absent from the sources. She makes extensive use of evocative language to bring her anonymous actors to life on the page: “In the early eighth century, a young boy living in a village blessed with a metallurgist . . . would have heard the heaving, rhythmic whoosh of air forced through the bellows. . . . Such memories would have seemed incredible to his disbelieving adult granddaughters in the early ninth century” (129). The combination of empirical fact and imaginative rendering is a delicate balance to strike, but she so does successfully, bringing the history to life.

Given that the mobilization of particular forms of masculinity are central to de Luna’s argument, it would have been useful to have a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of gender in her study. And despite the clarity of her writing and the maps, it was at times difficult to keep track of the archaeological evidence in particular. For a nonspecialist the same might be true for the linguistic evidence. But these are minor complaints about what is a very impressive piece of work. It should be of significant interest to all scholars of precolonial Africa, but also to scholars of southern Africa of all periods and of agrarian and subsistence history within and beyond the continent.

Rhiannon Stephens
Columbia University
New York, New York
r.stephens@columbia.edu

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