BOOK REVIEWS

ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

Katrina Thompson. ***Popobawa: Tanzanian Talk, Global Misreadings.*** Bloomington: Indiana University, 2017. xii + 226 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $30.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-0253024565.

I first heard of Popobawa ("Batwing") during a class break at the Institute for Kiswahili and Foreign Languages (Zanzibar) in 2003. With a chuckle, a European scholar described a sodomizing bat demon that appeared most commonly during periods of anxiety surrounding elections. Some people, he explained, believed that Popobawa was sent by the CCM (Chama cha Mapinduzi, Tanzania's dominant political party) to suppress CUF (Civic United Front) voters.

Importantly, this interpretation is just one of many versions of the myth taken up in Katrina Daly Thompson's new book. Indeed, this review begins with *my* first hearing of Popobawa in order to underscore that Thompson's text is about the ways that local and global persons talk about the mythic creature, rather than an analysis of Popobawa per se. Instead, she uses linguistic and ethnographic methods to "examine the textual, linguistic, and generic features of versions of the legend from various geographical and social contexts and transmitted via different media" (13). Thompson uses a Bakhtinian approach to make sense of the polyphonic qualities of Popobawa stories, focusing on the dialogic (interactional) qualities of discourse and the use of metalanguage (i.e., rumors) to lend credibility to the myth or to position the speaker as an authority. She argues that talk about Popobawa creates opportunities for Swahili speakers "to critique and transgress cultural and linguistic norms and, by extension, power structures" (13).

Compellingly, Thompson suggests that because talk about Popobawa is inherently sexual—after all, the subject is a demonic rapist—it allows marginalized people such as women and homosexual men to discuss taboo topics and to engage in subtle criticism of sexual normativity, male hegemony, and political leadership. Popobawa, Thompson argues, is an appropriate topic for such transgression, in that much of the talk occurs within culturally sanctioned discursive forms like *utani* (a ritualized form of humor) and stories about spirits and spirit possession. Within these domains, Swahili speakers explicitly reference the unmentionable, describing, for example,

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the enormity of the demon's penis and prohibited sexual acts such as anal intercourse.

Thompson's sources include interviews with Zanzibaris, stories collected by the research assistant of the anthropologist Martin Walsh, and a variety of nonlocal sources including internet forums, a pop-documentary, a Kiswahili classroom in Mexico, journalists' accounts, and the academic work of other scholars. These latter sources demonstrate the global reach of Popobawa stories, but also how they become objects of humor because of Western assumptions about African superstitions.

Chapter 1 begins with the bold assertion that previous accounts have failed to explain "how Swahili-speakers actually make meaning from the legend . . . in their everyday lives" (17). Thompson stresses the importance of a dialogic analysis, arguing that both scholarly and popular interpretations have silenced Swahili voices. Chapter 2 examines the telling of Popobawa stories and pays particular attention to the ways that Kiswahili speakers construct themselves as experts. Chapter 3 focuses on how rhetorical forms such as narrative framing, localizing, the use of pseudo-witnesses (such as neighbors), and authoritative communication work to solidify the myth. The fourth chapter examines global and local joking about Popobawa. One local joke suggests that Popobawa's sexual attacks result in illicit pleasure for some "victims." Similarly, discussion of Popobawa in internet forums and a Mexican Swahili language classroom focus on the illicit content of the story, albeit with different levels of analysis. Thompson argues that in contrast with local jokes which provide spaces for Zanzibaris to discuss taboo topics, global jokes often mock African beliefs. The next two chapters describe how Popobawa talk (including jokes) provides opportunities in an otherwise conservative Muslim setting for discussion of queer identities (ch. 5) and for women to talk about sex (ch. 6). In chapters 7 and 8 Thompson reminds us that Popobawa stories are not static, but draw on local and global discourses and make intertextual nods to both Western vampire and local origin stories. Further, she argues that Popobawa is a global metanarrative (ch. 8) retold in an iconic fashion and analyzed by Western academics and popular critics through tropes (such as election panic, hypersexuality, or as a manifestation of sleep paralysis) that often treat Popobawa as an example of African irrationality.

Thompson's movement between local and global discourses demonstrates the importance of a phenomenon that could otherwise be viewed as exotic ethnographic trivia, while her theoretical orientation makes the text as relevant to linguistic anthropologists as to African studies scholars. Especially important is her understanding that marginalized individuals in Zanzibar do offer social critique. At times, however, the text is a bit ethnographically thin, relying on too few interlocutors. Also, the author might have developed the compelling idea that Popobawa talk is "an opportunity to share theories about ways one might protect oneself from the societal changes that give rise moral panics" (151). Finally, while Thompson's analysis of Western popular accounts is thorough, the book would have

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benefited from more attention to Tanzanian journalistic writing about Popobawa. Similarly, it does not address the increase in Popobawa stories on the Tanzanian mainland, including inland towns like Musoma where several attacks allegedly occurred in 2010. In short, this first book on Popobawa makes an important contribution and opens avenues for future scholarship.

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HISTORY

Paul Lovejoy. *Jihad in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016. xix + 396 pp. Photographs. Glossary. Orthography. Bibliography. Index. $90.00. Cloth. $34.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0821422410.

In *Jihad in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions* Paul Lovejoy argues provocatively that the West African jihads were a crucial part of the revolutions that altered world history in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and he criticizes Atlantic and world historians for not recognizing their role. The book is most persuasive, however, in its discussion of Sokoto and Bornu in northern Nigeria. Lovejoy argues convincingly in favor of a point that I made forty-five years ago; that the jihads were to a large degree a response to disruptions caused by the Atlantic slave trade. He also argues correctly that ethnicity was fluid.

The core argument of the book is that jihad leaders were opposed to the sale of Muslims, that many regimes banned the sale of Muslims to Christians, and that as a result the export of slaves from Muslim areas declined after the jihads. This argument—also made recently by Rudolf Ware III *(The Walking Qu'ran: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, University of North Carolina Press, 2014)—is supported by data indicating that after the Sokoto jihad (1804–1808), most of the slaves exported from Africa were from Central Africa and the Bight of Biafra, and thus were not Muslim. Lovejoy concedes, however, that while the major jihad leaders tried to stop the sale to Europeans, they were not always successful, and their successors were not always resolute. In the Fuuta Tooro, for example, there was a decline in revolutionary zeal after the death of founder Abdul Kader Kan in 1807. Lovejoy also discounts the importance of European diplomacy and naval action in shaping slave exports. The British navy did not at first act south of the equator, which allowed the continuation of a large slave trade from Central Africa to Brazil. Nevertheless, the French slave trade from Muslim Senegambia declined because of French policy in the 1820s and ended completely in 1831.