

ing – indeed, wanting to wear – them signaled to many their intention to reside in France, but with a reluctance to assimilate. This was thought to be an affront to French secular and civic values. The September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center exacerbated tensions, especially when attempts were made to ban the *hijāb* in public schools. Years of hearings and debate followed, and issues became inexorably conflated. Feminists disagreed if the *hijāb* was a symbol reifying alleged Muslim patriarchy or an expression of individual choice. And women were often stuck in the middle, facing taunts from Muslim men if they did not wear a headscarf, or unemployment or intolerance in mainstream French society if they did. The problem is not yet resolved, though the actions of some fundamentalist extremists seem to have encouraged many young Muslim women to compromise to show their solidarity with French values.

As another example, we are shown that “national security” (*segurança nacional*) in Brazil meant something different than in the United States during the height of the Cold War. According to the military theoreticians of the day – many of whom would be become active in the coup in 1964 – Brazilian security necessitated development, which was thought to also have to be addressed before political stability and economic advancement could come about. But this view of security/development meant a break with the previous policy of protecting local industries and national control of production towards an American-style free-market capitalism highly dependent on outside investment. How this could offer *more* security seems paradoxical. However, the Brazilians bought into the language of *in*-security popular in the United States at this time: global leftist elements have infiltrated the domestic sphere on many fronts, and are an insidious threat waiting to strike if robust steps are not taken.

However, for all the enthusiasm and novelty of the contributors, the book does leave the reader a little puzzled at the end, asking “What’s the point?” Just what should the lessons of these linguistic journeys be? The editors admit that these essays “do not add up to a single ‘story’ – which could be summed up as the postcolonial condition, the nature of the modern state, or the effects of post-Cold War geopolitics” (6). To simply claim that these terms all link to one another in multifaceted and unexpected ways is merely to state an obvious fact that could be attributed to *any* set of words, and is ultimately unsatisfying. For one thing, “Some of our words do not at first glance seem ‘key’ at all” (4), and this is indeed quite true. In fact, important words like “democracy” were intentionally eschewed as being too broad. So what were the criteria used to select a “word-in-motion?” This is never made clear, but they apparently emerged in discussions with particular authors offering particular choices. Cultural key word analysis is a notoriously tricky business, even within a single locale – as anthropologists (Naomi Quinn), linguists (Anna Wierzbicka), and literary critics (Raymond Williams) have demonstrated. The problems only become compounded when crossing borders.

Nonetheless, for all these limitations, this book offers many things to open-minded readers. The unpredictability

at times can be refreshing, as we see when words imposed on the powerless become a double-edged sword (“terrorists” becoming “freedom fighters” in India, for example). Also, the words-in-motion project highlights the contributions of “critical public intellectuals who shape ideas and institutions not just in their home nations but also between and beyond national space” (16). All the authors in this collection write with originality, wit, and flair, and deserve a wide audience.

James Stanlaw

**Gonzales, Rhonda M.:** *Societies, Religion, and History. Central-East Tanzanians and the World They Created, c. 200 B. C. E. to 1800 C. E.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. 257 pp. ISBN 978-0-231-14242-7. Price: \$ 55.00

The African societies considered in this author’s study are the Kaguru, Ngulu, Zigua, Luguru, Sagara, Vidunda, Kutu, Kwere, Zaramo, and Gogo. Toward the beginning of this book, the author states her purpose in presenting this volume: “If there is one frustration that historians of early history likely share when reading ethnographic accounts, it is the occasional tendency writers have to telescope the contents of their accounts into the deep past as if they were an omnipresent fixture of society. As tempting as it is to hypothesize about the likely roots of a cultural practice or idea based on its prevalence across distinct societies in the ethnographic present – and even though in fact such features commonly do represent continuities in ideas and such from times past – doing so without historical evidence amounts to conjecture. What reconstructed language evidence does is add weight to such inferences by showing that there were spoken words in early eras that named such practices and abstract concepts. And that is what this book is able to do, reconstructing word histories on the basis of the proposed language relationships and chronologies and considering them with published ethnographic accounts as well as ethnographic data collected by the author during fieldwork interviews” (9f.). These assertions typify much that is wrong with this annoying volume. What the author claims for this book actually amounts to very little, but these shallow claims are cloaked in a clutter of verbosity and pretension. First of all, it is very difficult to learn from what she tells us exactly what, if any, “fieldwork” she did or exactly where. If, as it appears, she merely interviewed a few people about some “key” words they knew in their native languages and did not actually “live” with any of these people in any rural area for any appreciable time, then I do not think she can have much grasp of what these people traditionally think or do in relation to the words they know. Getting a sense of this would seem important, since all her claims ultimately depend on her capacity to interpret the ethnography of others, an ethnography informed by actual observance of what it means to live an everyday life in rural, less modernized Africa. Second, I have read most of the material published on this area, and I do not believe that the ethnographers of these ethnic groups ever claimed that what they reported would apply to “ancient times.” At the most, they assumed that these beliefs and

practices reflected a way of life that existed for many recent generations, but that is far from claiming these ever pertained to “the deep past.” So the author is claiming, in a belittling way, to improve and correct authors who never erred in the ways she asserts. Indeed, such errors appear to be ones that more characterize the author herself, not these supposed ethnographers that she neither names nor cites. More important, I do not see how the author’s own method of collecting and reconstructing assorted “key” words in various languages can produce any detailed or dependable analysis about how people lived centuries ago because we cannot be sure how these constructed “ancient words” were meant. The changing or constant meanings of such words remain products of conjecture. Even archaeological data, which so far are pretty scanty for this part of Africa, can provide only slim understanding of what happened in the distant past, at least regarding the issues of religious beliefs that seem to concern the author. Without a written account from the past, what we can “know” depends on conjectural reconstruction of the past using the ethnographic data from the present, material amassed from recent decades by those who interviewed and lived with native peoples or who collected oral histories from them. Even the case of oral history (perhaps the most promising form of conjectural history) presents risky and debatable materials. The accounts the author gives about early African belief are entirely dependent on the ethnography she seems to imply needs her analysis to be historically significant. Yet she adds nothing to them but her own conjecture. Her efforts at glottal-chronology and related linguistic analyses may indicate some relationships between languages and may even suggest some of the movements of peoples who spoke them, although the relations between words and behavior or even words and who spoke them are debatable. Most of this pretentious and rambling volume is based on shaky and debatable conjecture not much different from the supposed claims she initially criticized as being asserted by ethnographers whose historical claims she never cites and, therefore, does not demonstrate. In any case, her claims do not appear to be based on a thorough command of the published literature on this area of East Africa. For example, the author bases much of her work on a consideration of the language of the Kaguru (a people I have studied for fifty years), yet she seems unaware that a dictionary of that language was published many years ago, as well as Kaguru translations of Christian hymns and one chapter of the New Testament, and more recently a large body of folklore, mostly published in German journals such as *Anthropos*. Surely such material should be considered by a linguist claiming to examine the nature of the Kaguru language and the meanings it has. Gonzales neglects all kinds of possibly relevant material involving the area of her immediate study while at the same time she cites seemingly irrelevant material from distant regions of the continent. What we have here is a somewhat arbitrary patchwork quilt of ethnographic bits and pieces, taken from many different ethnic groups, culturally related in some ways but drawn from spots hundred miles apart and reported by researchers of varying competence and at

vastly different periods of anthropological understanding. This hodgepodge is used to make diverse assertions about African beliefs and practices that are so general and obvious as to seem fatuous. For example, she tells us that all these Bantu language-speaking people employ ritual which relates to the veneration and propitiation of dead ancestors. We are told that these peoples all relate physical illness to both material conditions and supernatural forces. (She employs the inappropriate term “ethereal.”) We are told that a precarious physical environment, especially shortages of rain, led these peoples to employ rituals, hoping to secure a more promising environment. We are told that these peoples employ rituals of initiation for the indoctrination and control of adolescents and that these rituals often relate to issues of age and gender. One could probably make such general statements about preliterate peoples almost everywhere. She tells us that most of the peoples she considers are now or were in historical times predominately matrilineal. We do not, however, learn why this might be either interesting or important or even exactly what matrilineality involves. Some passages in her writing imply that she has new insights about these forms of kinship and social organization, interpretations that the ethnographers she examines missed. I doubt this considering the simplistic generalities she makes about kinship. Most of what she presents as valuable insights are actually commonplace generalities or dubious assertions that amount to little more than circular arguments. I could document my criticisms with copious quotes and analyses, but that would give too much space to a volume that does not merit that much attention. This is not a harmful volume, but it is not useful. The author seems to be well-intended, but I am perplexed about why a reputable university press published this. I am more perplexed by the shoddy format of the bibliography which would be a disgrace to any copy-editor. The use of African terms is inconsistent and departs, without explanation, from conventional usage. The writing itself needs extensive editing. How did a university press allow this?

I suppose that a library bound to purchase any and all works on an academic topic may want to purchase this, but I cannot recommend any individual paying the high price asked for this work. At best, the comparative word tables and the associated conjectural history about language relationships and the possible movement of the peoples who spoke these “reconstructed” earlier “proto-languages” might constitute a paper for some journal in historical linguistics, though only if the author provided more sustained, detailed, technical, and coherent arguments for the interpretations she makes. I cannot imagine that this book could teach any good East African scholar anything new about the beliefs or practices of the ethnic groups considered here. Whatever information may be useful in this volume has already been published elsewhere by the writers whom the author cites, and there in better focused and more useful forms.

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