

## Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa. By Kathryn M. de Luna. 2016. Yale University Press, New Haven. 332 pp.

Cory W. Whitney<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Bonn, Department of Horticultural Sciences, Bonn, Germany

\*cory.whitney@uni-bonn.de

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Kathryn de Luna is an assistant professor in the Department of History at Georgetown University and faculty member in the African Studies Program in the School of Foreign Service. Her recent work *Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa* stitches together her long-term and in-depth linguistic and ethnographic research of the Botatwe-speaking ancestors of the Tonga people of Zambia. The study draws on the findings of archaeologists, climate and ecological historians, and historical linguists (including de Luna's own rich work). In her book she uses reconstructed proto-vocabularies, ethnography, archaeological artifacts, genetic maps, and studies of past climates and related shifts to provide new interpretations of linguistic and archaeological history. This makes for a fascinating read and an important contribution to the field.

De Luna pieces together a rich historical narrative of Botatwe-speaking people and their linguistic predecessors, specifically the way they spoke about society, work, each other, and their role in hunting, fishing, wild-collection, and agriculture. Her story shows how innovation and adaptation helped the Botatwe to thrive in their changing social and environmental conditions. De Luna's work tells of the links between many social and ethnoecological phenomena such as the ecological landscape, hunting and wild collection, fame, talent, political authority, gender, language, and personhood. In particular, she describes the role of masculinity (in individual distinction and group association) and the role that it played in the development of cultural and political practices. She also outlines the importance of the

relationships to plants, animals, and material objects that these cultures depended on. Her story covers the history of south central Africa across nearly three millennia up to the recent pre-colonial past.

In De Luna's work we learn how political innovation in pre-colonial African farming societies depended on developments in food collection. Farmers' investment in food collection spurred the spread of crops in the savannahs of central Africa, as in many other parts of the ancient world. She gives a compelling argument against a linear understanding of the history of food production and politics. Hunting and fishing were not the remnants of a primitive economy that supplemented agricultural diets. Rather, agriculture supported innovations in hunting and fishing technology. In this way, new categories of fame and prestige (mainly for men) were established and the culture changed over time.

The first part of the book presents a useful summary of literature that demonstrates the persistence of evolutionary models in historical discussions of subsistence. It outlines the use of comparative linguistics in reconstructing the deeper history of oral societies. Chapters two through five provide a chronological history of the first Bantu-speaking peoples in the region, starting some three thousand years ago. We learn of the social and political lives of the proto-Botatwe speakers, the first occurrences of cereal agriculture and metallurgy around 750 CE, the role of cultural standing gained from fishing, hunting, and wild collecting from 750 to 1250 CE, and that the region became a central frontier from 750 to 1700.



De Luna's book may be of interest to language historians as well as those who study modern social and political movements. Other readers with more diverse interests may be left with a hunger for linkages between these historical findings and the modern day. Reference to modern day descendants of the Botatwe speakers and the issues that they face would have been useful for grounding the work in current affairs. Perhaps there are lessons for modern society from these ancient stories. Currently the region is experiencing unprecedented loss of food culture and traditional foods, which many international

agreements and development policies do not seek to address. Poverty and the damaging nature of modern capitalism and post-colonialism upend the lives of the descendants of Botatwe-speakers. Given de Luna's in-depth knowledge of the region and the topic it would be useful to have her input on current development perspectives and the role of present day masculinity and "anti-subsistence" development agendas. One can only hope that this will be the subject of some of her future formal or informal writing.