

***Muslim Women Sing: Hausa Popular Song.* By Beverly B. Mack.
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. Pp. 303, ISBN
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Muslim Women Sing: Hausa Popular Song. By Beverly B. Mack. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. Pp. 303, ISBN 0-253-21729-6)

In her recent publication, *Muslim Women Sing: Hausa Popular Song*, Beverly Mack explores song and poetry among Hausa women in Kano, Nigeria. Basing her observations on doctoral fieldwork conducted between 1979 and 1983 (with return visits to Nigeria in 1987 and 2002), Mack suggests that the frequently sung but seldom documented songs of Hausa women are integral to their daily life.

Upon arriving in Nigeria, Mack set out to collect praise songs performed by women associated with the emir of Kano. She soon realized however, that these songs were connected to non-royal praise songs and to other extemporaneous performances of non-praise songs. Further, following the advice from informant Hajiya Abba Bayero (the emir's third wife), she became aware that any study of Hausa women's song would be incomplete without a consideration of authors of written poetry. It was then that Mack expanded the scope of her research to include extemporaneous oral song and written poetry in addition to royal praise song.

Hausa women's song is most often performed in private, by and for Hausa women. Functionally, the performance of wakoki (pl. poetry, song) provides both performers and audiences with access to historical information, politics and current events, serving further to provide spiritual and educational fulfillment in their composition (4). While songs and texts may not be explicit in feminist intent, argues Mack, the content of wakoki reflects the changing roles of women within Hausa Muslim society (98).

While performances of wakoki are contextually distant from Qur'an recitation, and apparent thematic contradictions between religious didacticism and secular satire may be read in song texts, Mack suggests that influences from Islam and Western styles are nevertheless evident in Hausa women's song. The religious training of many poets has influenced their composition styles, with the Qur'an serving as the poetic basis for many written works (23). Orally composed works are also filled with invocations to God, but employ varying degrees of irreverent criticism and satire in their performances (80).

While extemporaneous oral song and written poetry are often perceived as a bawdy/illiterate versus moral/literate duality, Mack is

adamant that each informs the other, and that it is through this process that multiple interpretations are enabled, performer and audience connect, and deeper meaning is made possible.

Mack goes on to assert that while the practice of wife seclusion in Hausa Muslim life has often been interpreted as a means of curtailing female autonomy, the poetry and song of Hausa women demonstrates that their status is “neither subservient, static, nor stoic” (3). In her words, “the sanctity of the family and the woman’s primacy in this context turn western models of public-private dichotomies on their head” (7). Rather than stifling creativity and performative freedom, the private nature of female *wakoki* performance makes for greater freedom in terms of thematic content and delivery (both vocal and gestural). Mack suggests that Islam has encouraged, rather than discouraged, literary composition among women (4).

Muslim Women Sing is written in two parts: Part 1: “The Singers and Their World” and Part 2: “Songs and Poems.” The six chapters that comprise Part 1 examine the multifarious roles music plays in the lives of Hausa women, the relationship between poetry and song, literate and oral traditions, poets and singers, the function of metaphor, and the social functions of Hausa women’s song. Profiles of poets and singers are interspersed between chapters, complementing detailed chapter information with human faces and stories.

The provision of artist profiles is a useful formatting strategy; however, Mack’s detailed work might be well served by a few alterations. The poet/musician profiles, for example, might be more useful at the beginning of chapters than at the end, so that the reader is introduced to characters before they are referred to in the text. In addition, descriptions of musical instruments and performances inside the palace would be well served with the addition of illustrations. Mack’s descriptions are detailed, and “profile” sections include a few images; however, without a contextual knowledge of the emir’s palace, nor familiarity with Nigerian musical instruments performed in private contexts, the imagination is stretched to its limits when reading sections describing these spaces and objects.

While subheadings and chapter summaries are extremely useful in reading a book as full of details and new terminologies as this one, *Muslim Women Sing* may have been easier to follow with a clearer formulation of textual bookends. An introduction to the place/role of

the emir in Hausa society, and an explanation of how the harem functions, for example, might clarify some of the confusion that arises as Mack moves from street to palace and male singer to female in her contextual descriptions of Hausa song.

Probably the most glaring omission in this book is the absence of a concluding chapter to Part 1. While valuable observations are made throughout the text, and Mack has clearly done thorough and diligent research, opportunities for theorization and synthesis are not taken, leaving the reader hanging and perhaps slightly disappointed at the close of the first section.

The compact disc that accompanies the book is a valuable tool, including 34 tracks of Hausa song, with English translations provided in Part 2 of the text. This collection of Hausa song texts is carefully transcribed into English, allowing non-Hausa speakers a glimpse into themes and verbal structure in Hausa poetry and song. While it may have proven useful to include some of these translations when referring to them in Part 1, Mack's compilation of this body of songs offers a picture of Hausa women's song that is significantly more comprehensive than a smaller, more detailed sampling could provide. Useful additions to the second part might include a list of track numbers in the book itself (connecting the CD to the text), or track references to particular songs discussed in Part 1. With the absence of liner notes and clues for cross-referencing, Mack's valuable field recordings are not utilized to their full potential.

For readers interested in Islamic music cultures, Hausa women's song, and their respective interactions with poetic, religious and secular practices, this book will prove a useful resource. Further, while little theorization is engaged in addressing issues of gender and class, their implicit presence in Hausa women's song may pique the interest of others. The CD proves a rich, if not fully "tapped," complement to the text, and points to the extensive work that Beverly Mack has put into this project.

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