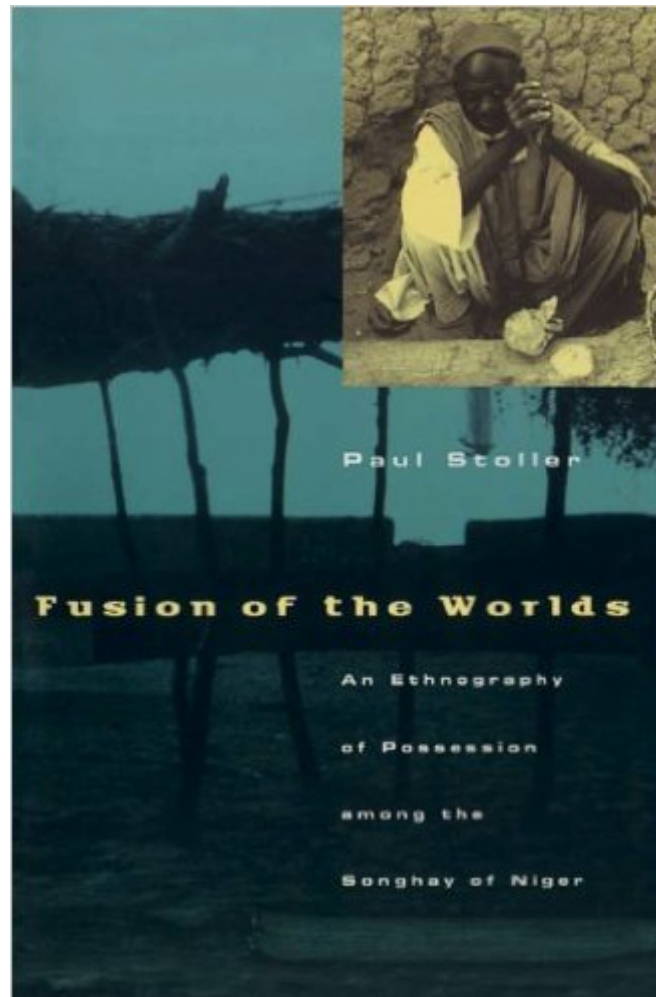


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Fusion Of The Worlds: An Ethnography Of Possession Among The Songhay Of Niger



Synopsis

"This ethnography is more like a film than a book, so well does Stoller evoke the color, sight, sounds, and movements of Songhay possession ceremonies."â "Choice"Stoller brilliantly recreates the reality of spirit presence; hosts are what they mediate, and spirits become flesh and blood in the 'fusion' with human existence. . . . An excellent demonstration of the benefits of a new genre of ethnographic writing. It expands our understanding of the harsh world of Songhay mediums and sorcerers."â "Bruce Kapferer, American Ethnologist"A vivid story that will appeal to a wide audience. . . . The voices of individual Songhay are evident and forceful throughout the story. . . . Like a painter, [Stoller] is concerned with the rich surface of things, with depicting images, evoking sensations, and enriching perceptions. . . . He has succeeded admirably." â "Michael Lambek, American Anthropologist"Events (ceremonies and life histories) are evoked in cinematic style. . . . [This book is] approachable and absorbingâ "it is well written, uncluttered by jargon and elegantly structured."â "Richard Fardon, Times Higher Education Supplement"Compelling, insightful, rich in ethnographic detail, and worthy of becoming a classic in the scholarship on Africa."â "Aidan Southall, African Studies Review

Book Information

File Size: 2585 KB

Print Length: 268 pages

Publisher: University of Chicago Press; 1 edition (February 16, 2010)

Publication Date: February 16, 2010

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B004HO5JEW

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #643,447 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #66

inÂ Books > History > Africa > Nigeria #335 inÂ Books > History > World > Religious > Ethnic & Tribal #762 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Africa

Customer Reviews

The skinny: Buy if you're an ethnographer, anthropologist, or if you are visiting Niger. Otherwise, skip. This ethnography is an academic upgrade to Stoller and Olke's *In Sorcery's Shadow*, which was their well-received memoir of Stoller's 10-year apprenticeship to a Songhay (Niger) sorcerers. Unlike the previous work of personal experience with more solitary sorcerers, *Fusion of the Worlds* attempts to show one spirit possession troupe's ability to operate in many different Songhay "worlds." That is, Stoller wants to show his readers how possession troupes often facilitate a variety of practices. These include the relationship between the individual and the group, remembering the past, engaging in political dialogue, relating Songhay religious practices with Islamic ones, and even negotiating rainfall. Possession troupes, like his from Tillabéri, Niger, are much, much more than performers--they are creating, maintaining, reflecting, identifying, mocking, celebrating, critiquing, and changing the Songhay world. Stoller claims they are fusing the world of the possession troupe and its performances with the rest of Songhay life. It is a mutually beneficial relationship, one which is actively and continually constructed by the troupe and its audience. Stoller uses large sections of quotation, either from tape-recorder transcriptions or field notes, and he argues that this is really the best way to understand the Songhay. This may be true, but it makes appreciating Stoller's thesis much more difficult. The long sections of stories can be enjoyable, but it can also be laborious for those of us who many read this book without a desire to learn the intimate details of Songhay life. It delays academic discussions to privilege the many stories that help show the troupe's activities.

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