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Baba Wagu Diakit. *The Hatseller and the Monkeys.* New York: Scholastic, 1999. 32 pp. $15.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-590-96069-4.

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Review of The Hatseller and the Monkeys

How many times and in how many different ways can a tale about a man who sells hats and gets them stolen by monkeys be told? More than once, and the tale will vary depending on the cultural context. In this version of the tale from Mali, West Africa, Baba Wagu Diakit has given us the traditional Fulani character, BaMusa, as the hatseller. The monkeys throw down some mangos to BaMusa who eats them, and with a full stomach is able to figure out how to get his hats back. The story suggests mutual dependency which is portrayed through the relationship beween the monkeys and BaMusa. Although the monkeys steal the hatseller's hats, they also force him to consider how to solve the problem of getting his hats back and they feed him. I

In Slobodkina's book, *Caps for Sale*, there is no hungry hatseller.[1] It is the hatseller's anger that is a catalyst to solving the problem. He throws the last remaining hat he has down to the ground and the monkeys follow him, throwing their hats down. One by one, he is able to retrieve his hats.

Both books are lovely, Slobodkina's illustrations presenting a European-style landscape, Baba Wagu Diakit's full-page color illustrations are based in West African life. Mutual help in the face of mischievous, playful deeds gives the book a distinctive West African flavor. Furthermore, children will love the book because of the sounds that pepper several of the characters' actions. One special aspect of the book is the author's explanation of the BaMusa character, and how the story fits into his Fulani culture. Moving from an oral to a written mode for such a lovely tale is the gift that Baba Wagu Diakit has given us with this book.

Note

[1]. Slobodkina, Esphyr. (1940, 1947). *Caps for Sale*. USA: Harper & Row Publishers.

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