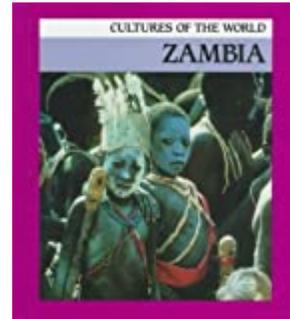


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Timothy Holmes. *Zambia*. New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1998. 128 pp. \$35.64 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7614-0694-5.



Reviewed by Agnes Ngoma Leslie (University of Florida)

Published on H-AfrTeach (January, 2000)

This book, which attempts to describe the geography, history, politics, economy and lifestyle of Zambia contains numerous flaws and stereotypic images of Zambia. The cover is a picture of Zambian youngsters with painted faces wearing cultural dress. Actually one has a higher chance of seeing the Amish in the United States, than the youngsters with painted faces in a traditional ceremony in eastern Zambia. Similarly, the first picture in the introduction shows thatched roof houses and does not bear a caption. This may give the impression to the reader that this is typical housing in Zambia. In fact the thatched roof houses are part of an open museum known as the Kabwata Cultural Village in Lusaka.

Although the author notes that the greatest contrast among the people is the level of sophistication of modern cities compared to the subsistence farmers, this is not balanced with pictures. Only 15 pictures show aspects of modern city life compared to more than 60 pictures which show subsistence and rural life. For instance, his introduction shows thatched roof houses. The "contents" pages which follow are laid out with a picture of a boy without a shirt on one page and a woman with a baby on her back cultivating the land on the other.

Further, while the author writes about "brightly lit air-conditioned modern supermarkets" we see five half-page pictures of people selling food in the open air but

none that portrays modern supermarkets. Although the author writes that Lusaka has many restaurants of "international standard," this description is coupled with a picture of a woman cooking on a tiny brazier in an unattractive setting! Similarly, although the author talks about the "stunning coiffures" and "intricate" hairstyles that Zambians wear, this paragraph is coupled with an unflattering example from the 19th Century which does not portray the beauty of the contemporary hairstyles.

The book also contains misleading statements. In the introduction the author claims: "The present nation was formed by the mixing of peoples from all parts of the country around Zambia's copper mining industry, which propelled the society into the modern world." Although it is true that the Copperbelt formed the political basis of the nation, Zambia was not formed solely by "mixing" of its people there. Other towns outside the Copperbelt, including Lusaka, were also important arenas for its political development.

The author's usage of words such as "tribe" and "Bantu" is disturbing and confusing. He refers to Bantu as an "ethnic group." He says: "Most Zambians belong to a single ethnic group, the Bantu, but speak different languages." However, "Bantu" does not refer to any one language or people, but to the group of more than 400 languages in a family that traces its descent to proto-Bantu

speech, in which the word “ntu” means person.

The chapter on religion is also misleading. The author says that the supreme god “goes by Lesa and other names.” “Lesa” is “God” in the Bemba language, just like God is “Dieu” in French. It is incorrect to say that God goes by “other names” in Zambia: each language has its word for “God”, Lesa being the Bemba word, Mulungu in the Ngoni language, etc.. The author also says chiefs are priests. In rare cases, chiefs may be priests, but this cannot be generalized. Chiefs carry out political functions and priests carry out religious functions. The author also gives the impression that there is one “traditional Zambian religion.” He says: “In traditional Zambian religion, death was brought about by a reptile, the chameleon.” There is no one traditional Zambian religion. He also says each household has its own spirits. One wonders what the author means by “spirits.” Each household may have its own beliefs which do not depart very far from the community’s beliefs, but each household does not have its own “spirits.” The picture of a white missionary and a black man kneeling and holding a bible while looking at a black female Zambian unintentionally may reinforce the stereotypic image of whites “civilizing” blacks.

The author refers to Archbishop Milingo, who was removed by the Pope from Zambia for practicing spiritual healing. However, the author neglects to mention that although Archbishop Milingo was removed from his see for practicing spiritual healing, he has continued to practice spiritual healing in Rome. In his reference to the Catholic Church and Protestant churches cooperating, the author claims the churches “cooperate in producing a weekly newspaper, the National Mirror.” The churches do not

produce the newspaper. They established it. The newspaper has its own staff who produce it independently.

With regard to the arts, the author says that the one-party state in Zambia, inhibited artistic expression. In fact, the one-party state insisted on playing ninety percent Zambian music on the radio and put emphasis on featuring local artists on television, including the program “Play for Today.” This led to the growth of Zambian music and local theater development. It was also during the era of the one-party state that traditional cultural ceremonies were resurrected including N’cwala in Eastern Province, and Mutomboko in Northwestern Province.

In reference to the language. The author’s guide to pronunciation is incorrect with reference to words such as “ntu” (“in-too”) or “nsapato” which he pronounces as “in-sa-pah-too.” In both cases, the correct pronunciation does not have “i” at the beginning. “Izintu” is simply “zintu” meaning things.

In sum, the style of the book is simple with lots of colorful pictures. The chapter on geography is quite attractive with beautiful pictures of the Victoria Falls, the Zambezi River, animals, birds and lush vegetation. However, as he moves to people and lifestyles, the author’s portrayals tend to be stereotypic. There are also numerous flaws, some of which I have pointed out. Given the errors and the stereotypic images, I do not recommend this book.

Copyright (c) 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-aftrteach>

Citation: Agnes Ngoma Leslie. Review of Holmes, Timothy, *Zambia*. H-AfrTeach, H-Net Reviews. January, 2000.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3691>

Copyright © 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.