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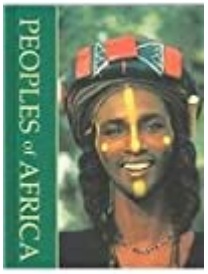

Fiona Macdonald, ed. *Peoples of Africa.* Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2001. 648 pp. $471.36 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7614-7158-5.

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Peoples of Africa is an eleven volume set of books that provides historical, cultural, political and economic information on each of Africa's nations from Volume 1 (Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana) to Volume 10 (Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Western Sahara, Zambia, Zimbabwe). Volume 1 introduces the series with an eight-page overview of African history and a reader's guide that describes how the chapters and indices are structured. Volume 11 includes a bibliography for further reading, four websites, some fictional sources, references on music, a pronunciation guide, a list of national days, a biographical index, a geographic index, an index of religions and religious ceremonies, and an index on sports and games. A glossary at the end of each volume provides definitions of terms used in the chapters. For example, in Volume 9 the terms defined include apartheid, brideprice, chutney, faith healer, millet, socialism, veld.

The chapters on individual countries vary from 3-5 pages (for example, Cape Verde, Western Sahara) to around 10 pages (Ivory Coast, Libya), to 15 pages (Kenya, Mali) to 20 pages (Nigeria, South Africa). These differences in length mirror to some degree the realities of the American social studies curriculum as most teachers do give more attention to Egypt, Nigeria or South Africa than to Chad or Niger. Each chapter begins with a map, information on climate and geographic and historical overviews. A timeline of major events runs across the bottom of these pages.

The rest of each chapter focuses on different ethnic groups and content about their ways of living, with some attention given to topics that are unique to the country ("Boats of Papyrus" in the chapter on Chad, "Dogon Villages: Religion Dictates Layout" in Mali). Many chapters have sections on words in a local language ("Let's Talk Chichewa" in the chapter on Malawi), recipes (for Bourek in Egypt), or celebrations/ceremonies ("Masks of the Giant" of the Mbwela in Angola). Most chapters have sections on religious beliefs, food, music, and art/crafts. In some chapters there are sections on natural resources, comparisons of rural and urban life, farming, education, or housing. The authors address recent or ongoing conflicts in several chapters (for example, Sierra Leone and Rwanda) and don't shy about from sensitive subjects (for example, "female genital cutting" p. 250 and p. 463). Color photographs or graphics are on almost every page.

The books provide an introduction to African nations and peoples that will be very useful for teachers who teach middle level world geography or world area studies or, possibly, world history courses that many school districts require for 6-9th grade social studies. School li-

brarians will want the series for their schools for student research and teacher reference. Given the constraints of space, the authors have selected content that is relevant for the standard curriculum. The historical overviews, cultural information, the glossy photos, timelines, and the insert formatting are visually appealing and content-driven. The bibliographies (very mainstream books), indices and glossaries will be helpful for student research. There is a good balance between commonalities across the chapters and attention to topics special to individual nations. Overall the series is attractive, informative, and easy to use.

One of the perennial problems faced by educators who teach about Africa is resources that reinforce stereotypes and misconceptions by focusing on the most "exotic" of the continent's peoples (the Masai, the San, etc.) or by using colonialist/imperialist perspectives, language and derogatory terms ("Bushmen," "huts," "witchdoctor"). This series avoids the worst stereotypes and misinformation and, for the most part, provides accurate information. The series makes it clear that all Africans are not the same as it lists diverse ethnic groups and languages and highlights some of their customs and beliefs. There is some attention to African resistance to European oppression and to current conditions in the countries. The authors explain (p. 25 and elsewhere) how Europeans ignored where African societies were living when they decided national borders and split up homogeneous groups of people across two or three countries. The authors, for the most part, have not glossed over the problems of ethnic conflict, poverty, or political instability. In places there are explanations that include different points of view (for example, on FIS versus the Government, p. 7).

We are disappointed with what is missing from the series. Even if they read every word, teachers and students will still have no comprehension of the daily lives and perspectives of average people in any country, nor will they understand the ways in which Africans are connected to other parts of the world. They will miss some the most important lessons to be learned about Africans and Africa's place in the world. They won't understand how the inheritance of colonialism lives on today in trade, agriculture, industrialization, politics, education, and in what Ngugi wa Thiong'o [1] calls the "colonised mind." They won't see the significance of Islam as a political and cultural force on the continent, understand the importance of extended families in people's lives or have any idea of why there are extremes of wealth and poverty within most African countries. Most people just sound terribly poor as one reads through the books.

Although there are places in the text where it would be easy to do so (p. 460, for example), the authors do not explain the historic and on-going effects of the Cold War on African peoples. Therefore students reading the series will gain no understanding of how people in Somalia, Ethiopia, Congo, Angola–to name a few places–have been affected by American and Soviet (and Cuban) proxy wars, military aid, intervention in politics, and oil interests. In the same vein, students will not learn about the impact of world markets and multinationals on African people's abilities to improve their lives or the ways in which the education of girls and women can effect social and economic change.

There is little attention to the unique development and characteristics of industrialization and manufacturing on the continent. Students will not understand why some countries export raw materials (coffee, for example) and then import processed goods (instant coffee), instead of having local industry process the raw materials within the country. There is no explanation of the significance of foreign investment or the International Monetary Fund in the lives of people. Instead jobs are listed vaguely, as in herders of cattle, farmers, market traders, laborers, (p. 258) without any description or explanation as to what these terms mean in terms of education, work, lifestyle, or standard of living. All African farmers (or miners or fishermen, etc.) are not the same. In many African countries there is a wide socio-economic range with wealthy farmers, middle class farmers, and people who farm who can barely feed their families. Many people who have other jobs (teachers, nurses, clerks) also grow some crops for themselves or have farms back in their home town.

The chapters separate indigenous African beliefs from Christianity and Islam as though there is no integration of beliefs, values, and customs in people's lives. This compartmentalization of belief systems ignores the syncrety of African systems of thought, which is a very significant factor in understanding Africans across the continent. A Mende man in Sierra Leone who becomes a Roman Catholic does not forget other beliefs his family has taught him but integrates them with Christian practices into his life. One major problem within the series is the dichotomies it teaches: rural/urban, traditional/modern, European/African when such sharp distinctions do not exist in people's lives today.

The series presents African history and cultures through European/American perspectives which constrain the opportunity for students to learn how Africans view their histories or explain their cultures. There are no

African voices– no inclusion of the work of African historians, no primary sources, no excerpts from a whole continent's literature, much of which is available in English. Since we believe Americans need primary sources from Africans themselves, we see these omissions as a serious weakness in the series. Even in discussing protest songs in Algeria (p. 8) or Kenyan writers (p. 257), the authors do not include lyrics or excerpts written by Africans. Very few African men or women, either in the historical sections or as contemporary leaders, writers, inventors, or scholars, are given more than cursory attention. In many sections, we see the authors as sympathetic to Europeans, as in the South Africa section, "Whites and Africans Collide" (p. 472). Throughout the series injustices, even atrocities, that Europeans committed have been ignored or glossed over. Either the authors have not studied Africanist scholarship and read widely or they have ignored much.

At times the authors' language and perspectives raise questions. For example, on p. 33 the Fon and Adja are described as "very poor." What does "very poor" mean in the context of Benin? Is the author comparing them to other people in Benin? Are they poor compared to Americans? On p. 18 in the timeline "Portuguese discover the mouth of the Congo River…". The Portuguese may have come to the river for their first time but saying they discovered it implies no humans had been there before. "Traditional" is use to describe everything from housing, dance, music to where people live (p. 86). Yet the authors never explain what it means. Do we refer to traditional housing the U.S.? Traditional dances? The series would be strengthened if descriptive words were used in place of "traditional." We wonder if the authors actually have read through the list of their headings as so many reinforce negative stereotypes: "Monrovia: High Rises and Shacks," "Concrete and Mud, Caves and Tents," Poverty Aplenty," "Conflict Brings Chaos," "A Troubled Modern State," "Stolen Diamonds," "Perfume and Poverty," " A Decade of Genocide," "Independence and Corruption," "A Crowded Country," etc. The sections on eating caterpillars (p.43, p. 486) are an example of the problem of using the extraordinary instead of the usual. Many topics, such as brideprice (p. 503), the Yoruba creation story, female "genital cutting," scarring (p. 498), are presented through western perspectives, which do not help young Americans understand Africans. The effect is a continuation of the colonialist tradition where Africans are constructed and explained through European or American lenses as though they are not competent to describe their own history or explain their cultures (see Willinsky's *Learning to Divide the World* [2]).

Photographs are very important as those images are often more lasting in students' minds than any text. Many of the photos are excellent as they capture average people today going about their lives. We believe, however, there is an overabundance of photos that portray what some call traditional or exotic Africa. This overemphasis of the photos on "traditional" festivals, clothing, dancing, and minority groups simply does not represent the realities of the majority of African people today and therefore is quite misleading. For young Americans this overabundance will reinforce media stereotypes of Africans as exotic and unchanging and could easily lead to assumptions that African cultures are static and are not developing new artforms, new music, new dances- which is not true (and even noted in the text - but no photos). There are relatively more photos of minority groups that have more traditional lifestyles than there are of the groups who are in the majority. For example, in the chapter on Botswana, there are photos that show a San mother and child and another of a Kgaladagadi family, two of the very small "traditional" ethnic groups, yet not one photo identifies a family of Tswana people despite their making up the vast majority of the population. The incredible number of photos of festivals and so-called traditional dress in the series would skew anyone's perception of African peoples. For example, in the South African section, there are seven photos showing people in festivals, dancing, or "traditional" clothes, and only five photos of people doing other things and wearing their regular clothes. What is a 13 year old to think?

Sections entitled "everyday life" do not describe daily life. They sometimes provide demographic data (for example, on p. 419 "95 percent of Rwandans live in the countryside"), very abstract generalizations about rural/urban differences (p. 70, "In rural areas most Cameroonians still live much as their parents and grandparents did."), about employment (p. 70 "Here, most people live by trading, working in industry or in services, or by making things."), or food (p. 254, "Kenyan food is a reflection of the wide variety of ethnic groups in the country), or religion (p. 255, "Over 60 percent of the population follows Protestant or Roman Catholic Christianity."). Since these books will most likely be used by middle school students, these generalities may mean little compared to the thick description of a day in the life of a 12 or 13 year old or a description of an actual family and their daily routine. By keeping to generalities instead of providing illustrations or details, the authors have lost an opportunity for young people to learn which industries

and services are in the countries, and what "living much as parent and grandparents" actually means.

The authors use the term "Bantu-speakers" in many chapters (for example, pp. 17, 37, 65) instead of actually naming specific ethnic groups. Bantu is a linguistic grouping Europeans made as they classified African languages. The way it is used here will probably mislead middle school students who may logically assume people who are labeled "Bantu-speakers" are the same people when they are not, and they may assume they are called Bantu people, which they are not. If there is a second edition, we strongly suggest the term Bantu-speakers be omitted.

There are mistakes. For example, several of the pronounciations of Ndebele and Zulu words are incorrect, "pumwe" (p. 453) is from Mende not "Tembe," ugali is never made of beans (p. 516). There are omissions. The Nyakyusa are one of the major ethnic groups in Tanzania and not mentioned at all.

There is no explanation as to the target audience of the series. In reading through the volumes and thinking about where Africa is taught in the curriculum, we have hypothesized that the series will be used mainly at the middle school level, with some elementary or high school teachers adapting it for their students. Yet we wondered if the authors assume middle school teachers will want to discuss "female genital cutting" with their seventh graders.

We could find no information on the five contributing authors, their institutions, their scholarship on Africa, or their experiences on the continent. On the copyright page, the department and institution is given for one consultant, Bryan Callahan, but not the other consultant. Given the network of American and African K-12 teachers, scholars, and outreach coordinators in the nation's Title VI African Studies centers, we expect some Africanist educators to be involved or consulted in a series of this kind.

There are no references or footnotes on the sources used for demographic data (population, ethnicity, health, education, etc.), cultural or historical information. Since some of the data appear to us to be quite dated or inaccurate, this omission is significant.

Given the hundreds of websites that allow teachers and students to interact with African peoples in labor unions, political parties, environmental groups, women's organizations, schools, etc., we expected more than four websites to be recommended. Despite its weaknesses, the series is recommended for middle schools.

References

[1]. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the mind.* (London: James Curry, 1986).

[2]. J. Willinsky, *Learning to divide the world: Education at empire's end* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).