

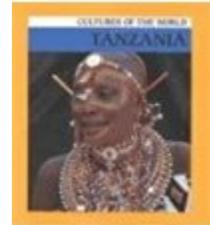
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Jay Heale. *Tanzania*. Tarrytown, New York; London; Sydney: Marshall Cavendish, 1998. 128 pp. \$35.64 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7614-0809-3.

Reviewed by Paul H. Thomas (Hoover Institution Library, Stanford University)  
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## Tanzania for Young Readers

Jay Heale initially published several books in and about South Africa, and more recently, in the same series as the title under review, also about Congo (Democratic Republic), Madagascar, Poland and Portugal. This volume is nicely illustrated with lots of color maps and pictures that provide a good idea of what rural Tanzania and its people look like. There are relatively few images of urban Tanzania, however; but then we are told by the author that 85% of Tanzanians live in rural areas, so evidently the author feels it is not necessary for his readers to see much about how urban life in Tanzania appears.

The book begins with a physical description of Tanzania its geography, flora, fauna the type of things one would expect in a book such as this one. Heale then turns to history, government and economics and does a creditable job covering a lot of material in very short space. References to the parliamentary system may confuse American children not familiar with it. Also, it may have been rather charitable of him, when describing Nyerere's policies, to state that his socialism did not bring the economic success he had hoped for – but that may be the price one pays for trying to simplify complex issues for children.

He then spends close to half the book describing the people of Tanzania and their culture, with chapters covering various lifestyle topics such as religion, food and leisure. This may constitute the most interesting part of this publication for young readers. The section on the lingua franca of East Africa, Swahili, is relatively detailed for what one would normally expect in a children's book,

for example. Small details of daily life even include sections on such things as eating out although the Tanzanian experience is unlikely to be very similar to what the intended audience for this book may be used to. The chapter on food even includes a recipe for making ugali, a local corn porridge. The book also includes a section called "quick notes" that gives some brief information about Tanzania such as the name of the capital, its major exports, main rivers, etc. Also appended is a glossary of terms, a bibliography of five titles and an index.

While the author has packed a lot of information into this book, some of it could have been stated differently. It is unfortunate, for example, that traditional ethnic groups are still referred to as "tribes" (p.53), or the people, collectively, as "black Africans" (as opposed to non-black Africans, presumably the "small numbers" of Europeans and Asians he mentions?). And while one always expects some simplification, it is also unfortunate that in a section that briefly describes different ethnic groups, the Swahili, in the two sentences they are given, are described as looking "more brownish gold than black and their bone structure [showing] a more European profile" (p. 54). Along the same lines, one cannot help feel that an author is always on slippery ground when trying to describe "national characteristics"; and it would especially appear to be so when Tanzanians are described as being "quick to smile" but also as a people who "can be reserved in bestowing friendship" (p. 56). One cannot help but wonder on what basis the author makes this claim.

Indeed, there appears to be a tendency towards de-

scribing what Westerners would characterize as the more exotic aspects of Tanzania. Certainly there are many pictures of Tanzanians in traditional garb (not the least of which is the cover of the book itself). In a book like the one under review, it is important not only to emphasize how people in another part of the world look and act differently from “us,” but also to point out where and how we are similar. Whereas differences highlight the “otherness” of people being described, similarities underscore the universality of human nature.

One certainly cannot accuse the author of glossing over any of the less pleasant aspects of Tanzania, whether it is government corruption, the lack of economic development or the place of women in society. He repeatedly provides a less than enchanting view of urban life in particular. “Street kids and beggars live a desperate and degrading life,” (p. 64) and makes the point that city jobs are so scarce “the government has been known to take truckloads of people, sometimes at gunpoint, back to the rural areas” (p. 64). When describing the place of women in Tanzanian society, the author writes, “The place of women, forever in the field or kitchen, is essential to the economy but has no apparent cash value” (p. 68). If by

that he means that Tanzanian women are not paid a wage for keeping house, that is hardly unique to Tanzania or even to Africa. And while it is no doubt meant to provide an example of the low status of women in Tanzania, one wonders if the author needs to quote a parliamentarian who states: “Beating a wife is similar to providing maintenance to a car. It corrects the problem, at least for a time” (p. 69).

Overall, this really is not a bad book, although it probably should be used with caution. It is obviously written by an author with a Western cultural viewpoint and does not do as much as it could to dispel many of the cultural stereotypes of Africa held by Westerners. Nevertheless, given the long and fairly detailed and interesting chapters on daily life in Tanzania, something that should prove of interest to children, I would still recommend this volume for inclusion in children’s collections, albeit with some misgivings.

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