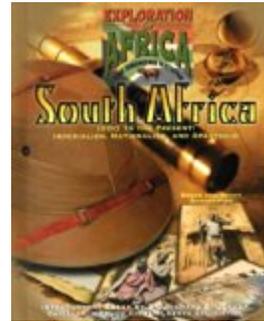


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Bruce Durost Fish, Becky Durost Fish. *South Africa, 1880 to the Present: Imperialism, Nationalism, and Apartheid*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2001. 144 pp. Ages 10 up. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7910-5676-9.

Reviewed by Agnes Ngoma Leslie (University of Florida)
Published on H-AfrTeach (February, 2002)



This book is about the early exploration and occupation of South Africa. It focuses mainly on South Africa, although the authors have included a few accounts of other countries in the region, including Botswana, Zambia, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The book starts quite abruptly with a Zulu force armed with spears and outdated firearms having defeated the British with their “modern rapid-firing field guns.” After the defeat of the British, the book focuses on the arrival of the Boers and white control of southern Africa. The authors include lengthy accounts of the history of missionaries, including David Livingstone and Robert Moffat. They also give short summaries of some of the ethnic groups, including the Khoi Khoi, the Tswana, Zulu, Ndebele and Lozi. In some cases, the authors point out some of the stereotypical attitudes of the Europeans towards Africans. Unfortunately, the authors of this book display similar attitudes. For example, the book has some unflattering pictures of Africans taken by a British explorer, Chauncy Hugh Stigand, on his hunting expeditions. Three pictures depict Africans with the following captions: “Pictured here is Chauncy Stigand’s guide standing beside a sable antelope” (p. 45) and “These servants (at least twelve African men and women) accompanied Chauncy Stigand on his Okavango Hunting Trip (p. 49). Except in a few instances, many of the pictures show Africans naked or semi-naked and in subservient positions. The use of the pictures in most cases is questionable since they bear no relationship to the text. On page 91, for example, in the middle of a discussion of the Lozi protectorate, a nude picture of a child with the caption, “An Eastern Bantu Child, 1908,” suddenly appears. Interestingly the child does not look like a “Bantu” child. Likewise page 47 shows “Tswana” women who seem more

like indigenous Australians. On page 120, two African men stand with one holding a fish but they are not identified. The caption is devoted to the “tigerfish” which seems misplaced next to the page titled, “South Africa Transformed.”

Although the book discusses nationalism and apartheid, resistance to apartheid is only briefly touched on in the last three pages, where Nelson Mandela’s name is mentioned for the first time. He suddenly becomes president and retires in the same sentence! While John Cecil Rhodes had a whole chapter dedicated to him, and Robert Moffat and David Livingstone share an entire chapter, with detailed accounts of their lives and families, Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, and Desmond Tutu are only briefly mentioned in a few concluding pages. There are also some general assertions which may be misleading, such as the claim that by 1830s, many chiefdoms in southern Africa had disappeared and that starving people turned to cannibalism. While there may have been isolated cases of cannibalism, it is erroneous to generalize or suggest that this was the norm. The authors also use pejorative words such as “tribes,” “Bantu huts,” and “ancestor worship.”

Although the book has just been published in 2001, it offers little to the volumes that have been published on the subject. The last chapter on “South Africa Transformed,” which could have offered more insights, provides little information. For example, they devote only two sentences to the Soweto Uprisings: “Thousands of children in Soweto demonstrated on June 16, 1976. This sparked a year-long cycle of protests followed by repression.” It would be hard to resist the temptation to compare the authors’ treatment of European exploration and

occupation to the very brief Africans' resistance. The important events and people whose actions led to the transformation of South Africa are ignored or underplayed. These shortcomings as well as the poor depictions of Africans are unacceptable.

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