Book Reviews

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Biography

Leo Zeilig

Voices of Liberation: Patrice Lumumba.
224 pp. R210/£55.00 pap. ISBN 9780796924254

Leo Zeilig’s Patrice Lumumba: Voices of Liberation is divided into four sections: Patrice Lumumba’s life, his voice, other voices and his legacy in that order. The sections on other voices comprises copies of three letters by Kwame Nkumah to Lumumba, Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre’s writings about Lumumba, Juliana Lumumba (Lumumba’s daughter) and Ludo de Witte’s (author of The Assassination of Lumumba) interviews on Lumumba, and a tribute to Lumumba by the Indonesian poet, Saharsatoso Antanaguna. The section on Lumumba’s legacy talks about on the contemporary events in the Congo as well as parts of Africa, while the section on his voice contains 14 of his press statements and public addresses.

The section on his life outlines his initial ambivalent views on independence and, what was to cause his murder, his final resolute views on independence for the Congolese. How I wish that this most engaging section was less episodic and more cohesive as a narrative on his life.

Here Lumumba’s life, as well as the tragedy that eventually befell him, is intertwined with the brutal history of deceit and pillage that had roots in Henry Morton Stanley who had several chiefs in the Congo “hand over sovereignty by signing treaties” (p.8) they did not understand because they were illiterate in the name of Leopold, the king of Belgium. This context of deceit and pillage informed the colonial relationship between Belgium and Congo. Disadvantageous to the Congolese, the relationship was marked by exploitation through brutally expropriating resources such as ivory, land and rubber and ruthless recruiting labour by business concessions and, later, the state.

Zellig points out that Congolese resistance to exploitation and oppression had its stamp on the history of this relationship, however, to the extent that it had resulted in “massive genocide” (p.10) shown in the changing fortunes of the total population of the Congolese in a space of 35 years: 20 million (1891), 8.5 million (1911) and 10 million (1924). Despite the resistance, however, exploitation and oppression carried the day as a wide network of Western business interests joined Belgium in impoverishing the Congolese. Thus, as a combination of American, Belgian and British companies made massive profits from exports and mining, “between 1890 and 1960 not a single Congolese had been trained in law, medicine or any higher profession” (p.11).

1960 is the year that Congo regained its independence, which would lead to the brutal murder of Lumumba who, acting contrary to Western interests and, consequently, beleaguered by external and internal forces, wanted the independence to be meaningful to a people long exploited and oppressed. Showing the conspiracy hatched by these interests and embedded in internal treachery and secessionist adventures to eliminate him, this book both keeps alive his memory that the executioners intended to obliterate and is worthy reading in the age of “neo-liberalism” (p.184).

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Cookery

Xoliswa Ndoyiya with Anna Trapido

Ukutywa Kwasekhaya. Tastes from Nelson Mandela’s Kitchen.
175 pp. R325/$26.95 hardback ISBN 97819986996818

Ukutywa Kwasekhaya means “home food” in isiXhosa, the first language of South Africa’s former president, the late Nelson Mandela, and his personal chef of many years, Xoliswa Ndoyiya. This book is a collection of Xoliswa’s favourite recipes that she prepared for Mr Mandela and his family, friends, visiting heads of state, celebrities and politicians, for over 20 years. Each recipe is accompanied by a colour photograph and a quotation or anecdote from someone who is either especially fond of the dish or who has a special memory to relate or story to tell. Mr Mandela had simple tastes in food; often preferring traditional dishes, eating fruit for dessert, for example, and porridge for breakfast. Some of the dishes include amngqumbo