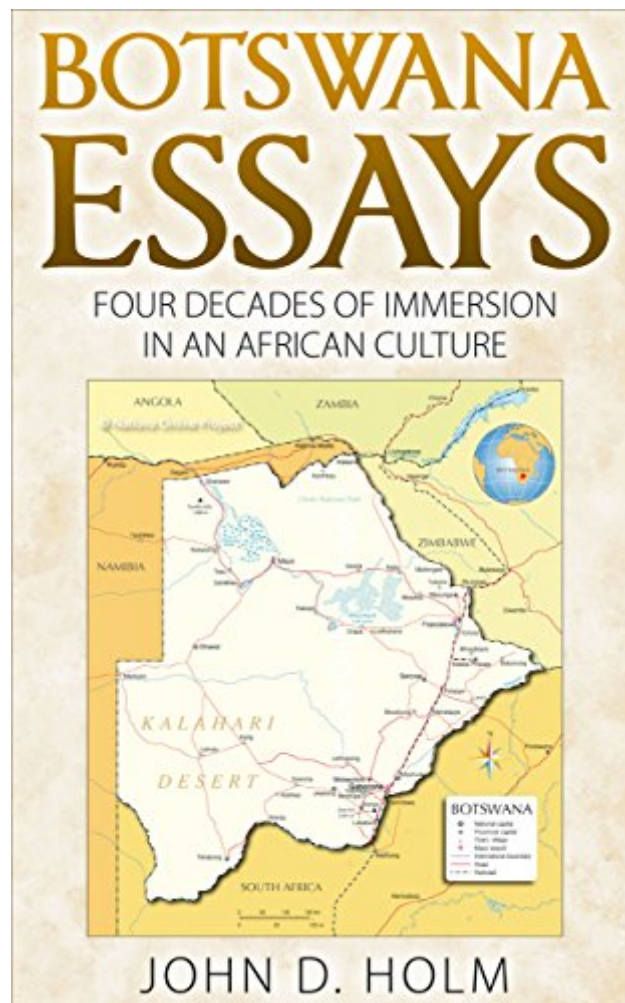


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Botswana Essays: Four Decades Of Immersion In An African Culture



Synopsis

This collection of essays critically examines common perceptions the developed world has about Africa. The author, using his experience of living and working in Botswana and, to a lesser degree in other African countries, argues for a more nuanced portrayal of the dynamics of significant forms of African social interaction. In metaphoric terms, his intention is to take the charming images of Botswana presented by McCall Smith in his *The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency* novels and add to these images a more balanced structure and meaning—combining the enchanting and amusing with the troubling and confounding. The essays are intended for two audiences. One is citizens of Botswana and students of the country who are interested in reflecting on the extent to which rapid modernization since independence has transformed social relations. The other audience is readers intent on obtaining a keener sense of ways a modernizing African society is different from the developed world. This latter group includes students and travelers who want to consider some underlying forces they may observe with a sustained immersion in a developing country, and particularly Botswana. The discussion in each essay is founded largely on experiences the author has had in a wide range of contexts. He seeks to weave these experiences into one or more generalizations about the way in which Botswana society works in a particular environment. In the process he raises questions about prevailing perceptions that the developed world has of less-developed countries. He admits in the course of most essays to have himself once held some version of these developed-world misperceptions. The topics covered are ones which are highly contested in both public and private discussions within Botswana. The specific focus of the various essays are as follows: Rejection of market values at the cattle post Critical role of “face time”—above all other means of communications Meaning of money Grave risks of driving Obsession with cleanliness Blending of traditional religious beliefs with Christianity Social divisions between women and men Importance of tribal identity in interpersonal social interactions Extent of racial conflict Primacy of obedience to the law Authoritarian nature of Botswana—its culture of democracy South Africa—its broad domination of its small neighbor—its society Failure of western radicalism in Botswana Dynamics of Ken Good—its deportation Brain drain within Botswana and with neighboring African states Fears Botswana students have of American graduate education Failure of aid and exchange programs to recognize psychological dimensions of their endeavors in Botswana Failure of local university lecturers to perform normal academic duties The author is a PhD-trained political scientist. He began field research in Botswana in 1970. He returned regularly for the next thirty-five years for varying periods of time, the longest of which was 14 months. As a researcher in these years he traveled

over most of the country and met a wide range of the citizenry from top executives to hunter-gatherers on the Kalahari. Beginning in January of 2006, he served for four years as the first Director of International Programs at the University of Botswana. In this position he was able to observe the internal dynamics of a major social institution as well as the misconceptions of visiting students and scholars. In the course of his career, the author has also visited many other African countries and engaged in field projects in Ghana, Nigeria, Lesotho, and Zambia. However, Botswana is his second home.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a great source of helpful information for those who will be traveling in, working in, or studying Botswana. It provides valuable and important insights into this wonderful country and its people. Professor Holm has developed many close friendships there over the years. As a political scientist he is very skilled at seeing social and cultural patterns in them. His observations include both scholarly assessments and warm descriptions of individual personal encounters. His essays convey his insights in a respectful and thoughtful manner. I wish this book had been available when I started working in Botswana. I recommend it highly for anyone wishing to learn more about the subtle distinctions in tone and style that are extremely helpful in developing positive relationships in a new

environment.

These essays are excellently written, are succinct yet highly and efficiently informative, and give much evidence of authority/expertise blended with appropriate modesty in recognition of the limits of understanding we all face when spending even many years in such cultural-linguistic environments than our native one. The almost conversational style invites thoughtful imagined interaction on the part of the reader with Professor Holm. For anyone in any profession with considerable cross cultural experience it will be easy to recognize the depth and authenticity of the writing as well as the critical thinking applied by the author to his reflection on his experiences and to his own analysis of his impressions and conclusions. To those new to cross cultural work, these essays are especially valuable as guidelines to an open-to-learning, non-superior attitude so essential to establishing a relationship of trust with local colleagues and friends as a foundation for understanding the mores, manners, and cultural assumptions and idiosyncrasies that open the doors to acceptance, shared experiences, and insights that go well beneath the surface. As the author exemplifies, that takes serious time, effort and sincerity.

Botswana Essays is a fascinating series of essays about the people and culture of Botswana. It is written in an accessible and charming style. Dr. Holm discusses gender roles, tribal identities, the duty of successful people to help family members, ideas about cleanliness and order, the importance of cattle stations to family prestige and many other aspects of life in Botswana. I would recommend this book to anyone curious about Botswana.

An excellent collection of experiences in Botswana culture . A great read for anyone wanting to understand swana culture. An excellent resource for anyone teaching culture and cultural differences. If you are moving to Botswana as a worker or peace corps volunteer it would be helpful for pre departure orientation. I recommend for any all anthropology students

The essays are interesting, diverse and very well written. The author clearly know his subject.They make me want to visit Botswana

A good reflection of the author's experience and understanding of life in Botswana. The essays are useful for readers who are interested in learning about the Tswana society, and it raises many scholarly issues to pursue. In addition, for the locals, it serves as a mirror on some of the

practices-whether bad or good, and which are worthy to either disprove or accept as reality. In the end, to truly appreciate and find out why things unfold as they do in Botswana, it is important for one to visit and live as part of the society. I commend the author for having done just that.

Really interested and unique perspective

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