

REVIEWS — COMPTES RENDUS

**Les Lunda – The Lunda
République Démocratique du Congo – Democratic Republic
of the Congo**

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Many so-called traditional societies are increasingly under threat of losing their cultural heritage. Acculturation, which is the process of cultural and psychological change that results from the meeting of cultures, brings about changes at multiple levels in both interacting cultures. In most cases, it brings about a change because after the initial contact(s), one culture quickly begins dominating the other; historically, this process was initiated through either military or political conquest, but nowadays it's more 'vicious' with so-called modern or Western values permeating all aspects of less-dominant societies. The latter often adopt a subdued or victim position and 'gladly' take over Western mechanisms, values, and so on, as these are often perceived as being the (one and only ?) way to success. At group level, acculturation then often results in changes to culture, customs, and social institutions. Noticeable group level effects of acculturation often include changes in food, clothing, and language. At the individual level, differences in the way individuals acculturate have been shown to be associated not just with changes in daily behaviour, but also with numerous measures of psychological and physical well-being. As enculturation is used to describe the process of first-culture learning, acculturation can be thought of as second-culture learning. In situations of continuous contact, cultures have been shown to exchange and blend foods, music, dances, clothing, tools, and technologies. Cultural exchange can either occur naturally through extended contact, or more quickly through cultural appropriation or cultural imperialism. In this context, cultural appropriation is understood as the adoption of some specific elements of one culture by members of a different cultural group. It can include the introduction of forms of dress or personal adornment, music and art, religion, language, or behaviour. These elements are typically imported into the existing culture, and may have wildly different meanings or lack the subtleties of their original cultural context. Because of this, cul-

tural appropriation is sometimes viewed negatively, and has sometimes been called ‘cultural theft’. In some cases, the process is intentional. In this case, one can speak of cultural imperialism which is the practice of promoting the culture or language of one nation in another. This usually occurs in situations in which assimilation is the dominant strategy of acculturation as was often seen during colonialism. Cultural imperialism can take the form of an active, formal policy or a general attitude regarding cultural superiority.

In a context of colonial conquest and supremacy rule, the dominant colonizer culture very often tried to impose his own rules, values and way of thinking. This often resulted in a loss of (im)material culture at the ‘receiving end’ of colonialism. In numerous cases, however, traditional cultures that were the colonialists’ target tried to openly resist these pressures (or tried to maintain their culture far away from the occupier’s sphere of influence). The Lunda of Central Africa are clearly an example of how one can try and maintain one’s values ‘against all odds’. They are a dignified people, powerful and faithful to their traditions. The Lunda civilisation was one of the largest in Africa in the 18th and mid-19th century and it remains vibrant in the 21st century. The Kingdom of Lunda (c. 1665–1887), was a pre-colonial, African confederation of states in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, north-eastern Angola and northwestern Zambia. Its central state was in Katanga. The kingdom of Lunda came to an end in the nineteenth century, when it was invaded by the Chokwe, who were armed with guns. The Chokwe then established their own kingdom with their language and customs. Lunda chiefs and people continued to live in the Lunda heartland but were diminished in power. At the start of the colonial era (1884), the Lunda heartland was divided between Portuguese Angola, King Leopold II of Belgium’s Congo Free State and the British in North-Western Rhodesia which became Angola, DR Congo and Zambia, respectively.

In Musumba, their imperial capital located in the South of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the traditional Lunda rites continue to be practiced with great passion by the population, and even today the dynasty of kings still holds sway in terms of traditional authority. The picture book that Stichting Kunstboek publishes here testifies to and illustrates how present-day Lunda culture presents itself. The Italian photographer Angelo Turconi, who is well-acquainted with the region, wanted to show the vitality of these Bantu people, who maintain a strong attachment to their culture and social structure despite the border divisions which occurred during the colonisation period. Together with John Anthony, also a photographer, and anthropologist Manuela Palmeirim, who has authored a documented study on Lunda culture, he takes us on a journey to a part of Africa which preserves many of its traditions and yet is firmly rooted in the present. The pictures mostly speak for themselves, but Palmeirim provides us with very useful, informative pieces of text that guide the reader through the different rituals and finer details of the Lunda’s culture and living environment. A very nice book to peruse and read (and maybe offer to an Africanist friend?).

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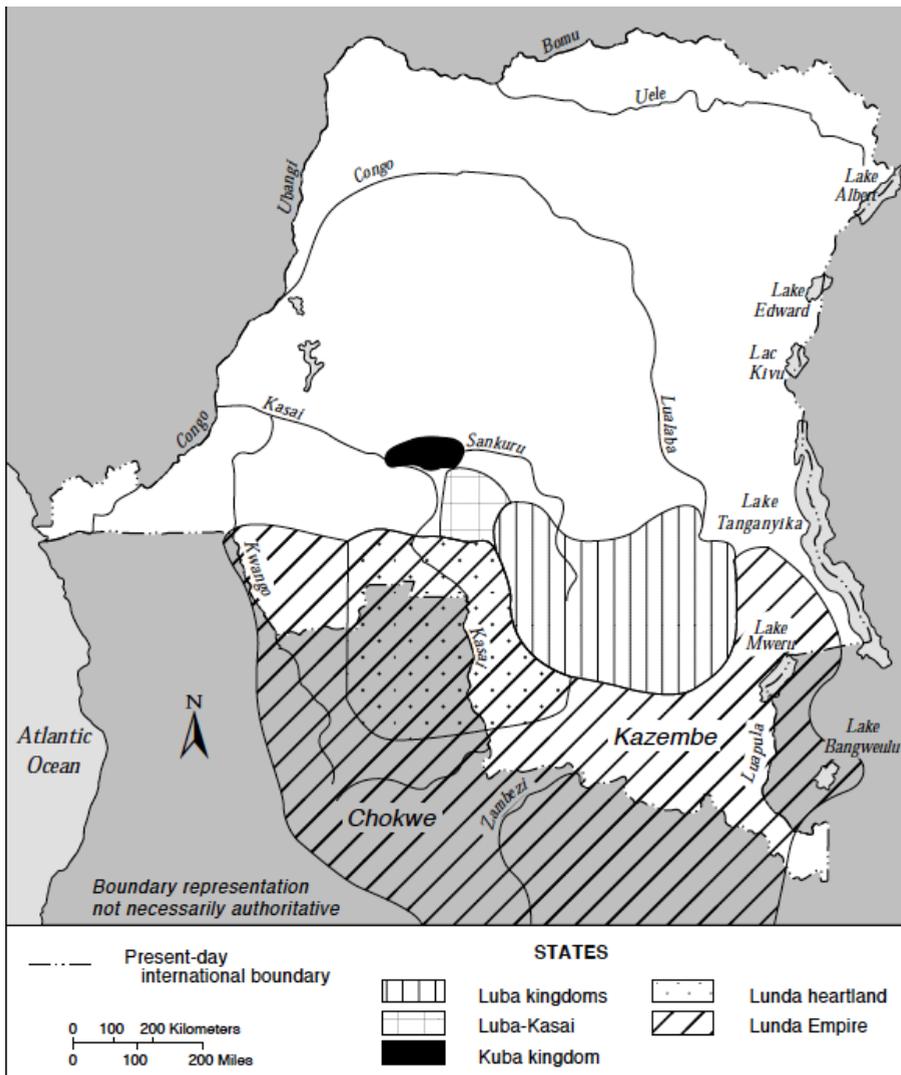


Figure 1: The Lunda State (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Lunda#/media/File:Lunda_Empire.png).