

André du Pisani, Reinhart Kössler, and William A. Lindeke (eds.) (2010), *The Long Aftermath of War: Reconciliation and Transition in Namibia* (Freiburger Beiträge zu Entwicklung und Politik, 37), Freiburg: Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, ISBN 978-3-928597-55-5, 437 pp.

This stimulating collection of essays focuses on the general question of how postcolonial Namibian society manages and deals with particular aspects of its violent colonial past and memory. In many ways, the topics and themes analysed here relate to “key aspects of ‘unfinished business’” (viii) and to the paradigmatic nature of colonial legacies in the context of postcolonial nation-building. As such, the book is a must for African Studies libraries. The volume comprises 13 essays within three thematic divisions (Reconciliation: Discourses and Constraints; Communal Resilience; The Presence of the Past). Importantly, most of the contributors to this volume are based in Namibia itself. The volume results from the Volkswagen Foundation’s research project “Reconciliation and Social Conflict in the Aftermath of Large-Scale Violence in Southern Africa”.

The reader is presented with much original research and both short- and long-term analyses of diverse political, social, economic and historical issues. In many ways, this book is yet another important volume of essays on Namibian issues that have been published in recent years, all being very useful compilations and providing well-grounded introductions to Namibian society, past and present.<sup>1</sup> Wide-ranging analyses in chapters by André du Pisani on the nationalist discourses of the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) and by Phaniel Kaapama on post-settler land politics are presented alongside succinct overviews on the reconciliation discourse by Namibian churches (by Gerhard Töttemeyer), the so-called “genocide and reparations debate” in Namibian–German relations (by Reinhart Kössler), and the postcolonial debate about human rights violations during the liberation war (by Justine Hunter). Likewise, the chapters by Heribert Weiland analysing post-independence opinion polls and Volker Winterfeldt summarizing trends in the postcolonial social fabric are crucial. All these essays are complemented by analyses with (very) particular focuses, such as Napan-dulwe Shiweda’s visual history reconstruction of a northern Namibian kingdom, and Memory Biwa’s, Reinhart Kössler’s and Johann Müller’s contributions on public memory, commemorative and diasporic/transnational history in southern and central Namibia and Botswana.

---

1 See, for example, Diener, Ingolf, Olivier Graefe (eds.) (2001), *Contemporary Namibia: The First Landmarks of a Post-Apartheid Society*, Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan; Melber, Henning (ed.) (2007), *Transitions in Namibia: Which Changes for Whom?*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

In general, this volume makes clear that Namibia's postcolonial transition on the one hand displays, as Heribert Weiland puts it, an "encouraging" and "ongoing democratization" (60), and on the other hand is in many ways a very limited and relative transition. For me, the contributions by Bill Lindeke on transformations in two crucial state sectors and by Pamela Claassen on violent resource conflicts against a rural backdrop are the most illustrative when it comes to understanding the complexities of post-apartheid and postcolonial transformations and their embedded legacies. Lindeke analyses two institutional domains of transition and change – namely, the government institutions concerned with education and security (including the army, police, prisons and other central intelligence bodies). In both cases, the so-called "reforms" and "policy strategies" which have taken place since Namibia's independence in 1990 are scrutinized with regard to probable institutional transformation and the crucial role of governmental ministries. Lindeke's findings – a mix of achievements, changes and failures – point to a rather complex situation in which the country's economy, a shortage of well-trained personnel and severe apartheid legacies are further strained with pre-independence contentions over what he calls "personality issues [with regard to decision-makers and office-holders], job insecurity, and party loyalties", all of which "frequently hinder progress. In significant developmental arenas such as education, these weaknesses are a clear fetter on success" (86). As many other contributions in the volume make clear, these are not simply weaknesses, but structural pre-independence issues with dynamics embedded in newly developing post-independence frameworks. On the other hand, Lindeke can convincingly show that, despite much failure in, for example, the educational system, the state did facilitate a remarkable transition from apartheid education to national education. Likewise, the security sector, formerly dominated by a military war situation, is now firmly in civilian – yet still (?) quite corrupt – command with a definite national agenda.

The micro-study by Pamela Claassen on conflicts amongst farmers in northeastern Namibia over land and water resources, grazing, fencing and property rights (among other conflicts) also links pre-independence issues to post-independence dynamics. She stresses an increasing degree of local and regional "instability" and observes a "reconfiguration of ethnic identities and relations" (322), along with the erosion of traditional roles and the expansion of state structures (321). She points out that (traditional) mechanisms of "conflict resolution [are] by and large effective", whilst conceding that conflict prevention mechanisms are virtually absent.

As Volker Winterfeldt in his contribution on Namibia's postcolonial social dynamics makes clear, "the removal of race barriers does not automatically remove class barriers" (140), whilst traditional and "transitional

classes” (155), including the new bureaucratic elite and new underclasses, are wrapped up in very contradictory or at least ambivalent positions, claims and prospects. It is within these rather complex dynamics where one would seek explanations for the extreme inequalities that continue to be prominent 20 years after independence in a country with a very low population density that has been the recipient of substantial and diverse support since its independence. While the complexities of reconciliation and transition in and of a post-apartheid society as presented in this book are analysed convincingly, what is absent in this volume, as is so often the case in Namibian studies, are thorough socio-economic analyses. The topics of land policies and land alienation are, of course, prominently addressed in this book, but there is nothing on the structural economic transitions and shifts that have occurred over the past 20 or so years, and there is thus very little information on those crucial post-independence dynamics and foundations which underpin the new social fabric, the “transitional classes” and the continued socio-economic inequalities.

- Dag Henrichsen