

**Review:** Emmanuel Ike Udogu, *Liberating Namibia: The Long Diplomatic Struggle Between the United Nations and South Africa*, Jefferson, Mcfarland, 2012.

Many books have now been published on aspects of the way in which Namibia was liberated from South African rule. The title of this one suggests that it concerns the diplomatic “struggle” between the United Nations (UN) and South Africa over the ‘liberation’ of Namibia. A new scholarly analysis of how the South African government opposed the UN on Namibia, from 1946 until virtually the moment when the last South African-appointed Administrator-General left the country in March 1990, would have made a useful contribution to the available literature. Alas, this book, though attractively produced, not only does not live up to the promise of its title; it is a flawed and limited work. Instead of being the “exceptional” account the author suggests it is (2), it adds very little to our understanding of how and why Namibia moved to independence in the way it did, and is misleading in places about that process.

The author, who is a scholar of Nigerian origin who teaches at Appalachian State University in North Carolina, tells us in his Preface that his book is a revised version of a doctoral dissertation entitled ‘South West Africa People’s Organization of Namibia as a Non-state Actor in the Namibian Issue’. What he does not say is that that dissertation was completed at Southern Illinois University thirty years before this book was published. It would be surprising if

a book focused on relations between the UN and South Africa was based on a dissertation on SWAPO, and in fact only some of this book concerns the UN and South Africa. Udogu begins with a general chapter on Namibia, which is largely unrelated to what follows and is probably aimed mainly at American undergraduates (one is reminded of Vice-President Walter Mondale’s joke that many Americans, if asked what Namibia was, would probably suggest a flavour of ice-cream). Another one of Udogu’s chapters (4) is little more than a descriptive account of SWAPO ‘and other groupings in the political developments and contestations in Namibia’, the others being the DTA and the Namibia National Front. The most useful chapters are 3 and 5, for their largely descriptive account of the range of UN activities relating to Namibia. Chapter 7, which is on the Western Contact Group, does not make use of the key work on that mediation exercise by Vivienne Jabri (though her book is listed in the Bibliography), let alone, say, Hans-Joachim Vergau’s *Negotiating the Freedom of Namibia*.<sup>1</sup>

The entire text of this book runs to only 159 pages, and that include numerous tables and extracts from documents. Udogu effectively ends his story in 1979, merely providing a few pages (chapter 8) on the decade of the 1980s, which was crucial in the story he

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<sup>1</sup> Vivienne Jabri, *Mediating Conflict: Decision-making and Western Intervention in Namibia*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990; Hans-Joachim Vergau, *Negotiating the Freedom of Namibia: The Diplomatic Achievement of the Western Contact Group*, Basel, Basler Afrika-Bibliographien, 2010.

presumes to tell. When one turns to the Bibliography, one finds that only UN printed sources are used, and only to 1979. No archival sources have been drawn upon. While those both at the UN itself and in the SWAPO Party Archive and Research Centre (SPARC) may remain inaccessible, the very valuable records in the archives of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs (now International Relations and Co-operation) are freely accessible, but are entirely ignored. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is no detailed discussion here of South African strategy on the Namibian issue, or even of South Africa's changing attitude to the UN on Namibia.

Udogu's interpretations are often open to challenge, and in places are clearly wrong. He writes, for example, about the failure of what he calls "the Big Five", his name for the Western Contact Group, and of how SWAPO "was able in later negotiations with the UN and South Africa, to succeed in bringing about a resolution to this classic case study of a conflict-resolution scheme in international and African politics" (p. 148). But he does not show that SWAPO was able to do this, and it is hardly the case that SWAPO was able "to participate enthusiastically in the conflict-resolution deliberations until a solution to the issue of sovereignty in the nation-state was accomplished" (p. 156). He says SWAPO was "quite pleased" that there was no UN-supervised election in 1979 because the Western powers, which had previously ignored the organization, now took note of its influence (p. 12), but that is not the case. What is one to make of this statement relating to

Kassinga: SWAPO "had some setbacks on the military front [...] The snag in the group's military strategy followed a 1978 effective attack by South Africa's Air Force on Kassinga, a SWAPO military base in Angola" (p. 11)? His assumption that Kassinga was "a military base" is in line with his using quotation marks when he writes of Pretoria's "atrocities" in Namibia (p. 11). He repeatedly uses such meaningless phrases as "the conflict resolution project" and "conflict-resolution scheme", and at one point writes: "Beginning in 1948, apartheid was given more zing" (p. 49). An amusing typo is Goof Offices' (p. 219, n. 22). More seriously, he grossly over-emphasizes the split between "external" and "internal" SWAPO (pp. 82-83), and keeps harping on the success of the diplomacy on the Namibian issue, not its failure until the winding down of the Cold War changed the game. While most of his appendices will be known to scholars, the first is a useful interview that the author conducted with Theo Ben Gurirab in May 1979 (pp. 161-170). The very inadequacies of this book point to the need for a study that, inter alia, relates the diplomatic struggle to the war and synthesizes recent work – much of it seemingly unknown to this author – on the way in which Namibia moved to independence.

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