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Otjivanda Presse. Bochum

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The anthology, *Writing Namibia* is a literary work long overdue. More than two decades after independence this collection of selected literary pieces is the first of its kind to give an overview of what has been happening in the field of literature and performing arts in Namibia. Even the specialist reader in a particular field, will not necessarily know what is going on in other sub-genres, and practices. This viewpoint is echoed in the Foreword by André du Pisani:

“The critical reader will undoubtedly recognise the different ‘silences’ in both pre-and post-independent Namibian literature, and, indeed, how specific writers and poets invest such silences with a presence, of linking conditions of exile and home, longing, desperation, and a search for meaning.” (p. viii)

In the introduction the editors, Sarala Krishnamurthy and Helen Vale outline the main themes dealt with in the anthology, and explain that the term ‘subaltern’ should be interpreted with the concepts of ‘decolonization’ and ‘post-colonialism’ in mind. The six key factors that motivate the writers in *Writing Namibia* are closely related to the transitional era before and after 1990.

In the opening article “The shifting grounds of emancipation: From the anti-colonial struggle to a critique of post-colonial society”, Henning Melber (an old boy of the Deutsche Höhere Privatschule Windhoek) gives a broad overview of Namibian writing starting with the work of the pre-independence struggle period from 1960 onwards, through the transition period literature, and ending with works which focus on the post-independence era. His hypothesis is that “knowledge production reflects on the restraints and challenges to a vibrant civil society and is dependent upon socio-political environment” (p. 20). He also outlines the channels through which the literary works were published, and the different themes and genres that were popular during this era (since 1960). For me, being associated with literature since 1984 when I joined the Academy of Tertiary Education, the precursor of the University of Namibia (and still lecturing), Melber’s article is an invaluable reference, and it takes me back to incidents, debates and think tanks in the pre-Apartheid-era, during the transition period and shortly after independence.

Pioneers such as Ruth First, who blazed a trail for the authors of struggle literature to follow, are credited, and at the closure of the article those authors who since 2000 have sharply criticized policy makers, party activists and higher-ranking civil servants, are mentioned.

In her article “Gathering scattered archives” Margie Orford examines “three clusters of texts” (p. 40) chronologically starting with mid-19th century texts and concluding with material published after independence in 1990. In the article though, she concentrates on the middle group, namely texts from the 1930s...

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and the colonial documents relating to them. The importance of tracing the history of women’s writing is emphasized. Exposing the fact and nature of women’s subjection to masculine and colonial dominance opens new possibilities to reinterpret the present. It would have been useful if the arguments in the article had been concluded.

In the well-structured and thoroughly researched article “Conceptualising national transition: Namibian women’s autobiographies about the liberation struggle”, Kelly Jo Fulkerson-Dikuua focuses on the three works, *Making a difference* by Libertina Amathila, *Walking the Boeing 707* by Lydia Shaketange and *The price of freedom* by Ellen Namhila. In each the duality of the transition undergone by the Namibian female autobiographers comes to the fore: there is not only a transition (and with it the adaptation) from childhood to adulthood, but also from going into exile to returning. This experience separates the writers from their peers and from their parents. The autobiography is thus a historical document as well as an individual’s story. A variety of interesting narrative techniques are identified, such as recounting childhood experiences from the perspective of the adult narrator. In this way the pros and cons of traditional vs modern living can be compared.

Patrick Colm Hogan provides a sensitive and gripping analysis of two novels which focus on the interaction between nationalism and narrative in “Emplotting nationalism: Comparing Sam Nujoma’s *Where others wavered* and Joseph Diescho *Born of the sun*”. Hogan bases his argumentation on three factors: the influence of cross-culturally predominant story structures, the close relationship between “emplotment” and the profiles of the readers, while keeping in mind the themes of politics and gender that influence “categorical identifications”. He also stresses the importance of considering “the unexpected coherence within – and unexpected contrasts between the two novels” (p. 87).

The article that I appreciate most is “The forgotten child of Namibia: An analysis of Misheke Matongo’s autobiography” by Jason Owens and Sarala Krishnamurthy on the SWAPO children who were in exile in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Matongo was one of the GDR-kids who were taken from their parents at a very young age and spent up to a decade in East Berlin. He was a leader amongst his peers, and to the reader it becomes obvious that he had the potential to become a distinguished author.

The article also describes the complex political situation: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the independence of Namibia within the bigger picture where Angola

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was a battlefield for the ‘proxy war’ being fought between the USSR and the USA. The GDR-kids’ helplessness in the face of international events is startlingly obvious when: “The children’s ‘persecutors’ in Pretoria, and their ‘protectors’ [...] in East Berlin were simultaneously swept from power” (p. 103).

Owens and Krishnamurthy look at Matongo’s unpublished manuscript as literature, as an autobiography and as a message that ought to be conveyed. I firmly believe that Namibians should know about the GDR-kids and learn lessons from the mistakes of the time. Matongo’s disappearance is shocking, but I am grateful that Owens and Krishnamurthy have honoured him by reworking his manuscript into an article with such insight.

Another precious piece of history is given by Alfeus Tjijoro in his article “Otiherero literature in transition from the oral to written word”. He challenges the reader with the assertion that oral communication is not inferior to written literature. He supports his argument with the fact that is too easily denied that humans are one with nature. For me as a critical reader with little knowledge of my fellow Namibians’ indigenous languages, Tjijoro’s introduction of the Otiherero literature published since the end of the last decade is invaluable. However, the article lacks a conclusion that provides a short summary of the literary issues dealt with.

Petrus Mbenzi’s “Gender stereotypes in Oshiwambo orature” describes the stereotypical Oshiwambo man, but refrains from taking the argumentation further on how this stereotypical behavior influences the language of literature. The issue of violence against women raised here is also a theme in Pasi and Mlambo’s article on autotelic violence in Chapter 17.

In “Who speaks at Spoken Word? Performance poetry in Namibia” Hugh Ellis and Don Stevenson examine the role the Spoken Word project has played in Namibia since 2000, the themes that were offered and the challenges that have been faced.

Sarala Krishnamurthy’s “‘Call of the Witpenssuikerbekkie’: Landscape as symbol in contemporary Namibian poetry” treats the postgraduate student and serious researcher to an excellent article with a theoretical introduction on the literary term mega-metaphor within the field of the conceptual metaphor theory. As part of her research, Krishnamurthy has studied nearly 200 poems (published and unpublished) by Namibian poets. She connects the use of the landscape in Namibian poetry to the idea of identity formation among Namibians. Four mega-metaphors in Namibian poetry are identified namely Landscape as female, Landscape as ancient time, City (Windhoek), as a negative place whilst township (Kathutu) is a positive place, and Road is a journey of life. She reaches the conclusion that Namibian poets create a conceptual space which provides a sense of belonging and security.

In two separate chapters Helen Vale uses interviews to explore the contributions of two artists: Joseph Molapong (“Namibian poetry since independence: A poet’s perspective”), and Sandy Rudd (“The development in theatre since
independence: A director’s perspective”). Both have devoted their lives to bringing theatre to Namibians. Mola-pong is a poet, playwright, actor, director, and the owner of Township Productions. For anyone researching the history of theatre in Namibia, the chapter on Sandy Rudd about the development in theatre since independence, and the list of productions at the end is very useful. The interview-based article by Laurinda Olivier-Sampson, “Representing Namibian drama (1985–2000): Frederick Philander” examines the struggle theatre works of playwright Frederick Philander.

“When applied theatre is no rehearsal for the revolution” by Nashilongwe-shipwe Mushaandja looks at applied theatre projects in Namibia on transformation in art praxis. Mushaandja concludes that stakeholders should operate together and not work in isolation. What I feel is lacking — from a student and researcher’s point of view — is a paragraph on the different characteristics of applied theatre and mainstream theatre.

As a lecturer of literature, and amongst others, Afrikaans Visual Studies, I find Hans-Christian Mahnke’s article “Reading Namibian films” a true treasure. Apart from the informative introductory notes on filmmaking in Namibia, he looks at several Namibian films under three headings, of which the last one, story themes presenting Namibian history and culture, serves best the purposes of this volume.

The development of children’s books in Namibia is comprehensively dealt with by Andree-Jeanne Tötemeyer in her article “Multilingual children’s books in an independent Namibia: The emergence of a new literature”. She describes the general situation in Namibia as far as publishing houses for children’s books are concerned. Tötemeyer was the founder of the Namibian Children’s Book Forum which still promotes reading material for children, and bestows awards on books considered to be of particular value.

Towards the end of the volume, there are four chapters on the Namibian novel. There are insights into an author’s way of thinking in Harlech-Jones’s “The Namibian novel: reflections of an author” where he discusses the reasons and impulses for writing using three of his own novels as examples. Literature students in particular will benefit from reading “Essential features of the novel” as the implementation in practice of basic theory is clearly explained.

How a testimony in the form of a novel can reveal the power of the voice of the female author is presented in Netta Kornberg’s fine article “Power at the margins: black female agency in two Namibian novels”. Kornberg analyses the novels Marrying Apartheid by Ndeutala Hishongwa and Meekulu’s children by Kaleni Hiyalwa.5 At the start she questions how analytical discourse can be applied to texts which have been marginalized. She offers the answer by means of strategies to treat the novels as works of literature in the sense of

creative power. Juliet Pasi and Nelson Mlambo take the theme of marginalization further in their article “Autotelic violence: an analysis of selected Namibian short stories in Elizabeth Khaxas’ We must choose life." The value of this article lies in the fact that it delves deeply into the problem of violence by defining and theorising the matter, and draws attention to “understanding” (my quotation) violence. The article voices the serious outcry that something must be done against the “misuse of culture and tradition in hurting, abusing and humiliating women and children” (p. 264).

Regrettably, the only article in the collection on Afrikaans literature is “‘Keeping a pet Bushman alive’: Piet van Rooyen’s Namibian oeuvre” by Helize van Vuuren. In van Rooyen’s works San (Bushmen) of Namibia are the central characters, and van Vuuren focuses on the fact that readers identify with the modern person’s longing to escape “from a world overwhelmed by materialism and technology” in favour of a “pristine primordial state” (p. 275). In her conclusion she mentions that although the white protagonists in van Rooyen’s novels are successfully presented as characters who ‘play’ Bushmen, the author fails to explore matters from the Bushman’s perspective. Being familiar with van Rooyen’s work, I am not convinced that it was the intention of the author to give this perspective. On the contrary, the inability to share the emotions of the Bushman is central to the character of the non-Bushman protagonist.

Schlettwein’s “When colonial imperialists go post-colonial: Namibian-German literature since independence” gives a balanced overview of how the relatively large genre of Namibian-German literature (in comparison to literature in the other languages) has largely been overlooked in terms of research and critical analysis. This changed with the launch of Hauptsache Windhoek. It is unfortunate that authors of good books should have written the articles on their own works. Apart from the Schlettwein article, Brian Harlech-Jones also discusses and evaluates his own books, A small space and To dream again in his article “The Namibian novel: reflections of an author”. Although the articles in both cases are without doubt invaluable, it is regrettable that these works are not discussed by other authors or critics.

I thoroughly enjoyed and was enlightened by reading the article “Will there be written literature in Ju’hoansi, a Khoesan language of Namibia?” by Kerry Jones and Megan Biesele. In the opening paragraphs they speculate whether reading material of interest will ever become a reality for the Ju’hoan.


people. The historical background has been studied for many years and with the help of sponsors like the Kalahari Peoples Fund, slowly but surely progress has been made in developing a written form of the language. The enormous efforts which have been made to develop reading material for Ju/'hoan people should be acknowledged by literature students worldwide. It is also a moral obligation of intellectuals in Namibia to see that names such as Melissa Heckler, Patrick Dickens, Ulla Kann are remembered for their contributions. Megan Bieselee and Kerry Jones take the reader on a journey, from the humble start of the Village Schools Project, via the Library Outreach and the Ju/'hoan Transcription Projects to a place where there is hope for the future. I found the webpage mentioned in the article to be a lively, welcoming site which I believe will excite the reader: www.kalaharipeoples.org.


I congratulate editors Helen Vale and Sarala Krishnamurthy on *Writing Namibia*, an important first step which will encourage further such works in the future. There are, of course, some weaknesses, and some articles need attention as far as planning and structure are concerned. Namibia may not be the richest country in Africa, but in my thirty years of lecturing, I have come to realise that academics in other countries are more than merely interested in the linguistic and literary activities in Namibia. The anthology, *Writing Namibia* is a true treasure for literary students worldwide and an inestimable source of information.

Chrisna Beuke-Muir
University of Namibia, Windhoek