

Review: André du Pisani, Reinhart Kössler and William A. Lindeke, (eds.), *The Long Aftermath of War – Reconciliation and Transition in Namibia*, Freiburg, Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, 2010.

The *Long Aftermath of War* is the first publication of a Volkswagen Foundation research project on social conflict and reconciliation in Namibia and Angola. Individual chapters were originally presented at a workshop in April 2009 in Omaruru, attended by post-graduate students and senior scholars based in Namibia, Angola, South Africa, Germany, Portugal and the United States. Some presentations were later revised and published in an edited volume, which focused on Namibia. The material, which I first encountered as a participant in the workshop and now as a reader, examines the aftermath of war from a wide range of perspectives. Together, they present a more comprehensive view than any previous publication of how post-colonial Namibia has been shaped by its violent past.

The diversity of authors' contributions is the volume's greatest strength. The first section, organized under the heading "Reconciliation: Discourses and Constraints", includes chapters that address Namibia's anti-colonial form of nationalism (André du Pisani); political attitudes among Namibian citizens at independence (Heribert Weiland); challenges to the state's formation of Namibia's education and security sectors (Bill Lindeke); the potential for, and constraints on, Namibian churches promoting reconciliation (Gerhard Töttemeyer);

entrenched colonial and emerging post-colonial divisions in Namibia's social structure (Volker Winterfeldt); approaches to, and discontent over, land redistribution in Namibia and other former settler colonies (Phanuel Kaapama); and the entangled history of Germany and Namibia (Reinhart Kössler). The second section considers "Communal Resilience", tracing it through the visual construction and reconstruction of Oukwanyama culture at Omhedi (Napandulwe Shiweda); the links forged between Botswana's Ovaherero communities and Namibian liberation movements during the apartheid era (Johann Müller); and pressures on the natural environment and competition for resources in the western Kavango (Pamela Claassen). The final section turns to "the Presence of the Past", tracing the narration of histories among Nama-speakers in southern Namibia of the 1903-1908 wars (Memory Biwa), the public performance of history at community commemorations in Omaruru, Gibeon and Vaalgras (Reinhart Kössler), and the challenge to the dominant national narrative articulated by and through SWAPO's ex-detainees (Justine Hunter).

In some respects, *The Long Aftermath of War* resembles other seminal publications about legacies of violence in Namibia. For example, Colin Leys and John Saul's edited volume *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* not only presents the first detailed, critical study of Namibians' resistance to South African rule from 1966 to 1989, but also considers how this past impacted on Namibian institutions and political culture immediately

after independence.¹ Almost a decade later, Henning Melber and the other authors of *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia* took up a similar set of issues, considering SWAPO's governance in the post-independence period and how it has been shaped by the circumstances in which the former liberation movement opposed colonial rule.² *The Long Aftermath of War* also organizes itself around legacies of violence but does so in a broader, if less focused, manner. In contrast to the previously cited volumes, whose contributors predominantly work in political science/political studies, the new volume includes a larger number of scholars trained in other fields, including history, sociology, development studies and environmental studies.³ It offers far greater analysis of colonial rule prior to the 1960s than do the studies previously mentioned and incorporates more recent issues such as debates on German government reparations, the uncovering of mass graves in Eenhana,

¹ Colin Leys and John S. Saul, eds., *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword*, London, James Currey, 1995.

² Henning Melber, ed., *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture Since Independence*, Stockholm, Elanders Gotab, 2003.

³ There are other edited volumes which consider contemporary issues in Namibia from a range of disciplinary perspectives (cf. Ingolf Diener and Olivier Graefe, eds., *Contemporary Namibia. The First Landmarks of a Post Apartheid Society*, Windhoek, Gamsberg Macmillan, 2001; Volker Winterfeldt, Tom Fox and Pempelani Mafume, eds., *Namibia – Society – Sociology*, Windhoek, University of Namibia Press, 2002; Henning Melber, ed., *Transitions in Namibia: Which Changes for Whom?*, Stockholm, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007). These texts do not focus explicitly on legacies of violence from the colonial past on the Namibian present, however.

the founding of the Rally for Democracy and Progress, and the formation of the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs. Moreover, the majority of the authors are part of a generation of scholars who have been trained since independence and whose views are beginning to shape new directions in scholarship on Namibia.

Certainly, the theoretical framework through which the new volume's chapters are placed in conversation with one another could be further developed. For example, in their introduction the editors not only indicate that the volume concerns itself with reconciliation, but also observe that Namibia's "official reconciliation discourse" cannot be taken at face value because it may conceal "the deeper issues that are implied by any genuine quest for reconciliation" (viii). Despite this important caveat, the editors do not discuss what the volume's different authors mean when they use the word reconciliation. What exactly are they referring to? A discourse? A process or result of state-building? An act of interpersonal forgiveness? A society marked by peaceful coexistence or trust? Equality within a social structure? An inclusive public memory? Although each of these meanings is suggested by different authors at different points in the text, they are rarely specified and never distinguished from one another. As a result, the volume does more to demonstrate the plasticity of the term 'reconciliation' than it does to unpack its many meanings or to identify how social relations in Namibia have been obscured through references to it.

By blurring reconciliation, the volume's authors also impair their analysis of

other concepts as well. For example, in his chapter on nationalism, André du Pisani highlights how a national narrative of anti-colonial resistance has been used to justify the position of the former liberation movement, and hierarchies associated with it, in the post-colonial social order. Nonetheless, both he and other authors continue to discuss reconciliation in Namibia as a national issue, rather than investigate how this and related concepts have become yoked to the nation. This stance is problematic in a country where, as my own research highlights,⁴ there are huge variations in citizens' definition of 'the national interest' and in which elites use the gaps created by 'national history' to wield power. The authors of *The Long Aftermath of War* might have raised these issues more explicitly – especially since several of the volume's chapters highlight how the structures perpetrating violence in Namibia (e.g. the German government during the early colonial period) and the locations in which Namibians have been violated (e.g. the front-line states where Namibian exiles fled apartheid rule) extend beyond national borders. Indeed, the Volkswagen researchers would do well to highlight such transnational issues in the future, drawing from Angola and Namibia not only as separate "cases" viewed from "comparative perspectives" (vii) but also as a territorial unit with overlapping histories, obscured first by colonialism and then by anti-colonial nationalism.

⁴ *Exile History: An Ethnography of the SWAPO Camps and the Namibian Nation*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Michigan, 2009.

These critical observations should not be read as detracting from the scholarly contribution made by *The Long Aftermath of War* and its authors. On the contrary, by assembling such a diverse range of academics, working across national, linguistic and disciplinary divides, the Volkswagen project, and the volume produced through it, have brought 'reconciliation' and 'the nation' into relief, highlighting inadequacies in the way these and related terms have previously been studied. In so doing, the book invites further research and engagement from those willing to move beyond the story of Namibia's successful transition and to address the pressing issues which face this country's people today.

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