

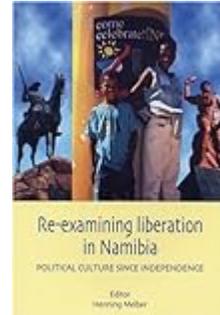
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Ingolf Diener, Olivier Graefe, eds.** *Contemporary Namibia: The First Landmarks of a Post-Apartheid Society*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2001. 397 pp.

**Henning Melber, ed.** *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture since Independence*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2003. 149 pp. No price listed (cloth), ISBN 978-91-7106-516-2.

**Volker Winterfeldt, Tom Fox, Pempelani Mufune, eds.** *Namibia, Society, Sociology*. Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2002. 397 pp. No price listed (cloth), ISBN 978-99916-59-41-1.



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When on March 20, 1990, Namibia, the former German and South African colony of Southwest Africa, became independent, a dream seemed to become true. It had all the elements of a modern fairy tale, of an incredible Southern African success story. Being the place where, in 1904-8 the first genocide of the twentieth century took place and, even before World War I, a political and social system based on strict segregation of race was introduced, which in many aspects closely resembled the later South African Apartheid-system, the last colony in Africa gained its freedom. And despite years

of racial oppression and liberation, the victorious South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) under its leader Sam Nujoma acted very cautiously and prudently. “White” ministers were integrated into the new government and a constitution written in order to guarantee the minority rights even of the former oppressors. As a result, the much feared exodus of the “white” population, which had completely disrupted Angola and Mozambique some fifteen years earlier, was avoided. Namibia even became a model for the ending of Apartheid in its former colonial power, South Africa.

The elapsing of a decade is a good time to look back, to analyse achievements, and to pinpoint still unfinished tasks. It was one of the legacies of apartheid that profound research in sociology and political science was still lacking for many areas of Namibian “black” and “colored” life (as characterized under former racial distinctions). Political decolonization was, therefore, accompanied by a scientific decolonization. Time now seems ripe for a “Namibian Sociology” because “Namibia needs to understand itself—not just economically or politically, but in terms of what constitutes a distinct ‘Namibian Society’ ” (p. i), as Volker Winterfeldt, Tom Fox, and Pempelani Mufune write in the introduction to their edited volume. Their programmatic slogan of the “Namibianisation” of a discipline is less devoted to a postcolonial project of nation building than it may sound; it just tries to develop sociological studies and data “of comparable quantity and quality” that exists for the rest of the world. (p. ii).

*Namibia, Society, Sociology* consists of twenty-two articles on “economy, labour and environment,” “social inequalities and social institutions,” “traditionalism, culture and art” and “sexuality and health.” The articles give an excellent overview of Namibian society and provide much needed information. The nature of the book is somewhere in the middle between a statistical yearbook and an introductory reader in sociology, with many articles referring to theoretical concepts in academic disciplines. Whoever wants to get a broad overview of Namibia as an independent state can be pointed to this volume.

The same comment is true for the book edited by In-golf Diener and Olivier Graefe, *Contemporary Namibia: The First Landmarks of a Post-Apartheid Society*, albeit this work is more tightly focused on politics. The contributors analyze various sections of the Namibian political system and civil society. The book was published in 2001, but obviously written around the year 1997. It contains eighteen articles on environment, political economy, the legal system, education, culture, the land question, political culture, etc. Like *Namibia, Society, Sociology*, the editors aim at providing basic information about the first decade of independent Namibia, and in important respects both volumes supplement each other. Reading them together gives the reader a good overview of Namibian sociological data and questions of political culture and the political system.

Very similar questions—though in a less “handbook”-like fashion—are tackled in the more recent edited volume

by Henning Melber, *Re-Examining Liberation in Namibia: Political Culture since Independence*. Written—like the two other books—by experts in their respective fields (more than one author contributed to several), it is a matter of the reader’s individual choice and specific purpose whether one would use one or the other but reading both together would be the perfect.

In the light of the more worrisome developments in Namibia during the last few years, Melber’s volume is eye-opening. Melber and his co-authors are angry; angry about deliberately missed opportunities, abuse of power and a strange collaboration between the old (white) and the new (black) elites. Melber is angry about a country where before 1990 free political work was not allowed, and where now it is increasingly impossible. For years, Melber was a member of the Namibian liberation movement, and between 1992 and 2000 he was director of the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit (NEPRU), the most important think tank for the Namibian government after independence. But his critical voice is, again, no longer welcome. In the past it was South African colonialists and the white settler class in Namibia that did not like to be criticized; now it is the SWAPO government as a “liberation movement in power.” Criticism quickly becomes an unpatriotic act. And it is now the time for scapegoats, whether gay people, “imperialists,” or SWAPO-“dissidents.” As various authors of the book show, the dualistic thinking in categories of “us” and “them” questions not only the official rhetoric of national reconciliation, but is part of the heritage of the liberation struggle. It verifies Melber’s observation that colonialism does not necessarily depend on differences in skin color and that independence is not the same as freedom. As the book convincingly shows, the problem lies in the authoritarian structures within SWAPO, which was victorious in their fight for independence but could not overcome patterns of thinking in old and dualistic categories.

To analyse the formation of this authoritarian character during the anti-colonial struggle and its legacies, would necessitate another book. For the moment, we can be happy to have three good volumes introducing us to Namibia, its successes, and its problems. Hopefully not only scholars inside and outside of Africa will read these books, but also members of governments and administrations inside and outside Namibia. Especially in light of recent news that the forcible removal of “white” farmers has already started in Namibia, one can only hope that many people will read especially Melber’s book.

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