

NAMIBIA LIBERATA

Brian O'Linn. *Namibia: The Sacred Trust of Civilization: Ideal and Reality.*

Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2003. xxii + 392 pp. N\$356.90. Paper.

Cedric Thornberry. *A Nation Is Born: The Inside Story of Namibia's Independence.*

Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2004. xiii + 412 pp. Appendixes. Bibliography. Index. N\$203.50. Paper.

Colin Leys and Susan Brown, eds. *Histories of Namibia: Living through the*

Liberation Struggle: Life Histories. London: The Merlin Press Ltd., 2005. viii + 165 pp. Notes. £14.99. Paper.

Barbara Becker, ed. *Speaking Out: Namibians Share Their Perspectives on*

Independence. Windhoek: Out of Africa Publishers, 2005. xii + 203 pp. Maps. Chronology. Notes. Bibliography. N\$95.00. Paper.

THESE FOUR BOOKS, cast primarily but not exclusively in the format of memoirs, provide remarkable and fresh insights into the demise of South African rule in Namibia. They will appeal to a variety of readers, some of whom may already have wearied of partisan accounts characterized more by political correctness/incorrectness than by demonstrable scholarly probity and imagination. Here we have different players with different, although usually convergent, outlooks exploring similar or complementary topics. Consequently, one sees a range of Namibians and non-Namibians addressing a series of implicit questions about the nature of political ideas and ideals, racism, authoritarianism, and civic integrity and responsibilities in colonial and postcolonial Namibia. Occasionally one finds more spontaneity than the logical rigor or long-range thinking characteristic of older polities, yet these books do underscore the idea that armed decolonization is painful, confusing, exciting, and infused with human suffering and trauma.

ACCORDING TO THE introductory biography contributed by Christo Lombard of the University of Namibia to *Namibia: The Sacred Trust of Civilization*, Brian O'Linn was a judge appointed to the High Court of Namibia after independence and thereafter became an acting judge of the Namibian Supreme Court. Before that he had chaired a commission dealing with allegations of electoral malpractice, fraud, and intimidation during the run-up to the 1989 elections for the Namibian Constituent Assembly that drafted the independence constitution. He began his career in the Namibian civil service in 1945 and then went on to serve with the Criminal Investigation Department of the South African Police in Johannesburg from 1948 until 1952. After returning to Namibia, like so many others, he took

his B.A. degree through the University of South Africa (which, as a correspondence university, caters to those who are working full-time) and subsequently went to the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg in 1959, earning his LL.B. degree in 1960. As a barrister (or advocate, in South African parlance) he reached the distinguished rank of Senior Counsel (comparable to taking silk, as the saying goes, as a queen's counsel in the United Kingdom) in 1981. In addition to his legal, police, and civil service career, he has served as a journalist and the managing director of a publishing house. This volume is to be the first of a two-volume study, with the second volume covering the postindependence era and including an evaluation of the new legal and judicial systems, land reform, corruption, affirmative action, the fate of those detained by the South West Africa People's Party (SWAPO) of Namibia, and the reintegration of liberation war veterans into the evolving society.

Three features of O'Linn's memoir are of considerable significance for a nuanced understanding of Namibian political structures and processes. First, he provides an intriguing reevaluation of the work of the Hall Commission, which was charged with investigating the police shootings and deaths that occurred outside Windhoek in 1959 and served as a catalyst for black African political mobilization and subsequently as a symbol in the nationalist struggle. Second, he corroborates the view that SWAPO's principal political opponent in the 1989 elections, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, was closely linked to, and handsomely funded by, the Military Intelligence component of the South African Defense Force (SADF). Third, serving sometimes as a participant-observer, he furnishes an unparalleled synopsis of the many trials in Namibia of SWAPO activists and of members of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the military wing of SWAPO. This material is not conveniently available elsewhere and is a signal contribution to the scholarly literature. He is especially diligent in showing the extent to which defense attorneys introduced the immunity portions of the 1957 South African Defense Act to shield SADF members from prosecution for alleged atrocities committed in Namibia; remarkably, the state was not consistently successful in utilizing this legal stratagem.

CEDRIC THORNBERRY is a British attorney from Northern Ireland who served as director of the office of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar during the United Nations Assistance Group (UNTAG) phase of Namibian decolonization in 1989–90. An experienced human rights lawyer, Thornberry was effectively the deputy of Martti Ahtisaari, the special representative who directed UNTAG operations in Namibia and later became president of Finland. From his vantage point, Thornberry was able to observe, and officially deal with, a wide range of South African, Namibian, and other foreign diplomats and dignitaries, in addition to a host of United Nations Secretariat mandarins. He kept a detailed record, arranged in diary fashion, from Novem-

ber 1988 through the end of March 1990 of his various meetings with officials and others knowledgeable about Namibia. The diary is also a record of bureaucratic in-fighting and diplomatic posturing and ploys. After he left the United Nations he also held interviews with key officials, and these allow him to add more welcome data and insights to a text crafted with both grace and wit.

Inevitably, there is some overlap between the O'Linn and Thornberry books, although the foci are somewhat different. Stymied by delayed international financing of the operation, which restricted the breadth, depth, and speed of UNTAG's presence in conflict-ridden Namibia in 1989, UNTAG nevertheless comported itself well in a situation in which it was buffeted on one side by SWAPO and its international friends and on the other by the person Thornberry terms "the viceroy of Namibia" (193)—the Administrator-General (AG) of then South West Africa, Louis Pienaar—as well as his staff and diplomatic and defense teams. It appears that the AG was not the complete master of his house, especially of the security elements that seemed to be the tail wagging the dog, which might explain why Thornberry employs the neologism "counter-insurgency state" to describe Namibia at this time (56).

Both O'Linn and Thornberry provide detailed, thoughtful analysis of the crisis of April 1, 1989, when PLAN forces crossed over from Angola into Namibia before UNTAG forces were ready to receive them, with the result that South African security forces, with Ahtisaari's permission, were no longer confined to their bases, as arranged in the governing United Nations Security Council resolution. The ensuing battle between PLAN and the South Africans took the lives of roughly three hundred PLAN members and thirty South Africans. This nearly derailed the peace process, but South Africa, Angola, and Cuba (which supplied troops to Angola) were able to restore the momentum, with the Soviet Union and the United States as observers. Neither the United Nations nor SWAPO was officially included in the restoration exercise. Both authors carefully conclude that SWAPO overreached itself in this attempt to secure bases within Namibia; this quest for in-country bases (on unconquered territory) had been rejected by SWAPO's opponents as far back as 1979.

An additional point of convergence occurs with respect to the United Nations General Assembly's 1976 designation of SWAPO as the "sole and authentic" representative of the Namibian people. This "canonization" of SWAPO, to use Thornberry's waggish term (194), not only made electoral life for Namibian-based competing political parties difficult (see O'Linn, 359), but also reinforced autocratic tendencies within the SWAPO leadership cadre, especially those in exile who had little, if any, exposure to democratic decision-making and governance.

HISTORIES OF NAMIBIA, edited by Colin Leys, now retired from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, and Sarah Brown, who is currently on the

staff of the Cape Town-based Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, is a compilation of personal accounts given by eleven Namibian informants during the period 1989–92. Although the editors caution that these particular Namibians do not constitute a rigorous cross-section of those who participated in the decolonization of the territory, they nevertheless demonstrate the varied backgrounds and experiences of those who took part in the nationalist movement.

Two of the essays are of particular interest, namely those by Phil Ya Nangoloh and by Kenneth Abrahams. The former is now the executive director of the National Society for Human Rights in Windhoek, a nongovernmental organization whose annual Human Rights Reports compare favorably to many of the Surveys of Race Relations published by the South African Institute of Race Relations that have been so widely cited by journalists and scholars. The latter is a physician who is currently involved in a number of civic groups. He provides a brief account of his role in the evolution of Namibian nationalism as one of the charter founders of SWAPO among the Namibian diaspora in Cape Town, where he studied medicine. Perhaps this narrative will lead to a fuller memoir which will add to a sophisticated understanding of these early, and often dangerous, days of political organization and mobilization in Namibia during the apartheid era.

BARBARA BECKER, WHO spent her career as a teacher and trainer of teachers in Germany, has served in Namibia in the field of educational training. This has afforded her access to a wide range of Namibians, particularly in the primary and secondary schools and social service sectors in the populated north of the country. Although she is neither a lawyer nor a political scientist nor even a journalist, Becker has received research funding from the Legal Assistance Center and advice from Jeremy Silvester of the Department of History of the University of Namibia at Windhoek. She has been able, therefore, to produce a remarkably cogent collection of twenty-seven different accounts of pre- and postindependence life in Namibia by men and women from various parts of the country. Even though many of her narrators hail from the Ovambo, which straddles the border with Angola and is the bedrock constituency of SWAPO, others are from the Caprivi (the eastern panhandle of Namibia), the Rehoboth area (the home of a proud mixed-race group whose home language is Afrikaans and who had a precarious position between white and black during both the German and South African occupations), and the Botswana diaspora (which hosted members of the Herero group who fled into neighboring Botswana after the savage Herero-German war at the beginning of the twentieth century). Two of her informants are white women (the widow of a Dutch Reformed Church *dominee* and a Swiss expatriate) who reflect on the national journey from minority to majority rule. Exile is a common theme for many, but not all, of the twenty-seven.

These autobiographical accounts are full of references to searing expe-

riences in the Namibian war of independence, which entailed privation, humiliation, violence, and torture. There is also recognition of the need for, and difficulty of achieving, some sort of reconciliation between former foes. These accounts mesh well with the findings of the anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom, author of the pathbreaking *A Different Kind of War Story* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), which deals with trauma management in the Mozambican war. The personal descriptions of the frustrations and joys of educational and economic improvements in rural Namibia should be standard reading for present and future Peace Corps volunteers.

WHO WILL THESE volumes appeal to? Becker's book is an excellent introduction to recent Namibian political history not only because of its list of acronyms, explanations of common terms used in Namibia, chronology of relevant landmarks in recent Namibian political history, maps, and fine collection of biographical sketches of major Namibian figures, but also because of its obvious attempt to furnish a balanced range of perspectives that provide the reader with a nuanced treatment of one of the longest African wars of the twentieth century. The Leys-Brown compilation is also well suited for the novice because of its crisp introduction, its ample notes (essentially a glossary of terms used in the introduction and narratives), and clear map, although it lacks an index (a failing shared by Becker and O'Linn as well). O'Linn's memoir covers a wider historical span, but would have benefited from maps, more rigorous copyediting, and a greater precision in documentation in the endnotes. It does refer to Afrikaans sources and includes photographs that enhance its scholarly utility. Perhaps the second volume of the memoirs will be an improvement with respect to editorial oversight. Finally, Thornberry's work excels in terms of its polished prose (with notes incorporated in the text), photographs, appendixes containing a list of names and acronyms as well as the text of a crucial United Nations Security Council document, and brief bibliography. It is valuable as a running commentary on the travails of bureaucratic and diplomatic in-fighting and negotiations within the United Nations Secretariat.

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