

**Klíma, Jan. 2015. Dějiny Namibie [History of Namibia].
Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 273 p. ISBN
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At a time of increased interest of Czech diplomacy in Namibia and also coinciding with the 25th anniversary of its independence a book tracing the history of a desert country far in the southern part of Africa was presented to Czech readers. Jan Klíma (born 1943) offers a neatly illustrated book from the History of states series which is presenting the milestones in the history of Namibia through its easy to follow language and a transparent and logical structure.

Ten years after publishing a book recounting the late colonial expansion of the German Empire (*Under the German flag. The story of a colonial empire*, Libri 2005) and six years after releasing an early volume devoted to Namibia (*Namibia*, Libri 2009), the well-known and reputable Czech Ibero-Americanist and Africanist offers a compact book containing beside a descriptive text also a well prepared appendices. With a basic chronological overview of major events and a list of representatives of the state governments and domestic dynasties the book could be taken as a de facto complement to a regular Namibia travel guide.

The area of southwest Africa (today's Namibia) came in the consciousness of Europeans rather late. The so-called pre-colonial period due to a lack of suitable ports and its inhospitable desert belt (aptly named Skeleton Coast) dated back up to the last third of the 19th century, when the region was seized by the German Empire in the spirit of the "Scramble for Africa". Knowledgeable readers will certainly not be surprised by the description of the period before the arrival of white settlers and missionaries in the book, which is rather limited. This fact is a part of "no event, no history" problem which generally comes with the lack of written sources all over the (not only) African cultures. In the case of Namibia, the historically very low density of settlement plays an important role too. In addition, we have to take into account some tragic events which marked the turbulent changes in the social structure and cohesion of Namibia during the 20th Century.

Klíma rightly intersects the modern interpretation of Namibian history with straight links to Britain's Cape Colony, which later formed the

Union of South Africa (since 1910) and finally the Republic of South Africa (since 1961). The German domination of the then South West Africa happened under the watchful eye of the neighbouring British colony. The author in the sections devoted to the German settlement provides a vivid picture of building the colony of dreams - a mix of civilizational ethos and modern Germanness imbued with elements of nationalism and the Protestant faith in hard work that deserves to be rewarded. Studying relevant passages the reader should keep in mind that the total number of German settlers even during the greatest boom hardly ever exceeded five percent of the total population of the country, which casts an interesting light on the depth of the tracks that are left behind by the Germans there. Administrators and soldiers were mostly of German domination - with the major exception of the campaign to suppress the Herero and Nama rebellion in 1904-1905 - limited to only a few hundred people operating in selected administrative centers spread across the vast area ten times larger than the Czech Republic.

From the general perspective of the world public, Namibia attracted attention at least three times. In two cases with totally disastrous effects to the vast majority of its people. The massacre of the Herero and Nama, two rebel ethnic groups whose leaders opposed the German land grabs, earned the dubious honor as the first genocide of the 20th century. The Germans discovered then the effectiveness of concentration camps, where most of the prisoners died. It was in the German Southwest Africa, where the famous anthropologists looked for evidence of racial theories, whose design they did not hesitate to illustrate with the bodies of internees. Their legacy had a direct link with the later established Nazi racial politics. Reports about the cruel treatment of the Herero and Nama, however, already had arrived to the old continent, where it heated political debate not only in the German Empire. In a sense this debate was concluded only a few years ago, when the descendants of the murdered and tortured Herero and Nama got an apology and subsequent compensation from the German federal government. In his description based on German and English-language sources Klíma does not omit any of these important facts.

The second equally important milestone of Namibian history represents a decades-long occupation by neighbouring South Africa. Originally a temporary administration mandate given by the League of Nations to the British dominion of the Union of South Africa stretched

in the end for more than seven decades despite repeated protests of the world public. After a series of fruitless appeals Namibia became one of the central themes of the UN Security Council at least since 1978, when it was clear that the situation in neighboring Angola would drag the whole African region between millstones of the two rival superpowers. Armed resistance against South African occupation led by the pro-Marxist SWAPO (South-West African People's Organization) became part of a broader struggle for the division of spheres of influence between the US, the USSR, as well as the PRC. A tangle of targeted alliances, where each party of the conflict watched geopolitical, local and its own interests at once, conserved for a decade the strange status quo. There was no shortage of seemingly contradictory statements by politicians and unexpected support from formally opposing parties (e.g. protection of western oil companies by communist guerrillas etc.). There was much at stake. South African leaders and its business elite were well aware of the strategic importance of this huge territory with the only deep-harbour, Walvis Bay, between Cape Town up to the border of Angola, in the middle. Also profitable mining played a big role in discussions about keeping close links with South Africa. At least on the table was obviously also an effort to keep the apartheid regime (highly unpopular with both the West and the East) favoring white minority and stabilize the increasingly unstable South African economy. The described struggle was after several years of negotiations at the highest level (accompanied by constant fighting) formally completed by the declaration of independence of Namibia on 21 March 1990.

In order not to be only pessimistic to the end, here we have to add the third milestone and highlight the successful transition to democracy in Namibia which attracted the world public so much in those years of changes. Klíma notes the multilevel shape of the liberation struggle, as nothing was seen as black and white from the European perspective. Definitely he does not even withhold from readers various conflicts between ethnic groups, or within the SWAPO in exile, where leaders did not hesitate to suppress apostasy by the most brutal means, including the torture and murder of former comrades and the internment of their children. The reviewer regrets that the book leaves aside the deeper description of the history of the Ovambo, who throughout German and South African domination managed their territory with a large degree of autonomy. Members of this majo-

rity ethnic group (about 50 % of the population) finally formed the cadres of the SWAPO in exile, and after independence also most of the top and lower members of state and local governments. Not only scholars would appreciate a broader interpretation of the ideology and practice of the SWAPO organization melted into a political party. It would help to frame the current developments in Namibia, which, as Klíma rightly says, begin to suffer the syndrome of the disappearing cadres. Former guerrilla fighters are passing away leaving a generational change unresolved. From the current placement of figures on the political chessboard, it appears that they are perhaps still not ready to do so (SWAPO is a sovereign winner of all the national elections, after the two founding members of SWAPO a member of the politburo and longtime diplomat of the then exiled SWAPO was elected in May 2015 as the third president).

In the last chapter of his book Klíma also remarks, that in the mid-80s the history of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and SWAPO crossed in quite an uncommon way. Though thousands of kilometers away, Czechoslovakia provided strong support to the Namibian children from the guerrilla refugee camps in Angola. Little girls and boys lived in a boarding school for six years before they could return to free Namibia. Meanwhile, they attended Czech school facilities and became strongly influenced by the Czech way of life and accustomed to the forested landscape of Czechoslovakia. From this example we can be reminded that it is the personal history of each human, together with a “big” history of a particular state, nation or movement, which gives the full picture of what really happened. It is no different in the case of Namibia.

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