

NAMIBIAN NATIONALISM

Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966. By TONY EMMETT. (Basel Namibia Studies 4). Basel: Schlettwein, 1999. Pp. xxii + 389. CHF 55.00, paperback (ISBN 3-908193-03-6).

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Once again Schlettwein Publishing has succeeded in putting a book into print which in its raw academic dissertation form had already become an avidly sought-after classic for those dealing with Namibian history in the twentieth century. In addition, the publishers have prefaced the work with an introduction that in itself is enough justification for anybody wishing to acquire the book. Frankly, the introduction by Patricia Hayes is the best historiographical overview available of Namibian history in print at the moment. Without wishing to launch into a series of adjectives, the fact is that for anybody with an academic interest in Namibia the work is a delight to read. It is extremely well thought out, perfectly structured, incredibly detailed and, above all, clearly presented.

The central aim of Emmett's work is to trace the origins or roots of Namibian nationalism and provide an overview of its development (p. 33). Essentially the work charts the development and suppression of resistance to colonial rule in the period prior to the Second World War, and the development of truly nationalist anti-colonial movements in Namibia following the war. In each instance Emmett clearly details the socio-economic background of resistance in Namibia, and lays detailed groundwork for each region of the country before developing it further. Thus, for instance, the reader is given an insight into the development of contract labour in Ovamboland, or exile politics in the 1960s, and how this relates to the development of anti-colonial resistance through time, community and region.

Following a lengthy introduction discussing nationalism and detailing the theoretical underpinnings of what is, after all, a doctoral thesis, Emmett has divided his work into four major sections. The first describes the initial colonial context within which colonized and colonizer operated. Emmett details the environmental constraints that determined the manner in which pre-colonial Namibian societies could survive, and how the coming of colonial settler farmers and ranchers placed ever greater strains upon this survival. The extreme nature of German colonial repression in Namibia is succinctly covered, as are the distinct phases of South African colonial rule prior to 1925. This then provides the background to the book's second section dealing with what Emmett sees as the first phase of popular resistance to South African colonial rule. Emmett discusses the Bondelswarts and Rehoboth rebellions, and provides information regarding the origins, composition (class, ethnic and regional), development and strengths of the Industrial and Commercial Worker's Union, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Namibia. Emmett argues that this first phase of resistance failed on account of the fragmented nature of Namibian social formation, the composition and nature of the political organizations established, and the preponderant power of the colonial state.

The third section of the book is a detailed overview of the development of the contract labour system from Ovamboland within Namibia. In effect this system created a mass of men who experienced the worst of South African colonial rule, and who came to form the basis of the Ovamboland People's Organization and its successor the South West African People's Organization. In section four the development of an urban intelligentsia is discussed and the various strands of the book are drawn together. Ovambo contract labourers, Herero urban intelligentsia, and Nama and Herero leaders in the Chief's Council are all discussed in relation to one another, the colonial state and their origins. Relying on an extensive body

of personal interviews with nationalist leaders of the first hour, Emmett provides the reader with a unique insight into the inner workings of Namibian nationalist politics in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the same manner in which the socio-economic background of nationalist politics inside Namibia were discussed, Emmett discusses and describes the stresses and strains experienced by Namibian nationalists in exile. Step by step Emmett describes the manner in which the South West African National Union sidelined itself, both within Namibia as well as internationally; how, even before the first shots of the liberation war were fired at Ongulumbashe in August 1966, the rigidly doctrinaire theorising of SWANU had lost out to the pragmatism of SWAPO.

Unfortunately the book lacks a little in terms of design. It could have been enlivened and made even more appealing through the inclusion of photographs, at least of a number of the main protagonists. Even so, the great strength of this work is the wealth of detailed and clearly presented information that it brings together. Quite simply, this book is essential reading for anybody dealing with Namibian history and society.

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