

A comprehensive tour de force on Namibia

Marion Wallace (with John Kinahan), *A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990*

Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2011

476 pp

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R249.95

The last comprehensive history of Namibian history was published in 1988. Two years later, the former South West Africa gained national independence after a protracted and extremely violent history of colonial oppression, first under German rule (1884–1915) and subsequently under the South African occupation. Since 1990, international research on various topics in Namibian history has proliferated, although it seems that interest in its former colony has

waned quickly in South Africa.

The objective of comprehensive histories is not only to provide a narrative of important events but also to take stock of new trends in the relevant debates. Marion Wallace has succeeded in presenting a new general history of Namibia that reflects more recent academic concerns, such as gender and culture. With the hindsight of more than two decades of post-colonial developments, this book also provides an important supplement to many previous narratives that viewed the aspired national independence of the territory as the ultimate historical objective.

Wallace has digested an impressive number of published and unpublished sources. Her discussion of the economic, political and cultural dynamics in Namibian history pursues a chronological approach that makes the complexities accessible to both academic readers and a wider audience. John Kinahan, the leading archaeologist of Namibia's pre-colonial past, has contributed an excellent opening chapter that provides the necessary background for Wallace's narrative that begins in the early eighteenth century. Analysing the pre-colonial networks of hunter-gathering and herding societies, Wallace provides a lively picture of the internal power dynamics before the arrival of the Europeans. She presents an equally succinct account of the transformations that occurred when European traders and missionaries inserted themselves into the socio-economic fabric of the different African societies before the annexation of the territory by the Germans in 1884 marked a significant stage in Namibia's colonial history.

Her examination of one of the central events of the German period, such as the genocidal war that led to the extermination of large numbers of the Herero and Nama from 1904 to 1908, provides a concise analysis of the events and of the historiography, without becoming involved in the polemics that have characterised a great deal of the respective academic and political discussion. The sections on the period of the South African occupation from 1915 to 1990 carefully cover the domestic and international aspects of the struggle of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO)

against South African apartheid, but they do not gloss over the incidents of human rights violations in SWAPO camps that have led to bitter debates in the country. A brief look at the political and economic developments in post-colonial Namibia rounds off this comprehensive tour de force, ending the book on a generally positive, but not uncritical, note on Namibia's current economic and political situation after having traversed a long way from the most oppressive type of colonialism to a democratic country. Wallace has presented an excellent new general history, including a 34-page bibliography, which should be compulsory reading for any researchers in the field. It remains to be hoped that this book will help to resuscitate interest in Namibian history among South African scholars.

Tilman Dederling
University of South Africa

Veterinary medicine in its socio-historical context

Karen Brown, Mad Dogs and Meerkats: A History of Resurgent Rabies in Southern Africa

UCT Press, Cape Town, 2011

234 pp

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R253.00

Academics working on any aspect of veterinary medicine in southern Africa frequently lament the paucity of relevant literature. Covering the whole of southern Africa, Karen Brown's account of the epidemiology of rabies, a first of its kind, will certainly lessen this burden. There is much to recommend in this book. Brown circumvents a number of methodological challenges to come up with a very interesting and informative account, which is useful for a number of fields including anthropology, history, veterinary medicine and public health. Taking a chronological approach, this book, which commences in 1800, deals with five main themes in seven well-