

BOOK REVIEWS

A far-away war: Angola, 1975-1989

(Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, under the SUN PRESS imprint, 2015, 207 pp.
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The war that broke out in the north of South-West Africa (today Namibia) in 1966, that escalated from about 1973, and from 1975 onwards spilled over into Angola, had far-reaching consequences for the whole of southern Africa. This conflict, which dragged on until 1989, has been referred to as (from a South African point of view) the Border War, and sometimes also as the Bush War. It can also be regarded as the Namibian War of Independence, albeit that it became intertwined with the civil war in Angola. It formed part of the Great Liberation Struggle in southern Africa, which lasted from 1961 (when guerrillas first became active in Angola, then still a Portuguese colony) until 2002 (when Jonas Savimbi was killed in Angola).

Although a number of books were published on this conflict in the years immediately after Namibia became independent in 1990, there has been a prolific output of books on the war “up north” and “on the border” (mostly from a South African point of view), dealing with, inter alia, special operations, unit/regimental histories and the (sometimes very personal) reminiscences of ordinary soldiers (and generals) who were involved. Very few of these books are of a scholarly nature, but those members of the general public who are keen on military history, do not really care.

From an academic point of view, it is always good to see a new book that is based on solid research, on the shelves. This holds true of *A far-away war: Angola, 1975-1989*, edited by Ian Liebenberg, Jorge Risquet (who died before the book was published) and Vladimir Shubin, with Gert van der Westhuizen, Hedelberto López Blanch and Gennady Shubin as co-editors. Other contributors are Phil Eidelberg, Klaus Storkmann, Ulrich van der Heyden and Tienie du Plessis (the latter who also died before the book was published). Already from these names it is clear that in this publication the war in Angola is seen from different points of view, including that of the Republic of Cuba, the former Soviet Union (now Russia) and the former East Germany (DDR).

A very important aspect of the book is thus the fact that it indeed does not primarily look at the war in Angola from a South African (Defence Force) perspective, but also gives a voice to participants “on the other side” – see in this regard especially the emphasis that is placed on the role of the Cubans and Russians. This is further emphasised by the inclusion of many (probably never before published) photographs from Cuban and Russian archives, etc. depicting the war as seen through the lenses of Cuban and Russian cameras.

The editors/authors have indeed achieved what they set out to do, namely to contribute to a wider understanding of the war in Angola (and in Namibia); a war that had lasting consequences for the whole region – consequences that are still felt today. In *A far-away war: Angola, 1975-1989* the editors and their authors provide an excellent review of the above-mentioned conflict. In the first chapter, important historical background information is provided. In the next chapter, the war is placed in the context of the broader Cold War. In separate chapters, the role of the Cubans and of the Soviet Union, is analysed. In other chapters, the relationship between South Africans and Russians, the military support provided by East Germany for the liberation movement in Angola, the resistance to national service by many South Africans, as well as the militarisation of South African society, are discussed and analysed.

Pages 165-200 of the book contain the most comprehensive list to date of sources that deal with the war: more than 500 book titles are listed, as well as some 500 articles, a report, 44 theses, as well as internet sources, websites, CDs, films, records, novels, plays, etc. This bibliography is an invaluable source for anyone interested in the war in Namibia/Angola and will be of great assistance to postgraduate students and other researchers, as well as anyone interested in the most traumatic southern African conflict in the era

since the end of World War II.

As Romanian Gen. (rtd) Dr Mihail Ionesco has previously correctly pointed out, *A far-away war* does indeed contribute to an understanding of present-day realities in the countries that were involved in the war in Angola. Furthermore, it offers striking if not controversial interpretations to past events that (perhaps disconcertingly), broadens our understanding of the present. To this, one can add that more than forty years after South Africa's armed forces invaded Angola in 1975, this excellent publication provides much thought-provoking background information, as well as an invaluable bibliography on the war in Angola (and adjacent areas), thus enabling those on all sides who participated in the conflict, together with those who watched from the sidelines, to either once again or for the first time take stock of this relatively recent and most devastating conflict. This is undeniably a very important scholarly publication and a worthwhile contribution towards the historiography of the Angolan/Namibian/Border/Bush War. It should be read by anyone interested in (southern) African military history, the political development of southern Africa in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and related themes. *A far-away war: Angola, 1975-1989* is highly recommended.

The new black middle class in South Africa

(Jacana Media, 2016, 296 pp. ISBN 978-1-4314-2316-3)

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While today's black middle class may be 'new', it has important roots in the households of the past (p. 164).

In *The new black middle class in South Africa*, Roger Southall offers us what he terms as a modest aim to making some contribution to the greater understanding of contemporary South African society. The book was originally inspired by

Southall's rereading of Leo Kuper's *An African Bourgeoisie: Race, class and politics in South Africa*. Intending to replicate Kuper's analysis of portraying the black middle class of the time with intimacy and deep understanding, whilst sympathetically depicting the "the pathos in their position" (p. vii). But, times had changed so much that a replication would not work, so a very different plan of analysis was embarked upon to examine the black middle classes composition and character.

Southall's interest in the composition and character of the black middle class (BMC) was sparked by the need for social scientists to complicate and correct the picture of the black middle class being crafted by the advertising industry (p. xiv). Furthermore, Southall argues that an analysis of the BMC has been largely pushed to the margins of South African society, and analyses of the BMC are needed as globalisation and democratisation impacts them (p. xvi). Southall contends that, "there is no clean divide here [his analysis] between 'structure' and 'agency'; rather, there is a complex interaction which is reshaping both the black middle class itself and the environment in which it is located" (p. xvi).

At the book's launch hosted by the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) in early 2016, Professor Hlonipha Mokoena in a jocular manner remarked, "If you're looking for juicy detail about the black middle class, this is not the book". Having now read the book, I am inclined to agree with her. Southall has largely focused on "structure" with sparse regard to empirical lived experiences of the BMC's "precious positionality" (p. 164), thus, rendering a stiff book. The book's overall mantra is that, "If we want to understand the location and identity of the black middle class, we need to relate it to the two major sources of power in contemporary South African society; the post-apartheid state and the large corporations that dominate the economy" (p. 159).

A reading of the book makes one question the accessibility and utility of the book. It reads as a detailed impact report. An anthology of stand-alone academic journal articles which tangentially speak to each other. It is a book about the new black middle class, but I have strong doubts that not more than a handful of the book's subjects would read beyond the first chapter. It is an academic thesis masqueraded as an accessible book for public consumption. Below I provide a review and highlight aspects of interest.

In chapter one Southall provides us with an elaborate overview of the widely used and misused "middle class" term. He begins with a Marxist understanding

of class, based upon ownership or non-ownership of property. He then moves onto a mosaic narrative of Weber who conceded that, “property and lack of property were the ‘basis categories of all class situation’, no less important were factors such as income prospects and the general array of social material advantages, summed up as a person’s market situation or life chances” (p. 6). Southall contends that, “in-between the two we find the middle class, who derive their income and status from their small-scale ownership of land, from their occupation (which is strongly linked to their education) or from both” (p. 6).

To jump ahead, in the concluding chapter Southall provides a “lived experience” definition of the black middle class, “[I]t sees itself as ‘black’ in reaction to the historical political and economic oppression by whites, and in resentment at what it perceives as continuing white dominance of the economy”, he says (p. 240).

Key theoretical problems around the middle class are flagged by Southall such as, contrary to Marx’s expectations, as capitalism developed, the class structures associated with it became more highly differentiated, along the lines elaborated by Weber. A multidimensional approach to class espoused by Weber seems to offer more purchase (p. 8). The middle class is becoming more differentiated as capital industrialisation advances, their contradictory class location may pull different segments of the middle class in different directions, their work, life, occupation, income and status are becoming inherently precarious for large segments of the middle class (p. 21).

Chapter two provides a broad history of the black middle class, examining the African petty bourgeoisie whose status was dictated not only by its standard of living, but by its education, literacy, lifestyle, political authority and its orientation towards material improvement and individual betterment (p. 25). Southall contends that while their counterparts in *kholwa* communities continued to enjoy relative privilege among the rural African population, a recognisable black elite took shape in urban areas, its position reinforced by individual’s ability to acquire certificates or letters of exemption from the provisions of ‘native laws’ (p. 28). The black elite were subject to legalised racial barriers that blocked their upward mobility. The South African Natives National Congress (later to become the ANC) was largely drawn from the emergent black petty bourgeoisie, and steadily these bourgeoisies were radicalised, to use Phil Bonners (1980) term. They were radicalised as they noticed that racial subordination affected them equally with the black masses.

In chapter three Southall examines the composition of the black middle class. Apart from broad consensus that the black middle class is 'growing fast' there is little agreement about its size, shape and structure (p. 42).

The Human Science Research Council (HSRC) in 2004 calculated the BMC to amounting to around 2.5 million people. UCT's Unilever Institute for Strategic Marketing in 2013 estimated it to being 3.6 million. Definitions of 'middle class' vary widely reflecting different theoretical traditions and purposes, not only whether the approach is broadly Marxist or Weberian, but whether research is being conducted for reasons of social analysis, policy or marketing (p. 42). The Black Diamond approach and the Living Standards Measures (LSM), despite their descriptive value, tend to feed a popular notion of the black middle class as essentially shallow, showy, and materialistic (p. 47).

Chapter four then examines the National Party reform policies which aimed to grant black people with residential rights in urban areas with unrestricted freedom to work in any white urban areas, improve salaries and join registered trade unions (p. 66). Yet, black advancement took place only as whites moved upwards into more skilled and better paid jobs (p. 67). It was only after democratisation that real transformation and upward mobility happened, as by 2008 the composition of the public service was 78% black African. As the National Planning Commission (NPC) was later to observe; affirmative action within the public service clearly played a major role in the growth of the black middle class (p. 77), whilst equity employment is far less advanced in the private sector. Two decades into democracy, the black middle class has outnumbered the white middle class. But its economic foundations are precarious and it remains heavily dependent on the ANC's party-state (p. 92).

In chapter five Southall charts forward with the Weberian term, "life chances" which are heavily depended upon education and qualification (p. 97). Southall further examines trends in levels of education amongst the black middle class and sparse complexities with regards to those that attended former model-C schools. Facts and figures on the number of black students doubled since the early 1990s and black students migrating to former white universities, and the legacy of resource distribution.

Chapter six examines various occupations that the black middle class occupy, as "it is the jobs people obtain and the roles they fulfil in the division of labour in society that largely determine their income, ranking and status" (p. 125). Southall then examines a few; black state managers who by 2011 accounted for 74% of public service managers, whilst black corporate managers haven't

increased that much due to various factors, some stating lack of qualified black people, but some black corporate managers are preferring employment in the public sphere as its viewed as more culturally welcoming and offering better prospects of advancement (p. 132). Most interesting are the ‘job hoppers’ as they move jobs in order to take control of their own careers, advancing from one employer to another in order to build their repertoire of skills and competence (p. 135). Another segment being the *professionals* and *semi-professionals* with professionals such as CA’s only 20% are black, “it does not only take ability and determination to gain entry to the profession, but requires access to considerable resources” (p. 139).

Chapter seven examines the social life of the BMC, dovetailing on the popular focus as in a previously racially segregated society, this aspect and its visibility is fairly new. The BMC have been characterised in pejorative ways, as their wealth is often seen as a product of corruption and political connection, rather than of the virtues of hard work, responsibility and integrity so often associated with being middle class (p. 163). The chapter is telling of the entire book’s thrust; “many dimensions such as leisure activities are therefore left aside in favour of the more fundamental issues of consumption and debt, changing residential patterns, and what is termed the ‘precarious positionality’ of the black middle class” (p. 164).

The capacity to spend embodies social agency; wealth represents success; and black consumerism has become associated with a realisation of citizenship (p. 170). Citing a Statistics South Africa September 2010 – August 2011 survey, two subgroups of the middle class were distinguished, namely the emerging and the more established middle class, arguing that the more the black people became established within the middle class, the less they spend conspicuously (p. 175). As asset ownership rises, conspicuous consumption decreases, because the need to signal economic status declines (p. 176).

In chapter eight Southall turned his attention to the politics of the BMC, giving an overview in three propositions all in line with the ANC being the party vanguard of South Africa’s BMC.

Southall concludes the book in an *Afterward* instead of a conclusion, highlighting key pointers for further analysis. Stating that, middle classes were believed [by firms such as McKinsey and others] to boost growth, promote desirable social dynamics, and safeguard democracy. In short Southall remarks that the new BMC are modernisers who embody a positive vision of social mobility and meritocratic social order (p. 230).

Southall has offered his colleagues a book of immense detail about the structures which contributed and continue to contribute to the black middle classes “precarious positionality”. But, to “ordinary” readers and members of the black middle class, the book lacks in many regards. Primarily due to its stiff nature and forfeiting “juicy” details for structures such as politics, corporate and their structures affecting the black middle class.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 had great potential of being “juicy”, by capturing the lived experience of model-C education (Matlwa, 2013) and “clever blacks”. Moreover, “job hoppers” were another rich vein to be cut open; the notion of “strategic guilt” articulated by Thabang Sefalafala (M&G, 28 August, 2015) would have enriched the analysis of black corporate managers. These and other rich veins were sidelined in favour of “major sources of power in contemporary South African society; post-apartheid state and large corporations” (p. 159). The book was largely disappointing.

Tales of the Old East Coast from Zululand to the Cape

(I-Go-Books, 2015, 271 pp. ISBN 978-6206-4994-0)

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The aptly-titled *Tales of the Old East Coast from Zululand to the Cape* is a compilation of absorbing sub-narratives that compose an enlightening narrative of the history of the South African East Coast. The book covers the period from the first European arrivals on the East Coast in the late fifteenth century up to late nineteenth century when British colonial rule was firmly established in the Cape and Natal colonies.

Each chapter of the book is headed by a catchy title such as “Birds with many wings” and “Nightfall at noon.” Some of the chapter titles such as “Seers and sorcerers” and “Cannibals and crocodiles” lean on the provocative side. The first chapter explains how the first Europeans on the Old East Coast were

castaways who were involved in the European trade with India. From such initial coincidental contact with the local Khoi population, the book reveals how more contact was established with other locals since there were at least twenty-five shipwrecks on the South East coast during the seventeenth century alone. The second chapter then demonstrates how the east coast developed into a “melting pot” with the establishment of planned and unplanned European settlements. The author emphasises how most European settlers (including Jan van Riebeeck) did not enjoy this early settlement, to the extent that even some British criminals chose to go and hang back home rather than die of the unknown in a faraway land.

The narrative develops as the Ron Lock illustrates the violent contacts between the different European settler nationalities (British, Dutch, French and Portuguese) and against the local populations. The subsequent slave trade and slavery are explained showing the involvement of different groups of people, including a case study of a Black African called Efendi.

The story moves into the nineteenth century as the European settlers clashed more with, particularly, the Xhosa and the Zulu. The contrasting roles of the Khoi as resisters and collaborators are also illuminated. Other local ethnic groups such as the Pondo are mentioned, but do not contribute much to the narrative. Similarly, the San are also included, but largely in dedicated chapter titled “The Bushmen”, and nothing more. The detailed encounters include the Frontier Wars, in which the Europeans clashed with generations of Xhosa people under leaders such as Hintza Nqqika and Sandile. The encroachment into Zululand and the encounters with Zulu leaders such as Shaka, Dingane, Mpande, and Cetshwayo are also discussed. The book ends with the final defeat and subjugation of the both the Xhosa and Zulu Kingdoms.

The author writes in simple language that enables the reader to focus on the intriguing content of book. Furthermore, the author does not inundate the narrative with needless dates, something which traditional history books are often criticised for. As a result, the content of the book is accessible, not just to historians, but also to all historically curious readers. The book is full of well-illustrated, some humorous and some tragic, anecdotes which flavour the narrative making it a captivating read. Many contemporary images are used to illustrate the tales helping the reader to create a vivid picture of events.

Ron Lock’s book is very useful for history teaching and learning. It covers content that school teachers and learners would do well to know, especially on topics such as European colonization, Slavery and the Mfecane. Very useful

information is provided about leaders such as Shaka (whose history is one of the most contentious in African history). Social life at the Zulu court is illustrated, showing how some of the brutality attributed to Shaka and his successors were exaggerated. The book also reveals the role of traders and Christian missionaries during the early days of European colonialism.

Through reading this book a history learner can develop an understanding of second order concepts such as change and continuity, cause and consequence and empathy. The Old East Coast experienced major changes within the 450 years under focus, while some traditions are explained to be continuing in the present-day. An interesting example is how the place presently known as the Red Desert at the end of Maurice Road in Port Edward was created as a result of one of Shaka's cattle raids. The reader can explore the causes and consequences of the Frontier Wars and understand their complex nature. The author also helps the reader to empathise with the Xhosa society which heeded Nongquase's call to slaughter all their cattle by explaining how the society had reached a point where they had virtually nothing to lose.

However, the book has a few weaknesses which can be raised. While self-published books are now very prevalent, they are still looked down upon as lacking critique. The narratives are written largely from a European point of view which could lead critics to label the narrative as "the history Europeans on the East Coast". Other populations fit into the narrative of what the then European settlers were involved in. Acceptably, the author has a right to his historiography. The book also contains a few typological errors which could have been eliminated with more critical editing.