to rely on foreign donors, most notably the EU and foreign NGOs for the community independent progressive media, and church funding for the church press, and on the work of volunteers and activists who were able to achieve a reasonable distribution in the country despite the great distances and the lack of a substantial readership, especially in the rural areas. Paradoxically, some of these media, which had been so strong in opposing the apartheid regime found, themselves under attack in post-apartheid Namibia.

Although I find the argument wanting at times – I would have liked to know more about these ‘intellectuals’ who at times disappear in a homogeneous and undifferentiated category – Hueva’s book is timely because it illuminates the role of the alternative media in the making of civil society in Africa and the way in which the colonial public sphere was a space for debates and counter-debates, arguments and counter-arguments in which several actors showed a great deal of agency in the making of their own subjectivities and in the creation of a language of officialdom which bears significant importance in the postcolonial era. One has to look at the memorandum of the South West News in the appendix and the aims and objectives of the alternative media provided by Hueva to recognize a language of officialdom which dominates much of postcolonial life both at the level of the state and civil society. This is a potentially central point for the analysis of postcolonial public life because it undermines certain arguments that officialdom is a recent phenomenon in the postcolony, introduced by foreign bodies such as the IMF and the World Bank in the structural adjustment period. On the contrary, and in spite of what the Afropessimists want us to believe, this language has a long-established tradition in the making of an alternative and vibrant African public sphere.

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Melber’s edited collection aims at critically exploring the achievements and shortcomings of the liberation in Namibia. In particular it foregrounds a series of trends in postcolonial political culture that are emerging under SWAPO (South West African People’s Organization) majority rule. This is an objective that is partly accomplished through a collection of essays, each of them based on insightful knowledge of Namibia. Most of the contributors are Namibians or have been working in the country for a long period of time, each of them displaying a degree of theoretical sophistication, and each offering a distinctive angle on the complex array of discourses that constitute political culture in a post-apartheid society. The chapters provide an interesting disciplinary cross-over, from history to law, from sociology to anthropology and ethnomusicology, from philosophy to political science, and cover a variety of subjects (SWAPO media in exile, the role of constitutionalism, indigenous people’s rights and civil society, memory and reconciliation, liberation, democracy and tolerance, state, politics and culture). As such Namibianists and Africanists working on nation-building, the making of the state, and process of democratization in Africa will find this collection stimulating.

The main argument running through this book is that Namibian postcolonial political culture shows the hallmarks of the limits to liberation experienced in
other Southern African countries. As Melber points out in his introduction, once the organizations which led the struggle against colonial rule, like SWAPO in Namibia, had seized power and reorganized themselves as parties, they came to dominate the political arena by shaping public discourse often along dichotomous categories of inclusion and exclusion. Despite being legitimate, these governments have lacked a true ‘commitment to democratic principles and/or practices’ (p. 9). Further they have tended to deviate from their original policy aims and goals and more importantly have failed to implement policy initiatives which would bring much needed social and economic transformations to their citizens.

Namibia is shown to be no exception, and the authors are careful to stress the recent authoritarian turn by the government to substantiate their argument: the attack on the independent media and on free academic research, the hideous homophobic campaigns of the now former President Sam Nujoma, the intervention in the Angolan and DRC conflicts, the silence over the atrocities committed in the struggle and so on. These examples of authoritarianism and the lack of real democratic commitment by the Namibian government, the authors argue, have to be seen in the *long durée* from the colonial to the postcolonial era. Because liberation happened in a climate characterized by undemocratic political structures and violent practices, these have been carried over into the postcolonial period – a point best illustrated by the rhetorical language used by SWAPO which echoes and reproduces in content and vocabulary the political climate of the struggle against apartheid. This language comes to life in the section on the contested site of public memory in Namibia, to me the most interesting part of this collection. Here the contributions by Colin Leys and John Saul on the SWAPO detention camps in southern Angola, Christopher Saunders on the autobiography of Sam Nujoma, and Reinhart Kössler on ‘memory landscape’ and ‘mnemoscapes’ in Namibia, illustrate the way in which the Namibian government has constructed an official narrative of the colonial past and the liberation struggle. The nature of this discourse appears to be monolithic and uncompromising in the official government version, full of rhetoric and vitriolic language. Nujoma’s autobiography is a case in point with its many pauses, historical lapses, silences, ‘enemies’ and ‘traitors’. And yet despite this official discourse, as Kössler reminds us, public memory in Namibia is a deeply contested terrain in which different layers and sedimentations of history have left their unsettling mark in postcolonial public life.

Having spent two years in Namibia as part of my doctoral research I do recognize some of the arguments presented in this collection and indeed have experienced first hand the authoritarian turn taken by the government in the last term of Nujoma’s office, as most of my fieldwork was conducted in the Kavango region at the time in which UNITA attacks were having a dramatic impact on people’s lives in this north-eastern corner of the country. However, and here is where I disagree the most, one has the sense reading this collection that the postcolonial state in Namibia is weak and de-institutionalized, at best predatory and dominated by neo-patrimonial practices and patron–client relationships in which the elites are enriching themselves at the expense of the citizenry. Moreover Namibia’s post-apartheid public sphere appears to be the exclusive site of political intolerance and incivility (see for example Du Pisani’s essay). More than the limits to liberation, the picture presented in these essays is one of post-independence failure. I disagree with this argument for several reasons, not least because conducting part of my fieldwork among the SWAPO elite of Rundu, a middle-sized town in northern Namibia, I came to understand the way in which this local elite of educationists, behind its
party rhetoric, had contributed substantially to the making of nation-building in this town by advocating the most praised virtues of professionalism, public good, good governance and civility in public. These values are part of the postcolonial political culture of officialdom, but also reside in local notions of personhood and leadership, that cut across generational and gender divides. Despite Melber’s claim that seizing power at independence for SWAPO meant ‘the end of history’, as it were, the work of these local SWAPO elites showed that history is very much alive in Namibia. This is particularly true of the great post-independence thrust, often highly emotional, towards education and its tremendous achievements despite the legacy left by apartheid. In Rundu the Namibian state appeared to be institutionally strong, often encroaching on civil society, a point acknowledged in this collection only by one contributor (see Daniels’ essay).

What the contributors to this edited collection regard as simple rhetoric and cynicism, used as a smoke screen to hide the shortcomings of their policies, I regard as the expression of a generational consciousness formed in the traumatic experience of the liberation struggle against apartheid. It is a generational consciousness whose language denotes its anachronisms – indeed many Namibians today regards it as such – but which stresses also how Namibia post-independence remains an incomplete revolution for many a Namibian of that generation, and especially for its political cadres. It is an incomplete revolution because the means of production are still in the hands of a white minority and of foreign-based enterprises. And they are so not because the SWAPO elite had never believed in what they were preaching during the struggle (see Saunders), or had betrayed their commitments to social justice in favour of self-enrichment under neo-liberal policies as Leys and Saul suggest, but because the changed historical climate at independence and the by then successful policy of reconciliation in Zimbabwe suggested otherwise.

Lest I be misunderstood as writing an apologia for the SWAPO elite or as praising the tyrannical policies adopted in Zimbabwe, my aim is to argue that if the ‘the stony ground of history’ (to paraphrase Du Pisani) needs to be exposed in post-independence Namibia this should happen through the presentation of a more balanced argument that would unfold not only the shortcomings but also the achievements of Namibian liberation and thus give voice to the different concerns of those Namibian citizens who want to present the image of their country also as a success story. This concern was especially strong among the youth, irrespective of their status, who often aired their remarks to me. Getting the proportion right is the challenge ahead and I place this challenge within the limits of a critical public anthropology advocated by Richard Werbner that would bring the unexpected and little considered postcolonial transformations into relief.

However, what this important volume successfully achieves is to deconstruct and clearly present the discourses that have dominated and shaped postcolonial political culture in Namibia since independence. It is a substantial achievement that will lead the way for future debates on the nature of the state, civil society, good governance and democracy in Namibia and in Southern Africa at large.

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