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A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990: By Marion Wallace with John Kinahan. United Kingdom and Johannesburg: Jacana media, 2011; pp xxi +451.

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*A History of Namibia: From the beginning to 1990*¹ by Marion Wallace, with John Kinahan (Hurst, London, 2011), is a long overdue and comprehensive national history of Namibia. Although Namibian historiography has grown substantially since independence, Wallace has brilliantly managed to 'bring together what has been written on Namibia's past, covering the period from the beginning to independence in 1990' (p. 2) and to draw on new research to expand and deepen our understanding of the events that shaped Namibia.

Given Wallace's own history of involvement in solidarity and anti-apartheid activities during Namibia's struggle for independence, it is commendable that she presents a multivocal perspective that is not trapped in a nationalist and activist agenda as she gives a balanced and fair analysis of events and developments, including the good, the bad and the ugly, rather than a sanitized version of Namibian history, dealing for example with the internal conflicts within SWAPO in Zambia in 1976 and concluding that "The leadership . . . treated the dissension essentially as a military mutiny, rather than a legitimate demand for democratic accountability" (p281).

The title of the book reflects the fact that the book follows a chronological format, starting with a chapter by John Kinahan, which gives an overview and evidence of human activities in prehistoric periods. The chapter is significant as it negates the perception that Namibian history starts only in the late eighteenth century with the emergence of written records. The book provides an important bridge between archaeological and archival evidence of the past. Historians have previously neglected the rich archaeological evidence that provides insight into the thousands of years of Namibian history that preceded the letters of European traders and missionaries and the diaries of Hendrik Witbooi. Wallace builds on the archaeological foundations and insight that this provides about the communities that inhabited the area of Africa that was to become Namibia unpacking their 'complex and multi-layered histories', and showing how the arrival of Europeans changed the social, political and economic landscape.

Wallace is also to be commended for having included areas previously under-represented in Namibian historiography. These areas are the Kavango and Caprivi regions. Previously, if covered, these regions have often been portrayed through a Eurocentric lens. The book continues to detail the colonial history, dedicating a whole chapter to issues such as the contested representation of 'The Namibian War' of 1904-1908 as genocide. The book covers the implementation of segregation by apartheid South Africa and concludes with chapters discussing issues surrounding national consciousness and nationalism until the

¹ Acknowledgement: This review was first published in the *Insight Namibia* magazine of November 2011 (p.44).

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attainment of independence in 1990. It is emphasised that independence should not be seen as marking 'the end of history' for Namibia (p315).

Wallace acknowledges the challenges of putting together a history of more than 800,000 years in one volume. She argues that this carries the 'danger not only of doing violence to history by attempting to summarise very complex events in a line or two, but also of reflecting, at least to some extent, the limitations and emphases of existing literature, and thus of eclipsing alternative narratives'(pp. 2-3). However, Wallace has widely cited new published and unpublished researches on Namibian history, (34 pages of bibliography and 74 pages of endnotes) by Namibians and non-Namibians alike. The comprehensive range of literature consulted by the author also means that the book can serve as a powerful tool in the compilation of a list of priorities for future historical research. Wallace frequently points out her concerns where a topic, such as the impact of the Odendaal Plan on land resettlement, has been inadequately covered.

After identifying the gaps that are missing in Namibian historiography, Wallace encourages historians to take up the challenge and opportunity for research by 'unpacking these themes' (pp. 273, 316).

One aspect that adds value and interest to the book are the photographs and sketches that are included. However, with the exception of a few ordinary people, (Otjiherero-speaking women, p. 65; Herero prisoners, p. 173) the book has, visually, followed the trend of featuring 'big men.' For instance, Maharero (p. 108); Theodor Leutwein (p.132); King Mandume (p. 209); Hosea Kutako (p. 2250); and Sam Nujoma (p.248). Although the role of women is acknowledged, one misses the photographs of 'big women' if any exist or existed. Perhaps, this is an aspect that has been omitted from the historiography of Namibia and is one of the gaps that Wallace is asking the historians to take up the challenge.

Made up of 21 preliminary pages and 451 pages of the main text, *A History of Namibia: From the beginning to 1990* does not form part of your leisure collection. Fitly, it deals with the history of Namibia from the beginning to 1990. It is a must read for all Namibians and all those interested in the rich and complex history of Namibia. Therefore, I recommend that all learning institutions, from primary school to tertiary level, should have copies of this book on their shelves. The book is indeed a treasure to the Land of the Brave.