



ISSN 2336-3274 (Print) ISSN 2570-7558 (Online)

<https://edu.uhk.cz/africa>

Klíma, Jan. 2017. Dějiny Kapverdských ostrovů, Svatého Tomáše a Princova ostrova (History of the Cape Verde islands, and the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe). 2nd edition. Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 384 pp.

Author:

Vlastimil Fiala – Philosophical Faculty, University of Hradec Králové, The Czech Republic

Recommended citation:

Fiala, V. (2018). Klíma, Jan. 2017. Dějiny Kapverdských ostrovů, Svatého Tomáše a Princova ostrova (History of the Cape Verde islands, and the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe). 2nd edition. Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 384 pp. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, 5(2), 169–172. <https://doi.org/10.26806/modafr.v5i2.204>



University of Hradec Králové
Philosophical Faculty

I already mentioned that Horáková's and Werkman's book deals less with knowledge production in Africa than with knowledge production about Africa. While, for example, Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová rightly deplores that "the history of Africa" has only been viewed from a Eurocentric perspective, because there are still no "true African" theories, she does not deal with African perceptions of knowledge production.

Hana Horáková's and Kateřina Werkman's book is a thorough exploration of the topic "Knowledge about Africa," sensitising its readers to the many (mis-)representations about Africa and Africans. These are (still) important and relevant statements, albeit no longer particularly innovative. Thus, the book describes convincingly and thoroughly how patterns first elaborated in Said's "Orientalism" also play a central role in the knowledge production on Africa.

Georg Klute

Klíma, Jan. 2017. *Dějiny Kapverdských ostrovů, Svatého Tomáše a Princova ostrova* (History of the Cape Verde islands, and the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe). 2nd edition. Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 384 pp.

The second edition of the publication under review is testimony to the fact that interest in understanding the history of Africa among Czech readers is constantly growing. In its series on the history of nations, the publisher Nakladatelství Lidové noviny has already covered 13 African countries, while the author of the reviewed publication has previously contributed to works devoted to Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Namibia. In addition, Jan Klíma, the leading Czech authority on the Lusophone world, is also the author of histories on Portugal and Brazil. The author has already displayed his deep knowledge of Lusophone Africa in a number of previous books and articles devoted to topics such as the Portuguese Colonial War.

As the title indicates, the book is divided into two main sections, one for each individual nation. Logically, it would be more prudent to combine the history of Cape Verde with that of Guinea-Bissau.

Nevertheless, the combination of the two nations in one book is not so illogical considering their shared period under Portuguese colonial rule, as well as their status as island states with relatively similar political developments after achieving independence (one-party state) and more or less successful democratisation processes. Today both countries receive relatively positive evaluations from virtually all experts assessing the quality of political regimes, and the Freedom House database repeatedly lists them among the (more or less) democratic nations.

The structure of both sections is the same. The author first of all devotes relatively detailed attention to the pre-colonial period, before eventually moving on to developments after the attainment of political autonomy (1975) and the democratisation process starting in 1990. This is followed by chapters traditional for this series devoted to culture and the relation between the Czech Republic and both nations. The book contains several interesting appendices, such as basic statistics, a chronological summary of important events, representatives of state and governments, a glossary of terms, a list of maps and of abbreviations. The book does not lack a bibliography or index, nor a list of literature for further reading. It also contains a great quantity of interesting historical maps and photographs.

The individual sections are relatively balanced, and the author displays his great love of history, which is above all shown in his detailed examination of historical developments before and after Portuguese colonisation, including a description of the Portuguese Colonial War for independence. Unlike most African colonies, which obtained political independence on the basis of an agreement between the colonisers and leading political representatives of the region, African nations under Portuguese rule had to fight for freedom with their weapons in hand. The colonial wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau were much more intense in comparison to those of isolated islands with a terrain not particularly suited to partisan fighting, however, even the political elite of both island nations had to endure a number of casualties in the fight to secure independence.

The chapters devoted to developments after the attainment of political independence and to political developments after the

commencement of the democratisation process in the early 1990s are (at least from the perspective of a reviewer interested in current political events) more concise than the preceding ones. Nevertheless, they cover all milestones in the political affairs of both countries, including assessments of election results up to the year 2016. The economy of both nations in the mid 1970s dramatically influenced the exodus of Caucasian residents, who after the establishment of a black administration and the one-party state no longer felt safe on their respective islands and preferred to return to Portugal. The modernisation of the economies and the development of new industries, especially for crude oil extraction but also including tourism, have aided in the gradual improvement of living standards for the local population, along with a relatively peaceful political climate without the kind of major crises we can currently observe in various nations in west and southwest Africa.

In writing his history of both countries, Jan Klíma has drawn on a wide range of Portuguese literature and sources, alongside personal experiences he had on visits to both countries. The author's deep knowledge of Lusophone Africa comes to the fore in his highly valuable assessments and commentary, through which he explains complex issues to his readers. The author writes with a lively, readable style and has a sense for the dramatic. Embedding the history, politics, economy and culture of these interesting tourist destinations into the wider context of world history creates a full-fledged picture of the history of these two island states.

The book under review is the only detailed historical work (if we set aside several studies of political partisanship in both countries) in the Czech language to cover the history of both countries, from their first mention in the journals of Portuguese seafarers to the present day. The book will be valuable not only to students of African studies or African/world history and the professional academic community, but also to lovers of history, and even to travellers and tourists who are heading to these destinations in order to satisfy their curiosity or to relax. Jan Klíma proves that it is possible to write history in a balanced and readable way, without the reader becoming lost in marginal historical details. For these reasons we can recommend this book to the wider reading community, academics, students, and to others who wish to

deepen their knowledge of what for central Europeans is the magical world of Africa.

Vlastimil Fiala