

Klíma, Jan. 2022. *Nad Angolou zataženo. Zápisky z roku 1992, roku prvních angolských voleb a evakuace posledního československého velvyslanectví v Luandě* [Dark Clouds over Angola: Notes from 1992, the year of the first Angolan elections and evacuation of the last Czechoslovak embassy in Luanda]. Praha: Lidové noviny, 174 pp.

This is a gem of a book. Relatively thin in size, it tackles intriguing questions of independent modern Africa. Jan Klíma is the most productive Czech writer on Africa, namely its lusophone countries. An excellent historian, he spent time in Africa, partly also as a Czechoslovak diplomat. The book under review is part memoir, part report about Angola in the election year, 1992, and part deliberations about African independence and its socio-political problems. It reads very well; the author sometimes displays a witty style that keeps the reader's attention.

Klíma was sent to Angola as a first secretary in the embassy of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, ostensibly to strengthen the country's representation during the decisive election year of 1992. There was a Czechoslovak embassy in Angola practically since the declaration of independence of the People's Republic of Angola in 1975. Then Angola, formerly under centuries-long Portuguese colonial administration, led by Agostinho Neto and his MPLA (Popular Movement for Liberation of Angola) set out on a Marxist-orientated socialist path. That was complicated by a prolonged and destructive civil war between MPLA (supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba) and the alternative liberation movements UNITA and FNLA (supported by the U.S.A. and South Africa). Sixteen years of war made this mineral rich country a candidate for collapse. In 1983 UNITA captured 66 Czechoslovak experts and their families who had to walk hundreds of kilometres across the bush of eastern Angola to the UNITA headquarters in the far southeast. Women and children were repatriated but men were released only after 16 months when the Czechoslovak communist government made an uneasy special agreement with UNITA. After this affair the embassy continued its work only symbolically.

The Bicesse (Estoril) Accords between the MPLA and UNITA, signed in Lisbon on 31 May 1991 by President Dos Santos and UNITA leader Savimbi, opened the way to a multi-party system together with the abandonment of the socialist orientation of the country. Eventually, general elections were set for September 1992. The end of the communist rule in Czechoslovakia

created conditions for new relations with Angola. Jan Klíma was sent to Angola to ensure that post-communist Czechoslovakia would be an active witness of the Angolan transition to democracy.

His book consists of diaries written during Klíma's eight-months stay in Angola and explanatory notes added to the publication thirty years after the ominous year. The book is divided into 16 chapters, each offering a compulsive reading. The author begins with a description of the pre-election Luanda. The geographical position of this capital of Angola is breathtakingly beautiful, but the level of poverty-stricken periphery and the militarization of the airport and the city somewhat spoils the impression. Luanda, however, is not the whole of Angola, which is the fifth largest African country. Klíma mentions the Portuguese colonial foundation of the city that now ever more strives to absorb the influx of members of various ethnic groups and makes it more Angolan than before. Today one fifth of Angolans live in Luanda! This brings with itself the string of shanties all around the modern downtown. But newly arrivals have also populated the European-style houses where they practice their countryside lifestyles. The multi-storey buildings have been turned into dilapidated camping places in which nothing from the civilizational achievements of the recent past functions. The overpopulation leads to the sprawling of makeshift housing on roofs and in former gardens. Children have no playground other than the streets. The picture of street Luanda is complemented by *malucos*, often semi-mad gatherers living from garbage containers. The city is beautiful when seen from the old fortress of São Miguel. There the governor's palace is situated that in the time of Klíma's sojourn served as a temporary mausoleum of president Neto who had died back in 1979. Ilha de Luanda is a more pleasant area for recreation displaying some attractive beaches.

The author stresses that his knowledge of Portuguese opened the barrier between him and local inhabitants. But Czech can also be used as quite a few Angolans completed middle and higher education in communist Czechoslovakia. Some of them come to the embassy to inquire about postgraduate scholarships. Of course, most other people in Luanda speak Portuguese that for most *assimilados* is their home language. The author suggests that Portuguese was their mother tongue for more than 40% of Angolans. Klíma adds in a note that by 2016 71% of Angolans used Portuguese as a national language. This lusophone character of Angola is obviously a good reason for its leadership in lusophone Africa (other lusophone countries in Africa are Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé e Príncipe, Cabo Verde and Mozambique) and for its firm position in the lusophone world. Nevertheless, the author asserts, African languages slowly enter the media through television, radio and multi-media.

A special chapter is devoted to trading. The difficult economic situation makes one to search for bargains. Selling, buying, re-selling and black marketing are omnipresent, the dependence on foreign goods is considerable. Middlemen and thieves besiege the storage areas in the port or at the airport. Contrabandists and security personnel cooperate and containers are often opened illegally. Goods reappear at the market sites. Cheaper goods are sold in places where the potential buyer is treated like a victim. The whole of Luanda looks like a market where everyone offers something for sale. Women with their goods on their head offer them practically in every street. The Angolan currency *kwanza* is practically inconvertible, but black marketeers make it convertible. During the eight months of Klíma's stay in Luanda the black rate of one USD rose from 1500 to 4000 kwanza, whereas the official rate rose from a mere 400 to only 584. That this led to a dollarization of the economy is obvious. The salaried people cannot meet ends and corruption is omnipresent. Companies that prosper have their own shops with lower prices, they offer various perks to their employees who resell the goods with profit on the open market.

The chapter "Memory of nations" summarizes more than 500 years of Angolan history. The author's erudition is great as is the style in which Jan Klíma describes the vicissitudes of the country starting from the chief *Ngola Mbandi* who gave it a name, and the arrival of the first Portuguese *caravellas* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Angola was gradually settled by Portuguese who exported African slaves to Brazil, also a colony of Portugal. The resistance was combined with trade and Angola exported agricultural products and rubber when the slave trade was discontinued. Diamonds and petroleum made of Angola a potentially very rich country. Angola developed fairly well under the New State policy of the Salazar regime. After the revolution in Portugal (1974), the new government promised its colonies independence. Angola was devastated as a result of the civil war but there was light at the end of the tunnel. The author emphasizes the positive heritage of colonialism, which brought with itself the necessity of work and cooperation of races and cultures for a decent life.

Resulting from armed resistance, the Angolan nation-state was born with slogans such as Savimbi's *Primeiro os angolanos, os angolanos sempre* (Angolans first, Angolans always). But that did not lead to a racially pure nation because Angolans do not racially discriminate and often rely on the expertise of the whites. Most of them left the country but some remained and also mulattos are motivated to work harder.

By 1992, Angolan health service was much neglected, people had to turn to healers. Children died in state hospitals because medicines were missing. A strike of the medical personnel forced the opening of containers with medicaments. Klíma admits that he for the first time in his life was afraid of falling ill or suffer an accident because there would have been no help. The author ventured out of Luanda, to the beaches in the north and south of the capital. Security considerations limited the radius of trips but one could still enjoy the beaches and restaurants with their picnic facilities.

The evangelization of Angola began in 1491 and today, irrespective of the Marxist intermezzo, many Angolans believe in God. About half the population practices traditional cults. When Pope John Paul II visited Angola for ten days in June 1992, the whole of Angola rejoiced and appreciated the organization of the visit. The local cardinal Do Nascimento exerted influence on Angolan politics. The Roman Catholic clergy also enjoys respect because of assistance to simple people. Klíma agrees that the Angolans' religious belief is their hope.

A short chapter on driving in Luanda describes a hair-raising experience. The daily routine of a diplomat in pre-election Angola is well described in a longer chapter. Diplomatic work in Luanda was hard, not a proverbial dance through parties and receptions. Klíma is frank when he finishes his description of a diplomat's day on 10 September 1992 by realizing how tired he was. I liked his expression "nutritional corruption" for reaching an agreement for a business lunch. A special chapter towards the end of the book expresses gratitude to the fellow diplomats with whom the author had the honour of experiencing the dramatic days in Luanda.

Another chapter in this informative and very readable book is devoted to Angolan education and culture. While education struggles with a lack of finances, museums are in decay for similar reasons. Theatres excel, the fine arts as well. Music and singing are omnipresent and good. It seems that Angolan culture thrives irrespective of the general misery.

The rest of the book colourfully describes political events that climaxed during well-executed general elections. Before them the president Dos Santos met and shook hand with Savimbi, the leader of UNITA. Is there a chance for peace and prosperity? Not really. Jan Klíma was a witness to a dismal resolution. Is Africa to remain a world beggar, is Angola following the destiny of so many African independent countries? The United Nations dislocated in Angola its armed missions UNAVEM I and II. Cuba recalled its soldiers, the Soviet Union no longer exists. The MPLA government jettisons Marxist jargon and adjusts to reality the rate of the local currency. The result of the election confirmed the

MPLA as Angola's strongest party. UNITA disagreed, Roelof 'Pik' Botha, the South African minister of foreign affairs, tried to arrange another meeting between the Angolan president and Jonas Savimbi. The Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations attempted to reach an understanding. All this was in vain. UNITA finally attacked and MPLA forces countered the attack. UNITA's official presence in Luanda became untenable. The fighting intensified and foreigners, including diplomats, had to be evacuated. Klíma vividly describes the days in the end of October and the beginning November 1992, before the evacuation that meant closing of the Czechoslovak embassy. The cover picture, used also on the jacket of the book, tells a lot: on it Jan Klíma dictates a report for his ministry to a colleague whose typewriter sits on the toilet seat. Apparently, the only safe place was the toilet because of shooting on the street outside the embassy building. Eventually, the Czechoslovak diplomats joined several other contingents in a South African evacuation plane. At home, Jan Klíma told the press what had happened but underlined that Angola, despite the terrible conflict, remains a rich African power.

After ten years the embassy returned to Luanda, even though „only“ the Czech one. On 31 December 1992, Czechoslovakia peacefully separated into two independent states, the Czech Republic (shorthand Czechia) and Slovakia. The author comments that Angolans would never imagine a dismemberment of their country, however bitter their internal struggle. Klíma's excellent book poses many questions about independent Africa, evokes regrets as well. Angola is still governed by the MPLA although the corrupt president Dos Santos, whose family for decades profited from the sale of oil, diamonds and other Angolan riches, resigned in 2017, after 38 years in power. Next elections took place after 20 years, in 2012. Economically, Angola now fares reasonably well, some political reforms under the new MPLA president João Lourenço have strengthened Angola's international authority.

The book under review is remarkable by its realism, a style not without humour and the high level of information provided (including a glossary, bibliography, index and list of acronyms). Apart from its reporting qualities, it can serve as a source for researchers on Africa and diplomacy.

Petr Skalník^a

a Independent researcher, E-mail: skalnik.petr@gmail.com