

BOOK REVIEW

SKALNÍK, Petr. et al. *Afrikanistika v českých zemích a na Slovensku po roce 1960: kritické ohlédnutí* [African Studies in the Czech Lands and Slovakia after 1960: Critical Insight]. Ústí nad Orlicí: Oftis, 2017, 336 pp. ISBN 978-80-7405-427-3.

The main goal of this publication is to describe the development of African studies, especially in Czechoslovakia and surrounding countries of the former Eastern bloc, after 1960. This period of time is marked by the specific political developments of this area, which affected the discipline in very specific ways. The book was written by the most influential experts on African studies from this area, which guarantees its objectivity as well as offering insight into the personal histories of the people involved in this field of study. The book begins with a short introduction written by Petr Skalník, a part consisting of studies and discussions by seven different authors. The following part contains four reminiscences by authors engaged in African studies, while the next chapter comprises information about five different workplaces contributing to African studies in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Italy and Austria. The last chapter provides the reader with a selected bibliography of Czech and Slovak authors involved in African studies.

Introduction: Half-century of Czech and Slovak African Studies (pp. 5–10) written by Petr Skalník provides the reader with a great deal of useful information about the contents of the entire book as well as with a basic characterization of the political situation in the period of time on which the book is focused.

The part devoted to studies and discussion consists of seven articles written by different authors. The first one is called *Concept, Creation and Development of African Studies Worldwide, in Czechoslovakia and Later in a Czech and Slovak Context* (pp. 13–36) by Petr Zima, which describes the problematic conceptualization of African studies in general. He stresses the importance of an interdisciplinary approach towards African studies. He also points out that Africa is a disunited field of research with a number of differences across various different areas. He used his own research of the Djourga language as an example. He also evaluated trends in African studies worldwide and then the specific area of Czechoslovak African studies. The following piece written by Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová *Ivan Hrbek, his Concept of African History and Participation in The General History of Africa under the Auspices of UNESCO* (pp. 37–56) is mostly focused on Ivan Hrbek's contribution to the concept of African history, which influenced one of the most complex books focussed on the issue. The article also describes his other successes, which are especially remarkable if we take into account the difficulties caused by the political situation of the time. *A History of Africa in the Context of Czech Historiography* (pp. 57–76) is an article written by Jan Klíma and is focused on the development of African history in general as well as on the specific problems of historians in the Czech environment. His interesting article is followed by a

list of publications focused on African historiography in the Czech Republic. The following article written by Petr Skalník *Central European African Studies and Its Role in Understanding of Africa* (pp. 77–86) evaluates the development of African studies in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. He also describes how political affiliation, instead of professional maturity, affected the possibilities of employment and the opportunity to do research abroad. He positively evaluates the multiplicity and diversity of relationships established in recent history. Surprisingly, however, even those contacts do not affect the volume of books written by Czech and Slovak authors published abroad. Getnet Tamene in his article *Findings on the Weakening Tendency of African Studies in Slovakia. What Next?* (pp. 87–106) describes the importance of Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová as the leading figure of African studies in Slovakia. He also outlined all of his published works. He is of the opinion that interest in African studies in Slovakia is on the decline and predicts three scenarios in the possible evolution of the discipline. The next article *African Studies in the Environment of Czechoslovakia in the Second Half of the 20th Century* (pp. 107–112) written by Josef Kandert deals with African studies outside of academic interest of UK in Prague and OÚ ČSAV, especially travelogues, books and art collections. Maciej Kurcz in his article *Expedition to Mars, or How the Second World Discovers the Third World: Researchers Focused on Africa in Eastern European Countries During the Communist Era* (pp. 113–126) describes the Africa 76 expedition made by Polish scholars to Algeria, Niger, Mali, Nigeria and Cameroon. He pays special attention to difficulties caused by the political situation in Poland, which made research in Africa by citizens from Communist countries particularly challenging.

The next part of the book consists of reminiscences by four authors. The first one, written by Otakar Hulec, is called *Formation of Czechoslovak African Studies as a Scientific Discipline in the Oriental Institute of Former ČSAV at the Beginning of the 1960s* (pp. 129–134), about the formation of the institution focused on systematic studies about Africa. Vladimír Klíma in his article *My Beginnings in OÚ ČSAV* (pp. 135–138) describes his work in this institute. He also draws special attention to “the political cleansing” of the institution after 1968. *Quo Vadis, Czechoslovak Africanist? A Personal Journey 1961 – 2016* (pp. 139–164) by Magdalena Hauner née Slavíková is an autobiographical article which provides the reader with interesting insight into the personal decision-making of the author, especially during 1968 and her reasons for emigration. It is also the story about her personal success in England, Kenya and USA, which she modestly considers a work of chance. The last reminiscence is written by Ladislav Venyš: *Liberia/Sierra Leone 1975* (pp. 165–175). It is about his mission in the remote areas of the tropical forest of those countries. He contacted 32 villages, some of them probably for the very first time, and he negotiated their transfer to different areas, because of the construction of a hydroelectric power plant.

The next chapter is focused on centres of African studies. It consist of the articles: Luboš Kropáček: *African Studies at Faculty of Philosophy UK: Ambition and Pain* (pp. 179–196); Elena Bertoncini Zúbková: *African Studies at Oriental University in Naples* (pp. 197–200); Emília Bihárióvá and Veronika Danielová: *African Studies at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, History and Activities* (pp. 201–210); Silvester Trnovec: *African Studies at ÚO SAV in Bratislava* (pp. 211–218); Dorota

Pucherová and Jitka Kloudová: *Teaching and Research at the Institute of African Studies of Vienna University* (pp. 219–224). The articles listed above consist of a brief history and the current activities of specific institutions in different countries.

The last chapter consists of a list of bibliographical data on most of the publications focused on African studies from the Czech and Slovak republics. It was written by Kateřina Mildnerová: *A Selected Bibliography of Czech and Slovak African Studies 1960 – 2016* (pp. 245–317). The bibliography is arranged in alphabetic order and contains more than 950 monographs and scientific articles.

The entire book is truly interesting to read, in all probability because of its variety of different approaches and the combination of a scholarly and slightly popular style. The description of the evolution of African studies in this specific area may serve as teaching equipment for students focused on African studies. It can also serve as promotional material for this sometimes underestimated and unknown field of study among the general public. Most importantly, however, through the evaluation of its history, we can understand the reasons for the current state of African studies and we may be able to contrive to its better employment in the future.

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