



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

A Teutonic ethnologist in the Windhoek district: rethinking the anthropology of Guenther Wagner

Gewald, J.B.; LeBeau D., Gordon R.J.

Citation

Gewald, J. B. (2002). A Teutonic ethnologist in the Windhoek district: rethinking the anthropology of Guenther Wagner. In G. R. J. LeBeau D. (Ed.), *University of Namibia Press publication* (pp. 19-30). Windhoek: University of Namibia Press. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4836>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4836>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

- Nwanunobi, C.O. 1992. *African Social Institutions*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press.
- Ogunbodede, A.J. 1997. "Mental Illness and Traditional Therapy in Nigeria". In: *Ibom Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 4, No. 1, April, pp 56-66.
- Oke, E.A. and B.E. Owumi (eds). 1996. *Readings in Medical Sociology*. Ibadan: Ajascent Press.
- Olukoshi, A. and L. Laakso (eds). 1996. *Challenges to the Nation-state in Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Owusu, M. 1979. "Colonial and Postcolonial Anthropology of Africa: Scholarship or Sentiment?". In: Huizer, G. and B. Mannheim (eds). *The Politics of Anthropology*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.
- Peil, M. 1977. *Consensus and Conflict in African Societies*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. 1976. *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Robertson, R. 1992. *Globalisation*. London: Sage.
- Rostow, W.W. 1960. *The Stages of Economic Growth: a Non-communist Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schumacher, F. 1979. *Small is Beautiful*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Senghor, L.S. 1964. *Nation et voie Africaine du Socialisme*. Paris.
- Smith, M.G. 1959. "The Haussa System of Social Statutes". In: *Africa*, Vol. 29, pp 239-59.
- Surplus People Project (SPP). 1985. *The Surplus People*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Tandon, Y. 1998. "Globalisation and Africa's options: part one". In: *AAPS Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January-April.
- Tylor, E.B. 1958. *Primitive Culture*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.

A TEUTONIC ETHNOLOGIST IN THE WINDHOEK DISTRICT:¹ RETHINKING THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF GUENTHER WAGNER

JAN-BART GEWALD

Without a doubt, one of the finest articles ever written by Brigitte Lau (1981 and 1995) was her excellent critique of the work of Heinrich Vedder, entitled '*Thank God The Germans Came*': *Vedder and Namibian Historiography*. Originally conceived as an Honours degree paper at the History Department of the University of Cape Town, the paper went far beyond the usual scope and ambit of an honours degree paper and heralded a major breakthrough in Namibian historiography. In it Lau became the first to dare to tackle head on the doyen of Namibian written history, philology and ethnology, Dr Heinrich Vedder. In so doing she also presumed to question, and eventually jettison, one of the most revered cultural icons of White Namibian colonial society.

Much as Vedder's work, between 1915 and 1945, came to form the basis, justification and benchmark for much of the colonial state's dealings with Namibia's Black population. So too the work of three ethnologists appointed by the South African state ethnologist, Nikolaus Jakobus van Warmelo, in the aftermath of the Second World War, came to determine much of the material and the many findings of the Odendaal Commission and the legislation that this generated. As yet the careers, works and findings of these ethnologists, Lehmann, Köhler and Wagner, (as well as their successors), which so directly influenced the immediate living conditions of the majority of Namibia's inhabitants (if only in that they provided the ideological basis for the Group Areas Act), have not received any serious academic attention.² A notable exemption in the study of the history of anthropology in Namibia has been the multi-faceted work of Robert Gordon (1998; 2000a; 2000b). This article, in keeping with Lau's article on Vedder, in part seeks to fill this lacuna in Namibian history with a discussion on part of the life and work of one of these ethnologists, Guenther Kurt F. Wagner. In so doing it is hoped that anthropologists and historians currently working on aspects of Namibian life, will take a new look at the materials collected by those who went before them. In particular, this article is written with implicit appeal that material not be immediately dismissed, but that it be analysed and thought through once again. Too often research is conducted in Namibia, as elsewhere in Africa, that does not take cognisance of the research that has preceded it. To be sure this is of great benefit to those who wish to claim that they are working in uncharted territory, but more often than not research previously conducted is simply lying unused and unappreciated in the archives of Namibia. As the alleged 'African Renaissance' seeks to stumble into existence, it would be useful if it took stock of that which has come before.

¹ With thanks to Udo Mischek, Michael Bollig, Werner Hillebrecht and Gertie Janssen, for thoughts, readings and information. Research in Namibia was facilitated by the staff of the National Archives in Windhoek and paid for by the DFG, SFB 389, C7.

² The Namibian National Archives Windhoek (NNAW) hold within them a massive 345 page unpublished manuscript, the *Ethnographic Survey of the Windhoek District*, by Guenther Wagner (NNAW, BB 0320, Wagner 1951). It is a monument to his work and diligence, and an invaluable source of information for social historians of the Windhoek district in the 1940s. Envisaged as one of the five ethnographic surveys of South West Africa which were commissioned by Van Warmelo.

In its investigation into South African media, The South African Human Rights Council (SAHRC) attempted to set out measurable criteria by which racial stereotyping could be investigated. In keeping with their expressed methodology they did this in part, "in the form of a list of racial and racist propositions founded upon racist stereotypes which exist within our society" (SAHRC 1999:7). The list of propositions, sub-divided into further categories, had under proposition number 4 "African society is primitive", the sub category 4J "There can be no African Renaissance" (ibid.:8). With all the precision and implied objectivity of quantitative analysis, the report showed that on the basis of a sample total of 50, 64% challenged the proposition that there could be no African Renaissance, 20% expressed no opinion, and 16% supported the proposition (ibid.:19). The report noted that this was but one of two racist propositions that was seriously challenged in the media. From which, if we may engage in a little quantum leap from the material to the thought, we may conclude that the South African media is largely in support of the African Renaissance. Exactly what the African Renaissance is meant to entail, that is the conceptual idea upon which the proposition 4J is based, is not elaborated upon in the report. Apart from references to "Mbeki's notions of the African Renaissance", and "President Mbeki's thoughts on the African Renaissance" (ibid.:19,33) no indication is provided as to what is the African Renaissance.

The African Renaissance, it appears, is all things to all people. A short trawl of the WWW nets a myriad of strange and wondrous sites related to the African Renaissance. From one man institutes, clothing boutiques, long-winded claims of relevancy, university transformations, bulletin boards filled with flaming raves, and the speeches of Thabo Mbeki. With the bankrupting of the so-called communist world and the sudden absence of a populist rallying cry, Mbeki has attempted to blow new life into an old pan-Africanist millenarian dream, the African Renaissance. While the still deputy-president Mbeki addressed the *African Renaissance Conference* with words that sought to re-capture the spirit of anti-apartheid struggle:

I address myself to those who are ready and willing to be rebels against tyranny, instability, corruption and backwardness ... I believe that the spirit is abroad in all Africa in favour of a sustained offensive against neo-colonialism and all the degeneration that it represents.

The challenge is to mobilise and galvanise the forces inside and outside of government, which are the bearers of this spirit, so that they engage in a sustained national and continental offensive for the victory of the African Renaissance. This means that the workers and the peasants, business people, artisans and intellectuals, religious groups, the women and the youth, sports people and workers in the field of culture, writers and media workers, political organisations and governments should all be engaged to constitute the mass army of our Continent (Mbeki 1998).

Mbeki's words show the African Renaissance to be what it is, a rallying cry for the re-birth of the continent. But beyond the rhetoric of massed battalions marching hard-chinned and determined into a glorious sunset very little content is to be found in the African Renaissance. At the launch of the 'African Renaissance Institute' Mbeki (1999) stated:

The question has been posed repeatedly as to what we mean when we speak of an African Renaissance. As all of us know, the word 'renaissance' means rebirth, renewal, springing up anew. Therefore when we speak of an African Renaissance, we speak of the rebirth and renewal of our continent.

Noble sentiments to be sure, but sadly hollow-sounding in the face of current events in Namibia and Zimbabwe, and Mbeki's words:

Thus would we assume a stance of opposition to dictatorship, whatever form it may assume. Thus would we say that we must ensure that when elections are held, these must be truly democratic, resulting in governments which the people would accept as being genuinely representative of the will of the people (Mbeki 1998).

The African Renaissance, for all its panache, universalises African identities and implies that there is a single African culture. Cynicism aside, the African Renaissance, through its self-appointed spokesperson, calls for the involvement of academics in:

The rediscovery of Africa's creative past to recapture the peoples' cultures, encourage artistic creativity and restore popular involvement in both accessing and advancing science and technology (Mbeki 1999).

It is in this that the rub is to be found. In the past academics have allowed themselves to be yoked in to supporting grand schemes and ideals, often with disastrous consequences. The wars of Vietnam and Namibia, the collapsed National Socialist, Christian Nationalist, and Real Existent Socialist systems partially bear sad legacy to the misguided involvement of historians, sociologists and anthropologists. Gordon, in this volume and elsewhere, has regularly pointed out and warned against the involvement of anthropologists in the pursuit of grand schemes.

EARLY WORKS AND EARLY WAGNER

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the famous German linguist Carl Meinhof (1857-1944) published his pioneering work *Grundzüge einer vergleichenden Grammatik der Bantusprachen* (1906) which, based in part on a comparative study of the Pedi, Xhosa and Herero languages, sought to reconstruct *Ur-Bantu*, Proto-Bantu, the language from which all Bantu languages are believed to have been derived. Meinhof, teaching in Hamburg, together with Westermann, who taught in Berlin, laid the basis and standards for Bantu language studies in the present. In the early 1900s African language studies were closely linked to evolutionary theories dealing with human development. Philologists, on the basis of their interpretations of language structure and the like, believed that they could make binding statements regarding the culture (evolutionary development) of societies that spoke specific languages. Meinhof's postulate of a common ancestral language spoken by Bantu-speaking people who colonised Africa South of Bight of Biafra, laid the basis for later excellent work, such as Vansina's, exquisite *Paths in the Rainforest* (1990). But in the 1920s and 1930s, with the rise of fascism, Meinhof's work appeared to fit into a historical mould powered by the concepts of race, racial purity and race war. History, as being none other than the struggle of races for supremacy. Meinhof, who was undoubtedly one of the greatest philologists of his time, was not a historian. Nevertheless he believed that the speakers of *Ur-Bantu* had been, "a Herrenvolk, united under a genial *Führer* who established a Reich by subjugating the aborigines" (Dubow 1995:81).

N.J. van Warmelo, Meinhof's South African protégé, studied under Meinhof from 1925 onwards, and assisted in the translation of Meinhof's *Lautlehre der Bantusprachen* (published in German in 1906) into English in 1932. van Warmelo later rose to fame as the Chief State Ethnologist for Bantu Affairs under the Nationalist Government of Malan in South Africa after 1948. As government ethnologist, one of his achievements was his creation of a 'language map' in 1952, which classified Bantu speakers into ten fundamental 'tribes' (Dubow 1995:81). These divisions subsequently played a critical role in the creation of the apartheid Bantustans.

Elsewhere Brian Bunting (1964) has exposed the strong and deep links that existed between members of the Nationalist Party of South Africa and Nazi Germany. During the 1930s large numbers of young South Africans studied in Europe, particularly in The Netherlands, Great Britain and Germany. Large numbers of those who studied in Germany were wholeheartedly sympathetic to the policies and activities of the Nazi party. With the outbreak of the Second World War, a number of these former students, along with their sympathisers in South Africa, formed the *Ossewabrandwag* and other organisations, which carried out acts of sabotage in an attempt at hampering the allied war effort. South Africa's later Minister of Police, and Prime Minister, Johannes Balthazar Vorster, was one of those arrested and sentenced for his part in the bombing of railway shunting yards in Johannesburg. However, with the ascension into power of the Nationalist party in 1948, all those who had been convicted for pro-Nazi activities, including sabotage and armed violence, were pardoned. South Africa, and the territories under its administration, became a safe haven for people with Nazi sympathies.

When Van Warmelo began studying in Hamburg in 1925 he may have met Wagner who was four years younger but like Van Warmelo, had already been a student at another university. Wagner was born in Berlin in 1908. Upon completing his schooling he started studying in Freiburg and later Hamburg. In 1927 he crossed the Atlantic and started studying with Franz Boas at Columbia University in New York. While in America he did research on the Peyote cult before returning to Hamburg in 1930, where, at the tender age of 24, he received his PhD in Ethnology in 1932. Upon completing his studies, Wagner received a one year grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, which he used to further his studies at Berkeley University in California (Mischek 1994:31).

During Wagner's sojourn in America, Prof D. Westermann interceded on his behalf and arranged for him to be employed in a research project run by the International African Institute of London in Kenya. As preparation for the research, Wagner attended seminars with Malinowski at the London School of Economics. After getting married in 1934 he left for field research in Kenya. Wagner travelled to Britain in 1938 and returned to Germany in early 1939 (Mischek 1994:32).

In Germany, Wagner joined the *Antisemitische Aktion* (Anti-Semitic Action), an organisation attached to the Ministry of Propaganda. In 1940, in the second year of the war, and at the age of 32, Wagner successfully defended his habilitation thesis and was officially appointed to the academic status of *University Lecturer, Dozent*. In the same year Wagner received a position at the Ministry of Propaganda dealing specifically with colonial affairs, and was awarded a position at the university of Tübingen (*Sociologus* 1952:81-84; *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 1953:144-146; Mischek pers. comm.).

In 1942 Wagner was conscripted into the German army. Here he served in a propaganda division which was to ensure the support of locals in an envisaged invasion and occupation of the oil fields of Iraq. Following the defeat of the German army at Stalingrad, Wagner served in Greece and Italy. Following his capture by American forces in Italy, Wagner was released from captivity in July 1945 and allowed to return to his family in Hamburg. Following his return to Hamburg, Wagner scraped together a living as a translator. Fortunately for him, and in spite of his activities in the *Antisemitische Aktion*, Wagner was cleared of all Nazi sympathies. In the first years after the war Wagner worked at the editing and revision of his earlier fieldwork in Kenya. Copies of his thesis in German had been destroyed in the war. As such Wagner had to re-write his thesis, which he now chose to do in English. Given that Wagner was forced to grow

his own food and collect turf for cooking and heating purposes, it is remarkable that Wagner was able to do what he did. The successful revision, writing up, and translation of fieldwork is hard work at the best of times, in the aftermath of war it must have required near superhuman effort. Indeed, to assist in the revision he contacted his earlier colleagues at the International African Institute in London with requests for paper and fuel.

Thus in 1949, Wagner had come through the war and was living at Duvenstatt near Hamburg in the British occupied zone of Germany. It was from here that he re-initiated contact and correspondence with his former colleague from Hamburg, N.J. van Warmelo, who, by this stage, had risen through the ranks and had recently been appointed Chief Ethnologist in the Department of Native Affairs. Van Warmelo, though often seen as a lackey of the Nationalist party, was a far more complicated figure, "who regarded the Christian-Nationalist chauvinism of the [NAD] head office ideologues (especially some notable parvenus) with amused contempt" (Hammond-Tooke 1997:115-116). Following the National party victory in 1948, the department was renamed the Department of Bantu Affairs and came to play a central role in the definition and implementation of apartheid.³

In 1946, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the then administrator of Namibia, had commissioned P.J. Schoeman to write a job description for the position of 'State Ethnologist' in the territory. In essence the job description, as written by Schoeman, was a listing of racist perceptions of the 'native', and as such was written with the implicit assumption that the 'native' was to be characterised by superstition, laziness, slow understanding and so forth. It was envisaged that the, "state ethnologist must be continually accessible to the Secretary for South West Africa, and to the administrator", and thus an integral part of the colonial administration of the territory (NNAW, SWAA 426/1, Native Affairs: Ethnological Research). These points were not particularly applicable to Wagner, however, that which most certainly did apply to him was what Schoeman listed as the very first attribute that the envisaged ethnologist should have:

- 1.) He must have an academic understanding of the general principles of native administration. For instance he must have knowledge of the different policies that are being pursued in Africa. Such as for instance the British, French, Portuguese and Belgian systems. One can learn a lot from the experiments and mistakes of other nations (NNAW, SWAA 426/1, Native Affairs: Ethnological Research, my translation from Afrikaans).

Wagner had extensive field experience, had published widely, was well schooled in African languages, and was most certainly ideally suited to the position on offer. Of this fact Van Warmelo was undoubtedly aware. Following his return to South Africa in 1929, Van Warmelo had been appointed as Government ethnologist in 1930. With the victory of the Nationalist Party in the South African elections of 1948, Van Warmelo was permitted to appoint Assistant Government Ethnologists to work with him in the Department of Native Affairs. Given the commonly held belief that German anthropologists were the best trained in the world for empirical work it made sense to hire some of the unemployed Germans, especially someone with Wagner's impressive credentials (Gordon pers. comm.). At the end of 1949 Guenther Wagner received confirmation that he was to be employed as Assistant Government Anthropologist for South West Africa.

³ Reflecting the evolving nature of Apartheid double speak, the department was later given the name of 'Plural Affairs' and even later the 'Department of Cooperation and Development'.

Wagner, probably anxious to escape the cold and misery of postwar Germany, and undoubtedly buoyed by the reports of a cousin who was living in South Africa, readily agreed to Van Warmelo's offer. Thus on the 30 January 1950, Wagner and his family arrived in Cape Town, South Africa, on board the S.S. Stirling Castle (NNAW, SWAA 736/A5 602, Immigration Permit No. 8130). On his *Application for permit to enter the Union of South Africa, or the Mandated Territory of South West Africa for Permanent Residence*, he filled in under question number nine, which dealt with the applicants race, that his race was Teutonic (NNAW, SWAA 736/A5 602).

WAGNER'S WORK IN NAMIBIA

By June 1950 Wagner was engaged in short fieldwork trips among the Tswana, and a month later he started working in Namibia. Within a year of his arrival in Windhoek, Wagner had completed his ethnographic survey of the Windhoek district, which he followed up in the following year with surveys of the Gobabis and Okahandja districts (unfortunately none of these surveys saw print during his lifetime). At the same time he found time to work on material for an article entitled *Aspects of Conservatism and Adaption in the Economic Life of the Herero* (1952). Apart from this multitude of work, Wagner was also able to arrange for his temporary appointment as Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in May and June 1952. Upon completing his lectures at Wits, Wagner returned to Windhoek by truck through the Kalahari Desert. It is clear that he had not anticipated the extreme cold of Kalahari winters, for it was during this trip that he contracted pneumonia. Upon his arrival in Windhoek, Wagner was placed in the Roman Catholic Hospital where he died shortly afterwards at the age of 44 (*Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 August 1952, front page obituary).

Guenther Wagner's *Ethnographic survey of the Windhoek district* is a monument to the incredible amount of work which he completed in the two years he spent in Namibia. True, the structure and format of his survey followed the guidelines as laid out by the Department of Native Affairs for Ethnographic surveys, and was thus predictable in terms of the themes covered, but this does not detract from the fact that in terms of content and insight it far surpassed what had been expected of him. Apart from clearly detailing: Boundaries; Extent; Control; Geography - the first four points in the departmental guidelines - of the Windhoek district, Wagner also allowed his own views to come to the fore, as well as a mass of social information on the district in the 1940s. Undoubtedly, in the years to come, Wagner's survey will prove to be a mayor source for those working on central Namibian history. However, much as Vedder's work has been uncritically regurgitated by a string of social scientists and historians, that is until Lau sounded a timely warning, so too one would be well advised to handle Wagner's wealth of information with the utmost of care.

Be that as it may, there are three aspects of Wagner's Windhoek survey that I wish to highlight and discuss in this paper. The first is his wealth of detailed statistics, facts and figures; the second is racism; and the third is the apparent compassion, understanding and insight, which Wagner showed for the predicament and position of the people whom he studied. It is possible that this last aspect of Wagner's work ensured that his monumental *Ethnographic Survey of the Windhoek District* never saw print during the apartheid era in Southern Africa.

STATISTICS, FACTS AND FIGURES

Wagner's work is packed with statistics, facts and figures detailing virtually all aspects of African life in the 1940s in the Windhoek district. This wealth of information is particularly rich when dealing with the position of farm workers. Though archival sources are fairly rich with

regard to the life of Africans in the urban areas of Namibia at the time, very little is to be found on Africans living and working on the settler farms of the territory. Wagner's survey devotes a major section specifically to conditions on the settler farms. Of particular interest to Wagner was the financial position of farm workers, and what and how they spent their meagre salaries. An aspect of the manner in which these people spent their money dealt specifically with clothing:

The principal item on which farm natives spend their earnings is clothing. Though the women wear the same type of dresses as in town, the clothing standard is generally lower, both as regards the quality of the materials worn and the number of dresses which a woman possesses. Even the Herero and Mbanderu women whom I saw on farms in their Sunday attire do not look as 'spick and span' as their sisters in town (NNAW, BB 0320:para. 126).

Continuing on the aspect of clothing, Wagner detailed the average number of yards of cloth sold for one dress according to ethnic classification. Thus the average, "... length was six yards for Bergdama and Nama women, and from eight to ten yards for Herero and Mbanderu women or for the Sunday dresses of the former" (ibid.:para 127). Dealing with male farm workers, Wagner noted:

Most men seem to have only one set of working clothes, i.e. a shirt, a pair of trousers, and a pair of solid boots, which they wear day-in day-out until they fall to pieces. For Sunday wear, nearly all of them possess a good shirt and a jacket, and many even a suit of clothes. Few women properly mend their husbands clothes, putting, at best, only clumsy patches on them so that the average life span of a shirt and trousers is shorter than it need be (ibid.:para. 128).

Rounding off his findings on clothing among farm workers in the Windhoek district Wagner came to the conclusion that, "A married man with two or three children will have to spend between 60 and 70% of his cash wages on clothing himself and his family" (ibid.:para. 132).

In the same methodical and systematic way in which he dealt with clothing, and the costs thereof, among farm workers in the Windhoek district, he dealt with other aspects of their life as well. Thus with regard to foodstuffs, Wagner noted:

Next to the money spent on clothing, the most important expense items are additional foodstuffs, especially coffee, sugar, tobacco, and sweets. Most of my informants said that they drank coffee every day and that the weekly coffee ration (approx. 4 ounces) lasted them only for two days, so that they had to buy about a shilling worth of coffee every week (ibid.:para. 134).

Beyond the extremely detailed breakdown and listing of incomes and expenses of farm and urban workers according to ethnic background, Wagner also detailed strategies which people had developed at the time so as to tide themselves over in times of need. One of the strategies developed was that of the *Gooi Mekaar*:

Friends - as a rule, two, and rarely more than three - often enter into an agreement which is locally known by the Afrikaans expression "gooi mekaar", to throw together. The agreement is that A lends part of his wages to B with the understanding that on the following payday the roles are reversed. It is not a true pooling of wages, as the expression *gooi mekaar* suggests, for the things bought for the money do not become the joint property of the partners to the agreement, but it is merely a system of mutual, though staggered, lending of money. The custom clearly reflects the difficulty which many natives apparently find in

saving up their surplus money even for such a short period as a week (ibid.:para. 636).

During the course of his work on the Windhoek district ethnographic survey, Wagner became more and more interested specifically in Herero society. Part of the detailed accounting of the financial aspects of life in the Windhoek district came to the fore in an article written by Wagner which combined both these features and interests of his work; Herero society and a detailed analysis of its financial status. Wagner's article, which started life with a greater emphasis on social processes as, *Forces of disintegration and re-integration among the Herero of SWA*, later shifted to a greater emphasis on economic processes in Herero society, and was published posthumously as, *Aspects of Conservatism and adaptation in the economic life of the Herero* (1952).

RACISM

It is easy with hindsight to refer to Wagner as a racist, however, to do so would be to obscure more than illuminate the content of his work. The cases of blatant racism which are to be found in his *Windhoek Survey* inform us a great deal about the manner in which White colonial society saw, and classified their subject population in Namibia at the time. Of particular interest is the fact that Wagner's survey indicated that settler society was obsessed about the issue of race and racial classification. In part, no doubt, this can be attributed to the success of the Nationalist Party and the introduction of apartheid laws which were predicated on race and racial classification. Of particular relevance at the time that Wagner was conducting his research was the so called *Population Registration Act* which was passed by the South African parliament in 1950. By means of the Act a register was compiled which listed and classified every individual in terms of his or her race. As apartheid laws were predicated upon racial classification, this Act was the cornerstone of apartheid. Given that racial classification determined access to state resources and privileges, it is hardly surprising that the issue of race was the topic of the day.

What is surprising is that Wagner, who himself had gone through the Second World War and undoubtedly knew of the horrors perpetrated in the name of racial purity, should have agreed to investigate and seek to classify in terms of race and racial classification. This willingness on the part of Wagner, mars his otherwise excellent work and results in White supremacist and insulting paragraphs which are essentially devoid of inherent truth. Though this may be the case, the paragraphs, however insulting they may be, do provide us with an insight into the perceptions of settler society at the time, and, perhaps more importantly, provide us with an insight into the constraints within which Black Namibians were placed when dealing with colonial authority. Black Namibians were perceived of primarily in terms of their perceived racial attributes. This resulted in statements such as the following:

According to observations made by several farmers with whom I discussed the subject, both Bastards and Coloureds on farms tend to 'breed back', even those who are already three-quarter White. My own data on this point are as yet too incomplete to warrant any statement (NNAW, BB 0320:para. 79).

APPARENT COMPASSION

Wagner's voluminous work is characterised by an apparent compassion, insight and understanding into the true position of the people whom he was investigating. Time and again his prose is arrested by short asides which discuss Wagner's perceived reasons for the conditions in which people found themselves. More often than not these asides clearly indicate that forces beyond the control of mere individuals were to blame, and show that the colonial state was, in a

large part, responsible for the conditions of social depravation and misery in which large numbers of the population of the Windhoek district found themselves. However, Wagner never condemns the colonial state outright, instead his asides occasionally also contain within them justification for the continued mistreatment of subject people, on the grounds of alleged custom. Thus there are cases where Wagner's apparent compassion and understanding fail to uncover the true causes of social misery and are a mere cover for continued ill treatment. In other words, this is a case of blaming the victim. A fine example of this is provided in Wagner's discussion on the issue of housing:

Compared with the housing standards of the agricultural tribes of Africa, the housing of most natives, both on farms and in the Reserve, seems poor or even very poor. **It must, however, be borne in mind that all South West African Natives are pastoralists who for centuries have lived a nomadic or semi-nomadic life and therefore can scarcely be expected to adopt fundamentally new housing standards within a generation or two**, the less so as the scarcity of building materials, especially timber, is against them (ibid.:para. 103, emphasis added).

At the same time, Wagner was at times well aware of the fact that many of the racist stereotypes being bandied about, were not based on fact, but on the machinations and fantasies of colonial minds:

... raw Ovambos ... many humorous stories circulate, illustrating the misunderstandings that arise from their inability to grasp what they are told to do. It must be said that in many cases these stories reflect less the slow mind or stupidity of the Native than the lack of imagination on the part of the employer who simply takes it for granted that he is being understood (ibid.:para. 89).

Wagner was clearly struck and affected by the social misery which he encountered during the course of his fieldwork. Indeed there are cases where he went beyond the guidelines of his research brief and sought to indicate alternative strategies which might benefit the inhabitants of the Windhoek district: "The possibility of starting home industries on farms- e.g. carpet knitting or leather work - does not appear to have been given serious consideration" (ibid.:para. 114).

However, these alternatives remained within the confines of a settler dominated society, the basis of which was not questioned by Wagner. Instead Wagner used his understanding to advocate the gilding of the cage of colonial rule. This comes most clearly to the fore in the following paragraph:

... it can be said that most of them do not only spend their money as quickly as they earn it but usually buy on credit during the month so that on pay day few of them get more than a fraction of their wages in actual cash. My information is too limited to say whether this granting of credit is a general practice, but it was done on all the farms visited. From the psychological point of view it seems to be an unfortunate custom as it makes people feel that they have worked a whole month for nothing or for a few shillings only (ibid.:para 141).

What Wagner failed to explicitly mention, was that which his extensive findings indicated: Farm workers in the Windhoek district were expected to work for a meagre wage, were bound to the farmer through credit manipulation, and the engenderment of psychological dependency was a strategy of farmers to ensure the maintenance of a subservient labour force.

Given that Wagner's ethnographic survey of the Windhoek district, was and is a veritable treasure trove regarding social conditions in the district in the 1940s, why is it that it was never published, while ethnographic surveys of other districts, and of far lesser calibre, were published? The mere death of Wagner cannot have been the cause for the Native Affairs Department's failure to publish. Indeed, Wagner's ethnographic surveys of the Okahandja and Gobabis districts were published after his death, albeit under the editorship and authorship of his successor Oswin Köhler. It is possible that the sheer bulk of Wagner's work may have prevented publication on the grounds of cost, but this is most unlikely, particularly given the fact that at the time, as 'Grand Apartheid' ground into gear, the Native Affairs Department was certainly not strapped for cash. Instead, we need to look elsewhere to determine why his work did not see print.

Of fundamental concern to Brigitte Lau in the last years of her life, was her wish to show how the *Broederbond* had conspired to further the underdevelopment of Namibia (Lau, B. and P. Reiner, pers. comm.). Elsewhere it has been shown how members of this elite organisation formed an inner governing body within the South African government between 1948 and 1994. It is possible that by 1951, when Wagner completed his *Ethnographic Survey*, his work was deemed to be incompatible with the interests of the newly elected Nationalist government and its apartheid policies. For what Wagner's work provided was an overview of urban African life which in no way complied with the understandings of social life as it was being promoted by *Broederbond* intellectuals at the time. Far from showing that African tribes formed single cohesive wholes that tended to maintain separate and unique identities, Wagner's work indicated that in the case of the Windhoek district this was most certainly not the case. For apartheid to work, apartheid planners needed separate unique and cohesive tribes, and not people who associated with one another on all levels of social life irrespective and in spite of their ascribed ethnic identities. In effect thus, Wagner's work failed to provide *Broederbond* planners with what they needed, if they were to continue with their apartheid projects. This having been said, the work of Gordon (2000b), as well as a good dosage of scepticism, should make one question whether there was indeed a deliberate plot to suppress Wagner's Windhoek survey. The incompetent nature of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, coupled with budgetary constraints of the Department, at the time could well have prevented the publication of Wagner's Windhoek survey.

Wagner noted that, "... the conditions of town life tend to level down tribal differences", and this becomes abundantly clear in his own words:

On the occasion of dances, sports events, etc., members of the different sections either mingle or amuse themselves on their own, without any group antagonisms making themselves felt. One of the Saturday evening social dances which I watched in the Bantu Welfare Hall provided a typical scene: Among the people attending there was a clear dividing line between the Coloureds and Union Natives on the one hand, and the Bergdama woman on the other. The former came dressed in modern European clothes - every girl with her male partner, and they danced and behaved in the true fashion of village beaux and belles in a European dance hall. The Bergdama women, on the other hand, wore their mid-Victorian dresses, and either two women danced together or - more frequently - each woman danced by herself, moving about in circles with skirts flying or improvising fantastic dances in rapt abandon. The two groups were worlds apart, but each enjoyed itself without paying much attention to the other. It was the typical atmosphere of 'live and let live' which seems to be the key note in the

everyday relations between the various ethnic groups residing in the urban location (NNAW, BB 0320:para. 401).

In the urban setting, as Wagner indicated, "there is no residential alignment within the sections according to traditional political or social sub-divisions. Generally speaking people occupy adjoining plots by virtue of the chronological order in which they have taken up residence and been assigned their plot" (*ibid.*:para. 430). Thus, far from Windhoek's African inhabitants being grouped together according to their alleged ethnic affinity, they lived, worked and died among one another without regard to their ethnic background. Clearly apartheid, which was predicated upon the myth of separate but equal development for all according to racial and ethnic classification, could not function in the racial and ethnic mix which Wagner had shown existed in Windhoek. It is thus hardly surprising that in the years immediately after Wagner's untimely death, the new assistant government ethnologist Oswin Köhler worked long and hard to separate and categorise the inhabitants of Windhoek into separate ethnic categories. The design of a new location, Katutura, along ethnic lines that bore no relation to the lived reality of Windhoek's Black population, was a pre-cursor to the bloody and forceful removal of the inhabitants of the Windhoek location to a new location. There, with the assistance of Wagner's successor Oswin Köhler, the African inhabitants were resettled into specific residential areas according to their ascribed ethnic identity.⁴

CONCLUSION

In summing up, the work which Wagner produced during his short sojourn in Namibia is not only a monument to his work, it also clearly shows that Windhoek, and by extension Namibia, was not occupied by mutually separate and antagonistic tribes in the 1950s. In this it echoes Lau's (1987) earlier work on southern Namibia, where in contrast to Vedder, she argued for an understanding of Namibian history which sought and emphasised cooperation and rejected histories of conflict. It is to be hoped that the tradition initiated by Lau is continued into the future. Wagner's work is of particular relevance in the new Namibia of today, where ethnic tension appears to be on the increase once again. An African Renaissance will only be impossible if there is no lessening in ethnic tension. A new look at the work of Wagner, will show that, at least, in the urban area of Windhoek in the early 1950s there was more unity among the city's Black urban inhabitants than an initial glance would seem to imply. It is a unity that is sorely needed if Namibia is to prosper.

REFERENCES CITED

- Bunting, B.P. 1964. *The rise of the South African Reich*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Dubow, S. 1995. *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gordon, R.J. 1988. "Ethnological knowledge is of vital importance: the martialization of South African anthropology". In: *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 12, pp 443-8.
- 2000a. "The stat(u)s of Namibian anthropology: a review". In: *Cimbebasia*, Vol. 16, pp 1-23.
- 2000b. "Licensees and Tricksters: South Africans in Namibian Anthropology". Paper presented at the AASA Annual Conference, Windhoek, 9-13 May.

⁴ The Department of African Studies in Cologne possesses a working map of Köhler detailing the resettlement areas of Windhoek's African inhabitants in the new location according to ethnic categorisation.

Hammond-Tooke, D. 1997. *Imperfect Interpreters*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Lau, B. 1981. "'Thank God The Germans Came': Vedder and Namibian Historiography". In: *Collected Papers*. Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, UCT.

----- 1987. *Namibia in Jonker Afrikaner's Time*. Windhoek: Archeia.

----- 1995. "'Thank God The Germans Came': Vedder and Namibian Historiography". In: *History and Historiography: 4 essays in reprint*, pp 1-16, Windhoek: Discourse Msorp.

Mbeki, T. 1998. "Statement by Deputy President Mbeki at the African Renaissance Conference". Johannesburg, 28 September.

----- 1999. "Speech at the launch of the African Renaissance Institute". Pretoria, 11 October.

Meinhof, C. 1906. *Grundzüge einer vergleichenden Grammatik der Bantusprachen*. Berlin.

Mischek, U. 1994. *Das Völkerkundliche Institut der Universität Tübingen (1940 - 1959)*. Magister Artium: University of Tübingen.

Sociologus. 1952. N.F. 2, pp 81-4, Berlin

South African Human Rights Council (SAHRC) 1999. *The News in Black and White: An investigation into Racial Stereotyping in the Media*. Media Monitoring Project, October.

Vansina, J. 1990. *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Wagner, G.F. 1951. (NNAW, BB 0320). *Ethnographic Survey of the Windhoek District*. (unpublished manuscript).

----- 1952. "Aspects of Conservatism and Adaptation in the Economic Life of the Herero". In: *Sociologus: A Journal for Empirical Sociology, Socialpsychology and Ethnic research*, New Series, Vol. 2, No. 1, Berlin.

Zeitschrift für Ethnologie. 1953. Vol. 78, pp 144-6, Braunschweig.

THE REINVENTION OF CULTURE AND TRADITION