Herero annual parades: commemorating to create

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> Throughout the world indigenous populations have had to reckon with the forces of 'progress' and 'national' unification. The results have been both destructive and inventive. Many traditions, languages, cosmologies, and values are lost, some literally murdered; but much has simultaneously been invented and revived in complex, oppositional contexts. If the victims of progress and empire are weak, they are seldom passive (Clifford 1988: 16).

To the many thousands of tourists who annually visit Namibia, the country is memorable for one of three things, the desert, the Germans and the Herero. In fact Namibian identity, as it is portrayed in popular media and tourist brochures, appears to be an amalgam of these three attributes. European television commentators delight in being able to present their viewers with 'traditional' Herero women dressed in long dresses speaking German against a desert backdrop. Indeed the long dresses and spectacular head dresses of Herero women have come to embody Namibia as it is perceived in the outside world.[2]

Given the spectacular and conspicuous clothing considered traditional for Herero women, it is hardly surprising that the Herero have so come to determine the popular image of Namibia. Indeed, in the present, Namibia without the Herero is unthinkable. However, it must not be forgotten that these Herero women are defined as Herero precisely because they wear particular forms of clothing. And, as with all societies and cultures, Herero society continually draws from a bundle of loose characteristics, be it in the form of behaviour, clothing, ritual, food and/or many other things, which are then combined in various ways to form stereotypes. One of the sites where unconnected characteristics come to be bundled together into what is defined as typically Herero is the annual Herero commemorations of the dead. These commemorations form the basis of this article.

Starting in 1923, at the funeral of the first paramount chief of the Herero, Samuel Maharero, Herero men and women dressed in military

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1 This paper is partly based on research funded by the Netherlands Foundation for the advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO). Michael Bollig and Berend Timmer went through earlier drafts of this text and made helpful criticisms and suggestions.

2 As Hildi Hendrickson has shown elsewhere, Herero society effectively 'hereroised' and 'traditionalised' its women through clothing. See (Hendrickson 1996: 213-44).

-style uniforms and have annually met as the *Otruppe* (disparagingly referred to by the settlers as *Truppenspieler* 'troop players') to commemorate the dead and discuss the present.[1] At various sites in Namibia and Botswana, the *Otruppe* members affiliated to one of three flags, *Omarapi* (derived from the Dutch word *lapje*, piece of cloth), gather together for ceremonies lasting two or more days to commemorate the dead and discuss the present. In the period from 1990 to 1997, there were three main flags, each of them with its own colours and different sites of commemoration. Currently the red flag, *erapi rotjiserandu*, has the largest following in Namibia and is the best known of the flags. Essentially, the red flag represents the Herero of central Namibia and commemorates the royal house of Tjamuaha, centred on Okahandja. The green flag, *erapi rotjigreeni*, centres on ceremonial sites in Okahandja, Okaseta and Botswana and is generally equated with the followers of the royal house of Kahimemua. A number of the followers of the green flag refuse to define themselves as being Herero, choosing instead to define themselves as Ovambanderu. The black and white flag, *erapi rotjizemba*, centres on Omaruru in western Namibia and represents the followers of the royal house of Zeraua. Following the independence of Namibia in 1990, the followers of lesser chiefs have also sought to institute their own annual commemorations and flags. As very little is known about these new flags, their ceremonies will not be dealt with in this paper.

For the purposes of this paper, the author's observations of annual commemorations, as well as the literature of others on these commemorations, will form the basis of a description of the manner in which Herero present and define stereotypes of what is considered to be Herero society and culture. The paper is divided into five essential parts:

- An informal description of the *Otjigreenie* ceremony held at Okeseta on 17 and 18 August 1991, as recorded by the author.
- A history of the manner in which these ceremonies of commemoration and the *Otruppe* came into being.

[1] Dag Henrichsen traces the roots of the *Otruppe* in Namibia back to the late 1880s the eve of German colonialism (Henrichsen 1997)

- A short sketch of the involvement of the Herero in formal ethnographic endeavour regarding their society and culture.
- A characterisation of what appear to be some of the essential features of the Herero ceremonies of commemoration.
- A discussion of the manner in which these ceremonies construct and proclaim an ideal type of Herero society.

The *Otjigreenie* ceremony held at Okaseta on 17 and 18 August 1991:

> "I eventually managed to commandeer a VW combi and arrived in Katatura early on Saturday morning, only to be told that I would have to come back the next day as Saturday was to be the day on which the people arrived, with Sunday being the actual day of the commemoration. ...
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> On Sunday morning G. and I were in Katatura by 5:30, and after picking up K. we roared off into the sunrise towards Gobabis. ... At about 8:00 we reached Gobabis, where, after driving through, we picked up three Herero women resplendent in their *Otjigreenie* green dresses and headgear. After about 4 km due south from Gobabis we reached the farm 'Detroit 175', owned by J.J. Krüger. It was more than a little incongruous to have white farmers roaring past us in their finest Sunday NG Kerk [*Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk*, Dutch Reformed Church] best with us to a 'heathen feast'. The Ovambanderu refer to 'Detroit 175' or at the least the area as 'Okaseta'. We drove past Krüger's house and along a dirt track towards a river bed, next to which was an encampment of trucks, vans, buses and cars. After getting out we were led to a gate next to which a number (4?) of old men in *Truppe* uniforms [based on old German uniforms] guarded a fire, the holy fire of Kahimemua. We were required to kneel in a row about a metre to the left and in front of the fire. To the right of us, one of the men was applying ash, taken from the fire, to the faces of a number of children and a few adults. These 'ashen-faced' then joined the end of our queue. As we knelt, a man passed along our right hand side. He took my left hand and pulled the finger next to my little finger till it cracked, then he took my right hand, shook it and said "Good morning".[1] The man at the fire, the one who had smeared ash on peoples faces, handed a jug of water, which had been standing next to the fire, to another man who proceeded down the left hand side of our line taking gulps from the jug and spraying this gulp over our faces, after which he muttered something. Kaendee told me to remove my glasses and I looked up to have my face sprayed. Those whose faces were covered with ash paste had to crawl under the legs of a man (not in uniform), whereafter we all slowly, solemnly walked up a rise. About 200 meters from the fire, to the left of a small kopje where saddled horses were

[1] I was greeted by the man in English, which I must admit I found a little incongruous.

grazing, was a fenced in enclosure of 50m by 50m which had been cleared of grass. Within the enclosure there were about nine graves and everybody who could got in. The entrance to the enclosure was guarded by officers of the *Truppe* who divided us up to the left and to the right, first timers and repeaters. Two of the nine graves were simply heaps of stones 2m by 5m and about 5m high, one of the graves still had the remains of cattle horns on it, the rest of the graves had tombstones on them. A small brass band played tunes and a choir sang a number of hymns. We joined the left hand queue and passed by the graves. At the end of a grave two old men in *Truppe* uniforms sat on the ground. Everyone who passed them had to kneel down in front of them, whereafter our right hands were pressed into the soil at the foot of the grave, and after giving our names our faces were forced down and a pinch of soil dribbled over the back of our necks whilst the old man introduced us to the dead. After this we had to follow a set route past all the graves, touching each one as we passed. As a consequence, some of the stones had a worn look to them. The *Truppe* ensured that everybody followed the correct route past the graves, the last one of which was covered in sacking. It was around this stone that everyone was gathered. Without wanting to sound insulting, the rows of women sitting on the ground looked a little like contended cows chewing on the cud, the horns of their head dresses moving slowly as they talked quietly to one another. After everybody had been squeezed in, a short prayer was said, a tune was played, a song was sung, and then around me nearly all the women were overcome by grief and started crying, lamenting, screaming, wailing, ranting and fainting. Everybody who was crying hung onto one another as a solid mass of grief. A *Truppe* officer removed the cover from the last grave, that of Aaron Mtjatindi who died in 1988, and the crying started slowing down again, songs were sung, tunes played and the crowd flocked past the last grave to touch it.

After this the various parade *Truppe* formed up and marched down the slope past the holy fire under the command of their various officers. The horse guard formed up last of all. There were about twenty horses, under the command of an officer who kept rearing up and charging around to loud acclaim from all those present. We strolled down the slope to the holy fire where faces were still being smeared with ash paste and the man in civilian clothes collected money for the organisation; this man spent the rest of the day next to the fire.

At the encampment a pickup truck faced a patch of open land and was used as the stage. The Officers of the *Otjigreenie*, *Otjiserandu* and *Otjithemba* troops gathered in front of the 'Bakkie' [pick up truck] with chief Munjuku II of the Ovambanderu with an umbrella over him in the middle of the officers, the *Otjigreenie* to his right and the *Otjiserandu* to his left with, after that, Chief Riarua of the *Otjithemba* with his officers. Directly in front of the Chief was an open patch with a diameter of about 25m, on the other side of which sat the assembled *Otjigreenie* women with one *Otjiserandu* woman and a couple of *Otjithemba* women.

Speakers were called forward and spoke from the pickup. The first speaker was Pastor Samuel Tjitunga who welcomed all those who had

travelled from Botswana. Then the regional commissioner from Gobabis praised the Swapo government and comrade S. Nujoma, "the Swapo government attaches great importance to the history of the past, however this has been used wrongly in the past and as a result these events had lost credit in the eyes of the people". He continued by stating that it was necessary for the Ovambanderu to remember who fought for this land and that upon this the new community had to be created. The third speaker, *Truppe* Commandant Ngaruka, stated that to build a new community, its foundations had to rest on the old and appealed to the youth of the community not to forget this. After this Ngaruka called forward the newly elected headman and councillors of Aminuis and introduced them to the assembled. The following speaker was Dr. Kaire Mbuende, deputy minister of agriculture, who noted that the installation of an Mbanderu headman in Aminuis would have been impossible under the previous regime. Kuhepa Zeze, chairman of traditional affairs (a government-appointed commission on the issue of chieftaincy), who in a rather controversial statement stated that the history and culture of the Herero and Mbanderu was and is uniform. After him Swanu spokesman Usiel Tjiendda stated that Swanu had always travelled in the footsteps of the ancestors and traditional leaders, and that Aaron Mtjatindi (whose grave was covered) had led the way in the past; he had been shot in the leg during the 1959 shootings when the old location was forcibly removed. Dr. Kaire Mbuende, deputy minister of agriculture speaking as a SWAPO member, proceeded to tell us that people drew strength from great men in the past, great men like Lenin. However it would be necessary for history and culture to be liberated, new perspectives had to be adopted to look at the past. He continued by stating that Namibia was willing to accept the repatriation of Ovambanderu from Botswana, provided there was enough land and the means to resettle them. Following this, the Field Marshal of the red flag (*Otiserandu*) spoke, whereafter General Field Marshal Ezekiel Kuriza of the *Otjithemba* spoke. Both condemned the plans of the new government to make it possible for those not of royal blood, to be elected as paramount chief of the Herero, such as the present paramount Riaraku, who was appointed by the South Africans following the assassination of Clemens Kapuuo in 1978. The chief trooper from the Botswana community spoke of the ever growing strength of the *Otruppe* in Botswana, to such an extent that even Tswana were joining up.

Every time one of the officers took the microphone, the *Truppe* would jump to attention, with the exception of the lower ranks and those who had fallen asleep.

After the speeches the *Truppe* formed up and were called upon to parade before the assembled crowd. The marching was - speaking as a former cadet - atrocious but flamboyant in the extreme and very entertaining to watch. Eventually a *Truppe* from Mariental was voted as the best and the mounted *Truppe* took to roaring around again and generally spreading dust everywhere. At this stage some of the assembled had begun leaving and a *Truppe* major was sent out to prevent them from leaving before the encampment was cleaned up. K., asked by his father, who is a senior *Truppe* officer and who was a big man in the first SWANU, to assist in

Botswana Ovambanderu discussions with the deputy minister of agriculture, Dr. Kaire Mbuende, regarding their possible repatriation to Namibia. Anyway, after having been asked by Chief Munjuku if I could take a couple of his family members with, we set off for Windhoek again.

As you can see, G. and I had a great time and we got ourselves introduced to a load of people ..."[1]

Before we can enter into a discussion regarding the essential structures and characteristics of this and other Herero commemoration ceremonies, it is important that the historical background and development of the *Otruppe* and the commemoration ceremonies be outlined.

A short history of the manner in which the Herero ceremonies of commemoration and the *Otruppe* came into being:

A question often asked by those observing the *Otruppe* on parade is, 'Why do these people march and commemorate their dead in what appear to be the uniforms and clothing of Imperial Germany? The selfsame country, after all, that defeated the Herero in battle?' Or in other words, how did it come about that the Herero have chosen to define themselves in ceremonies that appear to mimic the marching and parading of German troops? To discover this, it is necessary to situate the ceremonies and the *Otruppe* be historically, and to provide a certain amount of historical background.

Between 1904 and 1908 the Herero living in central Namibia were defeated in a genocidal war against Imperial Germany. The Imperial German commander in chief, General von Trotha and his commanders carried out what he had extolled in brave words:

> "The exercise of violence with crass terrorism and even with gruesomeness was and is my policy. I destroy the African tribes with streams of blood and streams of money. Only following this cleansing can something new emerge, which will remain" (Kühne 1979: 211).

Herero were either killed, driven into the desert or incarcerated in concentration camps. The majority of the survivors were women and children, who apart from being systematically abused, were put to work as forced labourers for the colonial army, businesses and individual colonial settlers. All forms of Herero society appeared to have been

[1] Letter of the author to his supervisor, Windhoek 19 August 1991.

destroyed and made to conform to the regimen of camp life. Herero leadership, with the exception of a few Christian evangelists, had been killed or driven from the country. Herero boys, in so far as they had not been incarcerated in the camps, became the mascots and servants of the victorious army (see also Gewald 1996).

In the aftermath of the war the camps were abolished. Henceforth the Herero were enmeshed in a series of laws which sought to transform the survivors of Germany's colonial wars in Namibia into a single amorphous black working class.[1] Herero were deported from their former areas of residence and allocated to those settlers and businesses demanding labour. Ancestor worship and the maintenance of *Okuruo* (holy fire) were prohibited. All forms of leadership, with the exception of the Christian evangelists, were prohibited. The ownership of cattle, essential to the maintenance of a pastoralist society such as the Herero were, was prohibited. Herero boys continued serving in the German army. In short, it appeared as if the settlers' dream of creating a pliable, leaderless working class was coming to fruition. In 1911 a colonial official in German South West Africa initiated a bureaucratic file on the Herero. He captioned the file with the following words: *aufgelöste[n] Eingeborenenstämme*, or "dissolved native tribes".[2]

Recent research has brought to the fore that though, in the immediate period after the war, Herero were subject to all manner of constraints, it is a mistake to view Herero society at the time as being solely acted upon. Herero were actively engaged in manipulating the pass and labour laws which had been imposed upon them. Evidence exists which indicates that Herero were engaged in re-routing labour allocations to their own advantage (Krüger 1995). Herero evangelists, the sole Herero who were permitted some form of mobility and literacy, informed other Herero, as they travelled from farm to farm, about the news of the world and the conditions of their families and friends.[3]

[1] For the war see Bley (1971). For copies of the legislation regarding the control of Herero, see Namibian National Archives Windhoek (NNAW), ZBU, 2023 *Verwaltung der Eingeborenen Angelegenheiten*, WII a 4 - a 10. For published texts, see *Verordnung des Gouverneurs von Deutsch-Südwestafrika, betr. Dienst- und Arbeitsverträge mit Eingeborenen des südwestafrikanischen Schutzgebiets, Verordnung de Gouverneurs von Deutsch-Südwestafrika, betr. Maßregeln zur Kontrolle der Eingeborenen, & Verordnung des Gouverneurs von Deutsch-Südwestafrika, betr. die Paßpflicht der Eingeborenen*, all 18/8/07, *Deutsches Kolonialblatt: Amtsblatt für die Schutzgebiete des Deutschen Reichs, herausgegeben in der Kolonial-Abteilung des auswärtigen Amts*, 15/12/07, pp. 1179 - 1184. For a detailed discussion of this legislation, see Bley (1971: 170-71) and for African responses to this legislation, see Prein (1994: 99-121).

[2] Namibian National Archives, Zentrales Büro (ZBU) 2027.

[3] On the prohibition of literacy, see Hillebrecht (1992). On the role of evangelists, see Gewald (1996: 253-255) and Prein (1994: 99-121).

Indeed, Herero evangelists were so successful in their function as purveyors of the latest news that settler farmers referred to them as weekly tabloids. Additionally, Herero living beyond the confines of the colonial state successfully established communities which were regularly in contact with Herero confined to the settler farms.

Following the South African invasion and occupation of Namibia in 1915, the strict German colonial laws that had sought to regulate the Herero were relaxed. Given that the Herero religious, military, political and economic leaders had been systematically liquidated in the Herero-German war, the Herero survivors were faced with a fundamental problem: How to run a society when all those in the know had been killed. Or to put it another way, how does one conduct marriages, circumcision ceremonies and the like when all the ritual specialists have been killed? This essentially was the problem that faced Herero society in 1915.

The reestablishment of what it is that makes a person and a society uniquely Herero is a historical process that started in the immediate aftermath of the war and has continued into the present. Throughout the 20th century Herero have sought to define and determine what it is that makes themselves Herero. In this process they have selected and rejected, at various historical stages, a whole series of characteristics which, when combined in varying forms, created stereotypical, yet historically contingent Herero. A fine example of this selection and rejection of specific characteristics is that with regard to Christianity and the mission.

In the immediate aftermath of the war the mission churches, both Catholic and Lutheran, provided structural support for the Herero survivors. However this support was only provided on the condition that Herero repudiated their former beliefs. In the early 1920s influences of the Ethiopianist movement elsewhere in Africa did not leave the Herero untouched. As early as 1921 Herero evangelists were being expelled from the Lutheran mission for conduct considered unbecoming to Christians, but clearly becoming to Herero. Herero, as they reacquired and redefined their identity as Herero, became increasingly more critical of the established mission churches. Telling in this regard was the visit of missionary F. Pönnighaus to Okakarara reserve in 1934, where Herero men and women refused to speak to the missionary and informed him that they were not Christians but Herero.[1] Effectively thus, in the 1930s, for one to be considered to be a true Herero, one could not profess to being a Christian. However, ten years later, in the 1940s, one could be considered a true Herero, while professing to

[1] Vereinigte Evangelishen Missionsarchiv (VEMA) 2510, Pönnighaus (11/9/34).

being a Christian. Albeit that in the 1940s Herero Christians were those who were members of the independent Herero *Oruuano* Church, which broke away from the established mission church in 1948.[1] Essentially thus, in both the 1920s and 1940s, membership in a mission church was not among the characteristics that defined one as a true Herero.

As noted earlier, a number of Herero survived the war as child servants in the German army. As they grew older, they, along with their associates, found within the confines of the German army the structures and institutions around which and within which they could reestablish their lives as social beings. Needless to say, with the defeat of the German army in Namibia in 1915, these people appeared to have lost the structures that had given their lives meaning. This, however, was not the case, for they had appropriated and inculcated the structures and institutions of the German army to their own ends. Within a few months of the German defeat, Herero soldiers had established their own nation-wide social support system modelled and based on the organisation of the recently defeated German military. These young men appropriated the names and titles of their former commanders. They sent handwritten telegrams in German to one another. They issued military passes, pay books, and commands to one another.[2]

Effectively, by copying the structures and images of the German military, young Herero men had set up a countrywide support and information network for themselves. A network that extended from Lüderitz and Keetmanshoop in the South, to Gobabis in the East, Tsumeb, Grootfontein and Otjiwarongo in the North, Swakopmund and Omaruru in the West and Okahandja and Windhoek in the centre of the territory. The regiments formed an organisation which looked after the welfare of its members, a social structure to replace the society which they didn't have or were only marginally part of.[3] This is not to deny that the *Otruppe* were also effective as a counterpoint to the colonial administration. The *Otruppe*, through the use of a number of traits usually considered to be characteristic of the colonial state, such as the issuing of travelling passes, the wearing of uniforms, and the issuing of printed proclamations, effectively laid claim to the same executive powers normally attributed to the colonial administration.[4] Effectively, in a twist to James Clifford, the *Otruppe* used powers and

[1] VEMA, 2607, *Bildung der `Oruuano´ bei den Herero, 1948 - 1958.*
[2] NNAW, SWAA 432, Truppenspieler 1917 - 1918 Vol. 1.
[3] Henrichsen and Krüger (forthcoming) and Werner (1990: 485-502).
[4] As is argued by Michael Bollig in this volume.

attributes usually associated with others, in this case the colonial state, to construct themselves.[1]

A short sketch of the involvement of Herero in ethnographic studies regarding Herero society and culture:

Prior to their defeat in the Herero-German war, Herero had been extensively involved in Herero ethnography; if initially only as the informants of a number of the Rhenish Mission society missionaries who were active in their midst. As early as in the 1860s, little more than twenty years after the first Rhenish missionaries had started in central Namibia, formal studies regarding the Herero, written by the sons of these missionaries had begun appearing in German magazines dealing with ethnography.[2]

Missionary interest in the language, social structure and culture of Herero society was determined by a single factor: their need, as missionaries, to convert those whom they considered to be heathen to Christianity. In order to be able to convert the Herero to Lutheran Christianity, the missionaries had to come to an understanding of what it was that the Herero believed in and what it was that would have to be transformed before a Herero convert could become an acceptable Christian in their eyes. With this in mind, the Rhenish missionaries met at their annual conferences and elsewhere, and presented and discussed what they believed were ethnographic studies of aspects of Herero society and life. More often than not, the studies presented at the annual conferences were based on the extensive and intensive questioning of Herero converts about their lives. Indeed, information divulged by Herero converts was used as a gauge of commitment to the mission and conversion. Thus, for instance, the conversion of Chief Kukuri in 1903 was seen as being genuine because Kukuri surrendered his *Otjiha*, fire sticks used to kindle the *Okuruo*, to the missionaries. In some instances Herero converts introduced Rhenish missionaries into areas which were ritually off-limits to all but Herero ritual practitioners.[3]

Interestingly, in the present, the products of this cooperation have come to form the basis for much of what is now believed to be known

1 Clifford and Marcus [Eds.] (1986: 10).
2 J. Hahn (1868; 1869), Th. Hahn (1868).
3 For a critical overview of these informants, see Lau (1995). Irle, Senior Missionar (1917: 337-267). In 1883, Irle was able, with the aid of evangelist Elia Kandikirira, to enter the hut of Maharero and see things inside it.

of Herero society. Both formally and informally, these snippets of knowledge gathered at various stages throughout the last hundred years are used to piece together what is considered to be a valid image of Herero society and culture in the present. Thus if one pieces together the genealogy of current ethnographic studies of the Herero, one comes up with a series of copyings that stretch back through time and which all claim to be true representations of a timeless Herero essence. The recent immensely popular work of J.S. Malan, *Peoples of Namibia* (Pretoria 1995) contains a section on 'The Herero'. Malan's work, as far as the Herero are concerned, is largely based on Gordon Gibson's 1952 doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, *The Social Organisation of the Southwestern Bantu*. Gibson's work in turn is based on the work of Heinrich Vedder, "The Herero", in *Native Tribes of South West Africa*, (Cape Town 1928) and the doctoral dissertation of H.G. Luttig, *The Religious System and Social Organisation of the Herero* (Utrecht 1933). These works in turn are based on the work of the missionaries Irle and Hahn, and so forth one hundred and fifty years into the past, with each retelling claiming to represent the true characterisation of the Herero in the present.

Similarly Herero presently engaged in attempting to determine what Herero tradition is meant to be are often dependent on the earlier works of Hahn, Vedder, Gibson and Irle. More often than not, Herero involved in ethnographic endeavour will similarly jumble together these various snippets of insight and perception into a single 'ethnographic present' representing 'the Herero'. What cannot be denied, though, is that much of what is currently being hashed into these ethnographic representations is based in part, no matter how warped and twisted, on the information provided by Herero ancestors in the past.[1]

Undoubtedly the greatest ethnographic source on the Herero is the voluminous work of the Rhenish missionary Heinrich Vedder. Vedder, whose first active posting was in the Herero prisoner-of-war camp in Swakopmund, became Namibia's self-trained and self-appointed ethnographer-historian, whose work has come to form the flawed basis upon which most of all Namibian ethnography and history is based.[2] Following the first world war, Namibia was placed in the care of South

1 See particularly the *Ovaherero religion and bloodlines project*, initiated by Alexander Kaputu, and the *Oveta Yovandu: Laws of the Ovaherero people*, initiated by Effa Okupa.
2 Vedder's impact on Namibia was and is far-ranging and has been the subject of previous critique. Kinahan (1989: 33-39), Lau (1981: 24-53). Before the second world war Vedder was a fervent Nazi party supporter and in the aftermath of the war, as the representative of Namibia's indigenous population in the South African senate, he continued to extol his national socialist ideals vis à vis Namibia's black population.

Africa as a mandated territory of the League of Nations. In the early 1920s when the South African government sought to impress upon the League of Nations its rights to the territory, the new administration sought to make ethnographic sense of the mass of people who had become its new subjects. To this end experts were appointed by the administration to assist in the definition and determination of Namibia's population. Part of this work is to be found in a book entitled, *The Native Tribes of South West Africa* (Windhoek 1928), which was commissioned and written with the express purpose of convincing the League of Nations of South Africa's good conduct in the territory. In his introduction, Mr. H.P. Smit, the then-Secretary for South West Africa, stated:

> "...the book was written to give the League of Nations a short sketch of each of the principal tribes, in order that without a great amount of study it can be seen by members of that body the state of development of the natives, their mode of living and the ways in which they resemble or differ from one another.
> The five main divisions into which the natives of the Territory fall have been treated: 'The Ovambo,' by Mr. Hahn, who is the representative of the administration in Ovamboland, 'The Bushmen,' by Dr. Fourie, the Medical Officer for South West Africa, and 'The Herero,' 'The Nama,' and 'The Berg Damara,' by Dr. Vedder.
> The authors are all authorities on the tribes they have written about, and I should like to record here the Administration's great appreciation of their having consented to place their knowledge at its disposal.[1]

Needless to say, these experts, and in this case specifically Vedder, were dependent on indigenous informants for their information. An analysis of exactly who Vedder's informants were and how Vedder conducted his research still remains to be done. Suffice it to say that Herero informants will have had their own agenda when assisting Vedder in his ethnographic study of the Herero.[2]

Throughout the course of the twentieth century, Herero cultural brokers have sought to define their society, and this has not been limited to the 1920s. In the immediate afterglow of Namibian independence in 1990, the new administration, too, sought to make sense of the country and its inhabitants. To this end, commissions of enquiry into land and traditional leadership, population censuses and voter registration were initiated.

1 C.H.L. Hahn, Vedder and Fourie (1928).
2 The Namibian National archives as well as the archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia contain records detailing Vedder's ethnographic research.

However, Herero definition of their ethnographic self has not been limited to the definition of the self to others, as was the case of Herero informants who worked with Vedder, missionaries and administrations. Herero cultural brokers have also been anxious to define to themselves exactly what it was that constituted Herero society, culture and ethnicity. Thus aside from reacting in response to state investigations the ethnic condition of Namibia, Herero, too, have initiated projects to define themselves. In part this has been through the initiation of projects that deal with what is considered Herero history, culture and ethnography. During the 1960s a large number of Herero fled Namibia and some of them were fortunate enough to continue their schooling in exile. At least three of these Herero exiles, Katjavivi, Mbuende and Ngavirue, wrote Ph.D. theses on Namibian history, and in the process also wrote ethnographic descriptions of Herero society. Of late a number of Herero have sought external funding for a project intended to investigate *Oveta Yovandu: Laws of the Ovaherero People.* Similarly, the Herero historian Alexander Kaputu has sought funding for the *Herero traditional fire project*, with the aim of "discovering exactly how Herero tradition is to be conducted". Along with these projects, a number of oral history research projects were established in the late 1980s, with the express aim of investigating Herero history.[1]

At the moment in Namibia, Herero-language broadcasts often detail aspects of what is considered Herero history. Though local newspapers do the same, their reach is nowhere near as extensive as that of the radio. Herero history forms a large part of serious discussion determining Herero identity. As many commentators have already indicated, history, and the role and position of Herero therein, forms a major part of Herero everyday discussion. Much of Herero-language radio broadcasts detail aspects of Herero history, in the form of praise songs, listeners' queries and detailed histories collected by NBC employees. Most notable amongst the NBC Herero-language broadcasters is Mr. Alex Kaputu, who consciously seeks to define the mythical `true´ Herero history. However, as all know, history lays claims on the present as well as the past, and the history that one chooses determines to a large extent of the quality of one's Hereroness.[2]

1 Of particular relevance was the Michael Scott Oral History Research Project, which led to the publication of *Warriors Leaders Sages and Outcasts in the Namibian Past* (Windhoek 1992).
2 See in this regard the ongoing struggles in the present regarding the `correct´ Herero approach in the postcolonial state to such controversial issues as land rights or the extent of traditional leadership rights.

A characterisation of what appears to be some of the essential features of the Herero ceremonies of commemoration:

Naturally other Western - trained anthropologists, historians and social scientists have observed and attended Herero commemorations of the dead at different times and at different places in Namibia and Botswana. Though it must be realised that each commemoration is unique and historically determined, and that failing to do so would lead one into the trap of the 'Ethnographic Present', it is also evident that in looking at the reports of others who have written on Herero commemorations of the dead at different times and places, and comparing their views with the author's description of events at Okaseta in 1991, a number of similarities do come to the fore, and it becomes clear that the ceremonies appear to be structured in a set pattern.

Sites of the commemorations are situated on the graves of men who are considered important to the flag. Generally the commemorations take place on weekends with the high point on Sunday. Usually organisers will arrive at the site on Friday with the majority of visitors arriving during the course of Saturday and the main ceremonies taking place on Sunday. Participants arrive on Saturday and are introduced to the ancestors at the *Okuruo, holy fire*. During the course of the day participants greet and meet friends and relatives, and practice for the events of the following day. In the evening food is distributed amongst all the participants and formal men's and women's dances evoking the past are held. On the following day, Sunday, the actual ceremony takes place. Long before dawn participants are dressed and start assembling in marching troops on the central parade ground. In this croud women sing songs and troops indulge in some last minute practice and start forming up in the order in which they will march to the graves. Eventually, shortly after the sun has risen and the *Ovandangere*, or ritual specialists, have deemed fit, the participants head off towards the graves, led by horsemen and followed by the marching men and women. Arriving at the graves, permission is asked of the ancestors, whereafter the participants are led past the various graves. Newcomers are introduced individually to the ancestors. Following the visit to the grave, the participants return to the parade ground. Here speeches are given detailing historical events and current affairs. Topics can range from the presence of researchers in their midst to what a speaker believes the correct approach to sales tax should be, as long as the topic is considered to have bearing on the community as a whole. Hereafter the various troop contingents display their marching skills and seek to chosen the winners of the competition. Winners are chosen on the basis of public acclaim, whereafter the ceremony is over and participants begin to pack up and go home.

Throughout the commemorations, people are continuously urged to watch and learn.[1] Participants and observers are continually urged to be on a good footing with one another, to preserve unity and not to display any forms of disagreement with one another. In the 'unity' thus created, observers, as well as participants, are told that here before them the prime aspects of Herero society are to be observed. In effect the commemoration brings into being, albeit for a very short time, a representation of Herero society which the participants see as the ideal and to which they seek to conform their lived society. The commemorations portray Herero society as Herero see it, as they believe it ought to be, and those aspects of their society which they consider to be essential to their existence as Herero:

> "The action of individuals of troops and of the procession is organized according to the principle that certain kinds of people lead and certain kinds follow. Ritual practitioners lead other participants, ranking participants lead non-ranking ones, men lead women, mature people lead younger ones, uniformed people lead non-uniformed" (Hendrickson 1992: 115).

In effect, by commemorating the dead as well as events associated with the dead, Herero bring together history, religion and the *Otruppe*, which they use to determine, define and display their own identity as Herero. In a short period of time, when people come together in their annual commemorations of the dead, the Herero attempt to determine the manner in which they and others see themselves and to redefine themselves as a grouping distinct from the rest of the world in terms of their religion, history, dress and norms. Effectively they seek to reach an agreement about what Herero identity should be and consists of.

A discussion of the manner in which these ceremonies construct and proclaim an ideal type of Herero society:

In the past, the historian Terence Ranger has eloquently dealt with the *Beni Ngoma* dance societies of eastern Africa (Ranger 1975). Ranger has described how, in Kenya and Tanzania of the interregnum, groups

[1] This is an issue also pointed out by Hendrickson (1992: 118):
"...a great emphasis [is] placed on the viewing and enacting of proper conduct within a hierarchy of personnel and groups".

of men and occasionally women gathered together in military uniforms to march, dance and partake in war-games. As with the Otruppe, members of the *Beni Ngoma* carried ranks and titles that were derived from those of the German colonial army. But in contrast to those who would argue that the *Beni Ngoma* was obviously a parasitical and derivative phenomena, Ranger argued that the phenomena was a creative and versatile African response deeply rooted in the cultures of eastern Africa. In a later publication Ranger noted:

> „African observers of the new colonial society could hardly miss the significance that Europeans attached to the public rituals of monarchy, the gradations of military rank, the rituals of bureaucracy. Africans who sought to manipulate these symbols for themselves, without accepting the implications of subordination within a neo-tradition of governance, were usually accused by Europeans of triviality, of confusing form with reality and of imagining that it was possible to achieve power or prosperity just by emulating ritual practice. But if this were true, the over-emphasis on the forms had already been created by colonial whites themselves, most of whom were the beneficiaries rather than the creators of wealth and power. If their monopoly of the rites and symbols of neo-tradition was so important to the whites, it was by no means foolish of Africans to seek to appropriate them".[1]

Elsewhere in Africa, at the same time that the *Beni Ngoma* and the annual commemorations of the Herero started in the early 1920s, peasants in what is now western Niger dressed in copies of colonial uniforms and engaged in massed drilling.[2] Members of the movement carried ranks inspired by their colonial masters, and some came to be possessed by the spirits of these selfsame masters. This movement, which still exists today, became known as *Hauka*.[3] Paul Stoller, an American ethnologist who has written extensively on the *Hauka* amongst the Songhai and Djerma of Niger, has argued that Songhai sought to 'master the master by appropriating his embodied behaviour'.
(Stoller 1995: 113). Stoller's work is heavily influenced by Michael Taussig's *Mimesis and Alterity* which refered to:

1 Hobsbawn and Ranger (Ed.) (1983: 237).
2 Stoller (1995; 1989) and with Olkes (1989); Rouch (1960); Olivier de Sardin (1984). Elsewhere in Africa: Ranger (1975).
3 Between January 1995 and May 1996, the author lived for thirteen months in Tera, a small town in northwestern Niger. During his sojourn the author attended a number of *Hauka* ceremonies.

> ...a novel anthropology not of the Third and Other worlds, but of the West itself as mirrored in the eyes and handiwork of its Others (Taussig 1993: 236).

Taussig used the *Hauka* as an example of this 'novel anthropology', in which it was his "intention to bring out the ways that the mimetic and alteric effect of such reflections must problematize the very act of making sense of reflection - which is why it strips the anthropologist naked, so to speak, shorn of the meta-languages of analytic defence, clawing for the firm turf of cultural familiarity" (Taussig 1993: 237). Taussig's and Stoller's work falls within earlier work on globalisation, which effectively sought to discover what it is that gets appropriated, transformed and thrown back by those who have been colonised. Stoller argues that Songhai and Djerma ethnography of their colonial masters allowed them to appropriate their power through 'the mimetic faculty' and to turn it against their colonial masters (Stoller 1995: 133). By coming to understand French colonists and by mimicking their behaviour Nigeriens could oppose the French:

> "Indeed, the Hauka constituted an embodied opposition to the French occupation.
> ...
> Copying the French Governor entails contact, which is electroshocking to both intended and unintended audiences" (Stoller 1995: 122).

It will be clear from the above that, in contrast to the activities of the *Hauka* in Niger, which have been seen by some as an ethnography of colonialists, the *Otruppe* at the commemorations do not seek to portray outsiders, but to define and portray themselves. Thus, though elements of the commemorations have been appropriated from the German colonial presence, the commemorations do not entail a description of German colonists; outsiders are not used to portray themselves, instead the Herero participants seek to present an ideal type of their own society, which is to serve as a template by which Herero action is to be informed and defined by both Herero and others.

In contrast to the *Beni Ngoma* of East Africa and the *Hauka* of Niger, the *Otruppe* do not concentrate primarily on the present. Instead, through the public remembrance and commemoration of a string of historical events, the Herero create a chain of history that leads back into the past, and which is then to a large extent moulded and used to justify their claims vis à vis the colonial and the post-colonial state. In doing so, the commemorations serve a three-fold function: they lay claims to the land; they allow Herero society to process and overcome the traumatic events of the past; and finally

they are a site where, through performance, an ideal type of a united and harmonious Herero society is presented. An ideal type that does not exist except in performance.

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