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Review: Robert Gordon, *SA Dreams: Ethnologists and Apartheid in Namibia*, New York, Berghahn, 2021. Also published by the University of Namibia Press 2022 under the title *Ethnologists in Camouflage: Introducing Apartheid to Namibia*.

Robert Gordon explores the central role of Ethnologists on the development of Apartheid ideology and separate development policies to an unknown peripheral or marginal part of the world formerly called South West Africa, now Namibia. He shows why a historic research focus on SWA/Namibia was necessary as the country had previously been largely overlooked despite having been an important testing ground for South Africa's Apartheid ideology and separate development policies. In chapter one, Gordon discusses the interwar (the first and second world wars) irrelevance of anthropological expertise and provides an understanding of some of the earlier works on the ethnic groups of Namibia such as that of missionary H. Vedder whose work was later contested by authors such as Brigitte Lau.¹ Although Anthropological expertise irrelevance was more pronounced during the interwar years, the impacts of Anthropological expertise was felt throughout the South African colonial period of Namibia. Gordon discusses the centrality of expertise on local people in efforts to legitimise colonial control, specifically the crafted representation or bushman myth

and marginalization, as a means to shift world attention from the real criticism over unfulfilled obligations under Mandate C on SWA/Namibia. Gordon's discussion of the participation of SWA/ Namibia Bushmen in the 1952 Van Riebeeck Festival would have benefitted from referring to Leslie Wits who saw it as an 'Apartheid' festival of South Africa's contested national past.² It is interesting to note too, that while Gordon reproduces the assertion that Bushmen sold their own wives to returning contract labourers for tobacco etc, Kletus Likuwa did not come across this assertion among the many aspects of the relations within the Kavango between the San and returning contract labourers covered in his oral history research.³ The chapter examines the ever present challenges to SA legitimacy over SWA/Namibia, for example the Bondelswarts rebellion in the early 1920s, which made SA claims of civilizing the 'native' through labour look very suspect.

In chapter two, Gordon discusses the disposition of ethnologists in a disputed territory. Specifically, he focuses on the central role of ethnologists in justifying to the international community SA's continued presence in SWA/Namibia. Gordon explores the centrality of the State Ethnologist in promoting SA's claim to be entitled to control over SWA/ Namibia as a mandate territory after the demise of the Leagues of Nation. He further shows SA attempts to divert world attention from its failure to fulfil its mandate C obligations,

¹ Brigitte Lau, 'Thank God the Germans Came', in: idem, (ed), *History and Historiography: 4 essays in reprint*, Windhoek, MSORP, 1995.

² Leslie Witz, *Apartheid's Festival: Contesting South Africa's National Pasts*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2003.

³ Kletus Muhena Likuwa, *Voices from the Kavango: A Study of the Contract Labour System in Namibia, 1925–1972*, Basel, BAB, 2020.

by exploiting the Bushmen's fear for their way of life or even their survival, as a pretext for continued control of SWA/Namibia. Gordon shows the SWA colonial administration's increasing fear of foreign scholars or researchers visiting and carrying out research among the African inhabitants of SWA/Namibia and explains why the colonial authorities controlled data collection processes in communities. In chapter three, Gordon provides biographical details on some of the key scholarly figures, such as, Bruwer, who was at the centre of efforts on the international stage to drum up support for the SA Apartheid government's 'nationalist Utopia' in SWA/Namibia as a Mandated C territory. Bruwer also served on the Odendaal Commission, was later appointed the first Commissioner General for SWA/Namibia and was instrumental in defending SA's Apartheid or separate development plan for SWA. While Gordon's analysis of the struggle for SWA between the UN and SA is well founded, it would have been strengthened by relating it to equally important works on the subject by Ike Udogu or on State formation in Namibia by Hage Geingob.⁴ Gordon's discussion of the way in which, in the central and southern regions, Namibians were dispossessed of their land and

⁴ Ike Udogu, *Liberating Namibia: the long Diplomatic Struggle between the United Nations and South Africa*, Jeffersson and London, McFarland, 2012; Hage Gottfried Geingob, *State Formation in Namibia: Promoting Democracy and Good Governance*, PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2004.

⁵ Jeremy J. Silvester, *Black pastoralists, white farmers: the dynamics of land dispossession and labour recruitment in Southern Namibia, 1915-1955*, PhD thesis, History Department, University of London; Memory Biwa, *Weaving the Past with*

eventually forced into becoming labourers for new white land owners would have benefited from drawing on Jeremy Silvester's PhD thesis and on Memory Biwa's work on the Bondelswarts history and uprisings in his doctoral thesis.⁵

In chapter four, Gordon explores the Apartheid Win Hearts and Minds (WHAM) concept and he shows how WHAM was central in the psychological campaigns to win over young people. Gordon discusses how SA strategy evolved to win the hearts and minds (WHAM) of the population while continuing softly with colonization. The chapter shows SA attempts to organize and win support among young people through youth camps and the central role of the psychologists and ethnologists embedded in the SADF in carrying out WHAM operations. The perspective gained by Gordon's use of extensive local scholarly sources such as by Akuupa to explore the impacts of 'Etango' or 'Ezuva' in northern Namibia enhances his work greatly.⁶ His extensive analysis of Apartheid SA's pretext for continued colonial control of SWA, i.e. ensuring the survival of Khoisan groups through programs such as Etosha parks, 'Bushman land' and Omega in Kavango, highlights how the regime's plans for 'uplifting' the San communities failed. It also raises

Threads of Memory': Narratives and Commemorations of the Colonial War in southern Namibia, PhD thesis, Cape Town, University of the Western Cape, 2012.

⁶ Michael U. Akuupa, *The Formation of 'National Culture' in Post-apartheid Namibia: A Focus on State Sponsored Cultural Festivals in Kavango Region*, PhD thesis, Cape Town, University of the Western Cape, 2011.

questions as to the extent to which the San projects were a colonial burden inherited by the new SWAPO government after independence in 1990 and about what lessons post-colonial Namibia can learn from the failed SA attempts in its efforts to deal with San developmental issues.

In chapter five, Gordon builds on Moritz Bonn's insights to analyse the thinking around 'volkundige' studies. He claims that these were never intended to be a true objective examination of local cultures but rather served the ulterior motive of wanting to discover local cultural secrets, which, he maintains, made the whole exercise futile and foolish. Gordon's book highlights the absurdities in the reasoning of the proponents of 'volkundige' studies and the doomed Apartheid Utopia project with its separate development concept as proposed under the Odendaal commission as a reason for continued SA control over SWA/Namibia. Gordon concludes by contextualizing the work of the 'volkundige' (ethnology) scholars through the lens of Aphasia in a group or closed thinking system and suggests that casting doubts on the false news or information these scandal-mongers peddle might push them to realise that others could rethink the same issues. Gordon, while showing the absurdity in 'volkundige' studies also indicates its value in exposing the deeply embedded uncertainties and anxiety of settler society in SA.

Gordon's book is well laid out and easy for readers to follow. Gordon's reproduction

of the negative statements of colonial officials on the 'Natives' should, I feel, at least have been followed by a few words explaining why such statements were and remain ill-informed which would have meant avoiding repeating old stereotypes uncritically. Gordon is right that oral historians from the Kavango remember Eedes for his rudeness and violent outbursts. A publication by Shampapi Shiremo for example portrays Harold Eedes as an oppressor in the Kavango who thrived on violence and abuse, and records that the people of Kavango were very happy to see Eedes leave, while in contrast, 90 percent of the Kwanyama [Ovambo] were sorry to see him leave.⁷ Similarly, Likuwa shows that Eedes' predecessor, Cocky Hahn (Shongola) was notorious for displays of violence such as public floggings as was the case for example during his 1920s tours of the Kavango.⁸ Gordon explains in great detail the role of ethnologists' informed opinions on the colonialists set ups of traditional structures for headmen and sub headmen and the assertions that these did not cater for the needs and aspirations of the protesting and enlightened youths. He also provides a good explanation of the significance of the contract labour system and how dissatisfaction grew among labourers who, despite their indispensable contribution to the colonial economy, were badly paid and badly treated by their employers. Gordon's analysis of the importance of the contract labour system and its exploitation of the labourers and their families would benefit from new insights on gender relations under the

⁷ Shampapi Shiremo, *Vamama's History and Heritage: forgotten histories of Namibia*, Rundu, Shampapi Shiremo, 2020: 23f.

⁸ Likuwa, *Voices*: 51.

contract labour system from papers by Likuwa and from Likuwa and Shiweda on the 'Okaholo' contract labour system.⁹

Overall, this book presents useful insight into the position of ethnologists in the making of 'South Africa's dream', especially in understanding their role when the South African colonial government tested Apartheid ideas in the SWA colony before implementing them in the metropolises of South Africa. Although there are areas in which I suggest the author could improve his work, overall, this book will be very useful to historians and anthropologists with an interest in the role of ethnologists in the making of Namibia's colonial past, and can provide the foundations for further research. This affordable local edition at N\$250, published by the University of Namibia Press, will allow a wider reprint and circulation of this book within Namibia and abroad. I take pleasure in recommending.

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⁹ Likuwa Kletus Muhena, "Continuity and Change in Gender Relations within the Contract Labour System in Kavango, Namibia, 1925–1972", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 47 (1), 2021: 79-92; Kletus Likuwa and Napandulwe

Shiweda, "Okaholo: Contract Labour System and Lessons for Post Colonial Namibia", *Mgbakoigba, Journal of African Studies*, 6 (2), 2017: 26-47.