Museums and Nationalism in Namibia

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> *". . . fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations."* (Anderson 1983:40)

Anderson's observation concerning nationalism in Europe in the Middle Ages, that " . . . the figuring of the imagined reality was overwhelmingly visual and aural" (1983:29) is a good starting point for discussing the relationship between museums and nationalism in Africa. Visual images for constructing, or imagining, nations in postcolonial Africa have been drawn from many sources, including representations and misrepresentations of indigenous culture and the fantasies of foreigners: tourists, filmmakers, colonial administrators, even ethnographers. These images constantly interpenetrate and distort each other, like a series of reflecting fun-house mirrors.

Science and history museums,[1] concerned with visual representations of the ostensibly real world, use tangible objects to construct these representations. The interpretations and contexts given to objects are inevitably cultural constructs but these types of museums still conceive of themselves as institutions that attempt to define and communicate "reality" about past and present cultures, about landscapes, and about the natural world. In dealing with culture, this reality is defined through objects that resonate with the specific, distinctive, and particular characteristics of indigenous and immigrant populations.

There is a paradox in the relationship between nationalism and museums.[2] While nations imagine themselves to be real but are in fact invented, history and science museums define themselves as celebrations of the real despite the fictions inherent in the politics of representation. Museums may be a minor component of an emerging model of national identity, but in presuming to present tangible evidence of cultures that coexist within state borders, museum exhibits and personnel become entangled in contradictions. In their exhibitions, museums must redefine the objects in their collections so that they help to reconcile ethnic and racial pluralism with the invented images of state nationalism. In order to construct politically useful memories within the context of the state, museums in the post colonial state must also engage in selective amnesia.

Clearly museums in Africa have played only a minor role in defining national identity; and museumgoing is not a "ritual of citizenship" as it has been for a long time in Europe and the United States (Duncan 1990). Neverthess, museums in new African states reveal the struggles that are going on over the construction of national identity. Increasingly, as state governments realize their potential image-making authority, museums have come under pressure to use their resources, including collections, in the service of nationhood.

Ethnicity and identity in Namibia

In the five years since independence (in 1990), Namibians are still preoccupied with creating a national consciousness and a national image. This "enterprise" involves enhancing the notion of citizenship and engendering support for the state, all of which promotes foreign economic aid and investment, and tourism. The visual symbols that are being promoted in tourist literature, postcards, museums, and in the national media include Namibia's unique desert landscape, portrayed as "barren" but teeming with life, its wildlife, its European-style hospitality, its developed infrastructure, the variety and richness of its fauna, complemented by stereotypical images of racial and ethnic types harmonized into a cultural and racial mosaic.

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1. *Independence Mural, Namibia.* Photo: Tony Pupkewitz.

Images of black Africans presented for the consumption of non-Namibians are of two kinds: those that represent the supposedly "pristine" African, and those that show cultural accommodation. The images in the press, in guidebooks, and in souvenir dolls include representations of the !Kung, San, and other "Bushmen" groups, poised with little or no clothing in a desert landscape; Ovahimba woman dressed in leather and jewelry, standing beside grass huts; and Herero woman dressed in "traditional" long dress, an adaptation of nineteenth-century "Victorian" dress. The Herero woman is the most common expression of Namibian ethnicity (Hendrickson 1989, 1991, 1992a, 1992b), not because of the Herero meaning of this dress, which as Hendrikson argues, was originally based on the idea that one could assume the power of enemies by adopting their clothing, but on the White reading of this symbol as a sign of the implicit acceptance by the African population of colonial domination. Today, in the new spirit of Namibian multi-racialism, there are attempts to redefine this symbol and others as apolitical signs of egalitarian multi-culturalism.

Another image that presents a similarly ambiguous message is on a postcard that shows an ocher-smeared Himba woman with a baby on her back, dressed in a short leather skirt, wire anklets, and arm bands. She is holding a shopping basket as she selects among canned goods, including ketchup, mustard, and barbecue sauce from the shelves of a well-stocked supermarket (see Fig. 2).

The most important ideational components in this new national consciousness are: (1) reconciliation: forgiving and forgetting the years of exploitation, war, anger, and mistrust that divided the population before independence; (2) racial harmony: the unity-in-diversity model of a multi-racial population, expressed in the "united colors" (*pace* Benetton) image;[3] (3) democracy, a model multi-party state, unusual for post-independent Africa, and seen in the years immediately after independence as a model for South Africa.

2. Musical instrument exhibit, Die Alte Feste, Winhoek, 1993. Photo: John Van Couvering.

The opening page of a new guidebook to Namibia explicitly borrows its title from the Benetton logo and expresses the idea of unity in diversity, reconciliation, and a positive reinterpretation of past conflicts:

> What can explain the harmony that prevails in Namibia today, given that the population consists of at least 11 major ethnic groupings and an even greater variety of tongues? The reason may be that, during the long period of colonial rule when the native Namibians never really confided their fears to each other, they still worked together, suffered together, mingled on farms and in small towns, shared the bitter and the sweet. (Haape 1993:21)

The use of imagery taken from Benetton's "United Colors" advertising campaign of 1984 is filled with the same ambiguity that characterized that particular promotional venture. As Back and Quaade note, "images of human difference are fixed within Benetton's discourse. Race and ethnicity are presented as essentially unchanging and eternal social categories" (1993:68). In Namibia's search for a national identity, there is an acceptance of stereotypical difference, as well as a plea for tolerance and accommodation.

The reiteration of themes of solidarity and reconciliation are meant to rewrite history as well as define the future. In Namibia, with its complicated colonial history, redefining the past has been a more or less continuous process: Germany's hegemony was over by the end of World War I and South Africa's control was never uncontested from the point of view of Black Namibians or the international community. Both the past and the future are defined within a global context. Namibians recognize that the international community played an important part in the country's attainment of independence just as earlier on it played a part in ending German hegemony. Since independence, South Africa has been seen as an amicable neighbor rather than an oppressive usurper of power. To many South Africans, Namibia now is seen as a best case scenario for the future and tourists from the south visit Namibia to gauge the mood of the people. Nation building thus involves a certain amount of amnesia and continual rewriting of history

to define the changing relationships between Namibia's diverse populations.

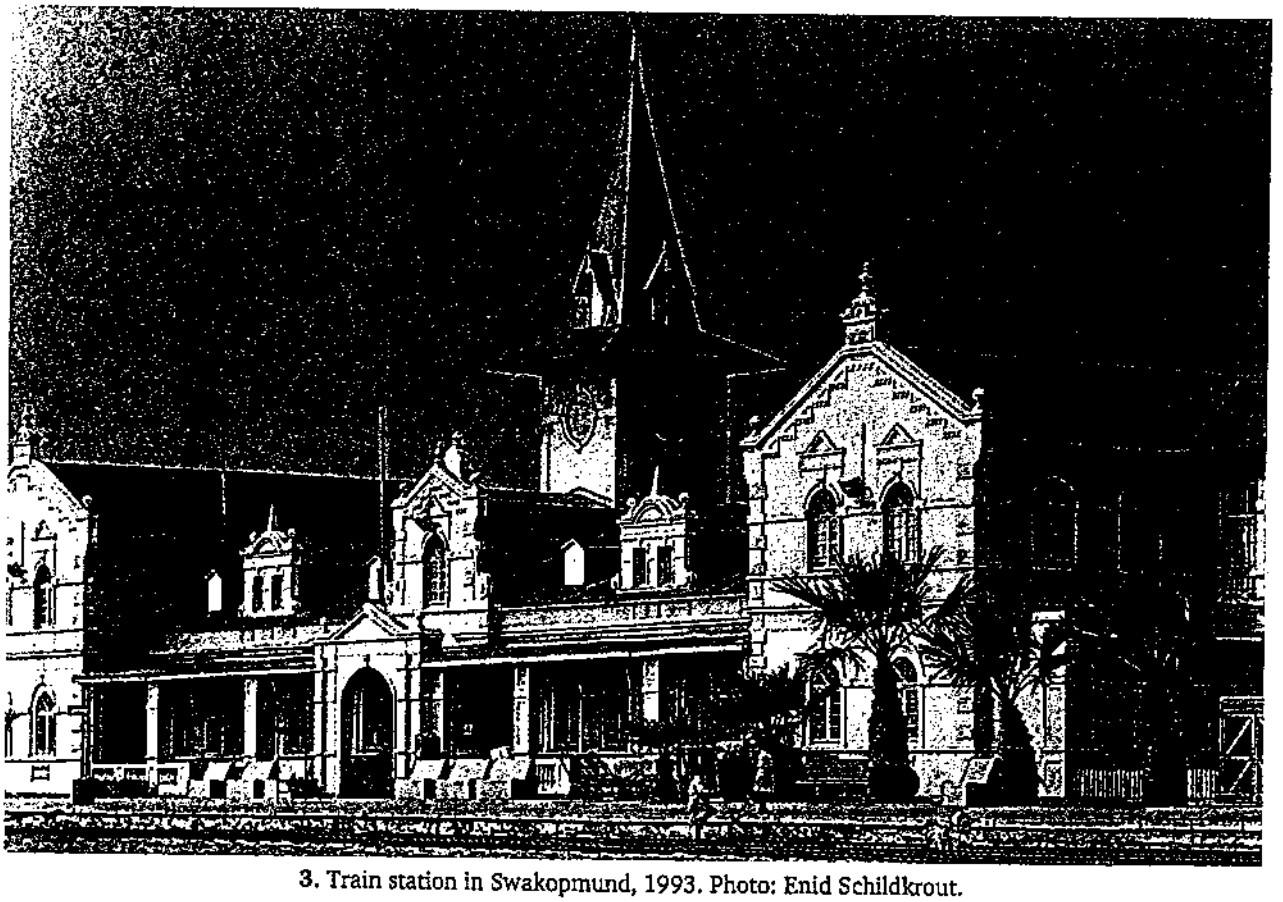
Symbols of national identity

When one arrives in the capitol, Windhoek, one is greeted by images and objects that attest to Namibia's integration in the world of global capitalism: Kentucky Fried Chicken, automated bank teller machines, escalators in an atrium leading up to the Kalahari Sands Hotel in the middle of a multi-story shopping mall, and Benetton. In the outskirts of Windhoek one finds small stores which sell groceries, take-out food, school composition books, and (in 1992) piles of T-shirts with the logos of the various national forces that were part of UNTAG (United Nations Technical Advisory Group, which supervised the elections), from countries as remote to Namibians' experiences as Malaysia, Fiji, and Finland.

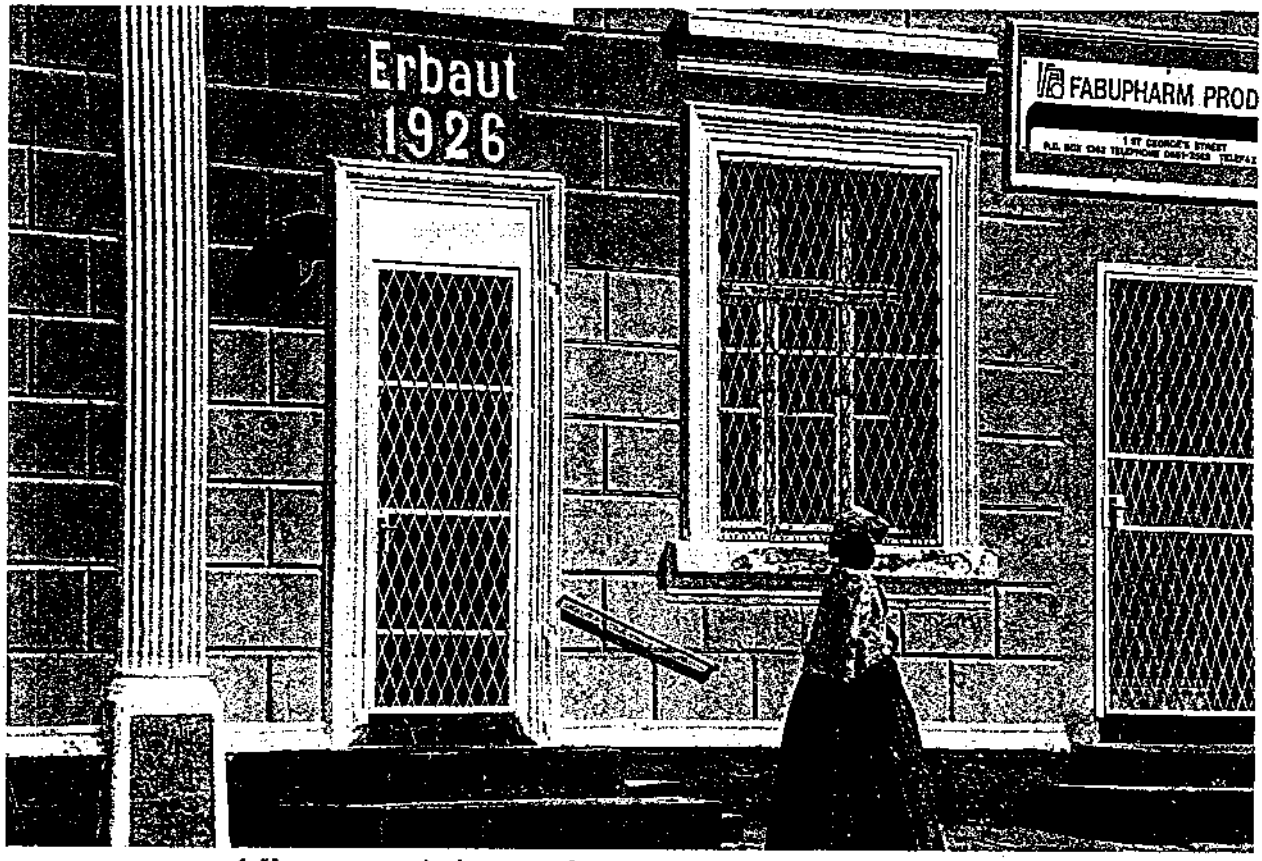
Namibia's history and its difficult path to independence has been played out on an international stage for decades. "Southwest" was a German colony until 1915 when South African forces defeated the Germans at Khorab, Namibia. After a few years of military occupation, Southwest Africa's fate was determined in Europe, at the Treaty of Versailles (1919). The British were made the administrators of the Protectorate by the League of Nations and in turn handed the responsibility to the colonial administration in Cape Town. The German diamond concessions were sold to Consolidated Diamond Mines, an Anglo-American company.

During the German period, settlers were encouraged to emigrate and many people came to work in the mines and on ranches and farms. Despite the detention and expulsion of about a third of the fifteen thousand Germans in the period between the two "world wars," about one thousand came back after World War II. German architecture, the German language, German music, and nineteenth-century German dress are still potent symbols of identity for many people in Namibia. German culture makes itself felt throughout most of the country—in architecture, street names, gardens, restaurants, and food.

The influence of Afrikaans-speakers in Southwest Africa/Namibia goes back to the last century, and the resulting population is now linguistically united but still socially disparate. Following the expansion of European settlement around the lower Orange River



3. Train station in Swakopmund, 1993. Photo: Enid Schildkrout.



4. Herero woman in the street of Otjiwarongo, 1993. Photo: Enid Schildkrout.

after 1793, bands of mixed-race Afrikaans-speakers from the Cape who had been marginalized by Boer settlers became roving bands in the hinterlands to the north, defeating the Namas and Herero and for a while turning them into subject people. Descendants of these people are still identifiable in Namibia today, and several groups claim their own territory and manage their local government. During more recent South African rule, these groups were allowed a measure of self-rule, comparable to that allowed to the "homelands" in South Africa. One of the museums I shall discuss below is in Rehoboth, where this community lives. Among other things, the museum presents the history of this community.

Although Namibia never became South Africa's fifth province, as many South Africans hoped, the cultural and racial mix of the country changed under South African rule. There were major land grants to poor whites and after 1920 there were at least three waves of immigration of Afrikaans speakers, two from the south and one from Angola. After the Nationalist Party took over in 1948, Southwest Africa was ruled as if it were a province of South Africa. Apartheid was enforced until international pressure led to a gradual loosening of these regulations. Afrikaans became the language taught in the schools, although some whites in the major towns of Windhoek and Swakopmund still sent their children to German and English language schools.

It is perhaps this mosaic and succession of colonizers, and the fact that South Africa's control was continually contested within the international community, that made Namibia amenable to the United Nations efforts. For a time, Namibia became a cold war battle ground, with Cuba backing SWAPO forces who were fighting South African forces. Most of the actual fighting occurred in the north, where the majority of the Ovambo population lives and where Angola-backed SWAPO forces launched attacks that frightened, but did no great harm to, people in White neighborhoods, who had an elaborate wireless phone system and plans for aid and evacuation. Relative to many other liberation wars, Namibia's struggle, from the point of view of the colonizers—who saw themselves as Settlers not colonizers, of course—was more psychological than military. The bitterness of the

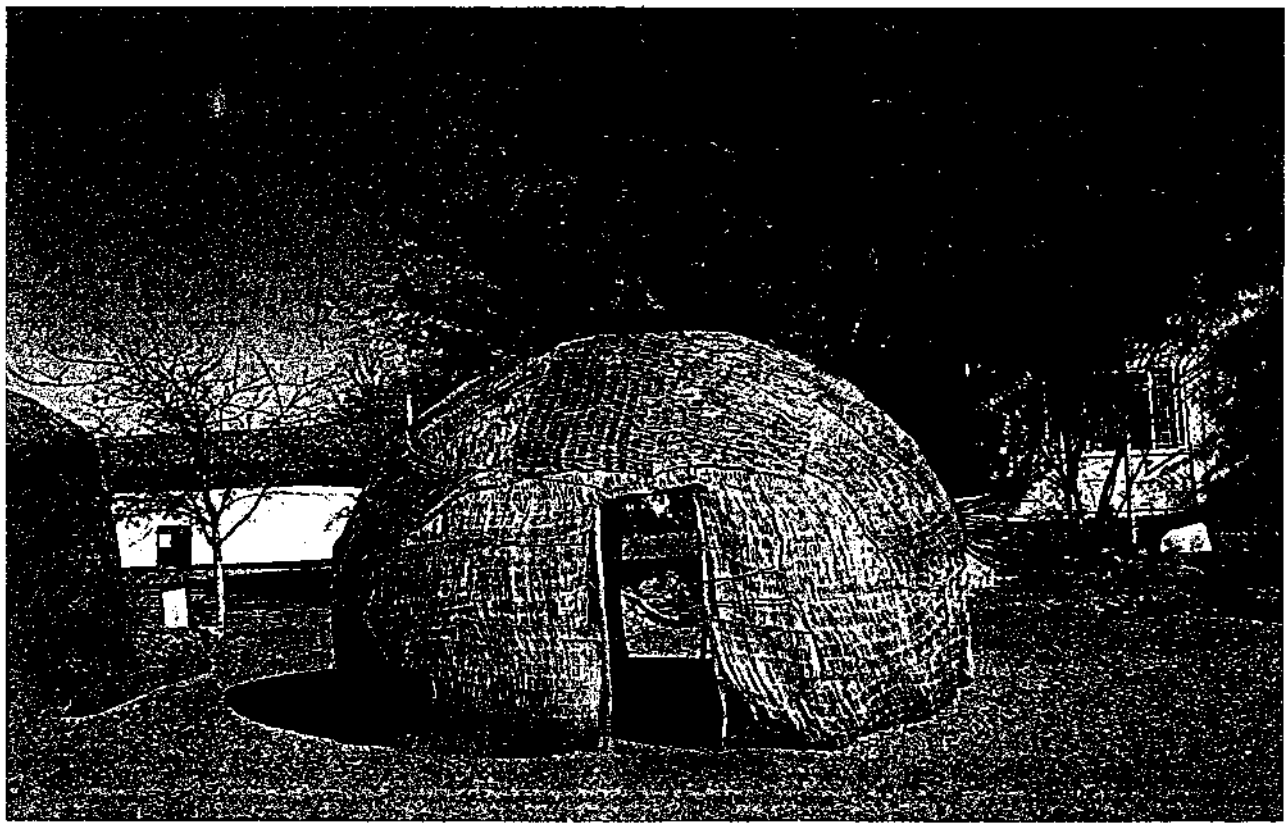
period should not be underestimated, however, even though it is now buried in symbols of peace and harmony.

Despite the genocidal campaign of the Germans in the Herero Wars and the many years of apartheid, the key idea in Namibia's post-independence image is the idea of the racial mosaic. Television programs, newspapers and magazines, billboard advertisements, all broadcast images of Whites and Blacks together or in close juxtaposition; every news report on television has Black and White announcers; and American movies with a multi-racial themes are shown on television. This media campaign reinforces the multi-party and multi-racial government structure and downplays the divisions that result from a history of de facto and de jure apartheid.

But Namibia's proclamation of a national identity based on racial harmony subtly avoids dealing with and to some extent even obliterates, recognition of differences of language and culture within the population. Thus English was declared the national language even though English speakers make up only about two percent of the population. The English language, like other elements of global corporate culture, including Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald's, Toyota, and Benetton, are part of Namibia's identification of itself as a member of a global community.

Museums

Namibia has at least thirteen museums, with more in the planning stage, in addition to a number of art galleries and craft centers. The State Museum in Windhoek comprises the *Alte Feste* (Old Fort) for history and the Owela Museum for natural history and ethnography. White tourists are guided primarily to the Old Fort, noted for its revivalist German architecture and its resonance of the European presence. Local people, mainly Blacks, and often in school groups, almost exclusively visit the Owela Museum. Within the context of a Museums Association in Namibia, curators, donors, and directors of these museums meet to discuss common concerns, and in the years immediately after independence some were involved in setting up a Mobile Museum Service. This project received Social Science Research Council Funding in 1993. Through it, workers visited local communities to help new museums, initiated programs with schools, and had plans to start oral history and collecting projects in many parts of the country.

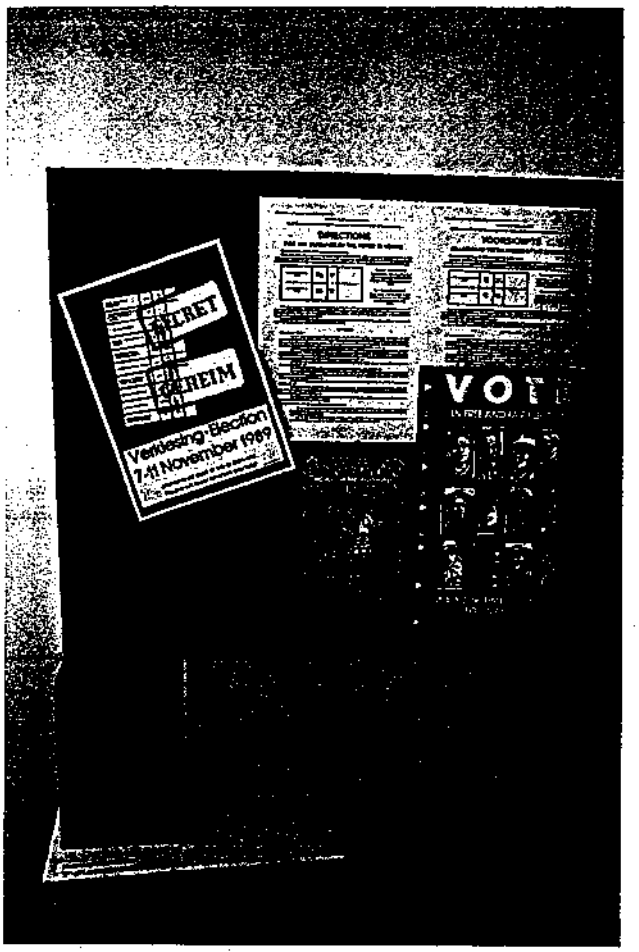


5. African house reconstructed on the grounds of the Rehoboth Museum, 1992. Photo: Enid Schildkrout.

There are also a number of private collections of objects which may or may not make their way into museums. One man, a pharmacist in Swakopmund, told me about his collection of arms and weapons. He kept these in a tower storage room in the building that housed the Swakopmund library. He said he hoped to use the collection to develop a military museum, although he complained that he was having difficulty getting the idea accepted among museum officials because the subject was not popular. He spoke with considerable resentment about the fact that the valor and bravery shown by the Whites in what ultimately was redefined as the independence struggle could not be honored in a museum exhibit.

There are also a variety of exhibits that deal with the different aspects of the colonial economy including, most obviously, mining and the economic activities that supported the infrastructure of the mineral-based economy. There is, for example, an exhibit about mining sponsored by Gold Fields Ltd. within the Swakopmund Museum,[4] and an exhibition, open to the public, at the Rossing Uranium headquarters. One of the founders of the Swakopmund Museum was a dentist, and the man's entire turn-of-the-century office is on display. Museums in many towns, including Tsumeb, Grootfontein, Swakopmund, and Kolmanskop have major displays on geology and mining. These displays include much historical material about the daily lives of the White "discoverers," investors, miners and support workers.

These museums and exhibitions each have somewhat different, sometimes conflicting, agendas but all of them now feel pressure to conform more or less to the new nationalism that is a requisite for public support, both financial (direct government subsidies) and moral (creating good will so that tangible assets will be protected). Many factors influence how different museums deal with these issues including, of course, the question of financing. While the State Museum relies entirely on government funding, and is thereby most subject to political pressure, many smaller museums rely on private funding from individuals or from the business community. All of the museums face serious financial pressures and shortfalls, making it impossible for them to change as quickly as they would like. It is worth reiterating that people working in museums usually have visions for the future that are not realized in what the visitor sees. This article deals only with what is revealed to the visitor through observations and conversations based on a short visit.

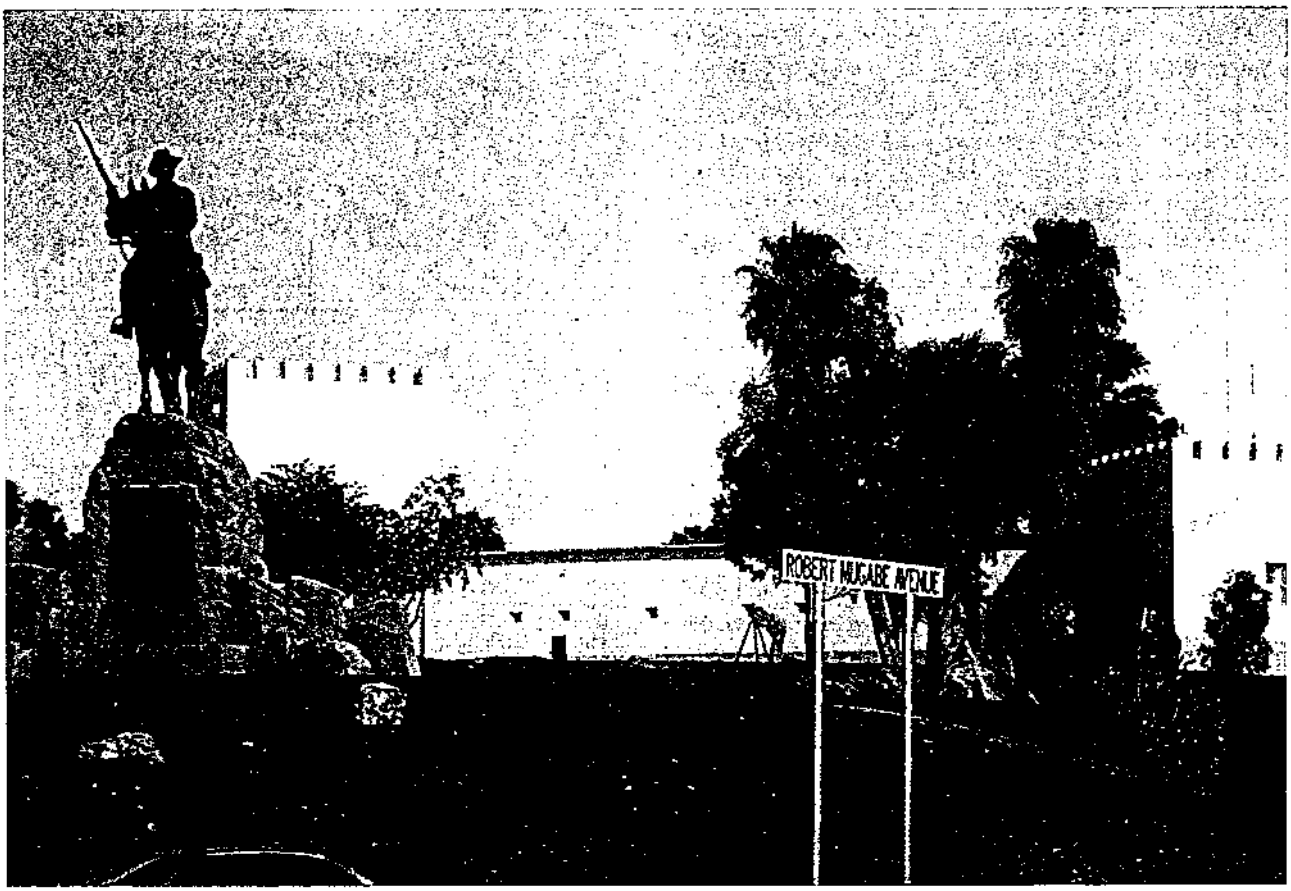


6. Independence exhibit at Die Alte Feste, Windhoek, 1993. Photo: John Van Couvering.

Local histories

In many of Namibia's towns[5] there are small museums following the tradition of the local history museums in many German towns. Each has a distinctive character and represents, in a unique way, the assertion of a distinct local identity and experience. Most local museums have not yet, and may never be, vehicles for the expression of national identity, although the personnel of some of these institutions are more receptive to this agenda than others. Whether they want to or not, a number of the local museums implicitly celebrate local colonial history as well as the rich mineral resources that beckoned Europeans to settle in southwest Africa. They describe the hardships of settlers from the European point of view, and in many cases relegate the ethnology of the local people to the natural landscape. The meta-narrative is very similar to the narrative of the American west.

Most of the collections have been donated by local Whites who recognize the historical and aesthetic



7. State Museum of Namibia, Die Alte Feste, Winhoek, 1993. Photo: John Van Couvering.

value of their possessions and see the museum as a way to preserve their culture and the history of White settlement in Namibia. There are collections of tools, clothing, and furniture made by German and Afrikaans settlers, arranged in displays that suggest the hardships and industriousness of the settlers. There is biographical memorabilia showing the stories of some local White settler families, showing how they worked, married, and educated their children. Considerable attention is paid in some of these exhibits to the experiences of some of the settlers during the two World Wars. This chapter of settler history is one that seems to have gone through several rewrites, and not surprisingly it is still being revised within the current multiracial framework.

Most of the local museums contain natural history displays based on collections made by amateur naturalists. The Swakopmund Museum, for example, displays fine collections of birds' eggs and butterflies. The larger museums have habitat displays that show the different landscapes of Namibia, including the Ethosha pan, the whales and the sea lion colonies along the coast, from the Skeleton Coast in the north to the sand dunes and diamond fields of the deserts. (There is an increasing tourist industry that features at least part of all of these sites.) Geology and mineral specimens are important in many of the museums, for minerals were what attracted most of the settlers in the first place; moreover, they are still what sustain the economy.

Many of the museums have ethnographic exhibits that show "traditional" African culture displayed either in the ethnographic present or in conjunction with stone tools, suggesting the ancient sub-strata of human occupation in the region. "Bushman" rock art is another tourist attraction, and a number of museums have small photographic displays about the art, with pointers to outdoor sites that can still be seen.

Few of the museums attempt to say anything about the life of the local non-White populations today, although Swakopmund Museum has begun collecting contemporary art by Black Namibian artists, a few of whom have work on display and for sale at a number of local galleries, in South Africa, and even abroad. In many of the small museums, photography and painting by local White artists are shown; older work consists mainly of landscapes that suggest an unpopulated environment.

Tsumeb

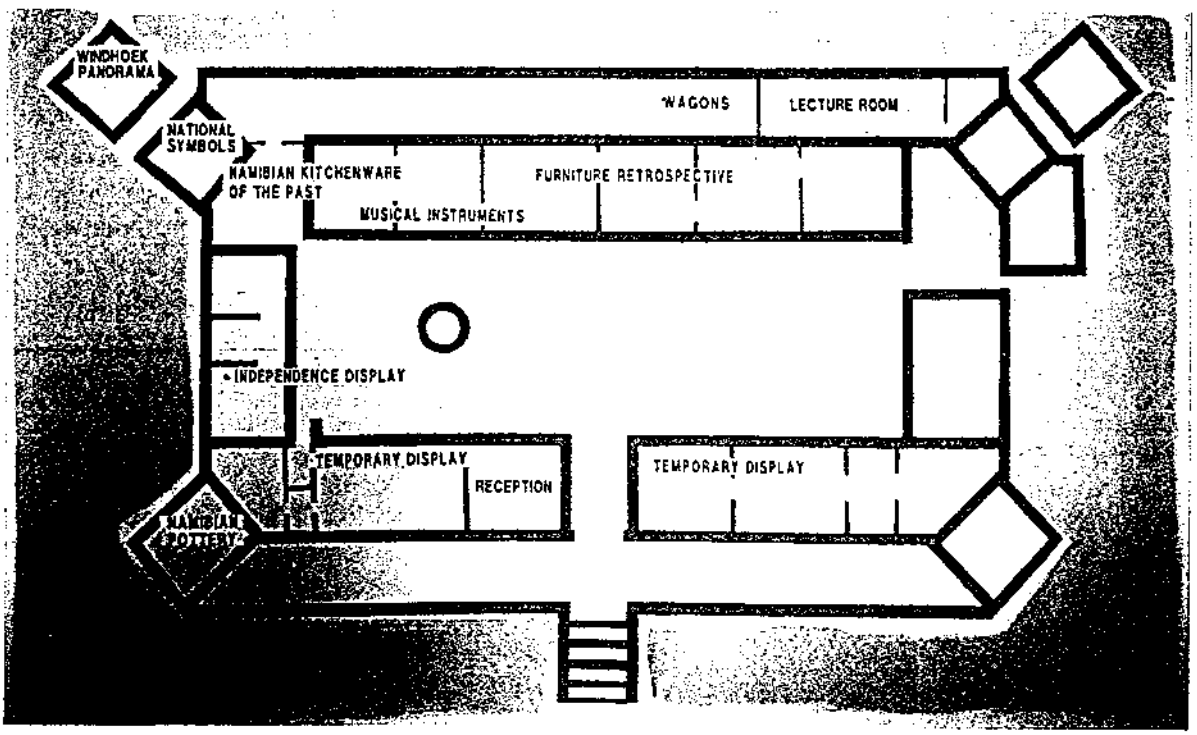
The museum in Tsumeb is still run by the German woman who founded it (whose husband worked at the Tsumeb mine). It is housed in a former German school, built in 1915. Its four exhibition rooms, devoted to minerals and mining, history, and ethnography show most of the collections. The focus of the museum is the history of the rich Tsumeb mine, and the museum receives a small stipend from the mine. The mineral collection contains over two hundred specimens including forty different minerals that were first discovered at Tsumeb and twenty-four specimens of minerals that occur only there. There is a series of very detailed miniature dioramas illustrating the mining process as well as accounts of the history of the mine and individual miners.

The military room is behind the large mineral and mining display. Here one sees a collection of mainly German war memorabilia, including carriages, flags, canons and guns, and photographs going back to the earliest days of German occupation and continuing the narrative of Tsumeb's history through World War II. Some of the items on display, including a large carriage, were recovered from the "bottomless" Okjikoto Lake near Tsumeb where they were dumped during World War I.

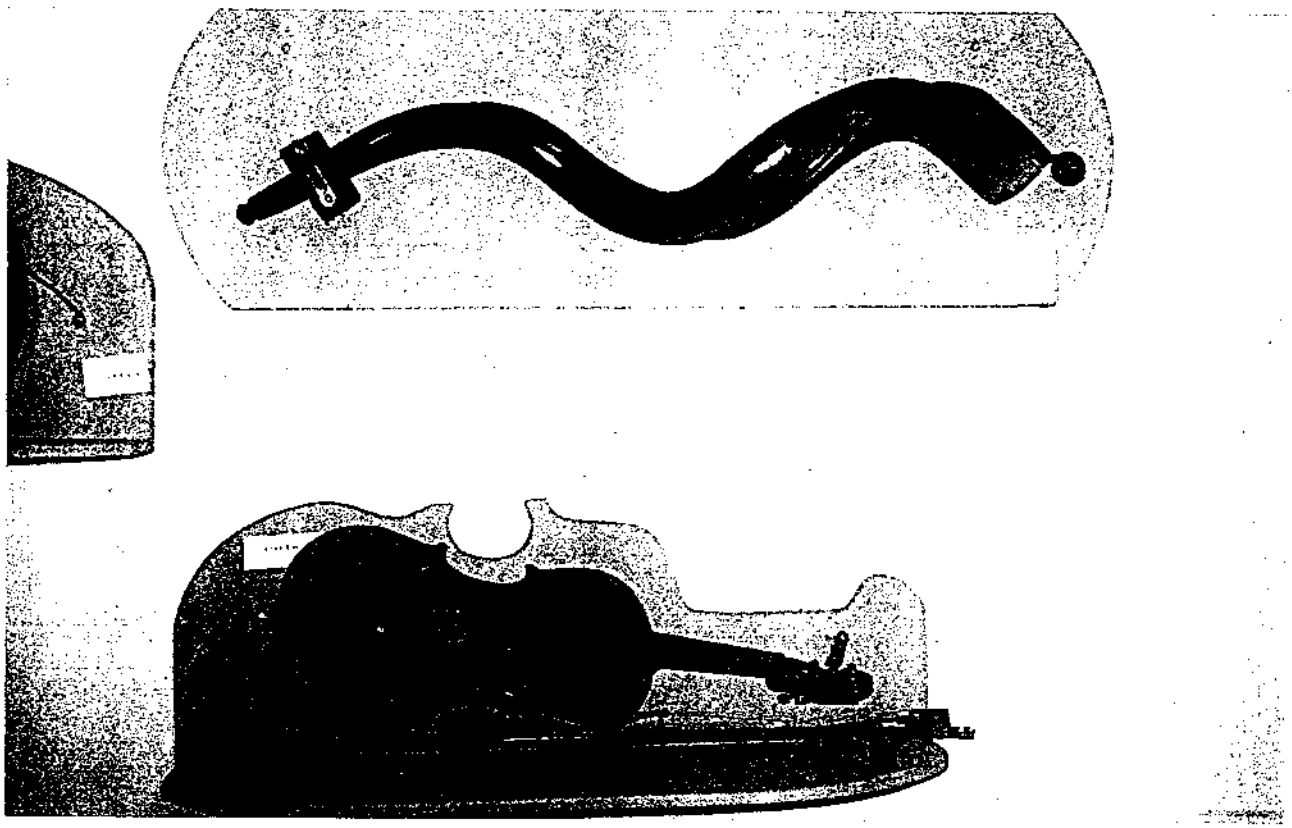
The German period in Tsumeb lasted far longer than in the rest of the country because Tsumeb town and the mine were recognized after World War I as "private property," not part of the German government's holdings. At the end of World War II Tsumeb mine and town were considered enemy territory and the (American) Newmont mining company took over. Thus Tsumeb's history is seen as distinct from the rest of Namibia's and the residents still pride themselves on the fact that they went from being German to being American, avoiding any interlude of South African rule. The mine is now owned mainly by Goldfields Ltd.

The next room contains a collection of colonial furniture, clothing, household implements and tools, displayed with a great sense of pride in the traditions of old world German craftsmanship, particularly carpentry. These collections convey the sense of a strong local immigrant community whose inhabitants share a common destiny as immigrants in a hostile land, but united by their common commitment to the mine. The exhibit attempts to explain the predicament of the Germans in Namibia during the two World Wars. With the exception of the World War II section, for an American observer the history of settlement display is reminiscent of the Gold Rush story of the American frontier.

The ethnographic collection is in a tiny back room and contains many objects from the Himba, who live in the northwestern part of the country and !Kung of



8. Floorplan of State Museum of Namibia, Die Alte Feste, Windhoek, 1993. Photo: John Van Couvering.



9. Musical instrument exhibit, Die Alte Feste, Winhoek, 1993. Photo: John Van Couvering.

the Kalahari desert. Objects are displayed with photographs taken by friends and relatives of the museum owner. She was pleased to tell me about her research into African traditional life and her travels to remote areas of the desert where she spent time watching ceremonies and learning first-hand about indigenous religion. Few local Whites, she noted, ever had this kind of interaction with Namibian Blacks. Although she had no formal anthropological training, she was the local ethnographer and museum anthropologist.

Rehoboth

The initiative for the Rehoboth Museum came from the local Baster community, although the museum itself is now committed to a broader agenda. The Director of the Rehoboth Museum, a White Namibian, is not a member of the Baster community. She is a trained archaeologist who continues to do research in the area. There is a small staff including people from the Baster community involved in research on local history. The Director does research on the pre-history of the area, leading excavations at a three hundred year-old metal-working site. The museum also is concerned with environmental issues and has an ethnobotany project, in which local people bring in plants that are replanted on the museum grounds while their medicinal, nutritional, and other uses are documented.

This museum has some collections that are not on exhibition and it is actively trying to raise money to care for them in a professional way. There is a new building for research, storage, and exhibition to supplement the original Old Post Office building. To raise funds and increase community awareness of the museum, there are fund-raising walks and the new mobile museum mentioned above.

The local history of Rehoboth is the history of the Basters—mixed European and Khoisan people who migrated from the Orange River in 1870. Rehoboth became a prosperous town that jealously guarded its political autonomy and its peoples' knowledge of European craft techniques. Although the museum encourages Rehoboth residents to save items of interest for the collections, the museum as a whole shows an awareness of the problems of nation building and attempts to cover a wide range of Namibian cultures. Only ten percent of the exhibit space is devoted to the Baster community. There are also small natural his-

tory exhibits, an exhibit on human evolution and prehistory, and a room devoted to the ethnography of different Namibian groups. Three full size houses have been constructed outside the entrance of the museum: a !Kung, a Damara, and a Nama house.

Swakopmund

Swakopmund is the second largest city in Namibia and was the German port city for Southwest Africa before World War I, in the period when the British owned nearby Walvis Bay. Today the town is a thriving resort where White Namibians and South Africans flock for seaside holidays. It has many fine German colonial buildings, good hotels and restaurants, and an Olympic-size indoor swimming pool (built with a retractable roof that no longer retracts) and water slide. The large museum is at the beach facing the pool and a playground where children, White and Black, play together in an atmosphere that, when I visited, seemed to exemplify the multi-racial harmony of the "new" Namibia.

Local citizens, mainly of German background, have given many collections and objects to the Swakopmund Museum with the intention of preserving the history of their settlement and culture in Namibia. The museum was founded by a German dentist, Dr. Alfons Weber, in 1951, and an entire room is devoted to a reconstruction of his office with his original dental chair and tools. In addition, there are rooms of memorabilia: clothing, tools, fine furniture, photographs, books, stamps, coins and weapons. There is also a large and impressive natural history exhibit with dioramas showing the various ecological zones of the country, as well as collections of birds, butterflies and, of course, minerals. The museum staff is actively building up the natural history and ethnology collections, and encourages research and collecting by both staff and amateurs. There is also an art collection with important photographs and paintings by White and Black Namibians including work by the late John Muafangejo and by Joseph Madisia. The paid staff is supplemented by interns, mainly from Germany. There are educational programs for the local schools, occasional seminars for adults and visiting scholars, and a publication program.

The Swakopmund Museum staff seems to value its independence and the support it receives from the local business community. They are not actively seeking state support, and some of them expressed fear that such support would force them to give up their independence and follow a national political agenda, possibly framed by a dominant political party.

The State Museum

The State Museum in Windhoek is the national museum of natural history, history (defined as the history of the Whites in Namibia) and ethnology. This museum has the largest staff of all the museums in Namibia: in 1992 there was a head of the museum and eight natural history curators, nine cultural history curators and two education curators under the supervision of three chief curators. There were sizable collections and some hotly contested exhibition spaces.

At the time of my visit to Namibia the Head of Museum, from the natural history section, had been temporarily moved to another position after staff disputes and government intervention. An Acting Director and a consultant from Germany had been brought in to analyze the situation. Their report attributed many of the museum's problems to incompetent staff, personality conflicts, and (implicitly) government interference. Between the lines of the report one could infer that certain individuals used connections to officials outside the museum to protect their jobs. The report proposed two possible solutions: one was to appoint an outside Board of Regents to oversee the museum. The second was to dissolve the museum as a comprehensive collection management, research, and exhibition and educational facility and turn the collections over to separate ministries. For instance, the biological collections would be given over to the Department of Conservation and the ethnology collections to the Ministry of Culture. In this plan the *Alte Feste*, or Old Fort building, would be used for exhibitions and educational programs only. Although the idea of appointing a Board of Regents was accepted, as of 1994 the plan was not executed. The Acting Director of Art and Culture was put temporarily in charge, pending further reorganization.

One of the main disputes that occurred in the State Museum was over the place of the history collections. These collections were distinguished from the ethnology collections and consist mainly of artifacts and documents relating to the German and Afrikaans presence. Some people have argued that a national museum in post-independence Namibia should not display or even collect colonial objects. These curators argued for deaccessioning this part of the collection. Here we have selective amnesia as well as selective remembering in the construction of history.

The problem was what to do with all the artifacts that might inadvertently celebrate the European presence. At the time of my visit, this issue was causing a great deal of anger in the museum community, cross-cutting racial lines.

Exhibitions at the *Alte Feste*

When one walks up the steps to the *Alte Feste* the first thing one sees is a verandah filled with old colonial wagons and large wooden farm tools: plows, ox carts, an old British fire wagon, cannons, and other large antiques associated with the European and South African presence. Inside the museum, furniture and other household objects are displayed in a series of rooms which give the feeling of being in a colonial house: a drawing room, a kitchen, and a bedroom. These rooms formerly included only European objects: musical instruments, kitchen ware and dining implements. In a back room, again behind the colonial collections, one found ethnographic collections, again arranged topically and mixing together the objects from different African groups.

The exhibitions in the museum have recently been redone and a compromise of sorts has been reached. One visitor was heard to remark that "it looks as though a group of Bushmen have moved into a German house." The African objects have now been mixed in amongst the colonial objects, so that one sees German musical instruments next to African ones, and African household objects placed inside the European kitchen. There are no African objects in the "bedroom." This incongruous juxtaposition is typical of the way the State Museum is attempting to conform to the new national ideology of unity and parity. In these rooms, however, the objects themselves defeat the intention of the display. They cry out for separate treatment, for further explanation about the distinctive and very different cultures that created them.[6] Juxtaposing them in a single context, a room still reminiscent of a colonial kitchen, does not dissolve these distinctions buf rather invites crude comparisons. The African artifacts become European curios. This is a clear example of the tangible reality of the objects defeating the ideological agenda that motivates the display.

The Independence Exhibit

From the point of view of museums and nationalism the most interesting exhibition is the Independence Exhibition, which one comes to immediately after leaving the awkward attempt just discussed to blur ethnic and racial distinctions. Here there is a display about the United Nations Peace Keeping Force, known as UNTAG, a display about the "path towards independence," one on the first election, and one on the Namibian Constitution. The Constitution is a text that is meant to be memorized by every school child and it is given pride of place in the museum. In a salute to Pan-Africanism, the displays include the Nigerian gown that Prime Minister Geingob wore at the independence ceremony and Independence Day celebrations, as well as photographs of the ceremony and documents relating to the first election—a voting machine, sample ballot counts, voting instructions, the UN's election plan. The exhibition validates the election and thus celebrates Namibia's democratically elected government. This exhibition quells any doubts about whether or not the State Museum sees itself as intrinsic to building national consciousness.

Conclusion

Most of Namibia's museums, only a few of which have been described here, reflect the history of the country and the diverse populations that constitute Namibia. Many of the local museums are in towns that were founded by or at least inhabited by Europeans from the turn of the century. These are settler communities whose inhabitants have strong local allegiances, and who culturally still see their heritage as European rather than African. The descendants of the German settlers who founded many of these small museums, now White Namibians, see museums as a way of preserving their own special history in southern Africa, a history that includes stories of discovery, conquest, hardship, and now accommodation. As these museums become integrated into a national museum community, certain stories, such as the stories of conquest and colonial heroism, have to become more muted.

This accommodation is proceeding slowly, but it is proceeding. The assertions of local identity in the regional and town museums are not really a matter of proclaiming racial preeminence—though there is occasionally a hint of that too—it is part of the desire of people in small communities to claim their own history within the pluralistic state. These are museums whose founders and supporters have preservationist agendas which sometimes conflict in subtle ways with emerging national ideologies and identities. While the national ideology is meant to be pluralistic and inclusive, these local histories are in-

evitably particularistic. The pluralistic ideology that Namibia is trying to project to the outside world—the United Colours view of the country—accepts diversity and allows the small museums to continue to function, but it also implicitly rejects the history that created this diversity. These ideological struggles can be seen in the day-to-day decisions that are made in Namibian museums, decisions about what they should collect, what they should display, and how they should display it. These are debates about whose history and whose culture museums should concern themselves with; the objects in museums remain rooted in particular histories and cultures and are not as easily rewritten as are peoples' memories. ❖

Notes

1. In the following discussion I use the term "museum" to refer specifically to science and history museums. Art museums do not have to deal with this particular positivist agenda, but they still do not escape the restraints imposed by nationalism. See Wallis 1991.
2. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to this as a blurring of local and national classifications (In *Art in America* 1991:81). I think there are often inherent contradictions that may not be able to be resolved. See Wallis 1991 for many examples of the deep waters museums find themselves in as they attempt to exhibit and in some cases "sell" nations.
3. On arriving in Windhoek, one of the first shops that attracted my attention was a Benetton. The aim of Benetton "United Colours" campaign was racial unity. "Toscani [the photographer and creator of the ad campaign] implies that his 'own reality' establishes trans-cultural or racial unity. This is the essential theme harnessed to the Benetton brand image. It is his preoccupation with boundaries which gives Benetton's campaigns a sense of thematic unity. He constructs, or invokes, a boundary in order to convey a message of its transcendence" (Back and Quaade 1993:66).
4. When an important hominoid fossil was discovered in the Otavi mountains in 1991, by Glenn Conroy, Martin Pickford, Bridgette Senut, and John Van Couvering, Goldfields provided funds for both research and an exhibit.
5. I was able to visit museums in Rehoboth, Tsumeb, and Grootfontein. There are also museums in Kolmanskop, Bethanie, Keetmanshoop, Omaruru, and other towns that I hope to study on subsequent trips. The Kolmanskop Museum and the nearby Luderitz Museum concern the abandoned diamond prospecting town of the same name in the Namibia desert: a settlement of gracious German Art Nouveau houses now half swallowed by sand. The Schmelenhaus in Bethanie is said to be the oldest colonial house in Namibia built by a missionary. It contains exhibits on missionaries, as well as rock art and "stone age artifacts" (Haape 1993:307). The Keetmanshoop Museum deals with the early history of a town in the southern part of the county and has missionary artifacts as well as replicas of Nama houses. There is an Agricultural Museum in Helmeringhausen with German farm implements. These can also be seen at the Rhenish Mission House in Omaruru which dates back to 1872. That museum displays a table used by the first missionary to translate the Bible into Herero. To get into most of these museums one has to ask local shopkeepers for the keys.
6. Presumably they do get separate treatment in the Natural History division of the State Museum. As noted earlier, I was not even aware of the existence of the Owela Museum. There is no obvious indication, in the Alte Feste, that ethnology is located in another building.

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