

Each Era Has A Legacy

IN response to the letters in the press of some Namibians who deem it desirable to rename the old German streets, I would like to pose the following arguments:

1. With a few exceptions, the Germans who came to this country did not rename existing African settlements - e.g Gobabis, Okahandja, Otjiwarongo, Otavi, Tsumeb, Kamanjab, etc. - so why should the streets that they laid out, especially in previously uninhabited areas such as Swakopmund (which was pure desert at their arrival), be renamed? Why take away the identity of the founders of a place which had no previous identity of its own?

2. What is so obnoxious about neutral street names like Post St (surely "post" means the same to all Namibians - namely mail or post office!), Breite (broad) St or Brucken (jetty) St?

3. Every town wants to be special - but having the same street names in every town does not contribute to the individual character of a place. Who wants to see the same streets in every town? (And by the way, do old buildings from one era really go well together with street names from a totally different era?)

4. Is it really necessary or desirable to spend hard-earned tax-payers' money on such a venture, while there are so many social needs that the State needs to address first? Is it really necessary or desirable to create so many extra expenses for the business sector, which generates valuable income for the country?

Is it really desirable to necessitate the printing of new maps, new brochures, new business addresses, etc? Would all this effort at least create some new jobs ...? And history is fickle - who knows, some future rulers might want to rename these streets once again, with all

the accompanying expenditure and effort all over again ...

5. As Mr !Garibasen put it in his letter (published on these pages): Wouldn't it be much wiser to create a Garden of Remembrance to honour the heroes of the struggle? A place where visitors could learn more about these men and women, instead of names on street signs with no particular meaning for people who are not familiar with the role they played?

Alternatively, why not name the streets of new urban developments or settlements after these heroes? Shouldn't each era of Namibian history be represented by its legacy, including its names?

6. The colonial history of the old SWA is part of our country's identity - without it, there would be no modern Namibia. To eradicate the past, one would have to pull down all the colonial buildings, rip up the old roads, destroy the old parks, dismantle European institutions. But even then the legacy of a century of European influence and education would remain. Please remember that a country without its earlier history is like a tree without roots - it is crippled. Please remember too that there are several population groups in this country, each with its own historical roots and identity. A common identity for Namibia cannot be forged on the values and history of one sector of the population only. An attempt at this would only create further polarisation instead of unity. In conclusion: Is it really worth the effort to alienate a small but significant population group that has been playing a major role in the development and prosperity of this country from the beginning? And is it worth all that money which could be spent on so many more pressing causes?

E.B.N, TSUMEB