

# Museum's Not 'Tacky' Says Local Historian

HAVE you been to the Alte Feste lately? If you have, then there is no need to convince you that the claim of Carol Kotze made in The Windhoek Advertiser of January 13 about 'empty rooms' is a product of ill imagination. If the colleague knew what a museum is all about, her expectations could have been different.

According to the International Council of Museums: 'A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purpose of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment'.

Therefore, a museum is a cultural institution of national significance whose goals reach far beyond mere the entertaining of tourists. And after all, Ms Carol Kotze has no mandate to speak for the tourist, or does she feel like a tourist in her own country?

The museum's visitors book of impressions of what she called 'tacky' exhibition (Our Namibian Heroes) at Alte Feste, includes the opinion of foreign tourists and Namibians alike. It speaks for itself. Just to mention a few of the remarks most often used over the last four months: Excellent/Very Excellent/Superb/Fabulous. These are comments of 38 visitors of which 24 are Namibian, 6 from RSA, 3 from USA, 2 from Norway, 1 from Denmark and 2 from Germany.

Nice/Very Nice/Beautiful came from 16 visitors; OK from 10 visitors; Interesting/Very Interesting came from 31 visitors; Thank-you from 7 visitors; Informative/Very Informative/Educational came from 15 visitors. It is impossible to mention all the different encouraging words in the book, but the positive remarks are certainly a genuine indication of the role of the museum in nation-building and a true reward for any museum professionals.

I would advise Ms Kotze, whose blood pressure apparently rises at the sight of museum exhibitions, to seek immediate medical help before she has a heart attack, for independence is here to stay and so is the historical reflection of the liberation struggle

which brought about this independence.

And if someone's head 'drops in shame' in the light of the historical facts revealed in the Alte Feste displays 'since independence', then obviously he/she is against the struggle.

The Alte Feste was visited recently by a SA tourist who humbly and quietly went through the displays. I took him around and showed him his own photograph on display as the last colonial governor of Namibia. AG. He wrote in the visitor's book the ambiguous: 'History has many facts'. Indeed history has many facts and many ironic twists too. An ancient Roman aphorism says: 'When the facts speak, even the gods keep quiet'.

As to Ms Kotze's concern about attracting tourists and investors to Namibia, distortion and silence over historical facts will not do the job. This kind of approach transpired in her history book for Std 8 two years ago, which outraged teachers, pupils and the public at large.

Tourists are not a bunch of fools, to whom one can sell cheap colonial myths like the one about Curt von Francois being the founder of Windhoek or that of the German Schutztruppe who came from Europe to 'bring peace among the rivalling Nama and Herero' as all the present monuments in Namibia hypocritically record.

It is evident, from the little improvised museum survey, that the tourists are interested to know the truth about Namibian history. Thus, they will be able to appreciate the real dimensions of national reconciliation today and the moral and political generosity of the Namibian people - a colourful cohesion of national characters who emerged victorious as a nation from a difficult past. As far as foreign investors are concerned, they are not investing in the history, but in the peaceful and stable present of Namibia and in the hope for a brighter future, and the price for today's peace and stability was heavily paid in the past.

That is why there is a saying that a nation without a past has no future either.

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