

Conference

Thursday 14th April 2022 – 10h15 – 12h00

Room D230

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Cultural Tourism in Namibia: Living Museums in the Straightjacket of Essentialism



This conference focuses on the recent rise in cultural tourism in Namibia, especially on “culture” in the making as it is performed in one of the most rapidly increasing forms - living museums (LM). They are viewed as social spaces which include expressions of belonging, the emphasis of difference, as well as a resource for social cohesion and poverty alleviation. We examine the role these performances play within the Namibian politics of identity. What meanings do the stakeholders - participants, spectators and officials – imbue with these performances?

How are they appropriated by spectators, participants, local community and external stakeholders? Theoretical framework is made up of several mutually intertwined concepts: culture – belonging – difference – authenticity / tradition / heritage. Since all of them are couched in essentialism, I will study the role of the LM stakeholders in the construction of “exotic other”. The basic conceptual and methodological framework derives from the premises of ethnography, in particular from the design of a multi-sited ethnography. My intention is to show how these concepts are interlinked, used and abused by the ongoing politics of identity and nation-building in postcolonial Namibia.

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