Culture Fact Sheet

Kelsey Lane, Elli Schappler, Susan Reynolds, Cayley Gosnell, Logan Quackenbush

**Categories of Culture:**

* Art
  + Traditional arts and crafts in Namibia focus on daily living. Woodcarving, despite the relative lack of trees, has a long history.
  + Beautiful utensils, knife handles and sheaths, and toy cars continue to be made from wood and sold. Baskets for holding everything from fish to grain to water are made out of the palm leaf, or, along the northern rivers, out of reeds.
* Clothing
  + Most Namibian city-dwellers dress in modern fashions, as in the West. Several examples of traditional dress stand out, however. Herero women have adopted the German Victorian fashions of the nineteenth-century colonists. They wear long petticoated gowns with shawls, along with extravagant headdresses. The Himba, the least-Westernized tribe in Namibia, typically wear leather thongs or skirts. They smear their bodies with ochre, a reddish pigment extracted from iron ore. Women wear elaborate braids and copper or leather bands around their necks, making their figures appear very elongated.
* Food
  + Beef, mutton, milk products, millet, sorghum, peanuts, pumpkins, and melons are common Namibian subsistence (food) products. Mealie (corn) is a staple in the Namibian diet.
  + Traditional Dishes:
    - Potjie Kos: Originated from South Africa, a dish prepared in a large, black three-legged cast iron pot that is placed on an open fire. Ingredients in this pot can be meat-based or chicken-based with vegetables. Some vegetarians might enjoy their plain vegetable pot. This meal usually takes about 3-4 hours; but with good company around the open fire, the wait is over before you know it and definitely worth the while.
    - Braaivleis: Is the Afrikaans word and in most countries it is known as the ‘barbecue’-maybe a bit more popular in Namibia and South Africa. The menu varies from meat, chicken, corn, garlic bread and sausages and accompanied with your favourite salad.
    - Boerewors: Another Afrikaans word for the well-known South African sausage. The recipe originated from South Africa and still stands the test of time and will always be the most enjoyed sausage in Namibia; as well as South Africa.
    - Biltong: This too was at first a South African delicacy, but Namibia is now known for making the best biltong (our top quality of meat-might play a role in this case). Yes this is dried meat, first marinated for days, then spiced and then hung to dry for 2-3weeks. This piece of meat can stem from game which include 'Kudu', 'Springbok' and 'Gemsbok'. The beef biltong comes from the cows and cattle. Then there can be sausage (boerewors) dried and that will be known as the popular Afrikaans word 'droeewors'.
    - Mopane worms: Although this dish belongs to the Oshiwambo ethnic group; it is a very famous and tried out dish for many that dare to try and taste something new. These caterpillars are found in the northern parts of the country and are fried to get a crispy coating. Definitely something more original.
    - through the generations to perpetuate the memory of the ancestors
* Sports
  + Soccer
    - As everywhere in Africa, soccer ("football" as it is known in Namibia) is the national sport with the most passionate followers. Children grow up playing it, sometimes using a ball made of twine.
  + Rugby
  + Boxing
  + Cricket
  + Track
    - Track and field, called "athletics" by Namibians, is becoming more popular. Namibian Frankie Fredricks won a silver medal in the 100-and 200-meter dashes at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.
  + Golf
  + Lawn Bowling
  + Namibians get their physical exercise through daily chores. Many rural children must walk or run 3 miles (5 kilometers) a day to school. Most adults hoe and harvest regularly.
* Language
  + It is common for people to speak two or three languages
  + 11 Languages are indigenous to Namibia but 30 are spoken.
  + Why is English the national language? After independence it was chosen because it was not associated with any particular ethnicity and could facilitate interactions with the outside world.
  + Principal languages: English (national language is less common as the first language but is widespread) and Oshiwambo (49% of population speaks it) Nama (11% of pop., indigenous language), and Afrikaans is about 10% of the population and comes from the influence of South Africa
  + There are 30 individual languages in Namibia, all considered to be “living languages” meaning that they are still used.
    - Of these 30, 6 are institutional (used in schooling, government, other social institutions),
    - 11 are developing (used in literature among many people),
    - 9 are vigorous (used for face-to-face communication)
    - 4 are in trouble (not used regularly or used among a small number of people).
* Values
  + The flag is a symbol of the values of Namibia. The colors represent sunlight and the desert (yellow), rain and the ocean (blue), crops and vegetation (green), the blood shed in war (red), and peace and reconciliation (white). Schoolchildren sing the national anthem daily.
  + While nationalism is emphasized in schools and other social institutions, ethnicity is still a force in Namibia. There are many ethnic-based organizations that are working to gain power in Namibia. For example there is an official opposition party: the Democratic Turhalle Alliance that is an alliance of ethnic-based organizations. Land is not secure to all people as various ethnic groups continue to take more from weaker groups.
* Stigma
  + HIV/Aids
    - Recent articles suggest that the stigma of HIV/Aids is still pervasive in Namibian society
    - There is a lot of scholarly research that attempts to explain why it is so strong or what parts of society experience it the strongest but one article suggested that people who were more heavily involved in community sports or activities were less likely to face extreme effects of the stigma
* Religion
  + 90% are Christians
    - Largest are Lutheran and Roman Catholic
  + Some native religions still present in ethnic tribes
* Holidays
  + Independence day → March 21st
    - The Namibian War of Independence ended on March 21, 1990. Namibia was colonized in the early 19th century by the Germans but after the fall of the German government following World War 1, Namibia was taken over by South Africa. Namibians weren’t happy with the way they were being treated by the South African government and as a result, a guerrilla group called SWAPO attacked the local South African government.  The war lasted for 24 years ending in 1988 and two years later, on March 21,1990 the government power transitioned and gave Namibia freedom from South Africa’s Administration. To celebrate this day, Namibian’s take off work and participate in street celebrations held in major cities and towns across country.
  + Heroes Day→ August 26th
    - Heroes’ Day celebrates Namibia’s first attack as well as a successful attack made by SWAPO (South-West Africa People’s Organization). On this day military honours and medals are handed out.
  + Workers day → May 1st
    - Workers Day, or May Day, is on May 1st. It not only celebrated in Namibia but is celebrated in many other countries. May Day is a day taken to recognize the struggles that workers went through in their trade unions as well as workers struggles to obtain fair working conditions and standards. The workers were looking for 8 hours of work, 8 hours or rest, and 8 hours of leisure. The day is also to celebrate their achievement of obtaining the 8 hour work day as well as to honor the work force.
    - To celebrate May day, people usually have parades and parties. There are baskets of flowers and food made to give to family and friends.
  + Cassinga Day→ May 4th
    - Cassinga Day is a day to commemorate the Battle of Cassinga and the people that died in it. The battle took place between South Africans who attacked a SWAPO refugee camp and military base through airstrikes. the SWAPO had overtaken Cassinga which was an abandoned mining town. Shortly after being taken over, Cassinga was used as a place for Namibian exiles and when SWAPO took it over, it became a place for refugees from South West Africa. The SADF (South African Defence Force)  decided that Cassinga was one of the main medical sites, training and control centers for the guerrillas in the area as well as one of the 2 SWAPO headquarters. SADF knew that SWAPO wouldn’t be able to defend themselves from an airstrike and as a result didn’t send ground backup. The SADF was correct and they won that battle killing about 600 SWAPO.
  + Africa Day → May 25th
    - This is a holiday celebrating the founding of the Organisaiton of African Unity (OAU).  The OAU works to create unity within the African states, advocate for human rights, promote peace, help settle disputes between states, and to increase living standards. In 1963, Leaders from 30/32 states in Africa “signed a founding charter in Addis Ababa, Ethopia” and created the OAU. In 1991 OAU created the African Economic Community and in  2002 created the African Union.
  + Ascension day →  May 29th (Easter)
  + Namibia Women’s Day → December 10th
    - Also called Aluka, celebrates women’s struggles and accomplishments
  + Constitution Day→ February 9th
    - celebrate the day the Constituent Assembly adopted Namibia’s constitution in 1990.  It established basic rights and freedoms for citizens and is considered a living document.  The former Prime Minister and Chairperson of the assembly, Hage Geingob was a leader in creating the new constitution.  It focuses on three pertinent points of difference: the powers of the executive, the question of bicameral or unicameral parliament, and the electoral system.  It is a day to recognize the country’s adoption of the document and the unity it created.
  + Day of the African Child→ June 16th
    - The Organization of African Unity established this holiday in 1991 and it has been celebrated every year since then.  It is to honor the thousands of school children who participated in the 1976 protest in Soweto, South Africa.  They marched for more than half a mile, to raise awareness of the poor quality of education and to demand the right to be taught in their own language.  Hundreds of young students were shot and killed by security forces.  In the two weeks following, more people were killed and over a thousand injured.  Each year, several organizations (government, NGO, international) gather to discuss challenges and opportunities that children in Africa face to ensure their rights are upheld.
  + Day of the Namibian Child → September 28th
    - Made to raise awareness of the plight of the children in the country.  On this day in 1990, Namibia as a country ratified the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child and consequently the day was declared a national day by the Cabinet in the year of 2000.  It is to protect children’s rights in Namibia.
* Namibians observe some of the same holiday’s that Americans observe such as New Year’s day, Good Friday, and Easter Monday. Their independence day is March 21
* Rituals
  + Marriage
    - Weddings are extremely important social events in Namibia, bringing family and friends together to sing, dance, and feast. Most weddings combine old and new elements. Many Owambo couples, for example, say their vows in a church ceremony accompanied by identically-dressed bridesmaids and groomsmen, then exit to a crowd of guests shouting praises, dancing, and waving horsetail whisks.
    - In many customary law systems, the payment of a marriage consideration or lobola is the principal criterion for a valid customary marriage. Thus, the bride price is used to distinguish a valid marriage from a non-formalized union. Lobola, as the criterion for a valid customary marriage, is tendered by the groom or his parents to the bride’s parents. This is usually paid in full and can be in the form of cattle or money
  + Dance
    - Ondjongo involves both men and women forming a circle, clapping, stamping and singing without any instrumental support. Solo dancers, who perform in the middle of the circle, play an obligatory role.
    - Ogandeka, which is often correlated to a boxing match, is performed in a similar way, though only young men are allowed to take part. The central topic is the simulation of a boxing match between two bulls, imitated by the solo performers.
    - Ritual dances form the essential part of spiritual healings, initiation ceremonies and of seasonal festivals. Body performance, rhythm and tone patterns differ from region to region.
      * Spiritual healing dances, which are practiced in case of illness, require the participation of the whole community in song, rhythm and dance in order to supply the healer’s solo performance.
  + Rites of Passage:
    - San culture initiates a women by being chased around a menstrual hut by a man dressed as an eland
    - Ovambo culture calls this ceremony Ohango
    - Himba culture requires boys and girls to have their four lower incisors removed and given back to their place of birth
    - Himba boys are circumcised at puberty and Himba girls must leave the village during their first menses until she goes through a ritual for spiritual protection
* Traditions/Customs
  + Births
    - When a baby is born to an Owambo family, a goat is slaughtered for the mother to eat, with the belief that it will restore the blood she lost during the delivery. After a few weeks, the baby is named by the father and baptized. The baby’s hair is cut, and the child receives traditional beads.
  + Death
    - *Ombindi* is the place where ancestors carried bodies for their final rest
    - Places of burial and ceremony differ between tribes
      * The Kavango bury their dead with their heads facing west
      * The Nama bury their dead in an isolated place
      * When a Damara dies, the home of the individual is abandoned
      * When a German Namibian dies, toasts are drunk to the deceased after the funeral
      * The Basters will only drink tea and coffee as a sign of respect
  + Courting
    - Traditionally, a young man asked a young woman’s parents permission to date her. However, urban young people now openly congregate in groups, and youth meet at dance clubs or school functions. In northern rural areas, girls and boys meet secretly
  + Hunting
    - Rituals involved requests and prayers to ancestors
    - The role of the wife varies between different tribes while the man is out hunting, but she is usually required to stay home and keep a fire burning while her husband is out.
  + Water Ceremonies
    - Villages would pray for water during a drought using distinct ritual ceremonies that were different for each tribe
  + Story Telling
    - The *karetsanadi* are folk tales and songs of praise passed down
* Tribes/People
  + **San** (not westernized)
    - General: live in the north-east region of Namibia
    - Language: Khoisan
    - Lifestyle: hunting and gathering
      * Form groups of 10-15 that travel together to hunt/gather/search for water
      * Seriously struggling due to drought, have developed sip wells made with ostrich eggs
    - Leadership: no leader of the tribe and women have a high status, are seen as equals
      * Make decisions by consensus and practice “gift” economy
    - Clothing: typically just a few thin cloths wrapped around the body
    - Leisure is very important to the San people and is incorporated through talking, joking, singing and dancing
  + **Nama**
    - General: 5% of the population
      * 13 clans in the southern part of Namibia
    - Language: Khoisan
    - Lifestyle: semi-nomadic pastoralists and subsistence farming
      * Communal land use
    - Clothing: Western-style clothing today with embroidery of colorful motifs
    - Religion: many follow a mixed religion of traditional beliefs and Christianity or Islam
    - Culture is rich with stories, poems, songs, dance and crafts
  + **Damara**
    - General: 7% of the population
      * Thought to have been the third oldest ethnicity
    - Language: Khoisan (“click” language)
    - Leadership: all eleven clans are ruled by King Justus ǁGaroëb
    - Lifestyle: practice hunting, gathering, and some vegetable and cattle farming
    - Religion: many follow a traditional religion
      * An “eternal fire” burns continuously and is crucial to daily life
    - Strict traditional roles: men farming and women cooking, cleaning and tending to kids
  + **Owambo**
    - General: about 50% of the population
      * Eight tribes that live in Ovamboland
    - Language: Oshivambo
    - Leadership: each tribe is led by a Chief and a board of headmen
    - Lifestyle: practice agriculture, cattle farming, and fishing
      * Call the homestead a *kraal/eumbo,* thatched huts surrounded by wooden stake fence
      * Land is assigned a tenant, but is not owned by anyone
    - Ascent to power: traditionally matrilineal but today more patrilineal
    - Clothing: Western-style clothing today
    - Religion: many follow a mixed religion of traditional beliefs and Christianity
      * *Kalunga* is like superior spirit of the traditional religion
      * A sacred fire burns continuously in the center of the homestead
  + **Herero**
    - General: 7% of the population
      * Live in the central area of Namibia
    - Language: Herero
    - Lifestyle: cattle farming and entrepreneurship
      * Status is determined by how many cattle you own
      * Communal land use
    - Ascent to power: bilateral, both mother and father lineage is considered
    - Clothing: Western-style clothing with a cloth wrapped hat that resembles the horns of a cow
    - Religion: many follow Christianity with a slight presence of traditional beliefs
      * *Omuroi* is their traditional belief in witchcraft
      * A sacred fire burns continuously in the center of the village
  + **Kavango** (not westernized)
    - General: 9% of the population
      * Five kingdoms that live in the north along the Kavango River
    - Leadership: each kingdom is led by a Chief, called *hompa/fumu,* and a board of headmen
    - Lifestyle: pastoral farming, cattle farming, and fishing
    - Ascent to power: traditionally matrilineal but today more patrilineal
    - Known for their wood carvings which are sold throughout the country
  + **Caprivi** (not westernized)
    - General: 4% of the population
      * Five tribes that live in the Caprivi Strip of Namibia
    - Language: Lozi and English
    - Lifestyle: practice hunting, gathering, fishing, farming and pastoralism
      * Homestead*,* thatched huts surrounded by wooden stake fence
      * Communal land use
    - Leadership: each tribe is led by a Chief (the oldest male), who chooses a *ngamela* that leads the board of Senior Headman to make up the tribal council called the *kuta*
    - Ascent to power: oldest man in village, then being chosen
  + **Tswanas**
    - General: 0.5% of the population
      * 3 tribes that live in the eastern region of Namibia
    - Lifestyle: livestock farming
      * Homestead*,* thatched huts surrounded by wooden stake fence
    - Ascent to power: patrilineal and act as a patriarchal society
    - Religion: many have adopted Christianity over their traditional beliefs
      * Traditionally believe in a God they call *Modimo*
      * Practice totemism
      * Marriages are arranged by the father, the number one role of a woman is to get married and have kids, the number one role of a man is to pass on his lineage
    - Dancing is an essential part of their culture
    - Strict traditional roles: men farming and women cooking, cleaning and tending to kids
  + **Coloured**: mixed race of people that came from the colonists intermarrying and interbreeding with indigenous women, now most coloured people come from two coloured parents
    - General: live in the central/southern areas of Namibia
    - Language: mostly Afrikaans, some English
    - Lifestyle: live and work in more urban centers and developed areas
    - Clothing: Western-style clothing
    - Religion: mostly follow Christianity with a slight presence of traditional beliefs
    - The Coloured people have faced a lot of discrimination over the years, especially during slavery and apartheid, because they were not as high-status as the White people but not accepted with the dark skinned ethnicities because they befriended and aided the colonists, never fit in except with each other, same today
  + **Himba**
    - General: live in the northwest region of Namibia
    - Language: *OtjiHimba,* a dialect of Herero
    - Lifestyle: agriculture, cattle farming, hunting and gathering, crafting
      * Homesteads are cone/dome shaped structures made from palm leaves/sapling posts and plastered in mud and dung
    - Ascent to power: patrilineal
    - Clothing: just a loincloth or goat-skinned mini skirt
      * Start every day by putting a paste of butter, fat and red ochre, called *otjize*, all over their body and in their hair - not done to protect skin from sun like rumoured, just done for aesthetics
      * The hairstyle worn is an indication of age and social status
      * Strongly value beauty
    - Religion:
      * Traditionally believe in a God they call *Mukuru*
      * A sacred fire, *ukoruwo,* burns continuously in the village outside the Chief’s house
      * Polygamous and arranged marriage, both girls and boys are circumcised as a rite of passage, not considered adults until married/bear children
      * *Omiti* is their belief in witchcraft and possession
      * Livestock are seen as a sacred gift, are kept in the center of the village in a fenced enclosure called a *kraal*
    - Strict traditional roles: men farming and women cooking, cleaning and tending to kids
    - Were once a part of a single ethnicity with the Herero but split around time of German colonization
    - Epupa Dam Project - create a dam from the Epupa falls for hydroelectric power (which would only benefit the wealthier people in cities and not the Himba at all), opposed by Himba because cause flooding on the land they use to graze their cattle
  + **Basters**: mixed race of people that came from the intermarriage of Dutch men and indigenous Khoisan women
    - General: 2% of the population
      * Live in the central area of Namibia
    - Language: Afrikaans
    - Leadership: Western style of government
    - Lifestyle: livestock farming
    - Clothing: Western-style clothing with a bonnet
    - Religion: Christianity
    - The Basters have fought politically to be recognized by the UN as a sovereign state (which they were before Namibian Independence)
  + **Whites** 
    - General: live in the central part of Namibia
    - Language: ⅔ Afrikaans, ⅓ English
    - There is not much information about the culture of the White ethnicity, but my best guess is that it is primarily based on Western culture with a little traditional influence depending on the other ethnicities nearby
    - White people make up a very small percentage of the population and no longer play a role in the government but control virtually the entire economy
  + In general, many of the ethnicities have been affected by harsh climate and the influence of colonists and missionaries so that many people have adopted Christianity, Western-style clothing, and have moved to urban centers looking for more stable work. Many young people of ethnicities that were not westernized are still moving to urban centers looking for more stable work. Also, even though the national language is English, the majority of the population speaks Afrikaans, or a traditional language, and only learn English in schools as a second language.