

**The Preservation and Conservation of Anthropological Heritage at  
the National Museum of Namibia: An evaluation of preparedness  
for caring for repatriated objects**

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## **Abstract**

Over the past years, the calling on European museums to return cultural objects believed to have been looted, and collected from African countries during colonial times has been gaining momentum or has become a burning topic among African nations (Sebuliba et al ,2021). It has also been found that many of Namibian cultural materials or belongings were also trafficked out of the country to European countries by Missionaries and former colonizers (Silvester & Shiweda, 2020). It is against this background that Namibia has also joined other African countries in the call of restitution and repatriation of colonial objects and cultural belongings from European countries especially Germany and Finland. Although, this is a challenging process to undertake, seven repatriations process of colonial and cultural materials including human remains have so far taken place in Namibian and these materials were received from Germany and Finland respectively. This paper presents the findings and analysis of the National Museum of Namibia's (NMN) preparedness towards the preservation and conservation of twenty-three repatriated cultural materials from the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin of Germany. The study considered a total population of seven participants from three Namibian institutions which played a major role in the repatriation of the twenty-three cultural materials. These institutions were the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MEAC), the Museum Association of Namibia (MAN) and the National Museum of Namibia (NMN), out of the seven participants from these three institutions each institution was represented by one participant, who was purposively sampled as they had directly worked with the repatriation of the cultural materials. The questionnaires were sent to the participants via emails and face to face interviews were conducted. A participant observation was also conducted at the ethnographic section of the NMN where the repatriated materials are kept. Data gathered was analyzed and compared to one another so that a common interpretation could be drawn. The results revealed that proper preservation and conservation of repatriated materials are being carried out however; there is insufficient space at the ethnographic collection section. Finally, this study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture may allocate an appropriate storage and display building for repatriated materials with adequate space.

**Keywords:** Restitution, Repatriation, Preservation, Conservation, Anthropology, Ethnographic

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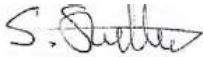
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## DECLARATION

I, Serak Shatimwene Oshouli Shidhudhu, hereby declare that this study is my work and is a true reflection of my research and that this work or any part thereof has not been submitted for a degree at any institution.

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Serak S O Shidhudhu

05 November 2023

Date

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

CCP, ECF	Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures
MAN	Museums Association of Namibia
NMN	National Museum of Namibia
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation
MEAC	Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
UNAM	University of Namibia
IPM	Integrated Pests Management
EM	Ethnologisches Museum

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

This chapter provides the reader with background information on the preservation and conservation of anthropological heritage at the National Museum of Namibia. Also, the chapter outlined the purpose of the study, statement of the problem and research questions. Similarly, the chapter suggested the significance of the study, limitation and delimitation of the study, organization of the study and chapter's summary.

Precious artifacts from the past are cared for by museums and their conservators; without their meticulous labor, the public would not be able to appreciate and learn from these pieces, thereby losing a way to make a personal connection to the past.. To help the conservators retain the ability to perform their job effectively, and allow for the continuation of these connections, it is important for their institution to have an efficient conservation management plan in place. The conservation management plan involves the act of creating, editing, handling of collections as well as understanding the lifecycle processes an object may undergo during its time in the museum. This act does not require the attention the conservators alone, but also staff members with the authorities in the management of the product (Brown, Coeytaux, DeGiacomo & Flannery 2016).

The National Museum of Namibia (NMN) is one of the museums that play a vital role in preserving the Namibian natural, historical and cultural heritage through its various collections such as geology, archaeology, anthropology and many more. These collections consist of different objects that were collected from different parts of the country and with vast difference in age. The NMN also store materials that were returned from Germany and Finland. The repatriated materials were kept in European museums with different climatic conditions from that of Namibia. Therefore, proper conservation and preservation of these materials must be employed to ensure they continue to maintain the same condition as they were in European museums.



Namibia is a former colony of Germany and South Africa, for many years it has suffered social, cultural, economic, and political transformation. She also experienced a huge damage to its social and cultural roots which is the results of looting and stealing of cultural objects and at some points the trafficking of human remains. According, to (Silvester and Shiweda, 2020), found that many of Namibian cultural materials or belongings were also trafficked out of the country to European countries by Missionaries who brought Christianity into the Namibian society.

In order to reclaim what it has lost, Namibia has joined other African countries in the call for restitution and repatriation of cultural materials from European countries especially Germany and Finland. To this point, seven repatriations of Namibian materials including human remains have been received ever since independence in 1990 from Germany and Finland (Silvester & Shiweda, 2020, Museums Association of Namibia., 2022). This process of repatriation gave birth of the collaboration between Germany and Namibia and this resulted in the introduction of capacity building projects between the Germany Museums Association and the Museum Association of Namibia, the National Heritage Council, and the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (Silvester & Shiweda, 2020, Museums Association of Namibia, 2022).

The collaboration further give birth to the collaborative project the “Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures” (CCP, ECF) funded by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung Foundation this and created an alliance between the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin and the NMN. According to the Museums Association of Namibia (2022) some of the major achievement of the project is the repatriation of the Twenty-three cultural materials from the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin, the training of Namibian Museums Professionals, the establishment of the Museum of Namibian Fashion and the funding of Namibian Students to study heritage studies was all due to the running CCP,ECF Project

Equally important, the CCP, ECF project seek to prepare Namibian museum professionals for the future returns of Namibian materials in Germany through training (Museums Association of Namibia., 2022). These activities within the Namibian museum sphere informed this study which is also funded by the CCP, ECF project. The study investigated the NMN’s readiness toward the

conservation of the twenty-three cultural materials returned from the Ethnologisches Museum that are kept at the National Museum of Namibia.

Despite it being built in 1907 as a German school and later, turned into an archive before turned into a state museum, the NMN still uses this building even after independence in 1990. Töttemeyer (1999) stated that the building is old and it might not be suitable to serve as a national museum. The National Museum of Namibia has a policy dating back from the late 1980s, thus it need to be reviewed as employees at the museum are forced to operate in a vacuum and relaying on their own expertise and knowledge but not being guided by a well update museum policy (Töttemeyer, 1999) and this puts conservation activities at a risk and compromises its standards.

Though, there is a Namibian culture policy of 2001 it lacks core issues regarding the protection of Namibian tangible cultural heritage against trafficking as well as traditional preservation and conservation measures of Namibian cultural materials. Similarly, the Namibian Heritage Act 27 of 2004 does not clearly state out a museum as an institution of conserving the national heritage, thus, the National Heritage Council (NHC) can delegate any institution to deal with the conservation of national heritage.

Moreover, there is no legislation or parliament act making provisions and setting conditions regarding the restitution and repatriation of Namibian cultural materials from its former colonizers, apart from memorandum of understandings that are signed between Namibia and Germany as well as Finland (Shiweda & Silvester, 2020). Making it a challenging task to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and other stakeholders to fully implement or strongly call for the repatriation of objects as there is no law giving them that mandate resulting in lengthy repatriation processes. These gaps in the Namibian legislations system in terms of national heritage and culture motivated this study by investigating the need to analyse conservation standards at the NMN's ethnographic section.

It the view of the aforementioned this study investigated the challenges that the Namibia's' National Museum currently faces upon receiving the twenty-three cultural materials from the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin in terms of conservation and preservation of such repatriated

cultural materials. Moreover, the study further established how the CCP, ECF, the MEAC and MAN played a role in preparation for the repatriation of the cultural materials. Equally, little study was done in terms of conservation of repatriated materials in the African context as museums are believed to be of western origin, therefore creating a room to define a museum in an African context and conserve African materials in an African manner. The study was also inspired by the fact that there was no study done in Namibia to investigate museum's readiness upon receiving repatriated cultural materials leaving the area of credible investigation on conservation standards. This study will thus, shed light on the government regulatory framework, policy makers, museums and specialists in the heritage industry because the empirical findings can be used as guidance in preparation of receiving cultural objects in the future. Finally, the study will also serve as a resource and open rooms for new research on the subject matters.

The following questions guided the study and assisted the researcher in answering the research problem.

1. What was the role of the MEAC, The Gerda Henkel Stiftung Foundation and the MAN in the CCP, ECF Project?
2. How the MEAC and the MAN prepared the National Museum of Namibia for the repatriation of the twenty-three cultural materials from Germany?
3. What are the conservation strategies does the National Museum of Namibia have in place in preparation for the repatriated cultural materials?
4. What challenges does the National Museum of Namibia faces upon receiving repatriated objects?

The research was restricted to the ethnographic division of the National Museum of Namibia, which houses the twenty-three cultural artifacts that were just brought back from the Ethnologisches Museum in Germany. Additionally, the analysis only included the returned artifacts—not all of the items in the ethnographic section. Further, only workers at the NMN who handle repatriation goods directly and those at the MEAC, MAN who were directly involved in the CCP, ECF project were included in the study.

Even though the NMN has other sections such as history, archaeology, underwater heritage collections and many more, there has been no repatriation of objects that falls under these sections. The repatriated Hendrik Witbooi whip and bible are stored in the Independence Memorial Museum since it is a display museum for historical objects and not in the ethnographic section of the NMN, which is the focus of study. All other returned artifacts will thus not be included in this research because they are not currently housed at the NMN's ethnographic section. Furthermore, additional repatriated cultural assets, such as the Ondonga Sacred Stone, were purposefully removed from the study because they were not among the twenty-three repatriated cultural materials under the CCP, ECF Project. However, the findings of this study might be applied to other areas of the museum as well.

The study is organized into five chapters: Chapter one is designated as an introduction to the concept. It introduces the study and provides a clear statement of the problem, overall objectives of the study, specific objectives, the study questions, limitations of the study, structure of the study, and organisation of the study. Chapter two focused on the literature review of related articles written on the topic. Secondly, it looks at theoretical literature and empirical literature reviews. Chapter three discusses the methodology used in the research. It further outlines the research methods, data sources and data collection procedures. Chapter four is exclusively for data analysis, findings and presentations. Finally, Chapter Five is devoted to conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions abridge what the study sought to achieve, what it found, and where it diverges or converges from existing evidence. It makes recommendations and suggests possible areas for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

The previous chapter has introduced the concept and the purpose of the study more entirely on what triggered this research. Therefore, this chapter reviews previous studies on the subject matter. In this study, the conceptual frameworks are drawn from international and local literature. The frameworks used are based on the concepts of heritage conservation and preservation.

The term repatriation is frequently used to describe the process where cultural objects are returned to a nation, central government, indigenous people or other groups while restitution is used in law to refer to recovery, and it may involve returning a stolen object or providing financial compensation. Furthermore, restitution is primarily used to refer to objects that have been stolen or otherwise removed from their owners in an improper manner (Swedish National Heritage Board, 2020).

According to Swedish National Heritage Board (2020) conservation is the museum's prime responsibility to maintain collections and to do everything possible to delay the natural laws of deterioration. Many of the materials from which objects are made are inherently unstable and undergo chemical or structural change as they age. In addition a new or shifting environment such as temperature, light, humidity, humans and other biological factors accelerate such change and all need to be controlled. Furthermore, conservation involves the treatment and, where feasible and acceptable, the restoration of objects as nearly as possible to their former condition.

Moreover, when the objects are returned to their original communities, conservations measures are put in place by the receipt country to ensure proper maintenance of the objects. In addition to that institutions within the recipient country are identified to handle, take care and store the returned materials (Swedish National Heritage Board, 2020). Organizations such as South African Museums Association (SAMA), International Council of Museums (ICOM) and function under the guidance of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) provides standards and criteria on how museums should look after their collections or cultural properties (Ngcai & Monnye, 2021).

Ngcai and Monnye (2021) explained that applying of standards in the conservation of the objects is essential to ensure that heritage objects are accessible to future generations. Standards are requirements based on international best practice that inform the institutions that house heritage objects of many different factors of which they must be aware to fulfill their obligation as custodians of heritage objects that form part of the National identity of the country.

In their paper, Ngcai and Monnye (2021) further suggested a few strategies to successful conserve museum objects. They indicated that institutions should be allocated an appropriate space, storage, and proper expertise on how to conserve the cultural material. Furthermore, to minimize the risks of damage and deterioration of cultural materials, state departments and supporting bodies must obtain an expertise of the conservator to assess and understand the environment in which the collections are housed or displayed. Similarly, the objects that are not displayed on a regular basis must be stored in conducive and appropriate storage facilities.

Equally, the objects should not be cramped together; the accessibility to the storage areas should as well be monitored and regulated. Museums, housing heritage objects must be incorporate within their policy, the staff members who has access to the storage area and regular checks must be made aware of the inventoried objects in the collection. Additionally, storage areas should comply with minimum standards for the type of objects stored, security measures, ventilation, pest control, smoke detectors, cleaning programme should be among the factors to be considered when deciding on storage facilities (Ngcai & Monnye, 2021).

In the same vein, Ngcai and Monnye (2021) postulated that, objects are diverse and differ in material, texture, shape, size, and context and this diversity had presented challenges to many curators and other heritage practitioners tasked with the management of such objects as they must apply plans and techniques in conserving and maintaining them. They further categorized these challenges into internal factors and external factors that affect museum conservations.

Internal factors are those that can be controlled by the organisation. These may include financial resources, human resources, and physical resources. These factors are crucial in the management of heritage objects and failure to observe these may result in the damage, loss, or deterioration of heritage objects whereas external factors refer to elements that are outside the organisation or institution's control. The indiscriminate vandalization of artworks, sculptures and the spread of

pandemics are good examples of external factors which organizations must guard against. Departments and institutions are however required to observe and mitigate these factors to ensure proper management of heritage objects (Ngcai & Monnye, 2021).

According to Arndt (2022) conservation methods in museums have considerably evolved in the past decades. Thus, museums used various chemicals in order to keep collected objects in good shape and to prolong their lifetime. In the context of preventative conservation, which he defined as the sum of controls and actions on the physical, chemical and human environment of the collections, allowing to prolong the life of the objects without intervening directly on objects. Most museums now proceed far less invasively and apply proactive preventive measures that substitute the generalized use of chemicals by a holistic method of combining prevention, monitoring and punctual intervention.

Moreover, Arndt (2022) noted that African cultural collections in European museums over years have been conserved using chemicals which rose concerned of restitutions of these materials. These materials got contaminated and at some points became poisonous potentially limiting participatory practices, obstruct repatriation, as well as raised questions about the practical, ethical, and epistemological implications of preserving cultural material by means of chemicals. It was further observed by the Native American Grave Protection Act (NAGPRA, 1990) as cited in Arndt (2022) that, the toxicity of artifacts has slowed down requests for repatriation of such artifacts.

A study by Sebuliba et al, (2021) investigated the readiness of African museums in receiving the colonial objects in Kenya and Ghana. The study revealed that African museums face huge challenges in terms of conservation and documentation of the repatriated colonial objects. Some of the challenges among others include lack of financial resources, proper facilities and lack of human capacity with expertise in conservation and documentation of the objects. This was also supported by Ngcai and Monnye (2021) who indicated that institutions are under-funded, even those that fall under the Cultural Institution Act, leaving many significant heritage objects to deteriorate. Moreover, a large portion of the financial resources are allocated to payments of expenses such as wage and day to day operational expenses. Budgets for ongoing care and proactive conservation to extend the life of cultural artifacts are either nonexistent or very small.

Brown, et al (2016) identified barriers in communication, limitations in technology, and inconsistencies in executing the process as some of the issues hindering the conservation and documentation process. Ngcai and Monnye (2021) stated that museums objects are not looked after according to standards or the staff in the museum are not aware that they are housing declared national objects and in most cases the heritage objects do not receive proper attention that is required and are not looked after according to the conservation standard practice.

Sebuliba, et al (2021) further stipulated that, “Many African countries currently stand a risk of failure to maintain their collection and of not using them for intended scientific and educational purposes.” In the same vein Halmer (2021) showed that Benin’s repatriated objects from France were kept in individual’s residences due to poor state museum facilities. This study is in line with the view of Ngcai and Monnye (2021), they indicated that it is alarming to note that some specifically declared objects and collections are not looked after according to international standards. This is because in some instances, there is no enough storage, no dedicated persons to look after them, no preventative measures in place nor a conservation policy or plan to aid in the process of looking after such objects.

According to Gertrude, et, al, (2020) museums in Ghana and other African countries have poor storage facilities. The storage and environmental conditions in Ghanaian museums are poor with inadequate environmental monitoring gadgets. In addition, there is inadequate space and housing containers and the storage spaces are limited, over utilised and inaccessible. In some case such storage conditions might not be favorable for the long-term preservation of the existing cultural objects. Kalibani (2021) on the other hand, discovered that African museums do not have conservation laboratories and facilities as well as trained staff for museums which is vital for the conservation of objects. Furthermore, Ngcai and Monnye (2021) found out that many institutions are unable to appoint skilled conservators to undertake the conditional assessments or management plans.

As a result, objects/collections are managed without the necessary skills that are required to assess the condition of the objects/ collection. This is a huge challenge of conservation in museums. In addition to that, some institutions do not have a provision for the institution succession plans. Hence when, experienced employees are left to retire or resign, it leaves a huge void within the organisation when the new employee is eventually employed and oriented. It has



also been observed once there is a vacancy of a critical role, the proper management of heritage objects is compromised as some institutions do not fill vacant posts due to a lack of funds or thus, inexperienced employees are left to assume the responsibilities without appropriate training (Ngcai & Monnye, 2021).

Apart from poor infrastructures as a challenge towards restitution and repatriation of African objects, (Gertrude, et, al, 2020) indicated that due to poor documentation of these objects in European and American museums, many African object's provenance cannot be traced consequently, they have not been returned yet. Moreover, their study in Ghana further revealed that Ghana's national and regional museums, cultural institutions and university museums are all not well-resourced and there are no specific standards and guidelines in the management of cultural heritage to be followed by all museums and heritage institutions in Ghana. Another study conducted in South Africa by Ngcai and Monnye (2021) revealed that implementation of legislation by state institutions had been a challenge and the impact of not adhering to the legislation poses a significant risk to the heritage objects.

Additionally, people do not know that some objects ever existed and the young generation will not be able to identify some cultural objects from their culture; since these objects were rare or unique and were sent to Europe during colonialism, they had never had the chance to see them (Kalibani, 2021). Hence documentation of these objects becomes a challenging task. Whilst it was argued that many organizations had one or a few methods of documentation, there were still many state departments and bodies that were still lacking adequate forms of record keeping (Ngcai & Monnye, 2021).

Kalibani (2021) further explained that, another issue is the translocation and transformation of African colonial objects. As these objects have long been absent from their countries of origin, it is questionable whether they will be able to regain a place in their original societal environment. On the other hand, in communities where the memory has been erased, this work of re-socializing the objects will be more difficult to be accepted by the communities.

A study in Ghana revealed that the people are not aware of the restitution and repatriation processes of cultural objects and their perception towards ritual and spiritual objects creates challenges of successful implementation of the repatriation process (Gertrude, et, al, 2020). In

addition to that, Kalibani (2021) indicated that people from the former German colonies (especially African communities) whose cultures happen to be represented in these objects at least through their contents are mostly unaware of the presence of this memory from their colonized ancestors in European museums. Since then, they are not known or recognized as heritage by their cultures of origin.

Gertrude, et, al (2020) stated that, Ghana also needs national standards and policies on repatriation of various types of cultural objects and how they will be received and reinstated. This was supported by Kalibani (2021) who indicated that there is also a lack of interest by some institutions that are normally supposed to take the initiative on the question of restitution. While the debate is getting intense in Europe on the political, cultural, and academic front, as the topic of restitution does not seem to be well known and well considered in Africa and political leaders in African seem to have other priorities.

The literatures analyzed revealed that preservation and conservation especially in African countries are of poor standards as a result of poor administration, lack of funds and expertise in the heritage industry which in turns hinders the conservation and documentation of the repatriated objects. In the processes this continues to influence the process of restitution and repatriation of cultural objects. Therefore, this study investigated Namibia's restitution and repatriation projects to determine how prepared Namibia is and whether similar challenges are applicable to the National Museum. Namibia.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Research Methodology**

The preceding chapter examined literature review, with a focus on the theoretical and empirical parts of the literature. The following elements make up this chapter: research design, data and sources, research tools, and data collection measures. It also includes ethical issues.

The study followed a qualitative approach based on an interpretive phenomenological design. This approach allowed heritage practitioners at the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MEAC), Museum Association of Namibia (MAN) and the National Museum of Namibia (NMN) to share their perspectives on the repatriation of Namibian cultural materials in terms of conservation and preservation at the National Museum of Namibia. The study was conducted at two of three Namibian institutions that were part of the CCP, ECF Project that facilitated the repatriation of twenty-three cultural materials from Germany in 2022.

The target population consisted of seven participants including directors, lecturers, advisors and conservators and the targeted group participated directly in the CCP, ECF Project. The sample of three participants was drawn from seven heritage practitioners using the purposive sampling technique and each respondent was allocated a code whereby respondent one was represented by code RS01, respondent two by RS02 and respondent three by RS03. Primary inclusion criteria were participant availability, knowledge of the CCP, ECF Project, and data saturation. Furthermore, the study only focused on the conservation and documentation of twenty-three repatriated objects but not all objects in the ethnographic collection section. The primary data collection methods were in-depth face to face interviews and questionnaires were sent via emails. Collected data were analyzed using the thematic data analysis approach.

Permission was granted to the researcher by the MEAC's Executive Director and the University of Namibia to conduct research at the NMN. Participants were informed of their voluntarily rights to participate in the study, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and consent forms were signed by each participant before face to face interviews were conducted. The Harvard reference style was employed to acknowledge all cited sources of material used in

the study. Equally, there was no misrepresentation, overestimation or alteration of the data used in the analysis in any way.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results and Discussions

#### 4.1. The role of the MEAC, The Gerda Henkel Stiftung Foundation and the MAN in the CCP, ECF Project.

The findings showed that the National Museum of Namibia functions under the MEAC's directorate of heritage and culture programmes. As per the Heritage Act No. 27 of 2004 the National Museum of Namibia is a depository of cultural materials and other artifacts of national interest including the repatriated objects or materials. Therefore, the *Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Project* was collaboration between the Ethnographic Museum in Germany, the Museum Association of Namibia (MAN) and the National Museum of Namibia (NMN). The Gerda Henkel Stiftung Foundation provided funds for this project to enable the successful repatriation of twenty-three cultural materials from Germany to Namibia in 2022. The reports were confirmed by the respondents (RS01, RS02 and RS03) who had this to say:

*This project is a bilateral negotiation between Namibia and Germany as it is a former colonial regime. The ministry is mandated to protect, conserve and preserve our cultural heritage therefore; it plays a key role in any project that deals with the restitution and repatriation of cultural materials. The ministry's role was to make sure that whatever was to be repatriated was of Namibian origin. The ministry engaged in research to confirm the originality of these artifacts and to conduct provenance research of these materials (Respondent SR02).*

*The ministry also played a role in determining how these artifacts can be conserved to prevent any deterioration and to ensure adherence to international standards of conservations. The ministry also ensured that the community was involved and it has given its consent and they are part of the repatriation process. The ministry also provided space where the objects are kept, as well as availing the ministry's staff members to engage in conservation and to be part of the negotiation process. Since the ministry is the legal custodian of heritage in Namibia, it made sure that the repatriation process meets legal standards and conservation standards to ensure its*

*success and it was beneficial to both museums in Germany, Namibia and Namibian people. (Respondent SR02).*

*MAN's role on the project was to coordinate all aspects (project funding applications, activities, sub-projects, administration, recruitment, stakeholder and media relations, coordination, financial management and reporting) of the project (Respondent SR01). In agreement with Respondent SR01, Respondent SR03 stated that the conservator has been accorded an opportunity to enroll for chemistry for Conservation course with the South African Institute for Heritage Sciences and Conservation. The course is currently underway it is crucial for the understanding of the chemistry of conservation in terms of treatments and restorations.*

*The CCP, ECF project role was to identify Namibian objects found in European Museums and to see if the Namibian communities still need them and they will be able to reconnect these cultural heritages with the original community by recreating the knowledge associated with the objects. (Respondent SR03).*

*The Gerda Henkel Stiftung Foundation was the main funder of this project. It provided funds to MAN, EM and NMN. The funds provided to the NMN were towards the renovations of the ethnographic collection (main collection, container and classroom) capacity build, employment of the conservator, researchers as well as towards facility development. The foundation also contributed materials needed for conservation purposes such as storage shelves, humidifier, cleaning materials, museum vacuum, chest freezer, packaging and storage materials and trained a conservator on how to conserve the materials (Respondent SR03).*

The repatriation of the twenty-three cultural materials was well planned and prepared. The fund donor made sure that all aspects of the repatriation process which include identifying stakeholders, engaging the community, documentation and conservation efforts were considered. As it was noted by Sebuliba, et al (2021), Kalibani (2021), Ngcai and Monnye (2021) and Halmer (2021) who carried out studies in some African countries regarding the repatriation of colonial objects, the challenges observed seems to have been address in the CCP, ECF project to ensure the sustainability of the materials and for the successful completion of the project. The

CCP, ECF objectives were clearly outlined and ensured that Germany and Namibia continue to be in good terms as it is preparing Namibia for future repatriations of cultural materials.

#### **4.2.How the MEAC and the MAN prepared the National Museum of Namibia for the repatriation of the twenty -three cultural materials.**

There were a number of activities that took place in Namibia and Germany before the cultural materials were repatriated to Namibia. This was to make sure that proper provenance research is carried out and that Namibians were engaged in the selection and repatriation of the twenty-three cultural materials. The Museum Association of Namibia (MAN) made sure that Namibians understood the significant of restitution and repatriation for the cultural materials as well as its necessity. MAN further engaged with other stakeholders such the University of Namibia and the community at large specifically heritage practitioners and museum managers by proving capacity building workshops on conservation and provenance research. The preparation of the National Museum of Namibia and the Namibian community at large was confirmed by the respondents.

*The first intervention of the MEAC was to ensure that the national museum have trained staff such as conservators. There was a need to have specialized personnel in place to deal with the repatriated materials. The ministry also made some alterations on the physical structure of the museum in terms of lightings and others. The ministry also avail funding for research and introduce the objects to the communities to make sure they reconnect with the community. The ministry also coordinated all stakeholders so that it becomes a Namibian project not only the ministry's project therefore, they incorporated institutions such as UNAM, MAN and community members to help with interpretations of objects and to be part of the selection of the objects.*

***(Respondent SR02)***

*Between 2019 and 2021, object selection committee workshops took place at NMN, which involved a team of representatives from Academics, Community, Museums, Contemporary Arts, and Fashion etc. The committee agreed on twenty-three objects that were returned home*

***(Respondent SR01).***

*Starting from November 2019, the Conservator, received training through the Chemistry for Conservation course with the South African Institute for Heritage Sciences and Conservation from the 16th to the 25th of May 2022, The conservator underwent ten intensive days of training with the Department of Conservation and Restoration for African collections at the EM. The training included the aspects of preventive conservation methodologies, conservation and/or restoration, handling and packaging for the artifacts travel preparation to Namibia. As a result of the work of the conservator on the project, and the training received in Berlin, the conservator was able to provide training to almost 30 Namibian Museum Professionals from all over Namibia in June 2022 (Respondent SR01).*

*The Conservator, Documentalist and MAN team have developed a preventative conservation manual (to be featured in the conservation policy/guideline) which would be used as a guideline by museum officials in Namibia on how best to take care of their collections. The manual is undergoing final editing and will be published by December 2023 (Respondent SR01).*

*While at the EM, the conservator was tasked to work on the conservation and preparation of the artifacts that were returning to Namibia, together with the colleagues from EM who have been working with us on this project. The process involved the restoration and preparation for transport (packaging, condition reports, photographs/ documentation etc.). In addition, while in Berlin, the conservator purchased some conservation materials and tools in Berlin for NMN conservation needs. (Respondent SR01)*

*MAN, through the project, was able to respond to facility renovation for the ethnographic collection storage. The renovation included window tinting (with UV filter), blinds and floor repair. The shelving cabinets for the ethnographic collection were purchased, to make enough storage space for the returned object. The purchase was made in agreement between the EM and NMN conservator in consideration of the returning objects' storage boxes. (Respondent SR01)*

*The Conservator has developed an Integrated Pests Management (IPM) checklist, which helps with the monitoring and controlling of insect infestation. There is also a fumigation plan in place which happens every four months. The conservator cleaned and treated the objects that are in the collections that are currently in thirty-six cupboards. (Respondent SR01)*



The repatriation of the twenty-three cultural materials was long planned as of 2019. It was found that the repatriation of objects is a lengthy process and a number of factors needed to be considered. The MEAC and the MAN ensured that the NMN was well prepared to receive the twenty-three cultural materials. These institutions ensured that human resources were in place to deal with the materials and the personnel were made part of the whole process. The physical structure of the NMN was also improved to ensure that it was in appropriate standards needed for the successful conservation and preservation of the repatriated materials. Furthermore, conservation tools were made available to the NMN and a conservation policy is being developed that may not only be applicable to the NMN but all Namibian museums too. Findings of a study done by Gertrude, et, al, (2020) in Ghana seems to be not applicable to the Namibian repatriation process.

#### **4.3.Conservation strategies at the National Museum of Namibia in preparation for the repatriated cultural materials.**

As per the observation made by the researcher, it was observed that the ethnographic section of the NMN is in good shape. There are strong measures taken by the curators and conservators to make sure that people entering the collection adhere to the rules set. Visitors are given gloves so that they do not touch the materials with their bare hands and no bags or food is allowed in the collection. The materials are kept clean, in special boxes and handling of the materials is done in full guidance of the conservator. Pest control measures are visible at the entrance of the collection and room temperature is controlled. The participants to the study also revealed that:

*The materials are conserved as per the National Heritage Act No. 27 of 2004; The Heritage and Culture policy have an elaborative chapter on how to deal with cultural materials. The restitution and repatriation of human remains and associated objects policy is a guide by the MEAC for restitution and repatriation as the National Museum Policy which defines the procedures of integrating new collections in terms of storing, cataloging and conservation. These are some of the legal frameworks that guide the conservation of repatriated materials.*  
**(Respondent SR02)**

*The ministry made sure that monitoring and evaluation on a regular basis is carried out to confirm that the elements such as temperature are at the standards. In addition, a conservation routine was put in place to determine when the materials can be treated and monitored as the seasons change. Funds were also made available for students to study and do research around the twenty-three repatriated objects so that the process does not become absolute. (Respondent SR02)*

*There is nothing really done on the repatriated materials but the team is busy monitoring how the materials are adopting to the Namibian climate. The materials are still kept in their packages so that they slowly acclimatise to the Namibian weather. The boxes are opened once a week so that the objects get used to the weather condition in the collection (Respondent SR03).*

*There is a humidifier in the collection and blinds installed on the windows and light is controlled. Once there is no one in the collection, the lights are off. Conservation work mainly focused on dusting, using humidifiers, arranging, treating, and packaging items one by one using the correct museum materials. Currently, condition assessment was conducted, and the condition reporting forms were completed (Respondent SR03).*

*The Conservators with the help of the appointed cleaners have been keeping the collection clean; priority monitoring is also made to ensure that the large objects are free of dust. The Conservators have set up insect traps in the corners of the storage-room and in cardboards; this is done to enable the identification of the pests' causing issues to the collections. The traps are monitored every Friday and the records are kept in the insect/pest checklist. The unidentifiable insects are shared with the entomology department for correct identification (Respondent SR03).*

*The ethnographic department purchased new shelves; therefore, conservators had to rearrange and display objects to showcase artifacts and objects. Objects on the new shelves are arranged to allow conservators and curators to ensure easy access and efficient retrieval when needed (Respondent SR03).*

Museum collection conservation incorporates a variety of factors. It entails managing artifacts by ensuring their continued good condition and by enhancing their surroundings. Preventing degradation, stabilizing circumstances, and restoring the physical condition of museum objects are the goals of conservation. Moreover, conservation is not just about keeping the artifacts intact; it's also about giving them an ideal home with a favorable environment. The National Museum of Namibia has excellent standards for conservation.

The use of chemicals on artifacts is minimized as the conservators prefer to conserve the materials using methods that are not hazardous to humans but employ local conservation methods. Physical resources such as cleaning tools, gloves, masks, humidifiers are important for the conservation of museum collections. The NMN's ethnographic collection was renovated and materials were rearranged to make sure the collection is free from pests, dust and objects can be easily accessed. An IPM is also being developed to provide guidance to the curators and conservators when dealing with pests' prevention and infestation.

These findings are in agreement with Ngcai and Monnye (2021) who suggested effective conservation measures that museums may employ when preparing to receive new collections. In addition, The Swedish National Heritage Board (2020) also provided a guide to receipt countries on how to ensure proper maintenance of the objects. Similar guidelines suggested by the Swedish National Heritage Board, were found to have been followed in Namibia during the repatriation of twenty-three cultural materials.

#### **4.4.Challenges faced by the National Museum of Namibia upon receiving repatriated objects.**

Although the repatriation the twenty-three cultural materials from Germany was planned and funds were made available by The Gerda Henkel Stiftung Foundation a number of challenges were encountered in the process. A number of researchers had reported on challenges faced during the repatriation of African materials from European museums, however, some challenges were addressed in Namibia and prevented under the CCP, ECF project. Challenges such as lack of funds, inadequate museum space, and limited personnel are among a few challenges discovered in Namibia by this study but they had not interference to the repatriation and conservation of the twenty-three cultural materials, hence they are

considered to have minimal impacts on the repatriated materials. The respondents to the study indicated that:

*No adequate conservators at the museum as there are only two conservators and they are not only taking care of the repatriated objects but the whole museum. There is an insufficient fund towards the conservation of museum collections as the large amount of the ministry fund is spent on operational costs and heritage is not the main priority. There are no capital funds to renovate museums (Respondent SR02).*

*There is an inadequate space to accommodate the repatriated objects and lack of information regarding the objects is one of the challenges. Inventorying of the objects is outdated and complicated as it is a challenge to do research around the objects because of incomplete information given that these objects were collected long time ago and mostly collected during the colonial regime hence subject to incorrect information. (Respondent SR02)*

*Additionally, the demand of the community that want the objects to be taken back to the community is a challenge as the objects might pose health hazards to humans because some objects were subjected to chemical treatment. Furthermore, there are no regional museums at the same capacity as the national museum to enable to store the objects and be easily accessible to the communities. The museum infrastructure is centralized and making it challenging for the communities to reconnect with the objects. (Respondent SR02)*

*There are no really challenges in curating and managing the twenty-three repatriated materials as nothing is done to them as of now. Plans are to make sure the objects adapt to the Namibian weather and that indigenous conservation methods can be used on them as they were once part of the Namibian environment. Currently the museum is busy on conducting research to create biographies for the objects therefore no observable challenges as of now. (Respondent SR03)*

There are only two conservators at the NMN and they are not only responsible for the ethnographic collection but for the entire museum. An inadequate number of personnel dealing with the conservation of museum collections pose a risk to effective conservation efforts. As stated by Gertrude, et, al, (2020) the NMN is of no exception too. Although the NMN's ethnographic section was renovated, no extra rooms were added to create more space for the new materials acquired through the CCP, ECF project or to be acquired in the future. A similar challenge was found in Kenya and Ghana by Sebuliba et al, (2021). The lack of adequate and correct information regarding the returned materials makes it difficult for the NMN to display the materials to the public. Provenance research regarding the materials is at a snail's pace.

Furthermore, the materials were treated with chemicals while in the EM, this might pose a health hazard to community members who want the materials returned to them hence a decision taken to store them at the NMN. The same concerns were share by Arndt (2022) who indicated that African materials were conserved with chemicals in European museums thus making them toxic and unsafe to come into contact with humans. The twenty- three cultural materials are yet to adapt to the Namibian climate, therefore reconnecting them with the community would mean, ensuring them that they are not damaged in the process. There are no regional museums with the conservation standards as of those of the NMN, to taken in some objects as that the communities remain unaware of these cultural materials.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The analysis of the results was reported in the preceding chapter. Conclusions based on the findings are provided in this closing chapter. Recommendation to policy decision makers and future researchers are also outlined in this section. Throughout this study, several key findings have emerged from the analysis.

#### **5.1. Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, several conclusions can be drawn, study investigated the preparedness of National Museum of Namibia to conserve and preserve the twenty-three cultural materials repatriated from the Germany Ethnographic Museum in Berlin. The materials were repatriated in May 2022 under the Confronting Colonial Past, Envisioning Creative Future project which was funded by The Gerda Henkel Stiftung Foundation and this project was collaboration between the EM and the Museum Association of Namibia.

The study was conducted at the National Museum of Namibia with participants from Namibia's main heritage stakeholders who worked directly and actively participated in the repatriation process of the twenty-three cultural materials. It investigated how prepared the NMN was to conserve and preserve the repatriated materials and its readiness for future repatriations. Data was collected through participant observation and in depth interviews with participants from three Namibian institutions that deal with cultural heritage and conservation of Namibian heritage.

The results of the study revealed that the CCP, ECF repatriation project had clearly outlined objectives and it was successfully implemented. Namibia was prepared in terms of human capital development, infrastructure development, human resource capacity building and professional growth, community engagement and conservation resource management and improvement. Namibians from different levels of heritage conservation and management were made part of the project.

Furthermore, conservation strategies at the ethnographic section of the NMN were found to be of good standards and the conservation management plan found in place to ensure that the repatriated materials survive the Namibian climatic condition which is different from that of Germany where the materials had spent a decade or more.

Although the results revealed that the CCP, ECF project was a success and the NMN was prepared to conserve the repatriated materials, few challenges were still detected that may negatively influence the successful implementation of conservation and preservation of museum collection. The findings revealed that, funds for the project were donated by The Gerda Henkel Stiftung Foundation and heritage conservation is not the ministry's top priorities that receive considerable amount of funds, that if it was not because of the donation, this repatriation could have not been a success.

Equally important, the NMN have very few conservators dealing with a huge number of collections at the museum, Storage and display space remains a huge challenge to the NMN hence the nation is unable to access the materials. Another challenge is lack of information regarding these materials which resulted in prolonged research and debates among researchers and the communities.

## **5.2. Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are put forth:

- The government should enhance access or avail funds towards the preservation of Namibian cultural heritage by purchasing museums conservation tools, chemicals and equipment as well as recruiting more heritage practitioners and making cultural heritage one of its priorities.
- A new national museum shall be constructed to avail adequate space for the museum collection hence promoting public access to museum's collections and providing a conducive environment for the artifacts. Regional museums must be constructed and existing ones to be upgraded to ensure the decentralization of museum services.
- Raise awareness among the Namibian community and encourage community active participation in issues of repatriation and conservation of cultural heritage.

- Namibian academic institutions should offer heritage management and conservation study opportunities at an undergraduate level to enhance professional growth.
- The review of the museum policy should be finalized as soon as possible and that the Namibian Culture and Heritage Policy of 2001 must be reviewed to incorporate the conservation of repatriated materials.
- Lastly more capacity building workshops or in-service training for museums professionals in terms of conservation and museum managements should be prioritized to make sure that heritage practitioners have the necessary skills and knowledge.

The paper recommends that future research examine Namibian indigenous methods of conserving the cultural materials or belongings and how these methods and skills can be incorporated and used in our Namibian museums.



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## Appendix 1: Approval to Conduct Research at National Museum of Namibia



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

### MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE

Enquiries: F.J. Groenewaldt  
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File no: 13/2/9/1

Luther Street, Govt. Office Park  
Private Bag 13186  
Windhoek  
Namibia

Dr Goodman Gwasira  
Senior Lecturer- Geography, History and Environmental Studies  
University of Namibia  
Private Bag 133301  
Windhoek

Dear Dr Gwasira,

#### **SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NAMIBIA**

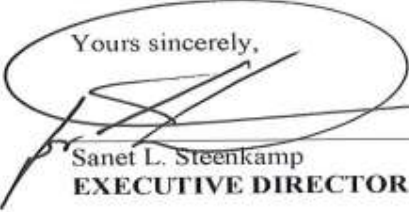
The Ministry wishes to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 06 September 2023 seeking for permission to conduct research interview by your Postgraduate Diploma Student at the National Museum of Namibia.

Permission has been granted to you. However, you have to ensure that:

- staff members' normal work is not disrupted during your interviews;
- participation is voluntary; and,
- furthermore, you are kindly requested to share your research findings with the Ministry after completion of the research project.

We wish you the best in conducting your research and the Ministry looks forward to hearing from you upon completion of your studies.

Yours sincerely,

  
Sanet L. Steenkamp  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**



## Appendix 2: Request for permission to conduct Research

**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES, SOCIETY AND DEVELOPMENT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND ARTS**

13 September 2023

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

This letter serves to confirm that Mr Serak Shidhudhu is currently enrolled in the Postgraduate Diploma in Heritage Conservation and Management programme at the University of Namibia. I am writing in my capacity as his research supervisor, to kindly request for permission to conduct his research in your organization/ community. Mr Shidhudhu is required to consult some archives, museum documentation and objects as part of his research. He is also required to conduct oral history interviews with identified participants. His research proposal was successfully accepted by the Heritage programme in the History Section. Kindly see attached to this letter his informed consent form and an information sheet that describes his research topic, objectives.

We shall be very grateful if you could grant him permission and assist him to carry out his research in your organization or community. The research results will be shared with the participants. For any further information please do not hesitate to contact me on the details below.

Yours Sincerely



Dr Goodman Gwasira  
Senior Lecturer: Archaeology and Heritage Studies  
[ggwasira@unam.na](mailto:ggwasira@unam.na)  
061 206 3632

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**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES, SOCIETY AND DEVELOPMENT**

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND ARTS**

**Appendix 3: Consent form**

**Consent Form**

Post Graduate Diploma In Heritage Conservation  
and Management (UNAM)

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**Research Project Title:** *The Preservation and Conservation of Anthropological Heritage at the National Museum of Namibia: An evaluation of preparedness for caring for repatriated objects*

**Researcher:** Serak Shidhudhu

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby confirm that I have read the information sheet concerning this research project. The researcher **Serak Shidhudhu** has informed me of the objectives of the project and my expected participation therein. I am participating voluntarily and am aware that I can withdraw from the interview at any time. I am also aware that I can choose not to answer question that I am not conformable with. I understand that my responses will be used confidentially and anonymously for the purposes of doctoral studies and further research.

I give my consent to participate in the interview and those materials that I may share with the researcher such as personal archives may be used in this research.

By signing this form, I confirm my consent.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

For any questions you may contact the researcher Serak Shidhudhu (Cell: +24681 3453721 or [serakshidhudhu@gmail.com](mailto:serakshidhudhu@gmail.com)) \or project supervisor Goodman Gwasira +264 61206 3236 or [gwasira@unam.na](mailto:gwasira@unam.na)

## **Appendix 4: Research Instruments**

### **Research instruments**

My Name is Serak S O Shidhudhu, a post graduate student at the University of Namibia currently pursuing my postgraduate diploma in heritage management and conservation. I am conducting a research on “*The Preservation and Conservation of Anthropological Heritage at the National Museum of Namibia: An evaluation of preparedness for caring for repatriated objects.*”

Over the past years, the calling on European museums to retain cultural objects believed to have been looted, and collected from African countries during colonial times has been gaining momentum or has become a burning topic among African nations. In recent years, Namibia has also joined other African countries in the call of restitution and repatriation of cultural objects from European countries especially Germany and Finland. Although this is a challenging process to undertake, Namibian has so far managed to receive several objects from Germany and Finland.

The collaboration between Namibia and Germany has resulted in the, the repatriation of the 23 cultural objects from Berlin Ethnographic museum in 2022 through the Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures (CCP, ECF) project. These objects are currently kept at the National Museum of Namibia.

This questionnaire forms a crucial part of the research that seeks to investigate the National museum of Namibia’s preparedness for receiving the repatriated cultural materials by evaluating the preservation and conservation standards of the anthropological section. Your input will play a significant role in advancing the understanding of conservation and preservation of museums artifacts especially the repatriated materials hence your contribution is immensely appreciated.

### Questionnaire for Museums Association of Namibia

Position			Gender			
Age range	25-35		35-45		45-60	
How long have you worked for the MAN?						
How long have you worked with the anthropology collection?						
What qualification do you have?						

1. What was the role of MAN in the Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures (CCP,ECF) project?
2. How did MAN prepared Namibia to repatriate the cultural belongings from the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin?
3. What assistance did MAN and the Gerda Henkel Stiftung foundation provided to the National Museum of Namibia as it prepared to receive the cultural materials from Germany?
4. Has MAN and the Ethnologisches Museum provided documentation and conservation guidelines to the National Museum of Namibia specifically for the returned materials?
5. One of the CCP, ECF project aim is to prepare Namibian Museums for future returns of cultural belongings kept in German museums. What strategies in place have MAN employed to prepare for future repatriations?
6. Which national legislation is used to protect the returned materials?
7. In your opinion do you think: *(tick your choice)*

	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
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Namibia is ready for the repatriation of cultural materials		
More objects should be returned the soonest		
Repatriation and restitution must be put on hold		
Cultural materials must not be returned at all		

### Interview questions for National Museum of Namibia

#### Biometric data

Position		Gender	
Age range	25-35	35-45	45-60
How long have you worked for the National Museum of Namibia?			
How long have you worked with the anthropology collection?			
What qualification(s) do you have?			

1. How did the national museum of Namibia prepared for the repatriation of cultural materials from the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin?
2. Can you describe for me the process of entering/ cataloguing the returned objects into the National Museum of Namibia
3. What conservation measures or methods does the National Museum of Namibia have for the repatriated materials?
4. Is there a specific policy that delineates how to handle and curate returned objects at the National Museum of Namibia?
5. Have you received training on conservation, documentation of these materials?



6. How is the anthropological section of the national museum of Namibia equipped in terms of material and financial resources that curators may use to document and conserve the returned cultural materials?
7. What are the challenges does the National Museum of Namibia is faced with after receiving the materials from Germany? What challenges do you experience as an employee at the NMN's ethnographic section?
8. In your opinion do you think:

	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Namibia is ready for the repatriation of cultural materials		
More objects should be returned the soonest		
Repatriation and restitution must be put on hold		
Cultural materials must not be returned at all		

## Interview questions for ministry of education arts and culture

### Biometric data

Position		Gender	
Age range	25-35	35-45	45-60
How long have you worked for the MEAC?			
How long have you worked with the anthropology collection?			
What qualification (s) do you have?			

1. What is the role of the MEAC in the Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures (CCP, ECF) project?
2. How did the MEAC prepared the National Museum of Namibia for the CCP, ECF Project in collaboration with the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin?
3. What kind of assistance did the MEAC received from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung and the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin?
4. What policies and guidelines did the MEAC employed in terms of conservation and documentation of the repatriated cultural materials?
5. When the materials arrived in Namibia, what role did the MEAC play to ensure that the National museum of Namibia properly take care of these belongings?
6. What challenges did the MEAC faced during the process of repatriation of these objects and how did these challenges affected the National museum of Namibia?
7. In your opinion do you think:

	YES	NO
Namibia is ready for the repatriation of cultural materials		
More objects should be returned the soonest		
Repatriation and restitution must be put on hold		
Cultural materials must not be returned at all		