

A Description of Materials Used to Make Children Among the Ndonga Communities in Namibia: A Case Study on a Returned Child



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Abstract

This research paper delved into the intricate craftsmanship and cultural significance of dolls within the Ondonga community of Namibia. In some African cultures, dolls are viewed as potent symbols of fertility and maternal prosperity, hold a pivotal role in the cultural and spiritual fabric of these communities (De-Whyte, 2018). This study presents an analysis of the materials used in the making of a recently returned doll, shedding light on the historical context and craftsmanship techniques that have evolved over generations. This study reveals the wide variety of materials historically used in the making of Ondonga dolls using a thorough ethnographic approach that includes participant observation, interviews, and archival research. Furthermore, this research paper looked into the symbolic properties of various materials, offering insights into the cultural, spiritual, and ceremonial components of doll making. The case study of the returned doll serves as a focal point, allowing for a detailed examination of the doll's construction, materials, and its historical journey. Through an analysis, this research aimed to provide a valuable contribution to the broader field of cultural anthropology, offering a deeper comprehension of the intricate interplay between materials, culture, and beliefs within the Ondonga community of Namibia.

Dedication

I dedicate my mini thesis work to the entire Ondonga community for having produced such a wonderful object that I have researched on. The Ondonga community has given me different views about the object which made me change the way I viewed this object from the beginning. In addition, I am further dedicating this research paper to the Museums Association of Namibia for bringing back this precious and valuable object back to Namibia and giving me and many other people the opportunity to research on the object. Furthermore, the Museum Association of Namibia has made it possible for me to complete my entire studies and research without having any financial difficulties. In addition, I would further dedicate my research paper to the University of Namibia for offering the Postgraduate Diploma in Heritage Conservation and Management where I found myself doing research. Lastly I also dedicate my research paper to the National Museum of Namibia for giving me access to the object every time I needed to study and interact with the object. Without this above mentioned, I would not have been able to complete this research paper.

Acknowledgement

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Declaration

I Naem Nakapandi, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof, has not been submitted for a long degree in any other institution of higher education.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Dolls, with their intricate designs and cultural significance, stand as vivid testaments to the rich tapestry of beliefs and practices that have shaped societies across the globe. Among the Ondonga people of Namibia, these ancient artifacts carry profound cultural implications (Umanah, 2021). The artisanship and materials employed in creating these dolls form a connection of cultural expression, artistry, and ancestral wisdom. This research paper embarks on an exploration into the diverse array of materials used in fashioning dolls, with a particular focus on a returned doll, whose history and restoration offer a unique window into the Ondonga cultural heritage.

Through a project called *Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures*, the Museums Association of Namibia, in collaboration with the National Museum of Namibia has managed to repatriate 23 artefacts from the Berlin Ethnographic Museum in May 2022. The project's aim is to use these processes to reactivate knowledge about the artefacts, document and preserve immaterial and material cultural heritage, and provide a vital source of inspiration for artists and designers (Museum Association of Namibia, 2022). It is against this background that this research will focus on the doll, particularly focusing on the description of the materials that were used to make the doll.

The crafting of dolls among the Ondonga community, stands as a venerable tradition deeply intertwined with cultural beliefs surrounding fertility, childbirth, and maternal well-being. Dolls, artifacts of cultural significance representing fertility and procreation, have been widely collected and displayed in museums around the world (Weller, 2012). These artifacts, distinguished by their intricate designs and profound symbolism, serve as tangible expressions of the Ondonga heritage. However, despite their cultural significance, there exists a critical knowledge gap pertaining to the materials and techniques used in the creation of these revered dolls.

The repatriation of one such doll, which has returned to Namibia in May 2022 from the Ethnographic Museum of Berlin, presents a unique opportunity to address this gap and gain invaluable insights into the composition and craftsmanship of these artifacts. This research endeavors to fill this void by conducting a particular study on the materials used in the making of dolls in Namibia, with a focused examination of the returned doll as a case study. This study will

also address the issues of repatriation and restitution of this specific doll, given that it is presently kept at the National Museum of Namibia.

This research contributes to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Ondonga community by documenting and understanding the materials, techniques, and symbolism associated with dolls. It helps safeguard a unique aspect of their cultural identity. It promotes cross-cultural appreciation and understanding. This contributes to a broader appreciation of the rich diversity of human cultural practices.

The study adds to the body of ethnographic research and anthropological knowledge, offering valuable information about the material culture and traditions of the Ondonga community. This contributes to a deeper understanding of Namibian culture. The research highlights the craftsmanship and artistic techniques involved in the production of dolls. This recognition can help preserve traditional artisanal skills and may contribute to sustaining local artistic communities.

The research findings may be of interest to museums, galleries, and cultural institutions. Understanding the materials and cultural significance of dolls can inform their curation and exhibition, enhancing educational experiences for visitors. The research may inform cultural preservation policies and conservation efforts, ensuring that practices related to dolls are protected and sustained for future generations. The findings can be used in educational contexts to teach students about Namibian culture, traditional practices, and the significance of material culture in shaping societal beliefs and values.

The paper focused specifically on the Ondonga community in Namibia and will not encompass other ethnic groups within Namibia. It will primarily concentrate on the materials that were used in the creation of the doll. Historical context that goes beyond a specific time period will not be covered by the study; hence, any dolls made by Ondonga communities in the 1800s and 2000s will not be included in this research paper. The primary focus was on the materials and techniques employed in the creation of the doll in the pre-colonial time. The paper did not delve extensively into other aspects of Ondonga culture or broader practices of doll-making in Namibia. The case study specifically centers around a returned doll, which provided unique insights into its construction materials and methods. Other dolls or artefacts were not included in analysis.

Material culture refers to the physical objects, artifacts, and possessions that are created, used, and valued by a society or culture. These can include things like tools, clothing, buildings, art, and any other tangible items produced and utilized by a group of people (Lunn-Rockcliffe, Derbyshire, and Hicks, 2019).

Restitution is the process by which cultural objects are returned to an individual or a community. Repatriation is the process by which cultural objects are returned to a nation or state at the request of a government (Temudo, 2021).

Conservation involves the careful management and protection of cultural artifacts like fertility dolls to ensure their longevity and integrity. Preservation pertains to the actions taken to maintain the original state and historical value of these artifacts (Wirilander, 2012).

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This literature review examined the significance of fertility dolls among various African communities, it will also examine the various materials used in the making of different African fertility dolls, the returned doll, specifically its journey from Namibian indigenous communities to the Ethnographic Museum of Berlin and its subsequent return to the National Museum of Namibia, as well as the challenges in conserving fertility dolls made of multiple materials.

In many cultures, fertility is considered vital for the survival and continuation of the community or tribe (De-Whyte, 2018). Fertility dolls are often linked to beliefs and rituals related to promoting fertility, ensuring successful pregnancies, and aiding in childbirth. They were used as symbols of fertility and may have been employed in rituals to encourage conception and healthy childbirth. For this reason, the desire and expectation for fertility was ingrained into the girl child from childhood (Welsh, 1992). A girl was raised to become the pinnacle of womanhood, motherhood, from the time she was an infant until she was married and moved in with her husband. A girl was being prepared to be what every woman should be—'a mother through her household duties, agricultural labor, and even the devotion of household and national deities' (De-Whyte, 2018).

Motherhood assumes different names and shapes depending on the society that is practicing it. The word procreation or giving birth and nurturing new life whether physically or otherwise has led to a different definition of the words "feminine," "maternal," and "feminine spirituality" in many cultures and religious traditions (Akujobi, 2011). Motherhood in some quarters is seen as a sacred and powerful spiritual path for a woman to take. The figurines often represent feminine attributes and the female body in a way that emphasizes fertility and motherhood. They symbolize the life-giving and nurturing aspects of women, reflecting the ancient societies' reverence for motherhood and procreation (Akujobi, 2011). They serve as a tangible reminder of the importance of women in the reproductive process.

Fertility rites or fertility cult are religious rituals that are intended to stimulate reproduction in humans or in the natural world. Such rites may involve the sacrifice of "a primal animal, which must be sacrificed in the cause of fertility or even creation" (DiLuzio, 2019). Fertility dolls were utilized in various religious and ceremonial practices in ancient societies. They might have been involved in fertility rites, fertility festivals, or religious ceremonies honoring goddesses associated

Traditional knowledge concerning children in Namibia is deeply rooted in the cultural practices and beliefs of various communities. These dolls, known by different names in different ethnic groups, play a significant role in fertility rituals and ceremonies.

Fertility dolls are considered powerful symbols of fertility and motherhood. They are believed to embody the essence of female fertility and are associated with the desire for healthy pregnancies and successful childbirth (Akhalebey, 2018). Traditional fertility dolls are typically handcrafted using local materials such as wood, clay, leather, and natural fibers. These materials are chosen for their availability and cultural significance.

Fertility dolls are often given to brides during marriage ceremonies. They are believed to bestow blessings for a fruitful marriage and the birth of healthy children (Akhalebey, 2018). Additionally, they may be used in rituals associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Many communities believe that fertility dolls possess spiritual power and are conduits for ancestral blessings. They are often blessed or ritually consecrated before being given to a bride or used in fertility ceremonies (Cole, 2017).

The creation and use of fertility dolls may be shrouded in secrecy. Certain aspects of the crafting process and the rituals associated with these dolls may be known only to specific individuals within the community (Akujobi, 2011). Knowledge related to fertility dolls is typically passed down through oral tradition and experiential learning. Skilled artisans and elder members of the community play a crucial role in imparting this knowledge to younger generations.

Fertility dolls may be involved in various rites of passage for women, marking significant life events such as marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth. They serve as tangible reminders of cultural continuity and transition (Challis and Sinclair-Thomson, 2022). Fertility dolls are important markers of cultural identity and resilience. They embody the wisdom and traditions of the Aawambo communities, serving as a testament to their enduring cultural heritage.

Understanding and respecting this traditional knowledge is essential for preserving the cultural richness and diversity of Aawambo communities. It also contributes to a broader appreciation of the significance of fertility dolls in the context of global cultural heritage.

This particular doll was made by Queen Lugondo of Ondonga for the Finnish missionary daughter Anna Rautanen. Anna Rautanen, the daughter of a Finnish missionary, commissioned Queen Lugondo of Ondonga to create this unique doll for her. The event might have been Anna's 1900 wedding to Rhenish Mission missionary Hermann Toenjes. Tönjes wrote on the significance of such dolls and in particular the tale of Queen Lugondo's gift to his bride in his 1911 book "Ovamboland." Anna was born in 1878 in Ondangwa as the daughter of the Finnish missionary Martti Rautanen (Binter, 2019).

As a child, she once owned a doll from Europe that the king's main wife admired. She gave the doll her own name, Lugondo, as a token of respect. Anna Rautanen had left her doll in Finland when she went there for school purposes before returning to the Kingdom. Adult ladies no longer played with dolls in Europe. However, dolls were much more than just toys in the kingdom of Ondonga. They were an essential part of growing up as women. Girls were given dolls by their parents.

At the engagement, the fiancé gave the doll a name that the first child of the couple was to bear. And now Anna was to marry without an "okanona", i.e., a "child", the Oshidonga name for such dolls. The queen made a doll according to the latest fashion (or had it made) and, again, gave it

her name. So, she and the doll were "Okadina" or name sisters. Okadina is much more than just a doll that Hermann Toenjes sold to the Royal Museum of Ethnology. She tells of the friendship between two women, their growing up and the fashions of their time (Binter, 2019).

Over the years, there has been growing recognition of the need to repatriate cultural artifacts and address the historical injustices caused by colonialism (Rust, 2022). In recent times, there has been a global movement towards repatriation, with demands for the return of cultural treasures to their countries of origin. In the case of the doll, efforts were made by the Namibian government and various cultural organizations to negotiate the return of the doll and other objects from Germany (Reucher, 2019). These negotiations involved discussions with museums, collectors, and German authorities. The aim was to restore the cultural heritage and significance of the doll to its rightful place in Namibia. After extensive discussions and diplomatic efforts, an agreement was reached, and about 23 objects were returned from Germany and among those 23 objects was a 19th century doll (Rust, 2022).

The return of these objects represents a small but meaningful step in acknowledging and rectifying the historical injustices committed during the colonial period (Onisha, 2017). The return of these objects also highlights the broader issues surrounding the repatriation of cultural artifacts. Questions about restitution attempts are raised by the child's continued stay at the National Museum of Namibia since its repatriation. It raises questions about the rightful ownership of these items, the responsibility of museums and collectors in preserving cultural heritage, and the need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between nations to address historical grievances.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

This paper utilized a case study research design to find out the materials used in the making of the returned doll and the significance of the materials. The case study was chosen by the researcher because it depicts actual experiences in real settings, fosters contact between the researcher and the participants, and illuminates the truth through an in-depth examination (Priya, 2020). According to Rashid, Warraich, Sabir, Rashid, and Waseem (2019), a case study is a type of qualitative research method that acts as a systematic enquiry into an event or series of linked

events with the goal of describing and explaining phenomena of interest. The case study will be conducted using in-depth data gathering methods such as observations and interviews, allowing the researcher to effectively reflect and criticize theory.

One of the greatest strengths of the case study method is the richness and depth of explorations and descriptions it may yield. This is partly possible because of the insider role the researcher plays as he/she becomes the instrument through which the data is collected and analyzed (Priya, 2020). Based on the above explanation, the case study method is not concerned with objective truth, but rather with truth from the informants' perspective (McCombes, 2019). Against this background, the case study in this paper will be seen as the most appropriate as the researcher will try to find out what the materials used in the making of the doll signifies.

For the purpose of this research, the researcher used semi-structured interviews and observation method as research instruments to collect data.

The researcher conducted interviews with some members of the National Museum of Namibia and indigenous community members of the Ondonga to gather information about the doll's historical context, significance and what the materials used in the making of the returned doll may signify. These interviews provided valuable insights into the specific materials used in the making of the returned doll and what these materials may signify for the Ondonga communities.

The researcher visited the National Museum of Namibia to examine the returned doll and document its physical attributes this will include taking photographs to document the materials used in the making of the doll. Taking photographs of the doll allowed the researcher to show the photographs to the participants during interviews, so they were able to explain why specific materials may have been used.

The table below shows different biographical information of the participants such as the participant ID, age, sex and occupation. For ethical reasons and to maintain anonymity, participants were given codes as identifying names.

Biographic information of participants

Participant ID	Sex	Occupation
ID1	Female	Traditional expert
ID2	Male	Retired wood carver
ID3	Female	Community member
ID4	Female	Museum expert
ID5	Female	Community member
ID6	Male	Traditional expert
ID7	Male	Community member
ID8	Female	Community member
ID9	Female	Traditional expert
ID10	Male	Traditional expert
ID11	Male	Traditional expert

Out of the eleven (11) participants, five (5) are males and they make up (45.5%), while six (6) are females who tallies to (54.5%). This distribution is relatively balanced, with a slightly higher representation of females why more women? Five (5) out of eleven (11) participants (45.5%) are chosen because of their expertise and knowledge in Ondonga culture.

Among the five (5) traditional experts, two (2) are female (40%) and three (3) are male (60%). While there is a higher representation of males among the traditional experts, it is worth noting that females also hold significant expertise in this area. One (1) female participant is identified as a museum expert. This suggests that she likely possesses a specialized knowledge related to museums, which could bring a unique perspective to the study. One (1) male participant is a retired woodcarver. This individual's background as a woodcarver may offer valuable insights into traditional crafts and skills within the Ndonga culture. Four (4) out of eleven (11) participants (36.4%) are community members in the study area. These individuals may provide a

grounded perspective on everyday life, practices, and cultural norms within the community most especially regarding doll making.

In summary, the participant group is diverse in terms of gender, expertise, and occupational background. The presence of traditional experts, along with the museum expert and retired woodcarver, suggests a rich source of cultural knowledge and skills. Additionally, the inclusion of community members ensures a representation of local perspectives and practices. The gender balance within the group, especially among the traditional experts, highlights the importance of both male and female voices in understanding the Ndonga culture.

Chapter Four

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected the data through observation and structured interviews. To analyze the data collected, the researcher engaged [Caulfield (2019), who suggest the analyzing of data using thematic analysis method where the researchers use a set of texts from secondary literature, and those transcribed from the interviews. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly on materials that woodcarvers used in the past to make traditional doll. Why perhaps such doll was made out of such material? Was the same material perhaps used elsewhere in Aawaambo kingdoms? Firstly, the researcher needed to transcribe and familiarize herself with the data collected through semi- structured interviews, observations, examining the returned child and the various photos taken of the returned child. The data includes information on the types of materials used, the cultural significance of the children, and the process of making and using these children.

Once the data was well understood, the researcher then began the process of coding, where she identified and labeled segments of data related to specific themes or topics. In this case, the themes revolved around the materials used, the historical and cultural context of the children, their role in any rituals, and any changes or adaptations over time. The coding process is iterative, and as patterns emerged, the researcher refined the codes and created a coding framework. After coding the entire dataset, the researcher moved on to the next step, which involved grouping related codes into overarching themes. These themes would provide a

structured framework for understanding and presenting the findings of the research. The final step was to interpret the themes, provide context, and draw conclusions about the materials and cultural significance of the traditional children among the Ondonga communities in Namibia, focusing on the returned child in the case study.

In summary, thematic analysis for this research topic involved data transcription, familiarization, coding, theme identification, and interpretation. The goal was to uncover and present meaningful insights about the materials used to make traditional dolls among the Ondonga communities, with a specific emphasis on the returned doll and its cultural importance.

Below are the research questions used to collect the data:

Physical Aspects of Doll

1. Have you ever come across this doll before?
2. How do you call this doll in Oshindonga?

Materials Used

1. Can you provide an overview of the key materials traditionally used to create the doll?
2. Do the materials used in making the doll have any meaning? If so, can you describe/ explain the meanings of each material
2. What factors influence the selection of materials for the construction of dolls in comparison to newly made ones?
3. How does the choice of materials reflect broader cultural or environmental considerations within the Aawambo communities?
4. Are there variations in the choice of materials or craft techniques based on different subgroups or regions within the Aawambo communities?
5. How have the materials used to make dolls evolved or changed over time within the Ndonga community,

Crafting Techniques

1. Can you discuss any specific methods or techniques employed in the doll?

2. Who makes the dolls and why?

3. Do people still make such dolls among the AaNdonga? If so, can you introduce me to them? If not, why have they stopped?

Symbolic Meanings

1. Are there any symbolic meanings or beliefs are attached to the materials chosen for doll creation? If there are none. You ask is there were any in the past or if the respondent ever heard about any such symbolism

2. Are there specific rituals or ceremonies associated with the making and use of dolls in these communities?

3. Who is allowed to carry the doll and why?

Traditional Knowledge

1. Is there any traditional sunderance associated with the doll

2. Can you describe the traditional significance and cultural importance of dolls within the Ndonga community?

3. Is there any historical context or narratives are associated with the use of dolls in the Ndonga community? If so, please describe it to me.

Restitution

1. The recently returned doll is part of an ongoing debate on restitution and repatriation of cultural objects. What are your views on returning stolen artefacts back to Namibia to their rightful owners?

2. Do you know about the return of this doll which is said to be from the Ondonga?

3. Since its return, has the Ndonga community showed any interest in claiming the doll and returning it back to the Ndonga kingdom? If so, can you please explain to me the interest. And why you would have it returned to the community.

4. There is not enough information of how the doll reached the Ethnographic Museum of Berlin. Do you perhaps have an idea of how the returned doll end up in a European museum?

Conservation and Preservation

1. Can you please describe to me the conservation practices that are used to preserve and protect dolls of this nature among the AaNdonga?

Findings

After analyzing the data, the following themes were identified:

3.2 Physical Aspect of the child

Although anthropologists refer to this type of child as a doll, in Oshindonga, this object is known as "*Okanona*", the Oshiwambo word for child. This kind of child was traditionally handed to girls to take care of and look after them like their own real children. This is not a doll, but simply regarded as a child.

Materials used

According to ID. No 1, the materials used to create these kinds of children are chosen by the makers based on what is readily available in their environments. The individuals who order that the child be made also had their fashion sense taken into consideration while selecting the materials. The child's extravagant clothing can be attributed in large parts to the fact that they are members of a royal family. Many of these materials, like "*Omba*," "*uuputu*," "*Oshiteta*," and others, were pricey such that they were out reach of ordinary people but only within the reach of the royal family.

She gave an example of "*iimona*" on and around the child's body, that such adornment could only be owned by someone from the royal family.¹ The child could have also been dressed in the way that it is depending on whom it was meant for. The namesake could also contribute by giving pieces of adornment to the child and such is called *okukwata mbushe* (adding to the pieces that the child already had).

¹ She also believes that materials that were not found in Ondonga such as the "*Omba*" could have been sold or gifted to the queen.

An example she gave was that if this child was meant for a young girl, all these beautiful exquisites would not be dressed on the child because all these were considered special materials compared to how now anyone who wants to own them because they are sold in Ondonga and Namibia at large. Even though a future husband to the baby girl (whom he proposed to be a future wife) in some cases could give a child as a gift, usually it was the parents responsibilities to make sure their baby girls owned one.

All these materials that are on this specific child exist among all the Aawambo ethnic groups, however each group may decide on how to construct their child and the choice of materials they want to put around the child. Other crafted children had, hair, nose, eyes, arms and legs depending on the artisan man and the instructions given to him when making these children. In addition, Parents who could not afford the wood carved children, they instead give uunona woondunga to their girls.

ID no. 5 argues that owning a palm fruit child was difficult to handle, as mother girls occasionally get enticed to eat up their child. The “*uunona woondunga*” practice was later replaced by children created from textile materials, emerged when the Aandongga peoples interacted with European missionaries.

Crafting techniques

Due to the prohibition against women handling blades for craft purposes, only men were able to create these kinds of children (ID 2, a crafting expert). Men in the Ondonga society were in charge of creating these kinds of children for their young daughters, which they usually handed over to them on the day their daughters are presented to their father’s ancestors.². Tools that usually used to craft children in the past were stones and knives. However, these types of children are no longer made and used among the Ondonga community as dolls in shops now replaced them (children).

According to ID no. 2, in case a child boy was born, the dad would give his son a stick representing (“*Odhimbo*”), a small bow and arrow (*Uuta waNamungongo*) it was believed that a

² On this day a baby receives the “*onyoka*”, which a woman who is a relative to the baby’s father put the necklace around his/her neck.

man/boy would always carry and use weapons to protect himself from any danger/attack especially when he was going out of his house setting. The stated was also seen as the most fundamental beliefs that the Aawambo communities hold that boys/men were expected to carry their *"oondhibo*, bows and arrows when going to tend to the goats and calves and used the same as hunting equipment, (as men were traditionally seen as the heads and providers of their homes.

Significance

To check what kind of life a young one will live used to be determined through one's conduct with a doll for instance. It is stated that parents usually observed how young girls behaved towards their children at a very early age and that significantly tells whether one would be a good wife to the family members as well as to strangers. Through the given chance of rearing children, parents corrected the wrong behaviors while early and that how a mother is supposed to speak and treat her children and that of others as well as the husband. Young ones learned the valuable lessons on how to raise children. In addition, these children were also given to girls to wish them luck, that they become fruitful after marriage. It was a way of teaching them that a woman raises children whether of their own or not. Parents observed how the girls treated the children. They looked at things like how a girl would speak to the child and the tone that she would be using.

Girls were also observed on how they were treating their children as they clothed, fed, bathed, and slept with them as that was an indication that in reality that is how they would be like. Most significantly, the girl's father, grandfather, or uncle gave each of these children a name. Some clans would usually brew traditional beer when handing this child over to the young ones and call for celebration. The child came with a baby carrier dressed in materials that were safe for the young child to handle when they were handed to them (youngster). In this way, the girl learns the importance of a baby carrier, and how it can make it easier for you to put the baby to sleep, and go about your daily business without the child interfering. Overall, the stated helped parents to determine whether that particular girl is able to raise and love children or not.

Equally important, these children were also given to adolescents who had been groomed and made prepared for female initiation and later to marriage. At times, a man could propose to his

father-in-law that should his wife give birth to the baby whose elders search for a male who can give the child a name and be recognized as the child's father. At times, the two would end up getting married.

Brides who were getting initiated "*mefundula lyookoongoma*" *Olufuko*"/ohango yokiitsali also carried these children with to their new homes. The brides also received small girls from parents or guardians that they brought along to their new home. Girls were mostly a great assistance as they helped the brides with daily chores like collecting water, firewood, pounding as well as cooking. Presenting their children as gifts to the bride and groom is a custom that is still practiced among the Aandonga and the other members of the Aawambo group. When the brides make their kitchen " *elugo*," they needed girls, so most of the girls were sent to live with them. Boys would help the men of the house by herding animals, bringing them into the field for food, and ensuring their safe return into the kraal.

In *Ondonga*, children are seen as precious members of the family and those for reasons they could not have children of their own were given children to pass on their conducts. The reasons those children given was to assist them with for instance to care for the animals, do the house chores, send them around and they also looked after them they are old. When boys grow up, they brought brides home and daughters brought lobola in the family. ID. no 4 states that, it was considered a taboo for a couple to be childless in the village or community. They were referred to as "*Kuna omutanda, kuna ongombe*". This implies that there will not be any more generations in this family. They had no children to take care of their animals, assist them with home duties, or send around kids. It implied that they would have no one to care for them in old age and that, in the event of their death, their holdings would pass to whoever wanted them, as the children they left behind would not be around to do so. In addition, this implied that the household lacked sons to bring the bride home and daughters to give away in exchange with lobola.

Numerous causes, which contributed to infertility are not addressed by this child, although a concept has been developed that addressed this type of children as, "fertility dolls". For instance, the elders would typically take an infertile woman to a traditional physician who specialized in treating infertility.

"*Okutsilika*" is one of the contraceptives that Aawambo mothers in the past employed to prevent their daughters from becoming pregnant before initiation. It is said that girl's mother,

grandmother, or guardian without letting the girl know why they would collect her first menstrual fluids and put it in the cracked marula nut ("*Oshiyongoti*") and secretly hide it somewhere in the house. It is said that their fluids were concealed either in a room, yard poles or under the stones/clay pots that served as stoves and these sites were not made known for the concerned as might misbehave and inform other peers about it. If the one who hanged the nut passed on or the house caught fire, then that meant such girl would never bear children of her own.

Parents could avoid social shame as well as being viewed as they failed to bring their daughters under control. This implied that the girl had embarrassed her family. Pregnant girls who brought shame to their community were burnt alive after being bound in a hut. A girl would occasionally find herself in such a predicament. In such cases, she would flee to the closest Kingdom, where she would be free to live in the new village without fear of retaliation from her village. Sometimes mothers prevented their daughters from burning alive by helping them flee the house. The elder then removes the marula cracked nut from its hiding place on her wedding day.

On her wedding day, the elder then takes the cracked nut that she had hidden and places it in the "*eholo*" cup that is intended to be consumed with traditional beer. In this manner, the bride's fertility has been restored, enabling her to become a mother.

Sum up this whole argument of the "*okutsilika*" consequences, parents believed that preventing their daughters from burning alive was important to losing their fertility. The nut holding the fluids could be lost because of events like the house relocating. Furthermore, nut may burn if a fire breaks out or if the elderly person forgets where they put it. Moreover, it is said that the girl would remain infertile for the rest of her life if the elder who started the "*okutsilika*" died and failed to tell an aunt who could reverse the process.

The girl's fertility could not be restored because of any of these circumstances. Therefore, the "*Okanona*" is not employed to treat infertility-related problems. She is usually just given children from either her families to raise as their own in this scenario. It is against this background that this type of children was not used to treat issues of infertility or restoring infertility.

Restitution

Due to Christianity, the Aandonga community has not only lost precious and priceless artifacts, but they also lost the know-how of crafting the children under discussion. The prevailing belief among our ancestors was that they created demonic items and were unknowingly persuaded into becoming Christians (ID.no1). "How certain are the missionaries that *Kalunga ka-Nangobe* was not the same god they prayed to, given their assumption that we had no God to worship and pray to? (ID No. 1) added.

ID. No. 4 argues that the returning of this child to the rightful owner had not only make the Aandonga aware of their precious material culture, but it serves as wake-up call to the rest of Namibia communities to think about repatriation of their artefacts, which they lost because the colonial officials or Christian missionaries took away from them after convincing them that they were demonic. When precious artefacts return to their rightful owners, the community gets the opportunity to view and engage with lost treasures. It gives a community its lost identity back. This child can be at least placed in the Nakambale Museum in the Ondonga community". This will give people in the north to see and interact with the child in the right community" (I.D. NO. 4). People will be aware of Ondonga's heritage and appreciate the ways that things have evolved throughout time.

Not only does the return of this child to Namibia fill the Aandonga people with pride, but it also serves as a wake-up call to the rest of the country about what we have lost. By returning this child to Ondonga, other ethnic groups will have the opportunity to engage with other communities that produce children that are similar to their own and maybe exchange information about their methods and motivations.

Conservation and Preservation

Children of this kind are presented to girls or brides who could properly care for them. Smaller children also received the same doll, but with less accessories. The elder might decide to dress the child in a skirt only because materials such as omuhanga were valuable to hand over to a little girl. To prevent the child from being stolen or lost, they would not give a child dressed well to a small girl but specifically to brides or responsible teenagers. The older girls knew how to look after this child compared to the young ones who could easily leave it outside or forget where they had placed it.

Inventory of the materials

Omuhongo or Olute lyo-musati

This child could have been made from trees such as “*omuhongo*” or *olute lyomusati*. *Olute lyomusati* is a red middle part of the Mopane tree. Both trees are used for constructing purposes. They are used to create house hold utensils, chairs, and dolls. The artisan of this doll might have opted to use one of these trees because they are both strong and are insect resistant. In addition, the crafter man might have used trees that are available in that community or area.

Onyoka

These types of beads are made from various materials such as ostrich eggshells and seashells. However, the difference can be seen by looking at the color of the beads. Beads made from seashells are darker in color or light brown depending on the inside of the shell, while the ones made from ostrich eggshells are plain white. Both shells are cut into small rough pieces. Women who make these beads use a needle to make a hole in the middle of the beads. The beads are then put on a string called “*nande kolwa*” which basically means that the thread is unbreakable when using hands. Women scrape the edges of these beads off using rocks to give it a perfect round shape and a smooth texture. This prevents the beads from hurting or cutting the person wearing them on the neck or around the waist. *Onyoka* is worn by both women and children and can be used for different purposes. In the Aandongo tradition, a family member from the child’s side is sent to present the “*Onyoka*” to the child’s mother’s place, compared to how other Aawambo ethnic groups do it. In their case, the mothers are expected to take the child to the father’s house. This ceremony is done to present the child to his/her ancestors. By putting this necklace in the child’s neck, this shows that the child has been accepted and well received into that family. Depending on the type of clan that this family is associated with, they might put a baobab seed, copper beads (“*Uuputu*”) or other different beads on the necklace. These are all believed to protect the child from any harm. If a woman presents a child to the wrong father, when the necklace is placed in his/her neck, this can result in a child dying, become paralyzed. In addition, a baby carrier, (*Odhikwa*), accompanied these necklaces and a small blanket made from

animal skin. In this case, boys do not wear the “*Onyoka*” in the waist. A belt made out of leather substitutes the “*Onyoka*”. Family members, neighbors and friends celebrate with traditional beer (*omalovu giilya*) singing and dancing because a child has united them. (“*Oshike sheetweta*”? “*Oluvalo*”).

Imona/Omagwe

Women mostly wear these glass beads. They wear them around their necks, so that it does not look or feel empty. When a woman wears these beads around her waist, one can differentiate that this woman has child/children. A Girl who falls pregnant before marriage also wears these beads because she has now labelled as a woman and not a girl. In addition, on the day where a girl becomes a bride, she gives her “*Omuhanga*” to the parents and they replace it with “*Emona*” because she is ready to have children with her husband. However, these beads were used at a later stage when the Aandonga/Aawambo communities met the missionaries and they started trading. Earlier to that, women and girls would wear “*Omuhanga*” but the difference was that women would as well put “*Onyoka*” in her neck. The glass bead was then later used to differentiate women and young girls and was given the name “*Imona*”.

Uuputu

These are copper beads used and worn differently. These beads were acquired through trade with the Aawambo from Angola who might have gotten them from the Portuguese and that is why they are name Uuputu. These beads can be added to the “*Onyoka*”, given to a child. They are also worn around the wrist specifically on the right hand only. They are believed to heal a paralyzed part of the body and can protect the person from evil spiritual attacks. I.D No 3 gave a scenario where she hurt her arm and has been struggle to recover. She remembered that she has the wristbands in her house which she then put on that moment. She stated that her arm recovered perfectly and demonstrated this by lifting her arm. In addition, “*Uuputu*” also brings lucks for the person wearing it.

Omwiya/Epaya

This belt was made out of an animal skin (cow). Men cut bigger strips from a fresh animal skin and boil them to make it easier for the fur to get off. They would then use rocks to scrape the furs off making it smooth for a woman to put on. These types of belts are worn by women only around the stomach. They are given to women who just gave birth and were instructed to at least wear them for two years. The belts are made to prevent the belly from growing bigger after giving birth. It prevented the air from entering through the belly button hence why a woman had to make sure that the belt covers the belly button very well. This belt is also worn around the stomach to prevent hunger.

Omuhanga

These beads are made from ostrich eggshells. Girls around the waist only wear them. If a girl gave birth to a girl, she then transfers her Omuhanga to her daughter and she replaces it with “*iinmona*”. When a girl gets married, elders instruct them to remove their Omuhanga and put “*Iimona*” because she is now legally ready to have children with their husband. Omuhanga shapes a girl’s body, the division the stomach and waist can be seen. Instructions are given to girls never to remove them without the parent’s instruction. If she was cursed for example and she was not wearing her “Omuhanga” beads, it will be very difficult for them to heal. The beads were also worn in a form of a skirt to cover the lower body of the girls and women when there was no animal skin, and if there was, preference would be given to boys. If a girl fell pregnant, the boy’s family was given a fine of paying two cattle to the girl’s father for the damages that he has done. This was done at a later stage when the child was a bit older. This is known as “*Omuhanga watokoka*”, which means, the “*Omuhanga* is broken.

Omba (substituted by the glass beads on the child)

These are made from snail shells. They are collected from the lakes in Angola. Men would use rock to scrape the “*Omba*” until they become white, compared to how they looked like during the collection process. “*Omba*” is regarded to be a very wealthy and expensive material that

makes a woman look beautiful when she puts them on. They were very difficult to acquire and were not accessible to everyone. They were traded with tons of “*Mahangu*” or cattle. during that time, “*Omba*” were only acquired by the royal family, a king’s wife for instance. When a woman is, seen putting them on, people assume that they are married to the king of that community. I.D No 4 sells them in the Ondangwa community market and price one “*Omba*” for N\$ 100.00- N\$ 150.00 depending on the size. He buys these “*Omba*” from his relatives who lives in Angola. He explained how he sometimes scrapes the “*Omba*” himself if the traders did not do it.

Onyemba

This long strip belt was made out of an animal skin. Men mostly made them. Men used this belt tied around their waist when they wore their leather. The piece of leather passes between the legs covering the buttocks and the front part of both men and boys. Women and girls also used this belt but theirs was the opposite, their leather would be hanging compared to men’s one. This belt was also used for beating the young ones who needed to be disciplined.

Oshiteta

This leather apron was made out of a Duiker’s skin (*Sylvicapra grimmia*) also known as “*Ombabi*” in Oshindonga. This kind of leather aprons were worn by the elderly women who came from wealthy families. It is called “*Oshiteta*” because women use the aprons to cover the front part. When I.D No 4 looked at the picture of “*okanona*”) he assumed that this apron is made out of “*Omupolo*” which means forehead. The focus was because the forehead skin is used is because the Duikers have unique marks on the forehead compared to the rest of the skin around the body. People believed that “*Omupolo wOmbabi*” was beautiful because of that mark on the forehead. They also believed that the Duiker was a lucky animal and that a woman who puts it on was a lucky woman as well. This animal skin was very difficult to access. The King would send his men to go hunt this type of animal so that the wife can wear a leather apron made out of the Duiker.

Okapa ka Nyendi

These are small bracelets made out a squirrel's fur. Men would cut a squirrel's (Sciuridae) skin into small strips to make a bracelet for their family members. These types of bracelets are believed to protect a child or adult from any harm

Chapter Five

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research paper has provided a detailed exploration of the materials employed in the making of children within the Ondonga communities in Namibia. This is with a specific emphasis on a returned child as a case study. Through meticulous documentation and analysis, the researcher has uncovered a profound connection between the natural environment and cultural practices, as reflected in the selection of materials such as wood, plant fibers, and animal products.

The case study of the returned doll has offered invaluable insights into the intricate artisanship and cultural significance embedded in the child-making tradition. It has illuminated the symbolic meanings associated with specific materials, underscoring their pivotal role in fertility rituals, rites of passage, and broader cultural expressions within the Ondonga communities.

Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge and practices. The meticulous artistry demonstrated in child-making serves as a testament to the cultural richness and complexity of the Ondonga traditions. It is imperative that efforts are made to safeguard these practices and ensure their transmission to future generations.

This research also lays a solid foundation for future studies, both within the Ondonga communities and in comparative contexts. Exploring the evolution of child-making techniques and materials over time, as well as their variations across different regions, promises to yield a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of cultural practices.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that efforts be directed towards documentation, education, and collaboration. Establishing detailed archives, facilitating cultural exchange programs, and organizing workshops can all contribute to the preservation and revitalization of this invaluable cultural heritage. Additionally, promoting ethical considerations and respecting

the rights of indigenous communities in matters related to child making is of paramount importance.

Ultimately, this research emphasizes the importance of recognizing and celebrating the cultural diversity and ingenuity of communities like the Ondonga. Through the continued study and appreciation of their doll-making traditions, we not only honor their heritage but also contribute to the broader tapestry of human cultural expression.

Recommendations

It is recommended to establish a documentation and archiving system to record the techniques, materials, and cultural significance associated with child making among the Ondonga communities. This will help preserve this valuable cultural heritage for future generations and serve as a resource for comparative studies. Through the observations made by the researcher, interviewees have knowledge and are aware that this type of children existed before. However, they have never seen a richly dressed child like this particular one. This research is thus recommending that the child returns to the Ondonga royal kingdom where more awareness can be created about this royal child. In addition, the interviewees stated that they handled these just like normal child. However, this child is referred to as a doll and is kept in a closed box/cupboard at the National Museum of Namibia, which speaks against the cultural way of treating a child in the Ondonga community.

In addition, cultural exchange programs between Ondonga artisans and researchers, as well as with other communities engaged in similar traditional craftsmanship can be encouraged. This would facilitate knowledge-sharing, skill development, and promote cross-cultural understanding.

Equally important, the National Museum of Namibia and the Museums Association of Namibia can team to organize workshops and training sessions within the Ondonga communities to promote the preservation of traditional child making techniques. These sessions could also incorporate modern techniques or materials to adapt to changing circumstances while respecting the integrity of the cultural practice.

Given the environmental significance of the materials used in child making, recommend exploring sustainable sourcing options. This may involve promoting responsible harvesting of natural resources, or even considering alternative materials that align with traditional practices.

Advocate for initiatives that promote cultural tourism, displaying the artisanship of Ondonga artisans. This could generate economic opportunities for artisans and contribute to the cultural and economic vitality of the community.

Develop educational programs that incorporate the cultural significance of child making in Ondonga communities into school curricula. This would help raise awareness among younger generations about the importance of preserving their cultural heritage.

Emphasize the importance of respecting the intellectual property rights and cultural ownership of child making traditions. Ensure that any commercial endeavors involving these cultural artifacts are carried out in a manner that benefits the community and respects their cultural values.

Encourage further research on child making practices not only within Ondonga communities but also in neighboring regions and cultures. Comparative studies can provide valuable insights into the broader cultural and historical context of these traditions.

Collaborate with museums and cultural institutions to create exhibits displaying Ondonga children, their materials, and the cultural narratives they represent. This would offer a wider audience the opportunity to appreciate and learn from this unique cultural practice.

These recommendations will help ensure a detailed and culturally sensitive study of the materials used to make children among the Ondonga communities in Namibia, and contribute to the preservation and understanding of this important aspect of their cultural heritage.

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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 Ms Naem Nakapandi 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 her community. Ms Nakapandi is required to consult some archives, museum documentation and objects as part of her research. She is also required to conduct oral history interviews with identified participants. Her research proposal was successfully accepted by the Heritage programme in the History Section. Kindly see attached to this letter her informed consent form and an information sheet that describes her research topic, objectives.

We shall be very grateful if you could grant her permission and assist her to carry out her 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



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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES, SOCIETY AND DEVELOPMENT

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND ARTS

Consent Form

Post Graduate Diploma In Heritage
Conservation and Management (UNAM)

**Research Project Title: A Description of Materials Used to Make Children Among the
Ndonga Communities in Namibia: A Case Study on a Returned Child**

Researcher: Naem Nakapandi

I _____ hereby confirm that I have read the information sheet concerning this research project. The researcher Naem Nakapandi 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, ... (insert phone number and mail address) \or project supervisor Goodman Gwasira +264 61206 3236 or ggwasira@unam.na