Making African Connections: Decolonial Futures for Colonial Collections

Initial Findings and Recommendations

March 2021

Cover image: The site of the Mahdist forces' camp during the 1883 siege of El Obeid, visited by Reem Al Hilou, Osman Nusairi and Fergus Nicoll in March 2020. Image credit: Fergus Nicoll

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Introduction

Making African Connections was a two-year research project inspired by calls for the return of African colonial-era collections in UK museums, and by activism over decolonising British public institutions. It was explicitly envisaged as provisional and experimental. The project was hosted by the University of Sussex and aimed to enable initial conversations between regional museums in Sussex and Kent with African institutions, museum professionals and historians, and African/African diaspora interest groups over the interpretation and futures of three African collections.[1] We knew a two-year project led by a British university would fall short of the radical change decolonising demands. The more pragmatic ambition was conveyed by the title *Making African Connections*. We aimed to render select collections accessible to African publics in the continent and the diaspora via digitisation and a project website; to undertake preliminary research and re-interpret the collections in a manner that allowed for multiple perspectives and privileged African voices and views, and to foster links with African museums, intellectuals and African diaspora interest groups to enable their role in decision-making regarding the future of these collections.

The project included digitisation, temporary displays and an international loan to Botswana. It was based on partnerships between the University of Sussex and four museums (Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, the Royal Engineers Museum, the Powell-Cotton Museum, and the Khama III Memorial Museum). Each UK museum worked with African and African diaspora consultants and specialists who provided historical and cultural expertise. Three collections were the specific focus of research: a 19th-century missionary collection from Botswana, a 19th-century Sudanese collection originating as military loot and a 1930's ethnographic collection from the Angola/Namibia borderlands.

Regional museums were the focus of the project because they are usually excluded from national-level debates about decolonising and repatriation/restitution. They face specific opportunities and constraints, and work with specific stakeholders. The project has led to significant change for all museum partners involved.

This report provides a summary of key findings and draws together briefings by all those involved in the project, in the form of short reflexive texts. These provide insight into both the project's achievements and the challenges we encountered. We hope to strike a balance between critical self-reflection and documenting positive changes.

Findings are directed at the UK museum sector, but we hope they are useful more widely to those working with African colonial-era collections. Some of our conclusions on working with colonial-era collections are distinctive because of the focus on regional museums and framing in terms of decolonising. Others echo prior work, such as *Revisiting Museum Collections* (published initially in 2006, and now

in its third edition), which provided a 'toolkit' to collections staff to open museums up 'for reinterpretation and knowledge capture by community groups and external experts to build and share a new understanding of the multi-layered meaning and significance of objects and records'.[2] This initiative was politically and intellectually important: it was developed by the Museums, Libraries, Archives Council (MLA) and Collections Trust (then the Museums Documentation Association) but support was cut under the coalition government. Funding for such work is essential: regional museums simply do not have the resources and capacity to undertake it. Documenting and reinterpreting collections should not, however, be ends in themselves: this work needs to be part of a process of more fundamental change, including returns. Otherwise 'capturing knowledge' risks becoming yet another process of extraction from marginalised and descendant communities.[3] The findings and reflections here raise ethical, political and institutional questions that stem from museums' continued ownership of contested collections that community outreach and improved documentation do not in themselves address directly. Museums wanting to respond to the challenge of decolonising are grappling with these issues without adequate national guidance. The need for such guidance is urgent, as the year 2020 showed so clearly.[4]

[2] 'Revisiting Museum Collections' https://collectionstrust.org.uk/resource/ revisiting-museum-collections/ [accessed 7 December 2020].

[3] We use this term to forefront the passage of time, following Jeremy Sylvester and Napandulwe Shiweda (2000) 'The Return of the Sacred Stones of the Ovambo: Restitution and the Revision of the Past', *Museums and Society* 18(1), https://doi.org/10.29311/ mas.v18i1.3236.

[4] There has been much debate over 'decolonising' within the sector and the Museums Association expects to produce guidance in spring (2021). See https://www.museumsassociation.org/ campaigns/decolonising-museums/ decolonising-practice/#. For reflections, see Rachael Minott (2019) 'The Past is Now: Confronting Museums' Complicity in Imperial Celebration', *Third Text*, 33: 4-5: 559-574; John Giblin, Imma Ramos & Nikki Grout (2019) 'Dismantling the Master's House', *Third Text*, 33:4-5, 471-486.

Changed contexts: Covid-19, Black Lives Matter (BLM) and museum futures

Covid-19 disrupted the research and raised far-reaching questions about museum futures. We could not hold the physical displays we had planned or undertake the loan because of travel restrictions, museum closures and staff being furloughed. The international loan to Botswana and the display at the Royal Engineers Museum are now scheduled to take place in 2021.

The disruption to displays and travel created some unforeseen opportunities: it allowed for greater investment in transcription and on-line resources including films (available from https://makingafricanconnections.org/). It also created scope for Khama III to define priorities themselves (see reflections by Kediseng and Lekhutile). They decided to develop a portable display based on the open licence photographs, designed banners, bought new equipment (a projector, screen and digital camera), undertook new collecting and are planning new research and community engagement. Thebele is working on a catalogue for publication in Botswana, with input from University of Botswana History Department.

The BLM protests underlined the urgency of redressing structural racism in UK academia and museums and the inequities and hierarchies they underpin. The protests brought home the need to try harder to prevent their reproduction within projects such as this one. They accentuated the importance of major change: not only for museums to make African collections accessible, but to work towards returns, and to be led by the views and interests of African descendant communities to whom universities and museums have ethical and political responsibilities.

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Executive Summary

1. There is a need for explicit guidance to support museums in responding to decolonising agendas, and in working towards the return of contested colonial-era African collections.

2. Decolonising cannot be achieved in the context of current global power relations, uneven development, funding/institutional structures and UK museums' ownership of contested colonial collections.

3. Partnerships between UK museums and descendant interest groups are essential. Funding needs to be directly accessible to Africa-based researchers, museum professionals and UK-based diaspora groups.

4. Museums need to see supporting African descendant groups' claims as their responsibility.

5. Partnerships between UK museums and universities can be a route to resources, enhanced research capacity, links with African institutions and to specific historical/cultural expertise. Funding arrangements via UK universities can create structural inequities with Africa-based partners, UK museums and community groups, and there is a need for support for equitable collaborative research partnerships.

6. There is inadequate guidance or support for museums in terms of promoting collections mobility, which should not be a substitute for returns. International loans pose huge challenges of cost and bureaucratic complexity.

7. It is recognised that museums need to engage external expertise in interpreting collections, yet guidance can be limited by a focus on data capture rather than understanding. There is a need for further guidance on the ethics and politics of 'knowledge capture' to avoid extractive relations with descendant groups.

8. Provenance research is essential to assist descendant groups' claims. Such research should be undertaken collaboratively. As object-linked evidence will frequently be missing, research needs to include broader contextual understanding to enable the best possible assessment of the circumstances of acquisition.

9. It is essential that museums present critical and accurate accounts of colonial history. Existing guidance does not address the practical, institutional and political challenges of re-narrating and re-contextualising from the perspectives of descendant interest groups from across the globe. The weight of the colonial past is so embedded in many museums' entire structure that doing this meaningfully raises a host of fundamental issues about museums' existence and purpose.

10. Documenting multiple interpretations has long been emphasised in guidance to the UK museum sector, but museums need further support regarding the moral, political and epistemological challenges raised by multiple views. How, for example, can they handle objects both as historic artefacts and living culture? How can they navigate conflicting interpretations?

11. Collections have an emotional charge and work on contested collections can be emotionally demanding, for members of descendant communities and for museum staff. Museums need greater guidance on how to support their staff and collaborators through this work.

12. As a specific legacy of colonial approaches to collections, racist language is pervasive and requires coordinated policy across the museum sector.

13. 'Core' documentation work needs to be resourced – regional museums do not otherwise have the capacity to undertake it in a sustained and strategic way.

14. The politics of collections within countries of origin matters and UK museums need to be more alert to the implications of colonial collections for specific communities today.

15. Sharing collections data is essential, as is working towards open access, where appropriate. Africa-based partners valued open access digital images, which they used in displays, publications, banners and teaching. African partners stressed the importance of mapping collections of objects across UK museums. Making research data accessible over the long-term is essential, particularly in short-term projects.

16. Regional museums face acute challenges in responding to calls for decolonising due to sustained under-funding and under-staffing.[5] In these museums, staff can also have greater freedom to de-accession materials, take other initiatives and make meaningful connections with African partners when resources and capacity permit.

[5] The impact of reduced public funding for museums, particularly on museums run (or formerly run) by local government is made clear in *The Mendoza Review: an independent review of museums in England* (DCMS, 2017).

3

Initial Findings and Recommendations

These findings summarise key points from project partners' reflections in the main body of the report. *Making African Connections* was distinctive in three main ways: 1) debates over decolonising shaped our deliberations; 2): our focus was on regional museums; 3) our aim was collaborative provenance research and fostering international partnerships with Africa-based partners with specific historical-cultural expertise (historians at African universities, intellectuals, museum professionals), as well as working with UK-based African diaspora and Black heritage groups. The important work of documenting and reinterpreting collections (covered in existing guidance to the sector) needs to be supplemented by attention to the ethical, political and institutional questions that this raises, which decolonising forefronts. There needs to be more attention to how museums can re-orient to support African institutions and descendant interest groups making claims to collections. Notwithstanding intense discussion within the sector, there is currently inadequate guidance on how to respond to 'decolonising' demands.[6]

Decolonising and institutional structures

Making African Connections partners undertook collaborative research on collections, provided new interpretations of objects and contexts, created new digital assets and physical displays. Debating this process in terms of decolonising raised challenging questions about current UK institutional structures and constraints. Indeed, partners' reflections highlight the contradictions of seeking to further decolonial ambitions against the grain of current institutional structures in academia and museums and the hierarchies of knowledge they reproduce (Skwambane, Heminway Hurst, McGregor). Africa-based partners and African descendant interest groups with claims to colonial-era African artefacts should be leading debate over the use and future of these collections and museums supporting them in doing so.

[6] The Museums Association are working towards such guidance, see https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/decolonising-museums/decolonising-practice/#.

Funding for equitable partnerships

The partnerships fostered through the project were valued by those involved, but some also stressed the need for these to be more equitable than they were. AHRC project funding via a UK university brought welcome resources, but produced inequities in relations among academic/non-academic institutions and partners, as well as between UK-based and African partners. There is a need for African partners to be able to access funding directly to enable them to gain understanding of historical materials in UK institutions, and to take the lead in partnerships they want to develop (McGregor). Regional museums also need funding streams to pursue international partnerships and collections research themselves: Heminway Hurst argues that these need to be grounded in 'inclusive curatorship' that is 'less authoritative and more democratic'. Community heritage organisations also need independent access to funds: Skwambane stresses the importance of meaningful engagement with 'those communities that feel excluded or not able to participate in/enjoy museums'.

Collections mobility

International loans need to be conceptualised within an overall frame of working towards repatriation. As Mears notes, the costs, logistic and bureaucratic challenges are vast, and the project significantly underestimated the hurdles. Short-term academic project funding was enabling but also insufficient, while loan preparations raised crucial questions about the practicality, ethics and power relations of international loans. Support is needed for international lending, including finance and assistance with navigating administrative complexities.

African partners stressed their own current institutional constraints and need for support in overcoming them, while also emphasising the moral/political imperative for British museums to de-accession and repatriate important collections in the future. Loans should not be a substitute for returns (this was not the case here – from the outset, Brighton Museum has been open to permanent return of the loaned items). Thebele highlights how returns to Africa need to be underpinned by new national legal frameworks on the part of African states. Such a framework in Botswana would bring additional protections, provide guidance and offer clarity in international discussions about the restitution of Botswanan cultural heritage from European museums. Kediseng's view on the benefits generated by partnering with Brighton and hosting a short-term loan was underpinned by recognition of their own current lack of capacity at the Khama III Memorial Museum. Similarly, current political and institutional circumstances in Sudan shaped the Sudanese team's view that returns were a medium- or longer-term goal rather than desirable immediately.

Knowledge and expertise to understand historic collections

A lack of specific historical knowledge relating to African historical collections among staff of UK museums can allow colonial myths to be perpetuated (Nusairi et al). It is essential for museums to draw on expertise outside their institutions in countries of origin and in diaspora (Heminway Hurst and Skwambane). The project challenged the apparent logic of world cultures collections by questioning the extent to which regional museums can serve as sources of knowledge about all collections, given the broad temporal and geographical span of holdings, and emphasised the limited resources available to those working with such collections, and the lack of language skills and specific historical-cultural knowledge. Existing guidance often hinges on capturing information from communities and experts, rather than on gaining broader understanding. There is a need for further guidance on the political and ethical questions raised by historical provenance research and community outreach. Asking people from source countries/diaspora communities to provide information raises important questions about how UK museums treat and use that information, as Lawther reflects: 'Who is it for? Who will benefit from this information? Whose viewpoint is it from? How are they credited (in terms of both acknowledgement and compensation)?'

Reem Al Hilou, JoAnn McGregor, Osman Nusairi and Fergus Nicoll at the Royal Engineers Museum archive.

Provenance research

For each collection we sought to develop understanding of the circumstances of acquisition, and to make documentary and oral evidence on the research process accessible to future researchers and publics. In most instances research did not identify specific users or creators: we recorded this as 'creator unrecorded' to draw attention to missing information. The fact that object-specific evidence is frequently not available underlines the necessity for research on, and understanding of broader historical contexts, as part of the process of evaluating acquisition histories. Museums need to seek out such understanding of their collections and sectoral policy-makers and funders to support this. There is scope for greater detail, complexity and nuance in accounts of colonial collecting. In the case of the three collections which formed the focus of this project, the Sudanese collection was overwhelmingly loot taken in the aftermath of battle: the wars and the looting were controversial even by the standards of the time. Evidence from the Powell-Cotton sisters' diaries showed some Angolan items were acquired under duress (the sisters recorded taking hair and asking people to undress for photographs against their will). Direct evidence about Willoughby's collecting for Brighton was not available: there are grounds for thinking he purchased most items, but he may have remunerated some owners inadequately (given his self-reported quest for a bargain and that his collecting took place in unstable times marked by famine, rinderpest and population movements as communities sought refuge from nearby wars).

Challenging heroic imperial narratives

The project challenged museums' presentation of imperial history, as conveyed through current displays, labels and colonial documents. Lekhutile and Kediseng call for local narratives to replace Willoughby's views. Nusairi et al call for recognition of complex histories in terms of reframing and contextualising objects in relation to Sudanese history. In the displays of the Royal Engineers Museum (REM), this means de-centring figures such as General Gordon, questioning their actions, conveying the controversy they provoked at the time, as well as narrating Mahdist history through Sudanese narratives. In the Powell-Cotton Museum (PCM), the figure of the 'Great White Hunter' needs to be challenged and decentred (Livne, Shiweda, Stylianou). Challenging these colonial myths is crucial: museums need to reframe, contextualise and re-narrate from the viewpoints of the African societies, political and cultural groups on display. Doing so, however, raises a range of practical, political and fundamental institutional questions. One collection/display cannot be meaningfully decolonised if the whole museum is structured around a colonial theme/figure/enterprise (as in the case of the REM's Victorian galleries and the PCM).

Racist language

Racist language in historic museum documentation is pervasive (see the briefing on offensive language by Nicoll et al). How to deal with this became an important issue for all partner museums. At Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, this led to the development of new protocols informed by best practice in the UK archive sector.[7] REM changed offensive display captions and catalogue records as a result of the project. Understanding how specific terms were used in the past and why this is unacceptable is useful for making sure the language does not creep back in. There is a need for a coordinated approach by the whole museum sector to address this systematically.

Addressing colonial legacies in collections documentation requires funds

'Core' collections work (inventory and backlog documentation, along with digitisation and provenance research) is vital to progressing decolonising agendas. It is an essential component of making collections accessible, mitigating the offence they continue to cause and working towards repair and return. Yet this work is hugely resource intensive, which can present insurmountable obstacles for regional museums. Museums and funders need to understand and acknowledge the extent of the documentation backlog and find a way to deal with it. Lawther stresses the 'invisible labour' of database work, and that of the cultural specialists involved. Despite its central importance there is no dedicated funding stream to support this work that regional museums can apply for.

[7] For example, Alicia Chilcott, (2019) 'Towards protocols for describing racially offensive language in UK public archives', *Archival Science* 19:359–376.

Accommodating complexity and multiple interpretations

The project generated a wealth of collections assets, including object photographs, new object descriptions, video and sound files. The project sought from the outset to record multiple perspectives and different types of data. Museums' documentation systems are often flexible, sophisticated and designed specifically to accommodate diverse sources and information (as are standards, like Spectrum 5.0, which they are designed to comply with). However, the technical capacity of systems cannot resolve important non-technical issues: not only regional museums' lack of capacity/staff-time, but also the epistemological, moral and political issues that such 'knowledge capture' raises, and the ways in which institutional structures influence decision-making (as Lawther discusses).

The emotional charge of collections

For descendant communities, colonial-era collections are personally meaningful and emotionally laden, as Skwambane emphasises. The status quo is a source of offence that can render museums 'unsafe spaces'. This underlines the importance of privileging the stories and meanings of descendant communities in re-interpretation (as Lekhutile and Kediseng also stress), and researching these within a framework of working towards return and repair. It raises centrally important questions of historical understanding, meaning and memory, and a lack of equivalence between different sorts of information and sources of value. *Revisiting Museum Collections'* typology of different forms of information and knowledge is oriented towards classifying and recording different sorts of data, rather than assisting museums to deal with divergent understandings. As Foster asks: 'how can the data of an object in a Western museum represent it as both an object from the past but also as being part of the living culture of modern people?'

Hangula Pohamba being interviewed about the Powell-Cotton Museum collection at his home near Ongwediva, Namibia.

Better understanding of the meaning of collections today in countries of origin

The societies from which objects originated have changed. In the context of working towards returns, it is important to understand the politics of the past in the present in collaboration with researchers and cultural/historical specialists in/ from countries of origin. Interest groups may be both narrow (family, ancestral claims, local chiefs) and very broad (entire nations and diasporic communities, transnational religious groups). Claims hinging on different sorts of knowledge reflect divergent positionalities (historians, curators, politicians, governments, community descendants, or individuals for whom collections encapsulate a sense of living tradition and identity). The idea of a small, mono-ethnic community of origin can be misleading and replicates colonial views of Africa (McGregor). Collections may reinforce or challenge today's ideas of political authority, identity, citizenship and ethnicity. In Botswana, the collection challenged understandings of the distinction between Batswana and Basarwa/San, the racialisation of which is itself a colonial legacy (Lekhutile). As Nicoll notes, the Mahdiyya was the first Sudanese government, but is now diminished politically and reflects a minority strand of Islam.

Sharing collections data and promoting open access

The project aimed to generate new understandings of collections and to share collections data. Making collections inventories of colonial material accessible must be a key priority for the UK museum sector. It is important that, where possible and appropriate, museums work towards open access including for digital images. Doing so raises questions about power and authority in decision-making and how to handle specific types of image, whose meaning can change when taken out of an archive or museum store or display room. Only one museum (Brighton) had a policy to digitise for open access. The project also aimed to use Wiki platforms to enhance access to the images. Foster reflects on the possibilities but also the constraints: Wikidata has the potential of multivocality, and can hold different types of knowledge and language, but 'can only be as flexible as the community who creates it'.

Sustaining digital assets

The sustainability of digital platforms is important, particularly for short-term projects. As Baker reflects, the project's own website is not pretty, but this was because it was built on static, open source technologies designed to need minimal attention and to be easy to archive. The point of the website was not publication but to document the research process and enable reflection, multiple interpretations and a diversity of types of material: images, video, audio, text.

Regional museums: challenges, opportunities and new initiatives

The project revealed regional museums' severe crisis of funding and short-staffing. All museums recognised the need for change. In all cases, the space the project created for African specialists to provide expertise in interpreting and debating the use of the collections, provided criticism of the status quo and provoked specific initiatives. The interactions increased pressure to work towards open access images, and future repatriation. These messages were amplified by BLM protests.

The geographical location of UK partners revealed differences and specific influences and challenges: the Kent museums served socio-economically deprived communities and lacked regular dialogue with UK-based African diaspora groups. For the PCM, it was challenging to decentre the 'Great White Hunter' narrative as local white museum volunteers, staff and the general public who support the museum initially upheld myths of empire. Training and discussion, however, led to a significant change in their view. The REM had explicit responsibilities to the descendants of Engineers, and in 2020 received letters not only from groups supporting BLM and wanting change, but also from members of the public concerned to prevent the removal of representations of prominent colonial Engineers.

But smallness relative to national institutions also brought opportunities: where museum staff have capacity, resources and choose to reach out to African descendant groups on the continent and within UK-based diaspora, there is scope for greater influence of descendant communities in decision-making than in larger institutions. Each partner museum is trying to work decolonising into future planning and saw opportunities for significant change. Although some museums had worked with Black heritage and African diaspora groups, links with Africa-based partners were new. Sustaining and taking forwards African connections is crucially important.

Ensuring project legacy

Several follow-on projects have been initiated by partner museums and other members of the research teams. These include collaborative research with Namibian partners on the part of the Powell-Cotton Museum, and Namibian-led contemporary collecting, supported by Arts Council England. Brighton raised funds from ICOM/British Council to assist Khama III Memorial Museum with collections management work. The Sudan team are planning workshops on the legacy of Mahdiyya within Sudan. Livne and Stylianou discuss how the partnerships generated through the project created opportunities for new collecting to reflect the skills and cultural insights of contemporary makers and self-consciously address the issue of representation. Similarly, new objects were acquired through the partnership between Brighton Museum and the Khama III Memorial Museum.

African partners emphasised the importance not just of partnerships with individual UK museums, but of mapping specific categories of objects across the UK museum estate. Some such work began under the auspices of this project (compiling this information for 19th-century Sudanese Mahdiyya items, and work on Botswanan collections will begin soon).

When the project ends, these resources reflect partnerships which we hope will endure and develop into the future.

Making African Connections project partners (associated with the Botswana project) and advisors. From furthest left: Helen Mears, Tshepo Skwambane, Scobie Lekhutile, Caroline Bressey, Neil Parsons, Suchitra Chatterjee, Bert Williams, Winani Thebele, Kathleen Lawther and James Baker.

4

Reflections by Project Partners

4.1

Funding, Partnerships and Collections Mobility

Decolonial Aspirations and Academia: Reflections on University/ Museum Partnerships

JoAnn McGregor, University of Sussex.

The project was inspired by debates over decolonising, but we were fully aware of the impossibility of achieving the radical transformations this implies through a two-year research project led by white academics at a British university. The more pragmatic ambition was reflected in the title 'Making African Connections': the project aimed to facilitate dialogue with African interest groups and expertise within Africa over the interpretation and futures of these collections, for museums to take forwards over the longer term, and to render the collections accessible through digitisation, temporary displays and an international loan. The research was planned and undertaken collaboratively and aimed to co-produce outputs both with our museum partners and the African curators, intellectuals and African diaspora interest groups.

Academia also needs decolonising

Our primary focus was decolonising debates in relation to museums. But the project also provoked critical reflection on academic funding and research practices, institutional structures and the hierarchies of power and knowledge universities reproduce. It is well known that the language of 'partnership' and 'co-production' in project research grants masks inequitable relationships that counter participatory ideals, just as in broader development assistance projects. The hosting UK university controls the budget and usually the lion's share of the funds, which appear disproportionate to other partners partly due to institutional overheads and costing based on salary bands rather than actual salaries. Academic tenure and postdoctoral expertise are necessary for applicants and researchers, undermining recognition of community researchers and sources of authority and expertise relating to lived experience, being part of a descendant community and public communication – all of which are valued in, and central to decolonial activism. The mechanics of submitting a bid and the low odds of success can undermine full dialogue with partners during the all-important preparation of a bid, the onerous legal-financial reporting precludes

substantial roles for small, community-based organisations, and the privileging of formal academic qualifications risks inadequate recognition of non-academic partners. In African contexts, these power relations risk reinforcing coloniality particularly blatantly.[8]

The concern for 'impact' beyond the academe that lies behind the enhanced opportunities within academic projects for collaborative work with non-academic partners has provided greater opportunities for researchers to be more creative and socially engaged in what they do. Many positive ideas, achievements, connections and practical changes have come out of this project that can be part of a process of on-going decolonial anti-racist work within museums and of rethinking collections futures. The point of this briefing is to reflect on the structural institutional issues that work against decolonising that arose. Some could have been mitigated with hindsight, but others reflect wider structural constraints.

Institutional structures and their effects:

- Relationships among university research staff, museum staff, consultants, advisors and community researchers were mostly positive, but in one team, the project's structural inequities created tensions.

- The contracts that the university provided (based on private sector corporate practice) were inappropriate and difficult for partners to understand, therefore creating delays.

- The lack of flexibility to create substantial new budget lines and redefine roles undermined relationships in one research team and prevented meaningful resolution.

- UK museum partners also worked within institutional constraints produced by austerity measures. Short-staffing, work overload, and dispersal across multiple projects made it difficult for some to keep to project timelines.

- Our partners in African universities and museums also worked in institutions driven by business models and bureaucratic hierarchies that were constraining.

[8] This is an issue that the African Studies Association (UK) has long protested and is currently seeking to address. The UKRI's criteria for 2020 Covid-19 research disruption extension funds were particularly problematic for projects with African partners: only British institutions and British citizens based in the UK were eligible leaving African partners and consultants with no source of additional funds in projects that were supposedly collaborative.

What was learnt:

- Discussions before research bids are submitted are crucially important. Even extensive consultations involving several meetings and sharing of drafts (as in this case) may not mitigate problems.

- Where large and diverse teams are working together, it is important to think through roles and relationships very carefully.

- Academic funding as currently institutionalised reproduces the relations of power within projects that decolonial thought challenges. For museum- and community-based research, this means reflecting on what can and cannot be achieved through academic funding and university-led projects. It is important to navigate the constraints in a manner that does not further the offence and lack of trust in UK public institutions that decolonising debates seek to challenge.

Museums in Botswana: Reappraisal of the Colonial Legacy and Development of Relevant Legislation

Winani Thebele, Botswana National Museum

The management of heritage must be done within legal frameworks, hence the need to develop specific museum laws. A sizeable body of international protocols and domestic legislation on heritage has been enacted in different countries. Much action by individual countries was a follow up to the 1970 UNESCO Convention. The US Federal Native American Graves Protection Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 and US Homeland Security Act of 2002 are such examples.[9] However, there are still gaps. Countries such as Botswana still lack domestic legislation to address different issues affecting heritage and emerging global trends such as the illicit trafficking of cultural property, restitution, the management of human remains in museums, collaborations and sharing responsibility as a way of decolonising the museum and relations with communities and indigenous people. Indigenous people should be involved in formulating domestic laws on the management of human remains and collections in museums.

Botswana needs an all-encompassing policy to guide the management and protection of heritage by museums, as existing instruments are inadequate (these include the 1990 National Policy for Tourism, the 2004 Monuments and Relics Act, the 2004 Policy on Culture and the 2008 Revised National Policy on Museum Development). These Acts and policies contain the position of the government on education, tourism and culture but are inadequate guidance and regulation for museums.[10] Other acts and regulations aimed at the protection and preservation of heritage do not directly serve the museum (e.g. regulations against poaching and the sale of wildlife products and diamonds). These regulations are complemented by the penal code for law enforcement structures such as police and military.

Local museum experts have also echoed their concerns over this state of affairs: the Oram & Nteta Report (1984) proposed a comprehensive policy framework for the museum service in Botswana and a holistic structure over the current disjointed set-up of local museums.[11] In 1999, Setlhabi highlighted the importance of a policy component in addressing ownership, legal title rights and copyright issues.[12] Keitumetse observed in 2009 that in order for the Botswana National Museum to remain visible, it should engage meaningfully in legal and policy development, including a sound policy for collaborative research, and incorporating contemporary trends such as community participation, ethno-tourism, cultural heritage tourism

[9] Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin and Lyndel Prott (eds) (2016) *Cultural Property and Contested Ownership: The Trafficking of Artefacts and the Quest for Restitution*, London: Taylor & Francis.

[10] Botswana UNESCO (2000) *Botswana UNESCO Information Magazine*, Gaborone: Government Printer.

[11] Jennifer Oram and Doreen Nteta (1984) *National Museum Monuments and Art Gallery, Botswana Extension Project Consultancy Report*, Gaborone: Government Printer.

[12] Keletso Gaone Setlhabi (1999) 'Developing a Collections Policy of the National Museum Monuments and Art Gallery of Botswana', Deakin University: MA Thesis.

policies, and policies relating to dealing with human remains, decolonisation etc.[13] This would afford the museum a degree of autonomy from government restrictive regulations.

An all-rounded policy addressing all functions of the museum and current global trends is necessary and long overdue. It should include new developments such as the Intangible Cultural Heritage covered by the 2003 UNESCO Convention, address the status of antiquities and clarify the issue of legal penalties for dealers and traffickers.[14] It should also make reference to ICOM'S Code of Ethics on monitoring standards for Archaeological Impact Assessments, the handling of human remains by museums and exercising due diligence when acquiring objects.[15] The proposed legislation should be known to enforcement agencies so that they enforce laws and deal appropriately with cases of violation to heritage.

Museums in Europe lack staff capacity and resources to accurately identify the source communities for human remains, do provenance research and facilitate repatriation and reburial.[16] They also need collections policies that include the de-accessioning component. European museums often repatriate African collections as loans because they lack de-accessioning policies. With the right laws and regulations, claims for restitution and the right to copyright could work for African countries that have lost cultural property and which still continue to lose it today. This should include standards and guidelines for collaborations between European and African museums.

The drafting of the Botswana Museums and Monuments Service Bill (drafted 2014), even though not yet approved by Cabinet is therefore, a positive move by the National Museum. This is a comprehensive policy proposing an inclusive structure for all museums, arguing for unity and a centralised museum system as found in neighbouring countries.

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[13] Susan Keitumetse (2009) 'Botswana National Museum, Addressing Policy Through Research Collaboration', Unpublished Paper, Gaborone.

[14] Webster Ndoro and Gilbert Pwiti (eds) (2005) *Legal Framework for the Protection of Immovable Cultural Heritage in Africa*, Rome: ICCROM/AFRICA.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy (2018) *The Restitution of African Heritage: Towards a New Relational Ethics*, Paris.

Decolonial Futures: Reflections on International Museum Loans

Helen Mears, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery

In the context of a project addressing decolonial futures for colonial collections, it seemed obvious that, as a UK museum holding colonial-era objects from present-day Botswana, we should ensure these objects could be seen by Botswanan publics. The project instigators identified a partner institution (the Khama III Memorial Museum in Serowe) as keen to borrow as we were to loan. It was not long, though, before the naivete of this ambition became apparent. Costs spiralled as we gained a fuller understanding of what was entailed, including conservation treatments and the preparation of mounts and cases. Further discussions with art logistics companies led to some declining to provide estimates, citing a lack of familiarity with the destination country and no existing relationship with in-country agencies, however we were advised against using cheaper non-specialist companies as they lacked the capacity to deal with complex customs procedures and could not ensure the safety of the objects.

A UK visit by two of our partners Winani Thebele (National Museum of Botswana) and Scobie Lekhutile (Khama III Memorial Museum) to view objects was followed by a visit by Brighton Museum representatives (Rachel Heminway Hurst, Colin Heminway and Tshepo Skwambane) to view the exhibition venue. Their assessment of facilities was broadly guided by the UK Registrars' Group Facilities Report but we all began to feel uncomfortable about applying western museum standards to an African organisation and the entrenched power dynamics inherent in this. Given the objects had been collected in the Serowe area by a British missionary in the 1890s, is it right that we should insist on UK museum standards for their display at the Khama III Memorial Museum? In demanding detailed information about display case structure, light fittings, pest management and security provision, it has felt that we are creating a burden for our partner organisation rather than establishing an equitable working relationship. The level of costs involved in realising the loan (circa £30,000) have also caused us to question whether a loan of museum objects is the best use of resources, or whether these could have been used differently, for example to meet some of the considerable infrastructural challenges faced by our partner institution.

Concerns about the restrictive and highly costly nature of museum loans are well-established. In the UK museum sector there has long been recognition of the need to change the culture of lending so as to lessen the bureaucratic and financial burdens imposed on both lender and borrower. Despite the aspirations set out in publications

like the Museums Association's *Smarter Loans* (2012) for an 'ethical' as well as 'flexible and pragmatic approach to loans' (p.3), a lack of precedent in hand with the sector's natural cautiousness and risk-aversion (often based in a desire to protect collections and organisational reputation), have hampered collections mobility and made loans to institutions in the Global South the exception rather than the rule.

To my mind, alongside progressing critical repatriation work (and not as a substitute for it), promoting collections mobility to institutions in countries from which collections originated must be a key feature of a decolonial future. And yet, until the terms of museum lending change, this is an ambition which will remain out of reach to all but the largest and best-funded institutions. The sector, its funders and policy-makers, have to do more to support international loans and to help institutions find cost-effective and responsible ways for objects to travel without generating massive costs. As institutions based in the Global North, we have to be braver when it comes to managing risk and inculcating radical trust in our partners. We need new mindsets, funding structures and networks to make increased collections mobility possible. The Making African Connections project has enabled us to forge a new path and new partnerships, but what can we do to enable other institutions to follow?

Ornament; Belt; Makgabe. Kalanga women's loin ornament or apron made of a doubled skin apron with three skin tabs at the top. Bottom decorated with a line of white shirt-buttons and deep fringe of coral coloured and white beads. Worn over a skin skirt. Creator unrecorded. Collected by William Charles Willoughby. Royal Pavilion & Museums, R4007/18.

4.2

Addressing Colonial Legacies in Collections Documentation and Digitisation

Offensive Terminology

Fergus Nicoll, Osman Nusairi, Reem Al Hilou, Elvira Thomas and Nicola Stylianou

The use of racially offensive terminology remains an issue in many museums across the UK. These terms were often associated with the peoples in question at the time the objects were acquired by the museum and, once added to the official records, tend to be repeated in display labels and online. Museum staff, dealing with a wide range of collections from across the globe, do not always recognise offensive terms as such.

The word 'dervish', a pejorative British term for a follower of the Mahdī, provides a useful case study. During the team's first visit to the Royal Engineers Museum (REM), they highlighted the offensiveness of this term, which was used throughout the display. The Museum has removed the term from its labels and, following a discussion with the team, replaced it with the word anṣar. The word dervish (Arabic darwīsh, pl. darawīsh) was widely used in the Sudanese context to describe an initiate committed to the ascetic path of the Sufi. However, in 1881, Muḥammad Aḥmad, the self-styled Mahdī, ordered a change in terminology, decreeing that all those who came to join him should be styled anṣar, after the Prophet's earliest followers. A proclamation from 1884 shows his continuing condemnation of the term 'dervish':

"All my beloved and all the faithful have already been notified not to use the label darawīsh for the ansār whose hearts are sharply aware of God and who know that this world is doomed to extinction … Such a man is not to be called darwīsh. Rather, he should be described as a man of reason and insight, clear-headed and a true supporter of religion. Let him be called sadīq, or righteous, and anyone calling him darwīsh – even by a slip of the tongue – is to be given a punishment of 100 lashes and three days' fasting."

For the British, the term 'dervish' remained the default label for Sudanese antagonists, especially in the military context. It was deliberately pejorative and, throughout the late 1880s and 1890s, it was routinely used by propagandists such as Major FR Wingate of British Military Intelligence to denigrate followers of the Mahdī and, later, the Khalīfa ʿAbdullāhi.

The curators at REM were unfamiliar with this history and assumed that the term 'dervish' was simply a term for a follower of the Muḥammad Aḥmad. A 2020 survey of Sudanese cultural heritage held in UK institutions revealed the extent to which this remains a problem in UK museums. 50% (12/24) of institutions used the term 'dervish' on display labels or in a digital catalogue entry. Within these 12 institutions, 20 artefacts were described in relation to the term. 14 of these records used the term to describe a follower of the Muḥammad Aḥmad (e.g. 'dervish soldier') or the artefact itself (e.g. 'dervish jibbah'). Four records which used the term quoted directly from original acquisition papers or old archival records. However, in these records the term was not signposted as problematic nor was any context provided about the Muḥammad Aḥmad's decision to relabel his followers anṣār. Only two of the records which used the term 'dervish' provided information relating to the historical use of the term, although even then the word was not signposted as problematic.

Banner carried by Anṣār in battle. Creator: unrecorded, 4801.1.2. © Royal Engineers' Museum.

Decolonising Collections Documentation

Kathleen Lawther

My main role on the project has been to improve the documentation of Brighton Museum's collections from Botswana. This process has revealed systemic issues.

At the beginning of the project most, but not all, of the identified objects had basic records on the museum's collections management system. Many of the descriptions were identical to those from the 1930's accession register, despite the fact that what is considered a good physical description, and the language used, has changed since then. This came about because the museum did not have the time or resources to view the objects and check the descriptions every time records moved to new systems (from accession register to catalogue cards to databases). It is also because the people doing that documentation work were not familiar with the culture that they came from (when a department of 1.5 FTE plus contractors is responsible for 'World Art' they cannot be expected to). Despite this, we tend to assume the original collectors and curators did know what they were talking about, and so end up replicating their information.

In this case the main collector of Botswana material, William Charles Willoughby, recorded so little that we do not even know his motivations in collecting. One of the rightful criticisms of the project partners was that the museum and university focused too much on the British collectors. I admit that my hope in doing this was that it would be the beginning of a trail that would lead to more information about where the objects were collected, and therefore the people who they were collected from. That information simply isn't there. On some level I was still trusting the museum/ archive systems to tell us something meaningful about the objects, but those systems are inadequate to do so. They were designed for the convenience of British museum professionals in the 19th century, not people from Botswana in the 21st century.

Through the project we have been able to supplement the information we had by talking to people in Serowe. But asking for information from people in the source community is a token gesture if it is not accompanied by structural change in the way we treat information about collections. I am not talking about the data structures and software we use but deeper thinking about the purpose of recording that information. Who is it for? Who will benefit from this information? Whose viewpoint is it from? How are they credited (in terms of both acknowledgement and compensation)?

There is invisible labour involved in translating the outputs of the project into a useful museum resource. It is rare that so much research is done around a collection and I wanted to ensure it was sustainably linked to the object records so that it would be accessible in the future. I am skilled in organising information about objects, drawn from various sources (including new research interviews and films) into the formats required for museum documentation systems. That is one level of invisible labour. But I could not do some of that work because I do not speak Tswana or understand the nuances of Southern African culture. This meant that I found myself asking project partner Tshepo Skwambane to check my transcripts and to explain things to me. His input was invaluable. That is another layer of invisible labour that I want to acknowledge.

To begin to decolonise museums we need to start with our collections and be open about what we know *and do not know* about them. To do this museums need to acknowledge the amount of work that goes into documenting collections, and unpicking colonial era documentation. This work requires expertise in both the systems of museums *and* the cultures from which the objects came. Museum decision makers and funders need to prioritise, and allocate real resources to, this work.

The Limits of Digital Tools in Decolonising Collections

Kelly Foster

I often find myself dwelling on the words of Caribbean historian Elsa Goveia, written in the midst of the independence movements of the 1960s: "we shall have to face the fact that we are courting defeat when we attempt to build a new heritage of freedom upon a structure of society which binds us all too closely to the old heritage of slavery".[17] She, of course, was writing about the role of the historian in a post-colonial Caribbean but that same conundrum faces the museum sector in the UK in trying to grapple with its colonial collections, processes and systems. Colonial structures are not only embodied by the museums but also shape funder requirements and are the foundation of the supposedly neutral digital systems built from and within that old heritage.

In recent years the sector has placed enormous optimism in, seemingly, more democratic systems that draw on the open knowledge movement's tools and communities. These are often centred around Wikipedia, now an integral part of the internet's knowledge systems, and Creative Commons, a tool for open licensing. But, like society, these tools and platforms are built from and constrained by colonial structures of authority and power. The "gender gap" is an often-quoted example of the inequalities present on Wikipedia. On the English language Wikipedia only 1 in 10 of the people who create the website are women or non-binary and under 18% of the biographical articles are about women. But what of measuring the "gap" created by colonialism and how coloniality shapes the very fabric of the encyclopedia? Does the optimism of the museums' world reflect the realities of the platforms? And how can the efficacy of projects like Making African Connections be measured?

Volunteerism is the model of labour used on Wikipedia, the expectation that a skilled and engaged volunteer labour force will represent the "sum of all human knowledge". But as a volunteer you have to be time- and resource-rich to even attempt to fully contribute your unpaid labour. Volunteerism does not work for most societies nor can it fulfil attempts to diversify the Wikipedia community, as it often means that the most marginalised sections of our global community are expected to contribute the most. Only 20% of content on Wikipedia is by or about people from the Global South. Therefore, how should (or perhaps could) GLAM projects that intend open knowledge platforms to confront colonial realities of their collections

[17] Elsa V. Goveia (1965) *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century,* New Haven: Yale University Press.

work differently? Can volunteering alone hope to balance centuries of knowledge extraction and the chronopolitical purpose of colonial memory institutions and the nature of contemporary of colonial amnesia in the UK?

Making African Connections has particularly brought up the possibilities (and my personal limitations in) using platforms like Wikidata to disrupt the colonial order of museum documentation by recognising the work, labour and role of individuals who are often unrecorded (or neglected and unvalued may be more useful terms) in museum records. Wikidata has the potential of multivocality, being able to hold and harness different types of knowledge and different languages. But it can only be as flexible as the community who creates it. Currently, it reflects the knowledge of the colonial institution and the metadata associated with the physical object but not its use or cultural context. How can the data of an object in a Western museum represent it as both an object from the past as well as being part of the living culture of modern people?

While there are conversations about the necessity for equitable approaches to the rights of a digitised object that contradict the expectation, expressed in the 2018 Sarr/Savoy report, that all African cultural heritage should be digitised and available under an open licence, [18] there has been little discussion of what philosopher Edouard Glissant called the - "right to opacity" - the right of oppressed people not to be understood.[19] How can projects that aim to centre decolonial approaches centre and safeguard those rights?

The community that builds Wikipedia has identified knowledge equity as a key strategic direction for its future development of the movement. They have committed to "focus our efforts on the knowledge and communities that have been left out by structures of power and privilege". Rather than considering how Wikipedia can be used to meet the purpose of the museum, how can the museum contribute to the mission of the Wikimedia community?

[18] Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy (2018) *The Restitution of African Heritage: Towards a New Relational Ethics,* Paris.

[19] Édouard Glissant and Betsy Wing (2010) *Poetics of Relation*. University of Michigan Press, pp. 189.

How Should a Digital Project End?

James Baker, University of Sussex

For two years the Making African Connections team have created and maintained the images, videos, audios and text on the Making African Connections digital archive, many of which are now accessible to descendant communities for the first time. This would not have been possible without the funder paying for our time. For many of us when that funding ends, the time we dedicated to this task will be replaced by other tasks. Others among us will search for new tasks, for new funders. Some of us will choose to continue dedicating time, unfunded, to creating more material, to maintaining what we have. Whatever we do though, the end of the Making African Connections project will signal a point of transition for the Making African Connections digital archive from live to dormant, from online to offline, from beginning to ending.

The Endings Project, an initiative funded by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, centres around a very relatable claim, that 'our ability to produce digital information continues to outpace our capacity to preserve and access that knowledge for the long haul'. This, they find, is particularly true of projects that make web-based heritage resources, in which:

The dynamic nature of digital data lends itself to new and promising possibilities, and the protean digital environment makes publication a moving target. Despite these temptations, while our research and scholarship go on, projects — even digital ones — need to end. We plan to investigate strategies and landmarks to bring DH projects to closure .[20]

I am a great admirer of The Endings Project, not least because I do the 'DH' they refer to, that being the Digital Humanities, a loose field-cum-discipline whose practitioners enquire into digital technologies, use digital technologies to ask humanities questions, and build digital technologies for the humanities. And whilst a feature of DH is what Nowviskie refers to as the 'eternal September' of debates over its definition, one constant, for me, is reflected in The Endings Project: that is, a shared concern over the impermanence of DH work, of its proximity to death, to technologies and sectors built for the now, not built for tomorrow.[21] We worry, in short, about all the websites that are no longer there and deaths of those we are building and maintaining.

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[20] The Endings Project, https://endings.uvic.ca/

[21] See for example The Google Cemetery, https://gcemetery.co/. See: Bethany Nowviskie (2010) 'Eternal September of the Digital Humanities' (blog), 15 October 2010. http://nowviskie.org/2010/eternal-september-of-the-digital-humanities/; and Bethany Nowviskie (2015) 'Digital Humanities in the Anthropocene', *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 30.

Now, whether or not we choose to call it 'DH' work, the interleaving of the museum and the digital is established, and the investment in digital research in and with museums is accelerating. Rigorous and carefully constructed sustainability and data management plans are built into this work and these programmes, and in turn - broadly speaking - projects tend to respond to the question of endings in two ways: we will back things up somewhere, we will look after things somehow. I have no reason to doubt these claims, but what they rarely say is what we all know: that all websites will die, that backups are always partial, that we have limited ability to look after things forever more.

So, I'll say it: one day the Making African Connections digital archive will die. First it will become dormant, later it will go offline, and we may not even notice it happening. This, The Endings Project tells us, is the trajectory of most projects, and the caring thing to do – especially in a context of a multi-partner project – is to be humble in the face of reality. But the Making African Connections digital archive won't disappear entirely. And that is because that from the start it was built to end, for a life after funding, after us. The website isn't pretty, but that is because it is built on static, open source technologies designed to need minimal attention and to be easy to archive.[22] During the production of images, video, audio and text we spent extra time on documentation so as to aid the intelligibility of the materials when one of their only access points is a secure store. And rather than making publication the point of website, I set it up so that our ends were always tilted towards finding out what we did in the making, to using the digital project as a platform for figuring things out rather than publishing what we found. In a sense, then, the Making African Connections digital archive was ending the moment it started, and – I believe – is all the more caring for it.

[22] Specifically, Omeka S https://omeka.org/s/

4.3

Recontextualising And Reframing

African Collections in the Context of Return – Why 'Source Community' Needs Decolonising

JoAnn McGregor, University of Sussex

Debates over the restitution of artefacts to Africa raise important questions about diverse interest groups, and relations between past and present. For each collection in the MAC project – military, missionary and ethnographic – research showed the idea of a 'source community' to be unhelpful at best. The imaginary of a 'source community' is ubiquitous in museum practice and provenance research: it is used in endeavours to identify original creators and owners of objects or their descendants in the places where they came from.

Why is it misleading? Because it obscures politics and historical change, suggests small-scale ethnic community and the implied positionality is that of an outsider. In African contexts it can replicate a colonial ethnographic imaginary of the African continent as peopled by localised, culturally homogenous, premodern, unchanging and mutually exclusive ethnic/tribal units. Essentialised ideas of culture and ethnicity in Africa today were a product of colonial rule, and can be reinforced by the idea of a local ethnic 'source community'. Yet artefacts dating from the 19th century often predate this consciousness. The idea of a 'source community' can thus obstruct understanding of the contexts of provenance, particularly 19th century African contexts where political hierarchy and affiliation were all important, polities were incorporative, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and mobile, and ethnic identities were less rigid than today. 'Source community' does not invite investigation of important questions about how specific collecting trips or looting of objects related to past sovereignty and 19th-century African states' internal and external relationships, pan-regional religious and political movements, wars, rebellions, frontiers and the contested process of drawing colonial borders, creating colonial administrations, the political economy of trade and mobility. Nor does it help understand how contexts of provenance relate to today's debates over heritage and identity, which are enmeshed in the politics of citizenship and nationalism, religious, governmental and state interests, chieftaincy claims as well as debates over ethnicity, race and culture.

Jeremy Sylvester and Napandulwe Shiweda suggest that it is better to think in terms of 'descendant communities' to forefront the passage of time.[23] The geographical imaginary of a descendant group needs to recognise that these can be very largescale and also include diverse interests. Indeed, descendant interest groups can

[23] Jeremy Sylvester and Napandulwe Shiweda (2020) 'The Return of the Sacred Stones of the Ovambo: Restitution and the Revision of the Past', *Museum and Society* 18(1), https://doi.org/10.29311/mas.v18i1.3236

include entire national publics, professional historians, diasporic and intellectual communities, as well as narrower localised, 'traditional' or familial interests. All three collections in our study revealed these problems with 'source community' particularly starkly.

In the case of the Sudanese collection at the Royal Engineers Museum, the objects were looted from the leaders and followers of 19th-century Sudanese Mahdism in the wake of battle. Mahdism was foundational for modern Sudanese identity and history, and is valued as such by historians, and commemorated in a variety of heritage sites and museums today. Muhamad al-Mahdī led his (multi-ethnic) Anṣār followers in a largescale, successful Islamic jihad against Turko-Egyptian rule, and ruled the huge territorial expanse of what is now the two Sudans for 12 years. At the same time as being of potential historic-national interest to all those of Sudanese descent, some artefacts of Mahdist heritage are claimed more directly by political and religious leaders tracing descent from the Mahdi, and are 'living tradition' for religious adherents of what is now a minority Islamic group, while today's Anṣār clan has connections to opposition party politics.

The Botswanan objects at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery were collected by a missionary in the 1890s from a large cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic town and capital of Khama III that subsequently relocated. They have local and national historical significance for the light they shed on ordinary life in the town and its hinterland at a moment that was foundational for the modern Botswanan nation. Some objects showed continuities with craft today and research showed the collection to be Tswana, yet initial reactions by educated Botswana publics living in the region of origin were frequently that they were not Tswana but Basarwa/San, which is now understood as a culturally distinct minority ethnicity. Interpretations of the collection thus had the potential to counter racialised, disconnected views of Tswana and San ethnicity that are themselves colonial legacies.

In the case of the Angola/Namibia collection at the Powell-Cotton Museum, the objects came from an ethnic group that spanned and was mobile across a state border. Objects can be appropriated by specific local descendent interests, such as chieftaincy claims and ethnic heritage projects, but the artefacts are also of cultural and aesthetic interest to national educators and historians in both today's states, such as the lecturers and students of fashion at University of Namibia who have been inspired by the dolls that were the focus of our research.

Alternate geographical imaginaries are thus necessary in the context of restitution and 'decolonising'. As African collections are repatriated, they will likely be embraced by diverse interests and can open up fascinating discussion of cultural change as well as tradition, and about the politics, significance and meanings of the past to African publics today.

Decentring the Powell-Cotton Family

Inbal Livne, Napandulwe Shiweda and Nicola Stylianou

The general problems faced by many colonial era collections in the UK are compounded at the Powell-Cotton Museum, which was both founded, and has remained, a monument to the achievements of one family into the 21st century.

Though most of the collecting activity undertaken during the Museum's formative years was organised, motivated and paid for by the Powell-Cotton family, the process of collecting was not solely in their hands. Indeed, the Museum's extensive archival records evidence the work of hundreds of men (and some women) who accompanied the Powell-Cottons on their expeditions, providing expertise in tracking, hunting and logistical support. For Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton, whose main focus in Angola was ethnographic collecting, this expertise came in the form of chiefs and headmen, translators and cultural guides who supported (and in some cases made possible) the acquisition of their vast collections.

Yet the Museum itself has, as noted by Napandulwe Shiweda on first visiting, remained a monument to the Great White Hunter. While the evidence for these vast networks of people connected to the Museum's collections exists 'behind the scenes' within the archive, the Museum itself presents a history of 'one man, one museum'. It was not until 2012 that the work of Percy's children Diana and Antoinette was permanently displayed, despite being one of the most significant parts of the Museum's ethnographic collection.

The Powell-Cotton Museum occupies a unique space in the national museum landscape. An independent museum with large, nationally significant collections, the Museum remained a family concern until 2006. Curatorial staff had served as boy and man, which meant the same three men had cared for the collections through most of the 20th century, passing on knowledge as they went. While other colonial-era institutions had already begun the slow and painful task of facing up to their histories, the Powell-Cotton had become steeped in nostalgic inertia. Unlike the metropolitan museums whose audiences demanded change – better representation

of the communities they served, recognition of the impact of colonial histories and extractive collecting practices – in semi-rural Thanet, where the population is approximately 96% white British, this did not happen. Those who felt unrepresented just stayed away. But this is all changing: people want to learn about the multi-vocal stories our collections can tell, to know about the people – both abroad and in Kent – who sit at the very heart of the Museum's story and should be represented as such.

Making the kinds of changes to displays, narratives and workforce that truly embed the notions of decolonising the museum have become aims for the Powell-Cotton and are centred within the Museum's vision statement for the next two years. Museum staff are keen to address these issues and make changes but it takes time and money.

One approach the Museum has adopted is to attempt to shift emphasis away from the family and onto all the other people who contributed to making the collection, both in the countries the objects came from and locally. By profiling these individuals and their stories the Museum hopes to create both a more inclusive narrative and a more accurate one. While the Museum has problems specific to its context, it also has unique opportunities. The extensive Powell-Cotton archive of notes, diaries and photographs means it is possible to find named individuals who contributed to the collections in all kinds of ways. It is often possible to locate where these people lived and sometimes to find photos of them and link them to objects in the collection or information in the archive. However, both photographs and information are inevitably filtered through the lens of a colonial gaze and need to be carefully analysed and understood. The contribution of these people to the collection and its understanding needs to be acknowledged.

In order to understand the archive and create meaningful displays that celebrate Ovambo culture and heritage, while acknowledging the historical specificity of the collection, it is necessary to understand more about the context in which the objects were collected. A lack of historical knowledge and perspective among museum staff risks the perpetuation of colonial myths and contributes to an ahistorical view of Africa.

Key contextual information for this collection includes the politics and society of the Angola-Namibia borderlands in the 1930s and the invasion and colonisation by Portuguese and South African soldiers. Changing power relations in the region influenced the sister's ability to collect particular objects, especially kingship insignia and special religious artefacts. In 1917 Mandume ya Ndemufayo, the last Kwanyama king, was defeated following a long period of resistance.

The Powell-Cotton sisters, therefore, collected objects among those living in an area whose traditional territory was divided between the two colonies. This sudden division caused many of the pre-colonial kingdoms to break up and new identity dynamics strongly linked to the border's invention to develop. It was a time of change and destabilisation. Thus, it is important for the museum to acknowledge the process of colonisation in the region, and how it destroyed the existing political systems of the time, in terms of the prevailing kingdoms and power relations. In this way there is potential for creative engagement in adding historical contexts of the people whose objects were collected or photographed.

Changes in identity dynamics led to increasing missionary influence and may have caused people to be willing to sell objects they would not have considered parting with a generation before, however, it also left them vulnerable. Additional factors to consider at the time the sisters were in Namibia are the famine of the early 1930s, when annual rainfall was consistently 60 per cent below average for several years.[24] The famine allowed the colonial authorities to further extend their control, exacerbating the process already described. The global depression also affected local economies in Namibia. People were struggling economically and we can see evidence of the impact of this in people's decision to sell to the Powell-Cottons in the sister's own diaries. We should also consider this when thinking about the role of the African individuals, including leaders of small communities, who chose to help the sisters.

The Museum needs to bring a critical perspective to the exhibited objects. It should seek out object biographies (while bearing in mind the context) to find out whether some objects would have been given away willingly at all, or never would have been parted with voluntarily. When making these assessments it is important to consider:

- what the object represents;

- its role in the community it came from;

- did an individual have the right to sell it;

- how it influenced the people /and the collection;

- what event(s)/ things were happening at the time of collection, etc.

While the sisters' own diaries are a valuable source, showing their interactions with people and clearly revealing unwillingness to part with objects, it is also important to consider other sources. It is crucial to be in dialogue with people from Angola and Namibia and to understand how they perceive the objects and the collecting process. An example of this is the response of the Queen of the Kwanyama (Martha Mwadinomho Kristian Nelumbu) to an unusually thick necklace of many strands of blue glass beads in the collection (ETH.ANG2.888). The Queen was adamant that this opulent necklace could only have been a sign of royalty, should never have been sold and should be returned.

Necklace of navy blue beads looped in a cascade, ETH.ANG2.888
© Powell-Cotton Trust.

[24] Marion Wallace (2011) *A History of Namibia*, South Africa, Jacana Media (pty) Ltd.

Complex Histories

Fergus Nicoll, Osman Nusairi, Reem Al Hilou,
and Nicola Stylianou

The period of Mahdist rule in Sudan is one of the most significant in the country's modern history. The 'Mahdiyya', as it is widely known, features strongly in the collective Sudanese consciousness and it is well documented. In British museums, artefacts, objects and documents related to that history, particularly about Mahdism itself, are obviously spoils of war: it is essentially loot. They are not there just to document history in a neutral way, but to celebrate a victory. The spoils can be seen as material proof of that victory. However, the fact that the artefacts are looked after and made accessible to visitors is positive.

Museums, of course, do not tell the whole story. It is crucial when presenting objects emanating from war to do so in a context that reflects and respects the lives and cultures of the people defeated by British forces. While there have been calls in some countries for the repatriation of looted treasures, the team felt that, in the case of Sudan today, the return of looted cultural heritage was not currently the key issue: what is important now is to balance the depiction by museums in Britain of what is a highly contested history. This could be achieved if institutions would admit that artefacts ostensibly in their possession are, in fact, on historical loan, awaiting a time when they will be claimed by their rightful owners – or when a neutral organisation such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) might help safeguard their future. Meanwhile, a greater focus on balancing the presentation or portrayal of other people in British museums would win respect.

When dealing with historical collections from the colonial period, museums should present an accurate history, acknowledging criticism of the process by British institutions as well as the viewpoint of the opposing side. A lack of territory-specific historical knowledge and perspective among museum staff can allow colonial myths to be perpetuated.

Contemporary British criticism

At the Royal Engineers Museum (REM), Major-General Charles Gordon is presented as a hero slain by savages. This is simply not an accurate portrayal of history. Gordon's actions were criticised in parliament at the time and also by establishment newspapers such as *The Times*. His presence in Sudan was controversial because he was there as a mercenary working on behalf of the Egyptian government – albeit with the endorsement of the UK government. In addition, he endorsed and accepted slavery as an institution in Sudan, promising that it would not be prohibited. This was a complete contradiction of his earlier campaigns against the slave trade in southern Sudan – and was made more dramatic by Gordon's intention to install Zubair Basha, a known slave trader, as an alternative indigenous leader. Another key issue evaded in the standard British narrative of the Sudan wars was the treatment of Sudanese war wounded, who were on several occasions routinely shot rather than taken prisoner. Furthermore, the British narrative – adopted as standard by most museums – rarely acknowledges the tactical and military mistakes made by Gordon.

The Sudanese context

Absent from the REM displays are stories relating to the wider context of Sudanese politics, religion and society, both good and bad. The nature of the material that is collected by a military museum frequently excludes more domestic items and things relating to aspects of society not directly related to warfare. This is a particular issue for Sudanese material culture because such a large proportion of collections in the UK relating to Sudan come from this period of conflict. This is the only story told about Sudan in UK museums, so collections have to be made to work harder to create a more rounded portrayal of Sudanese society. The role of women in the Mahdiyya is a good example: women had a role creating the uniforms and clothing that form part of the military collection, from spinning the cotton to sewing the jibbahs and flags. A food bowl, collected by a soldier as a memento, allows us to talk about their role as producers of food for the anṣār.

Decolonising in a Military Museum

Nicola Stylianou and Danielle Sellers

All of the UK partner museums faced some similar challenges but they also each had specific issues arising from their own situation. The Royal Engineers Museum (REM) is an operational charity partly funded through the Ministry of Defence (MoD) who pay the museum a cash grant to cover staff costs. This accounts for about 40% of its income. In addition the MoD provides and maintains the building the Museum is in for a peppercorn rent. The building and facilities are shared with the Royal Engineers and serving soldiers are present on site and are a key audience for the museum. An additional 9% of the Museum's income comes through the Corps of Royal Engineers 'a day's pay scheme'; the Museum is one of five charities the scheme supports. 11% is given to the museum by the Institution of Royal Engineers who own the collection. The remaining income is raised by the museum through ticket sales, etc.

John A. Haymond has argued that military museums should respect the contribution soldiers have made to British history, and that their aim should be 'to depict the army's experience in controversial wars, and not necessarily to be the final arbiter of the validity of the wars themselves'. He counsels museums to avoid the 'mire of politics.'[25] However, the inaccurate and occasionally dishonest renderings of history we see in museums are, in themselves, a political choice. While this is a problem across the museum sector, there are some specific issues that arise from the nature of REM as a regimental museum.

REM's objectives are laid out in the Trustees report for 2018:

to collect and present accessibly the military and civil work, deeds and history of the Corps of Royal Engineers and to educate and promote scholarship therein for members of the Corps, the wider Armed Forces and the general public and, thereby, to contribute positively to the proficiency, reputation and efficiency of the Corps, the recruitment and inspiration of its members and the benefit of the public.[26]

The need to contribute positively to the reputation of the Corps and be inspirational to its members makes it difficult for the museum to criticise past members, such as Major-General Charles Gordon RE. For many visitors with direct personal links to the Corps, seeing the museum is an emotional experience and they do not wish to see the Corps criticised. However, the need to educate and render history accurately must come first when considering a decolonial approach to collections. Gordon, who was not in Sudan in his role as a Royal Engineer, was controversial and widely criticised

[25] John A. Haymond (2015) 'The Muted Voice: The Limitations of Museums and the Depiction of Controversial History', *Museum & Society*, 13 (4): 462-468.

[26] Royal Engineers Museum Fund (2018) *Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2018.*

at the time but this is not reflected in the gallery. The Victorian Galleries were developed in the 1980s and although the museum would like to make substantial changes, the expense of doing this has been a barrier (in this they are very similar to other museums). Museum staff have noted that many of these once famous Victorian figures are not well known among current audiences offering an opportunity to talk about them differently with a contemporary audience.

Military museums face specific issues in their attempts to decolonise but there is also great potential to address complex moral, emotional and ethical issues through them.[27] In many ways museums like REM are on the front lines of what members of the current government are referring to as a 'culture war.' As a result of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement the museum received many messages expressing concern that they would remove representations of prominent military figures as well as messages in support of BLM.

REM sees itself as trying to fulfil its sense of responsibility to individual engineers' lives while also explaining the context of imperial aggression and exploitation in which the Engineers were agents. The museum acknowledges that there are major problems with the Victorian Galleries which currently perpetuate some of the central myths of empire, and the need for change. Furthermore, they are aware that their displays are offensive and alienating to some audiences and are particularly concerned about this in relation to Engineers from BAME backgrounds. A new strategic plan, currently being developed has decolonisation as a thread running through it. Future plans include working with BAME groups within the army who campaign on similar issues.

It is important to note how responsive the team at REM have been to their partners on the Making African Connections (MAC) project. They have changed labels and catalogue records to remove inappropriate language, added Arabic descriptions to the catalogue and terminology to labels, replaced mannequins and have been enthusiastic about the exhibition and online outputs. Next year, as part of their continued involvement in the MAC project, they are looking to incorporate decolonial approaches into their training for all museum staff and to begin working with local African-Caribbean interest groups.

[27] Alastair Massie and Sheila Watson (2015) 'Making Military Histories in Museums: Editorial Introduction' *Museum & Society*, 13 (4): 445-446.

4.4

Inclusive Curatorship/ New Narratives

Developing Curatorial Practice – Inclusive Curatorship and Funding

Rachel Heminway Hurst, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery

The following statement appears on the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) website, citing the Making African Connections (MAC) project: 'In a climate of austerity, many smaller museums are unable to invest in the research that is necessary to translate calls for decolonising into practical initiatives'. It clearly sets out a need within the museum sector; one the MAC project partners aimed to address.

Museums are public-facing organisations with a remit to engage with communities and provide access to collections. This work has involved a culture shift in museums over the last few decades, with efforts to become less authoritative and more democratic, especially in approaches to diversity, access, and collections knowledge. Museum staff caring for ethnographic material have for some time been working in partnership with diaspora and source communities as part of efforts to decolonise our practice. The world art section at Brighton Museum works in partnership with specialists with lived experience and cultural knowledge, to inform us, challenge us, and to re-contextualise collections through people 'speaking for themselves'. This form of 'inclusive curatorship' has become embedded into our practice.

Working in partnership on the MAC project afforded the opportunity to continue to improve this practice. My role as a museum curator includes acting as a facilitator to enable inclusive curatorship. Therefore, for me the most important element of this project was working with museum curators in Botswana and with a cultural specialist with Tswana heritage based in West Sussex. This was our first project working with both international and diaspora partners together. Working with the cultural specialist acting as a language and heritage mediator and relationship broker, we explored the collections together and built up trust with our Botswana partners through working as inclusive curators. This enabled us to share knowledge and to engage with people in Botswana, to introduce them to the collection held at Brighton and to share their cultural expertise.

The work described above was only one element of the project, and funding for this type of essential research work in museums and communities is rarely available. Smaller museums especially, rely on all kinds of community support to survive and thrive and therefore have experience in and an understanding of the processes

involved in complex relationship building, as well as a track record of successfully working in collaboration. So why are museums currently only eligible to apply for much smaller pots of funding that do not prioritise research?

If museums are so successful in this type of work, why is this level of research funding only available through universities, who can choose to work with museums and non-academic cultural specialists as junior partners. Is AHRC funding via universities appropriate for this type of work? This funding model means that the agenda is set by the university in consultation with partners, and the funding is primarily for academic and research staffing and overheads. In the MAC project, this meant that museums had relatively small amounts of funding, as did the UK-based community partners. Most importantly, some of those with cultural knowledge were not initially built into the project adequately.

If our aim is to further decolonise our practice, is this possible given that academic models of funding actually seem colonial in structure, with the power and funding sitting with the university. The value of universities, museums and cultural specialists working together is clear. However, the value and worth placed on cultural specialists who are key partners but not university-based is unclear under the current funding structure. If academics are paid considerably more than the non-academic cultural specialists and staff at the partner museum in Botswana, does this not suggest that their knowledge, expertise, and value is seen to be worth more than that of the partners? If our aim is to further decolonial debate and practice, this is not possible to achieve with a funding model that is neither democratic nor inclusive. This presents a problem for museum involvement as it goes against our inclusive remit and agenda. There are also problems in terms of organisational representation given a lack of diversity amongst university and museum staff; this risks reinforcing a colonial perspective and hierarchy of power with white professionals representing the UK institutions involved in this type of project model.

So moving forward, it seems that there are lessons to be learned. If we are serious about furthering decolonial practice, different models of both funding and project governance are needed. If these cannot be identified we are in danger of losing the support and trust of international partners, UK-based diaspora communities and cultural specialists. As well as more work on diversifying the workforce in UK museums and universities, moving forward two other changes seem important to implement. Firstly, a provision for UK funding which enables international partners to apply for research funding to work in partnership with museums in the UK that hold material acquired from their countries and communities. This will enable international museums to set their own agendas and choose the UK collections and partners they wish to work with. Secondly, given that the collections are held by and cared for by museums, and many smaller UK museums have a proven track record

of working effectively with community partners and cultural specialists, there is an obvious need for funding to be made available directly to museums. This will enable museums to continue progressing decolonising agendas through carrying out robust inclusive research projects with external partners. In this model, museums would work in partnership with communities and universities, but provide equal pay for non-academic specialists, thus enabling power sharing and inclusive curatorship practice.

On Knowledge Hierarchies

Tshepo Skwambane

Writing about decolonising colonial collections in museums is a challenging topic as we cannot decolonise the collection per se - we can only contextualise it or de-contextualise the narrative in/with which the institutions have been comfortable.

Dealing with the 'Bechuanaland' collections at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery has been an interesting exercise as many of the objects have a resonance and personal links for the partners at the Khama III Museum, as well as for Winani Thebele and myself. These lived experiences, connections, resonances and relevancies, bring to the project the facilities to change the narratives which are the 'epistemologies' that are inherent in the collections.

Brighton Museum has made efforts to accommodate the changes in narrative and to go some way to addressing the question of decolonising the collection with work ongoing to redress the sharing of the new dialogue. There are hurdles that still remain (over and above the COVID-19 crisis) that need addressing as part of the process of decolonising with a move to digital platforms.

One of the major frustrations has been the hierarchy of knowledge and the value systems that play a significant part in the negotiation of decolonising the collection. Other institutions will be comfortable with a rehash of their narrative and bring in token exercises that show a willingness to embrace subjects that re-align discourse. (A trait that has held back true progress in the addressing of colonial histories). It is up to us as activists to push the boundaries, limitations and hurdles while encouraging marginalised communities to engage in these processes.

One of the biggest elements of the narrative around collections is the focus on the collectors, be they incidental, colonial officials, missionaries or collectors, so the challenge is to tell the stories from the originating societies in their voices with the sensibilities that encompass the values that underlay those societies. This is best done with the full co-operation of the institutions that hold the objects and whose perceived knowledge is being challenged. The example of the William Charles Willoughby collection lends itself to this exercise in that the literature and accounts of the collector are full and generally wholesome whereas the societies that constitute his source of the objects are not given the focus or attention that they should warrant with the scant literature emanating from self-indulgent academics who have excluded

the epistemologies (lived experiences) that should be central to the discourse and those individuals in a position to give that knowledge not given the platform and status that gives them credence in academic spaces and circles.

For a museum to further the remit that is given the moniker of a Decolonised space with reference to its collections, exhibits and displays, it is important to engage a wider base in society including with those communities that feel excluded or not able to participate/enjoy museums. The institutions have to change the dialogue that to date has given the impression that the institution caters only for the well-heeled. A big part of this can be achieved by working with communities with the co-operation of the whole institution with the right set of attitudes (trust, respect and honesty).

Local Meanings for the Willoughby Collection

Gase Kediseng, Khama III Memorial Museum

Even though I haven't had the privilege of seeing the actual objects, I am intrigued by the craftsmanship displayed in the objects which spells excellence and perfection. Imagining that they did not have the luxury of specialised tools to enable them to work on the finer details of the objects still leaves me in awe.

As a modern Motswana who studied Botswana history, my understanding is that we were once a very poor country which later developed rapidly due to the discovery of diamonds and the production of beef, and made us one of the richest countries in Southern Africa. Nonetheless, nothing or very little is mentioned on how Batswana of the 19th century were industrious, let alone their love for the 'finer things in life'.

Looking back, I believe the discovery of diamonds somehow shifted our mindset from that of producers to a consuming nation. Diamonds brought with them the infrastructure, education, health and the jobs that gave us money to buy the stuff which we needed. We made it our way of life and became overly dependent. We shunned or forgot our way of survival - the bartering (goods exchange) system. This form of trading, I think, encouraged people or individuals to tap into their strengths and creativity to be able to produce the best they could in exchange for the stuff they needed, which I believe contributed to community building.

For me, I see this project as an eye opener. It should be able to give Batswana a gleam of hope that, yes, they can! It should be able to make us proud as a nation that our forefathers were creative and hard working. This will indeed dispel the fallacy that we had no past to boast of before the arrival of the colonisers; it will bring about the much-needed focus on our rich cultural heritage.

This project gives me a sense of pride and gratitude that even though the artefacts are kept in another country, they remain ours by virtue of them being produced by our forebears. It adds to the part of history that was forgotten and unknown to the new generation.

On our continued partnership with Brighton Museum: if this partnership could be geared towards assisting us build our capacity, it would go a long way in preparing us to handle loans of this nature in the long term. If our conservation standards cannot

be at par with museums in developed countries, they should be basic at least. We should strive to be able to maintain our collections, and when we have achieved this, we will be able to say 'we are ready'!

Post the COVID-19 total lockdown, which resulted in closing of borders, and presented a whole lot of uncertainties, we were left vulnerable as a nation. This forced some Batswana to come up with initiatives for survival and even strongly lobbied for the support of locally produced stuff.

In conclusion, I see this project helping with some issues that our society is grappling to address today. It will also help us as we are forced to go through the 'introspection phase' as a nation.

As they say, understanding of your past equips you for the future.

Khama III Memorial Museum, Serowe, Botswana.

Thoughts and Reflections on the MAC Project

Scobie Lekhutile, Khama III Memorial Museum

One way of decolonising collections is by taking them back to their places of origin which can be achieved through collaboration. The Khama III Memorial Museum, in this case, was identified as the rightful partner institution in Botswana for the Making African Connections project. This led to a UK visit by Scobie Lekhutile, Khama III Museum and Winani Thebele, National Museum Botswana. It gave Batswana partners a chance to view the collection and appreciate what it entails. There were also numerous presentations centered on the subject of decolonising collections. Moreover, there was a panel discussion at the University of Sussex.

Taking into consideration that the first museum was established in Botswana in the 1960s and there were not many artefacts from the 1880s left by then, the objects at hand open an interesting chapter in the past, stored in oral narrations without many items to show. The backyard industry was active; domestic utensils were hand crafted and there was less dependence on foreign items. Therefore, this makes the collection unique to the Gammangwato region as they are said to have been collected in the area around that era. Kelly Foster (the project's Wikimedian-in-residence) made a statement in a discussion that this made it possible for people to tell their own story. It resonated well with me as I am tired of hearing HIS-story and want to hear We-story. In this way, the people gain their heritage and stop being classified as only Bantu or African and become Batswana-ba-GaMmaNgwato with a story to tell.

During the discussion at University of Sussex, one participant asked how we can prove that the collection belongs to Botswana. This made me wonder; besides the documentation accompanying the objects, do Batswana still produce these objects and how much knowledge do they still have? The thought accompanied me while trying to source more information and further identification. It was mostly among the elders that some interest and identification was noted. Some remembered the artefacts by name and usage, as well as the processes and materials used to make them. To modern Batswana, the objects were more associated with groups that are still hunter gatherers such as the San/Basarwa (Bushmen). To them it is difficult to picture Batswana of 1880 in traditional attire because their picture of Botswana does not date that far back in time. This presents yet another challenge which can be addressed by using these collected objects as aids for teaching to inform young

Batswana of their rich culture and heritage and show that their ancestors were skilled creators of functional crafts which made them self-sufficient and reliant on noone but themselves.

Beyond decolonising the collections, there were many spin-offs as a result of the collaboration. These have included improved community involvement, the growth and development of collection management at the Khama III Museum, and gaining courage to address issues which were viewed as hotspots and correcting ethnic group classifications. At the end of it all our people will be better informed of our cultural past which will strengthen our identity.

'A Trinity of Dusky Kings' and the Decolonisation of an African Museum Collection in Brighton[28]

Suchitra Chatterjee

Suchitra Chatterjee holds a carved wooden bowl collected by William Charles Willoughby, at Brighton Museum.

Objects collected in Botswana by William Charles Willoughby and currently held at Brighton Museum.

When the Scottish-born missionary William Charles Willoughby came to England with the three African kings (Khama, Sebele, Bathoen) to petition Queen Victoria against Cecil Rhodes' railroad expansion, it was one of many actions that laid an inadvertent foundation for future generations to discuss and debate the decolonisation and repatriation of museum collections all over the UK.

This collection certainly has the potential to unite local communities in Sussex, as it is such an eclectic and fascinating collection of items; from cow skin shoes, woven gourds, highly-polished wooden bowls, poisoned arrows, spears, beautiful beadwork and possible items of religious significance. There is so much to be discovered from this hidden gem of a collection. However, there is also the potential for it to cause discord and resentment, especially among people who might have a vested interest in some of the items that now no longer exist in their original country of origin (Botswana), along with the fact that it is known as the 'Willoughby Collection' when it is in fact an African collection.

During a meeting where members of Brighton and Hove's Black History Project and other stakeholders got to look and handle some of the collection, an African cultural specialist mentioned in passing that many of the items on display were no longer available in their country of origin. Perhaps some families might hold similar items but many of the things we were examining and discussing were not present in modern-day Africa. Colonisation and the Christianisation of much of the country had ensured that a lot of local knowledge was irrevocably lost.

It is easy to say that we in the community/museum sector cannot answer for what was done over 100 years ago and that the collection was put together in good faith by a man who was just interested in Africa and its people. Willoughby wrote many books, tracts and articles on Africa, over the years, including one that looked closely at race problems in 'the new Africa'[29] and he was vocal in his support of the three kings when they came to England in 1895, acting alongside his young son Harold as their interpreter. Both father and son played important roles in the three-month long visit,

[28] 'A Trinity of Dusky Kings', *St James' Gazette*, 25 September 1895.

[29] William Charles Willoughby (1923) *Race Problems in the New Africa*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

and were integral in its success. Newspapers of the day admiringly made mention of young Harold and his fluency in Setswana, and this would have endeared the touring group to the general public.

Suchitra Chatterjee with Scobie Lekhutile.

It needs to be noted that the three kings visit to the UK in 1895 more than likely played a significant role in ensuring that Botswana was spared much of the horrors of apartheid (due to it being a British protectorate and not a colony) unlike other parts of Africa and so this rich, yet unsettling history has much to offer with regard to its connections to Brighton, primarily because of this visit and of course because of the many artefacts held at the Museum.

The Willoughby/African Collection is a major player in the decolonisation and repatriation debate, just as much as the Elgin Marbles or Benin Bronzes are. For some, especially in local communities, the easy answer would be to 'give it all back' but this is logistically impossible for a variety of reasons at this moment in time. The work that Brighton Museum has been doing with the Khama III Memorial Museum in Botswana over the last few years is a real tribute to what can be done, rather than what won't be done.

A positive way forward could be the development of evolving strategies and tactics where communities - especially those with a vested interest in the Willoughby/African Collection - get together with the museums and ensure that the legacy of the three kings is never forgotten through joined up working in the creation of an interactive digitised exhibition. This might not be repatriation as we know it, but it would be a start, running alongside the work already taking place between Brighton and Botswana.

We cannot change the past but we can endeavour to be partners in a new beginning.

Contemporary Collection

Inbal Livne and Nicola Stylianou

The Powell-Cotton Collection has been a 'closed collection' for some years, meaning that it has not collected any new material since 2013. After the 1950s (when the Powell-Cottons made their last contributions to the collection) the Museum did continue to acquire African objects and collections from a variety of sources, but no targeted collecting has taken place. While we were concerned that acquiring new objects replicated the extractive processes of the colonial period, we also felt that it was important to include contemporary Ovambo material culture and voices in the gallery space. Tresia Shekudja, who was interviewed about the historic collection for the Making African Connections (MAC) project, was keen for contemporary Kwanyama culture to be represented within UK museums. Both her commitment to representing Ovambo culture in the UK and her skill as a maker of contemporary beadwork were inspirations for this project.

We hope to achieve several things with this new collection:

- place contemporary Ovambo people and voices at the centre of the gallery;

- devote space to objects that were commissioned specifically with self-representation in mind;

- make clear the historic nature of the current collection;

- create a 'way in' for local audiences who find the historic collection hard to engage with;

- create connections between communities here and in Namibia and foster a sense of empathy and understanding of both sameness and difference;

- empower those represented in the Museum and those engaging with the collections to have more open discussions about the sometimes-divisive nature of collecting practices in the past and think about the potentially more positive and inclusive roles collections, and museums can play in society today;

- test the Museum's new Collections Development Policy, which aims to de-centre the curatorial voice and give space for descendant communities to reflect on their own identities within the museum space and using the museum collection.

In order to meet the above aims and carry out the work in a fair and ethical way we needed a substantial budget. There were no plans for contemporary collecting included in the MAC project but we were keen to use the project as a springboard for further collaboration and to explore some of the ideas that were arising as a result of the work with the historic collection. We have received funding from Arts Council England: Inbal Livne led on the application but received substantial input from both Napandulwe Shiweda and Nicola Stylianou. The pre-existing relationships developed through MAC were crucial to developing this project and will be key to its successful delivery.

The plan we devised will involve commissioning objects from craftspeople in Northern Namibia and asking them to create objects that they feel represent themselves and their culture. Finding makers has relied on Shiweda's extensive experience of working on heritage projects in the region and she will be central to the commissioning process. The making of the objects, and interviews with the makers will be filmed by Erasmus Stephanus, a local filmmaker who has previously worked as a research assistant to the MAC project. The filmmaking is as important to the plans as the objects themselves as it offers the opportunity to bring voices into the gallery and for the makers to talk about their culture in their own words, on their own terms. This will be a permanent display, which we hope will embed the lived experiences and knowledge of descendant communities as a crucial part of how we understand and think about our collections. A substantial budget for translation has been included, learning from the MAC project which did not budget adequately for translation. As well as being responsible for commissioning the objects Shiweda will also have a key role to play in creating the display at the Powell-Cotton Museum. She will travel to the UK to spend a week working on the display and preparing interpretation of these objects once they have been made.

These plans are currently on hold as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic but we hope the commissioning can happen a year later than planned in April 2021. We welcome thoughts and feedback to help us improve our plans.

List of project partners, advisors and others

Advisory Board

Caroline Bressey	University College London
Michael Cooke	Arts Council England
Penny Dale	Freelance broadcast journalist
Julie Hudson	British Museum

University of Sussex

James Baker	Digital Humanities Lab
JoAnn McGregor	School of Global Studies
Nicola Stylianou	School of Global Studies

Brighton Museum & Art Gallery and Botswana Partners

Suchitra Chatterjee	Brighton and Hove Black History
Rachel Heminway Hurst	The Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust
Gase Kediseng	Khama III Memorial Museum, Botswana
Kathleen Lawther	Consultant
Scobie Lekhuthile	Khama III Memorial Museum, Botswana
Helen Mears	The Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust
Neil Parsons	Consultant
Tshepo Skwambane	Consultant, Diverse Community Empowerment Services
Winani Thebele	National Museums of Botswana
Bert Williams	Brighton and Hove Black History

Powell-Cotton Museum and Namibia Partners

Inbal Livne	Powell-Cotton Museum
Napandulwe Shiweda	Consultant, University of Namibia

Royal Engineers Museum and Sudan Partners

Reem al-Hilou	Consultant, El Mahdiyya NGO
Rebecca Blackburn	Royal Engineers Museum
Fergus Nicoll	Consultant
Osman Nusairi	Consultant
Danielle Sellers	Royal Engineers Museum

Wikimedian in Residence

Kelly Foster	Consultant

Appendix:

Research conducted

The research planned was multifaceted: we investigated the historical contexts of collection through archives and oral histories; the meanings the collections held today for descendant communities, and the collections' display histories.

Botswanan contexts and collections

(Thebele, Lekhutile, Kediseng, Skwambane, McGregor, Stylianou, Heminway Hurst, Chatterjee, Lawther)

The research involved several components: 1) a two-week visit to the UK by Botswana partners (Lekhutile and Thebele) in January 2019. Lekhutile, Thebele and Skwambane conducted preliminary interpretational research with the 19th-century artefacts in Brighton. This was followed by archival research in Birmingham (William Charles Willoughby's personal papers), SOAS (focussed on correspondence with the London Missionary Society) (Thebele, McGregor, Stylianou), and in Brighton archives (Chatterjee); 2) Research in Iziko Museums, Cape Town, investigating Botswanan artefacts and archives related to Botswana and Willoughby (Thebele, one week, April 2019); 3) Research in the Keep, Brighton (Chatterjee); 4) Research in Botswana, August 2019 involving: a) two weeks of archival research by Stylianou and McGregor in the Botswana National Archives and Botswana National Museum plus oral history research in Serowe with Lekhutile, Kediseng and Thebele; b) research by Brighton Museum (Skwambane and Heminway Hurst), a one-week visit to assess the display space in Serowe for the loan, film interviews with craft-makers and undertake contemporary collecting (the latter focused on objects of fashion and adornment, basketry and woodwork). Further research is planned for 2021 to assess Botswanan publics' response to the collections on display at the Khama III Memorial Museum.

Namibian contexts and collections

(Stylianou, Shiweda, Livne)

The research involved a visit to the UK on the part of Napandulwe Shiweda in February 2019 to undertake research in the Powell-Cotton Museum, and joint oral history research in Namibia by Shiweda and Stylianou in August 2019 including a trip to Northern Namibia where the objects originated, and email/online correspondence over interpretational issues over the course of the project. Archival research in the Powell-Cotton Museum was conducted by Stylianou: this involved cataloguing material for the first time, transcribing diaries, ordering photographs and linking them with objects and texts. Further research in 2021 is planned.

Sudanese contexts and collections

(Al-Hilou, Nicoll, Nusairi)

The research included: 1) research in UK museum archives and interpretation of artefacts/texts primarily those in the Royal Engineers, but also some work documenting Mahdist artefacts across British museums; 2) oral histories and other interviews in Sudan in February 2020. All three members of the team were involved in the UK museums research, as well as the Sudan research.