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ENGAGING COLLECTIONS: *LIBETSHU* IN THE NICOLAAS JACOBUS VAN WARMELO COLLECTION, DITSONG NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CULTURAL HISTORY, SOUTH AFRICA

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Science, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg for the degree of Master of Science

February 2025

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Science at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Yola Nzimela



07/ 03 / 2025 at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to myself. May my efforts reap great results.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my supervisor, Dr Catherine Namono, for the constant guidance and motivation throughout this project. I am truly grateful to God for your presence in my academic life. I will always keep my eye on the ball. May God bless you in abundance. To my dear friend Kgolagano Vena, thank you for all your good cheer and assistance with some aspects of this study.

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To my mother, I say thank you so much for your constant support and persistently pushing me to go beyond my perceived limitations. I am grateful for your honest opinions, always guiding me to shift my perspectives and see the glass half-full rather than half-empty. I love you loads.

To my twin, thank you for embracing this journey with me, this exciting adventure; for offering unwavering support and understanding as I navigated through my writing challenges. You graciously helped me overcome these. You have always accepted my peculiar passions and provided solace during difficult times and good cheer when things went well. Thank you for always motivating me. Your advice and assistance are deeply valued.

My Mother(s), father and the whole family, thank you for your constant support and check-ins.

ABSTRACT

This thesis broadly examines curatorial practice of African ritual material culture within museum and related institutional collections in South Africa. Specifically, I focus on divination material known as *libetshu*, or *Mankgwanyana,* heir looms, in the Nicolaas van Warmelo collection, the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, Pretoria, South Africa. Although many communities from which ritual objects such as these divination materials originate still revere them as sacred, there is a lack of meaningful inclusion of source communities in curatorial decision-making mainly due to elitist or Eurocentric perspectives on culture due to colonial legacies and/or where curatorial practices reside with Western-trained professionals. Globally and locally, limited accurate archival contextual data about such divination material constrains connecting the objects to source communities. This thesis therefore sought to enhance understanding of *libetshu /Mankgwanyana* as ritually activated divination material, to encourage appropriate curation that takes cognisance of their spiritual significance for communities that hold them sacred. Through use-wear analysis, semi-structured interviews with traditional practitioners and curators, and a curatorial justice framework, I show that *libetshu / Mankgwanyana* are divination materials used in ritual performances, are spiritual and require specific handling and curation. I find that whilst co-curation with source communities and stakeholders is essential, a blanket approach for ritual objects is insufficient as each divination material belongs to different ancestral lineages. These findings highlight the importance of epistemic restitution and demonstrate the effectiveness of a curatorial justice approach that promotes sensitive, respectful, and appropriate curatorial practices cognisant of the integrity of divination materials such as *libetshu / Mankgwanyana* in collections.

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NOMENCLATURE

TKH -Traditional Knowledge Holder

Abbreviation

DNMCH-Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History

DASC- Department of Arts and Culture

ICOM- International Council on Monuments

ICOMOS-International Council on Monuments and sites

NHCA- National Heritage Council Act

NMP- National Museum Policy

NHRA- National Heritage Resources Act

UNESCO- United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WSA- Witchcraft Suppression Act

Definitions

Umhlahlo (in isizulu) refers to divination where a diviner *mhlahli* asks the divining material questions and receives a response from it. The divining tool is connected to the diviner and a specific energy field.

Umuthi (in isizulu) refers to traditional medicine.

Isikhwama (in isizulu) is a purse with ancestral materials in a physical context; the spiritual context is a spiritual bag that possesses gifts bestowed to the owner by their ancestor(s) and their creator.

Mwari (in Shona) or *uNkulunkulu* (in isizulu) refers to God, creator of all things living and dead

UkuGcaba (in isizulu) refers self-mutilation with incisions on the skin for various purposes.

CHAPTER 1: SITUATING THE MATERIAL

Introduction

This study draws on an ancestral material in the Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo (hereafter, van Warmelo) collection in the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History of South Africa (hereafter, DNMCH), to explore the significance of curatorial justice when curating divination objects in collections. Such an approach prioritizes the spirituality of objects and encourages co-curation with object source communities. Divination material culture in collections are thought to be 'dormant' having been acquired through looting, coercion or confiscation in violation of Legislative Acts during colonial times and stored in institutional archives such as DNMCH. Divination material culture in these contexts often remain silenced, inactive, and disconnected from their owners due to inadequate contextual archival data. This poses a significant challenge for curators seeking to approach these objects in an indigenous and culturally sensitive manner. Understanding South African museums' colonial history and its impact on collections is crucial for culturally sensitive curation. I sought to propose curation guidelines for divination materials in collections to guarantee the preservation of indigenous cultural practices and associated beliefs. I used a mixed methods approach involving analysis of historical records, conduct semi-structured interviews and use-wear object analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the life history and context of a divination object known as *libetshu*. Hereafter in this study the term 'ancestral material' will be used instead of the commonly used term, 'object'. The term 'ancestral material' emphasizes the notion that the now deceased original owners of the materials used these in a context involving ancestors.

Ancestral material

The ancestral material in Figure 1 of this study frames the context in which to examine curation of similar material based on curatorial justice. Described by van Warmelo as *libetshu* and *mankxwanyana* on the attached archival label, suggests that it was taken in Sibasa, Tshivhase, in present -day Limpopo Province. The ancestral material is held together by a leather string threaded through a wooden stick, one thread has red and white beads and another has blue. When not in use, the parts are folded (compacted) together; when in use, the ancestral object is held on one side, allowing it to open up and expand in a zig zag manner whilst held up.



Label reads - "Lazy tongs type of divinatory instrument. Confiscated at Sibasa 1939 from Venda diviner. Venda name *libetshu* (comparatively modern), not a Venda object, but Sotho (they call it *mankxwanyana*). Repaired by me. Note 2 catholic

Figure 1: Object ETH 8952 (Images: Taken by author in 2023)

Aim and objectives

The DNMCH houses several divination materials currently curated along a Western-curatorial ethic. This study sought to use *libetshu* as a focus to develop curatorial protocols for the ancestral materials in DNMCH, which could also be implemented by other institutions with similar materials.

Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- obtain a contextual understanding of curatorial practises of ancestral material such as *libetshu* in DNMCH;
- compare this with information on contextual curation of *libetshu* based on interviews with traditional practitioners/Indigenous Knowledge holders; and
- propose curatorial practice that takes cognisance of the sensitivity of ancestral material in collections.

Research Problem

Often, ancestral materials in museums lack accurate contextual data relating to source communities, name or function subsequently, there is a blanket curation ethic that ignores their (sometimes active) spiritual dimension (Mostamayi 2020; Hoeane & McGinn 2021:3).

Such materials are curated in the same manner as other materials within the collection; they currently possess the uncanny Eurocentric narratives of what South African spirituality, and its practitioners entail. Disassociating these divining materials from their original provenance potentially negatively impacts the diviner and their descendants as many of these materials are meant to be passed down generationally (Iqoqo discussion: Makhubedu Pers. Comm January 2024). Therefore, a curatorial justice is required to restore the dignity of the spirituality of ancestral materials through their curation. Whether a curatorial justice approach is a panacea for the challenges of curating ancestral material in collections, or it produces new challenges as well, is what this study sought to resolve.

Research Question

Is curatorial justice a useful framework for the curation of ancestral materials such as *libetshu* in DNMCH?

Rationale

Ancestral materials in institutional collections are obtained through various ways, but mainly through pillage (Seabela 2024), and confiscation. The contextual information of these materials is usually limited if not non-existent (Mostamayi 2020; Hoeane & McGinn 2021), making it difficult to curate them according to their previous provenance and/or indigenous curatorial practices (Kreps 2005) as one cannot accurately curate materials that they lack knowledge of. There may be culturally sensitive materials in ritualistic collections that must be curated culturally (Clavir 1996; Herle 1999; Rouvier 2011). Culturally sensitive curatorial practices may restore respect and honour for the source communities from which the materials in the museums come from (Onciul 2018; Chipangura 2020).

Expected Outcomes

A curatorial justice protocol that museums might use is the expected outcome of this study. Where there are comparable collections, other museums in South Africa and elsewhere can adopt a similar strategy. This study will attempt to contextualize libetshu in the DNMCH.

Contextual Background

Museums inherently reflected the social and political position of their communities; consequently, colonialism and apartheid were represented through the collections and

exhibitions in South African museums. The museum collections that are argued to represent the heritage of African communities either lacked contextual information or depicted racist and non-progressive ideologies. Numerous museums store ancestral possessions that are curated using Western Museum practices (Vitshima 2019; Chipangura 2020). Curation in this context means the process of collecting, labelling, exhibiting, preserving and lastly the methodology of handling material cultural objects. These practices do not account for the multifaceted and intangible aspects of ancestral possessions, that may be present due to their previous context of being active divining materials that would result in them being culturally sensitive and potentially having intangible value(s) (Chipangura 2020; Hoeane & McGinn 2021). There is a gap in community engagement in co-curatorial practices with museum collections (Reilly 2019; Mostamayi 2020).

Curatorial justice for ancestral possessions in museums may ensure that cultural, and spiritual practices and beliefs that give the material significance are considered in their curation (Herle 1999; Kreps 2006; Campolmi 2016; Onciul 2018; Chipangura 2020). Community involvement is crucial for curatorial justice to occur (Chipangura 2020; Namono 2021). The Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History (hereafter DNMCH) houses a divination collection of objects from all over southern Africa and includes a *libetshu*, the focus of this study. A mixed-method approach was employed to investigate whether a curatorial justice framework can be used in museums.

Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History

The South African Republic State Museum, Staats Museums, was created in 1892 and founded by the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) government. They were mostly Dutch speakers who travelled from the Cape under British rule in 1806, settled and forcefully took over occupied areas of the Transvaal area and other parts of South Africa (Bergh 2000). The museum aimed to bring to life the ideologies of Afrikaans nationalism and imperialism (Van Schalkwyk 2014:1,15), their first objective was the collection of ethnological, fauna and flora collections (Grobler 1996). Their collections consisted of what the state considered as national heritage as well as the heritage of those they desired to colonize (Ibid; Shapera 1939). The museum was used by the government as a tool in racial politics, and as a result, they perpetuated colonial racial ideologies and depicted them in their exhibitions (Masiteng 2019).

The Anthropology archive

The Market Square Museum in Pretoria collected, preserved and exhibited artefacts of general and historical significance (Grobler, 1996;2006; Van Schalkwyk 2000). The year 1964 marked the year of separation and the current name was adopted (Seabela 2024). The collection of African relics was already in motion through anthropological and ethnological fieldwork[1], however, there was a drop in anthropological and ethnological collection expeditions in 1983 as African communities refusing to give up their material culture (Van Schalkwyk 2014:11). The call to collect materials on behalf of the museum was made by the museum's director in 1894; missionaries and colonial authorities assisted in collecting, and the museum urged command generals to utilize their influence to acquire objects (Glober 1996:4).

The then curator, Mr. Raddciffe-Brown, appointed in January-July 1921 (Van Schalkwyk 2000:85), received some of his collections through his request for donations of material culture from magistrates, administrators and others through his field expeditions (Van Schalkwyk 2000:84). Dr Beukes, another curator, also added to the collection through his fieldwork expeditions to Transkei (now, Eastern Cape), Transvaal area-Sekhukhune land and Venda land (present-day Limpopo province), Mrs. Teinie Jacobs-Ventor, in her capacity as Professional Officer for Anthropology, effectively utilized her professional network to secure donations of material collections from state agents, comprising of police stations and administrative authorities, thereby enriching the institution's collections (Seabela 2024:4). Collections received from authoritative figures, especially in the context of colonialism and apartheid must be considered as part of a problematic collection due to the unequal levels of power between the transactors.

The contextual information accompanying most of these collections was poor and followed no strategic method as materials were being collected by different types of people, in different contexts and then donated to the institution (Van Schalkwyk 2000:85). The archive itself is extremely diverse with some materials being sold and donated to it from higher education institutions that also lack adequate documentation (Seabela 2024:4).

[1] "Union Government, which in 1925 created an Ethnological Section of the Native Affairs Department" (Shapera 1939: 97)

During the 1980's when the line between the Western and African collections became increasingly blurred due to societal changes and influences, the museums decided to decentralise "traditional objects" (Van Schalkwyk 2014:12), moving to curating more contemporary materials and exhibitions (Ibid). From this time onwards, the themes surrounding exhibitions were contemporary and of diverse backgrounds (Van Schalkwyk 2014:12-14).

Chapter outlines

Chapter one introduces the material in the study, the *Libetshu*, and provides contextual background to the research concepts including objectives, rationale, research question, and the expected outcomes. The study is framed through the social and political period within which museums emerged in southern Africa and gives specific background information on the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, its anthropology archive and a brief history of collection and curation. Furthermore, it provides background information on the previous owner of the object of study found within a collection by Dr Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo; and expands on his influence in the social studies and politics of southern Africa. Lastly, this chapter frames the study within post-colonial and New Museology thought, that informs the desired curatorial justice framework, to structure, support and engage with the study.

The literature review in chapter two, provides the historical evolution of museum practice and heritage legislation in South Africa; the context of colonial history and how this has influenced the curation processes of contemporary museums. A correlation between heritage materials and the historical impact of legislative frameworks on the curation of South African heritage (especially collections) and its evolution to accommodate shifting ideologies and social contexts. I argue that colonial curatorial frameworks disassociated objects in many ways, making it hard for contemporary curators to begin a process of re-connecting such materials. I argue that criminalization of traditional practices during colonial (including apartheid times) was deliberate and influenced the current curatorial approaches to divination materials in museums and related institutions.

In addition, chapter two briefly reflects upon concepts that suggest how museums are beginning to recognise and include cultural diversity and beliefs of previously marginalised groups through object narration and representation. The increased participation of these previously marginalised communities in co-curation is emphasized.

In chapter three, the study methodology, data-collecting techniques, and analytical methodologies that include a mixed-methods strategy, integrating qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analysis modalities are outlined. This study employed an object biographical approach to investigate the material culture, their curation and the role of community engagement in museums. Data collecting methods encompassed surveys, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and the examination of sources such as accession records. Emerging issues from the interviews, questionnaires and content analysis were identified and limitations of the data collected are explained.

Chapters four and five provide data analysis, results and discussion, respectively. They locate *libetshu* within a museum context and provide a nuanced understanding of DNMCH's curatorial practices and guidelines as well as those of the Wits Art Museum. The results indicate a curatorial change towards a contextual community-centered epistemic restitutive approach for DNMCH and related institutions with ancestral material / divination objects in their collections.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In South Africa, like many other parts of the world that were colonised, legislative enactments were used as a means to forcibly entrench the ideologies of the empire, exploit the colony 'legally'. The forceful extraction of material culture items and their deposition into collections that formed the basis of museums and the backbone that entrenched colonial superiority on colonised communities. Museum practice and heritage legislation in South Africa within the context of colonial and apartheid era, influenced the curation processes of contemporary museums. This literature review attempts to show how criminalization of traditional practices during colonial and apartheid times intentionally inspired contemporary curatorial approaches to divination materials in museums and related institutions in South Africa. I begin with the legislative enactments.

Colonial-Apartheid Legislative Acts

Since the seventeenth century, indigenous South African societies have been evaluated through Eurocentric social and moral standards and assessed based on their political systems (Van de Merwe 2012; Burchardt 2017). The depiction of indigenous customs and beliefs, along with their practitioners, is influenced by European notions of witchcraft, defined as the manipulation of nature for the practitioner's advantage (Mesaki 1995:163; Wallace 2015). This perspective is rooted in their interpretation of their own witchcraft practices (Mesaki 1995:162-164), and from their Christian perspective, is perceived as a direct repudiation of the Christian God and church (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991; Mesaki 1995:162-164; Munyai 2016). The imposition and criminalization of indigenous societies' practices occurred through the enactment of Witchcraft Suppression Acts, which were influenced by the Witchcraft Act of 1735 from Great Britain. The Act referenced the repealed Witchcraft Suppression Acts of 1886 and 1895, as well as the Transvaal Witchcraft Ordinance of 1904. They are substituted by the active Witchcraft Suppression Act No. 3 of 1957.

The enactment of these Acts, in conjunction with racist evolutionary theories, propagated the notion that individuals who engaged in or adhered to beliefs outside of Christianity were socially regressive, uncivilized, and inferior, maintaining these identities through ongoing participation in such practices (Garbutt 1909:531; Manganyi & Buitendag 2013). Garbut effectively illustrates the exaggerated representations of spiritual intermediaries by

missionaries, native commissioners, and scholars as deceitful (Garbutt 1909:535), “Heathens” (Garbut 1909:531) who are “haunted by the ghosts of their ancestors and by all sorts of goblins...” (Ibid), asserting that they were regarded with fear (Comaroff 1998). These distorted tales and perceptions continue to prevail in current South African societies about indigenous practitioners as a community, as well as their heirlooms.

Neither Indigenous community members nor chiefs or spiritual leaders were consulted or involved in the implementation of the witchcraft suppression Acts, resulting in a discernible theme of cultural ignorance in the language and objectives of the Acts as a whole. The legislation criminalized the mere belief in witchcraft, together with the acts of witch hunting and witch detection (WSA). The legislation fails to explicitly specify what constitutes a witchdoctor (Hund 2000); in reality, the act criminalizes the practice of witchcraft and "similar practices." This statement permits interpretation and assumption. And unfortunately section 1(f) criminalizes one who “pretends to exercise any [ ] enchantment or conjuration, or undertakes to tell fortunes, or pretends from his skill in or knowledge of any occult science to discover where and in what manner anything was supposed to have been stolen or lost may be found” This statement implies the inclusion of indigenous spiritual intercessors, as it encapsulates their role in advocating for themselves and their communities. The legislation intentionally fails to distinguish between witchcraft and indigenous spiritual practices, effectively criminalizing the latter. I concur with Hund (2000) in his assertion that these actions were re-nationalized to guarantee the efficacy of cultural imperialism. These concepts and actions supported segregation, including the Native Urban Areas Act No. 21 of 1923.

Regrettably for spiritual intercessors, the knowledge attained from anthropological and ethnological studies, scholars, missionaries, on the importance of San, Khoekhoe, and Bantu’s spiritual beliefs and of spiritual practitioners’ integral part of ensuring social and political wellness for societies (Eiselen 1932; Krige1936/1965; Prins & Lewis 1992; Hammond-Tooke 1995; Potgieter 1955; Watt & van Warmelo 1930; Hollmann 2022; Sinclair-Thomson & Challis 2020:277-280)[2] were perceived as a challenge by State bureaucrats tasked with the establishment and preservation of the empire. Spiritual

[2] Hollman 2022 reiterates and expands from Bleek, D.F. 1935. Customs and Beliefs of the! Xam Bushmen. Part Seven. *Bantu Studies*, *9*(1): 1-48.

intercessors were the backbone of Chieftaincies, serving as trustworthy courtiers of the royal palace (Kgatla 2004:88). They advised Chiefs on welfare issues related to their domains and provided spiritual intervention (Esterhuysen 2006); both the magician and the chief, as noted by Shapera (1939), were significant to the empire. The objectives of the government and missionaries would have been jeopardized by their assessment of social, environmental, resource, and spiritual adversities (Munyai 2016). The repercussions of these Acts were volatile as communities perceived the government's legislation as overlooking individuals who inflict harm through supernatural methods, due to its criminalization of the "pretence" of witchcraft (Witchcraft Suppression Act no. 3 of 1975; Tshamano 2005:25-30). Consequently, they tried to solve this issue informally, resulting in a surge of witch hunts and executions (Hund 2000). Spiritual intercessors and elderly women were frequently attacked (Kgatla 2004:90) in the Northern Provinces, where the former Transvaal was established, which has the most serious cases of witch hunts and killings (Minaar *et al.* 1991; Delius 2001). Consequently, the WSA was amended to encompass the regulation of witch hunts (Tshamano 2005).

These legislative instruments were exclusively enacted by colonial administrators and commissioners (Native Administrative Act no. of 1972; Tshamano 2005). Bannister's portrayal of *umhlahlo*, which involves spiritual intercession in criminal cases and investigations in Zululand during the 1980s, substantiates this assertion. He notes that permission had to be sought from a police station commander in Pretoria (Bannister 2007:39) where the department of Native affairs was located (Herbst 1930). However, according to section 1(f), divining through methods similar *umhlahlo* was deemed criminal. The accused were arrested or fined, and their divining materials were seized. Some materials were thus collected upon request of the curator into the context of museums (Seabela 2024:4). One may never know the true nature of material cultural transactions as at times they are often concealed through terminology that suggests ethical transactions between the owner and taker (Seabela 2024:5-6) The ethics and context surrounding collections of ancestral heirlooms should be considered as uncertain as no spiritual intercessor who is actively using their divining heirlooms who would give them up freely (Seabela 2024).

Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo: moving pawns, shaping policy and heritage

The Native Administrative Affairs created an Ethnology wing in 1925 which had two-fold purposes; one for scientific and academic endeavours and the other for advisory to serve for

practical ends of the Native administration (Rizzo 2000:190) An ethnologist of interest in Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo (van Warmelo).

A South African linguist, anthropologist and Chief Ethnologist for the Department of Native Affairs (later known as, the Department of Bantu Administration and Development), van Warmelo, born in Pretoria in 1904 (Coertze 1989; Evans 1997; Lekgoathi 2009; Daries 2020:23) began his tertiary education after matriculating in 1921 at the University of Stellenbosch, where he completed his Bachelor of Arts and Masters of Art in Classical Languages. From 1925 to 1928, he studied at Hamburg University in Germany, obtaining a summa cum laude doctorate in Anthropology and Bantu languages (Coertze 1989; Daries 2020). His passing in 1989 was considered a loss to the Volke community (Daires 2020:33) Majority of his work was done in his position as a government ethnologist in 1930 and served in this capacity for over 30 years.

As Chief Ethnologist from 1930 to 1969 (Coertze 1989), and advisor to the administrative department, van Warmelo's work was instrumental to the Apartheid state's plan to obtain knowledge of the African population and subsequently control them (Daries 2020:39). This, van Warmelo did willingly through his publications, fieldwork and advisories (Rizzo 2000:190-191). Tooke's assertion of neutrality in his work is undermined by the State's recognition (Rizzo 2000), for all his service to the state, he was honoured with the then prestigious State President's Order of Excellent Service (Class1: Gold) by the Apartheid government in 1987 (Ibid.). His work served a strategic manoeuvre to forward the oligarchic government's agenda of successful imperialism and the subsequent establishment of an apartheid society. van Warmelo's scholarship addressed tactics of chieftaincy succession, genealogy, and overarching political dynamics, primarily advising the NAD on these matters (Rizzo 2000). Furthermore, both van Warmelo and the then government recognized the vital interdependent relationship between the success of the Chieftaincies—and, by extension, the community—and their customs and practices, which hold intangible significance for the maintenance, success, and wellbeing of the chieftaincy (Lestrade 1940; Mulaudzi 2020:27).

The enactment of the Witchcraft Suppression Acts, along with the prohibition of divining tools and materials utilized in indigenous practices, constituted an indirect yet forceful strategy to undermine chieftaincy structures by marginalizing spiritual intercessors, diminishing the authority of chiefs, and eliminating symbols of resistance (Mataga &

Chabati 2012). Materials obtained through these methods were acquired legally but from unethical motives of control. The power dynamics between colonial commissioners and Indigenous South Africans, particularly spiritual intercessors, were characterized by inequality, both socially and politically. Consequently, the context of collections acquired under these historical circumstances must be regarded as ambiguous, as the genuine context of disassociation remains obscure, particularly concerning *isikhwama*, which no practicing spiritual intercessor would willingly relinquish (Seabela 2024).

van Warmelo's extensive work in the Native Administrative Department is purposefully omitted from academic papers (Rizo 2000:205), hence we are limited to critiquing him through his publications, fieldwork and written information about him. There is a need to re-examine van Warmelo's material cultural collections in a new light and enquire about the authenticity of his portrayals of authentic cultures from 1927-1964. Darie 2020's "Visualizing Volkekunde: Photography in the Mainstream and Dissident Tradition of Afrikaner Ethnology" assesses van Warmelo's privileged external projections onto the communities that he was examining and their material collections through photography and portrays a great example of what could be found in the examination of the cultural materials he has collected.

Daries (2020:35) argues that he portrays the inauthentic depiction of cultures free of external influences, which is incorrect. Ranger (1983) asserts that African societies exhibit boundless adaptability, even within their cherished customs and traditions, there is evidence of change. For example, glass beads are commonly used in association with depicting identity and ethnicity (and are also found on the Libetshu); they are evidence of social influences from external global traders as early as around AD 1020-116 within the Iron Age (Sibudu Cave) occupation (Wood *et al.* 2009). Nzimela (2021) also highlights the global and local influence of the glass bead trade in the creation of iPhephethu, iRhabi and iPhotho materials. Van Schalkwyk (2014:11) corroborates this stating that visible influences from Western culture was already visible in the 17th Century, amongst other things the political climate of the 18th-20th century was such that individuals joined politically and socio-economically beneficial societies and then either adapted or assimilated and/ or carried on their own cultures within that society (Esterhuysen 2006:108-117). Ultimately, the apartheid system itself prompted several alterations in the identification of various communities and their limits via the Department of Native Affairs (Herbst 1930:484). Consequently, van Warmelo's depiction of

stable pure tribes integrated influences from global, regional, and local societies. Nonetheless, he successfully established ethnic identities, differences and institutions of tribal governance through massive collections of material culture and display of African people through cultural re-enactments (Daries 2020:39). He also attempted to do this in his portrayals of beliefs and divination apparatuses (Letsoala 1940). He valued physical aspect of the materials and in terms of context description he valued the tribal affiliation, language and geographical location (Daries 2020:40) from which the material comes. This is what constituted the contextual information of the material. Majority of his collected materials find themselves in various museum archives all over South Africa, there is therefore a need for them to be re-examined and ensure these skewed depictions do not get carried into contextual societies and a need for curatorial justice for ancestral heirlooms collected under suspicious contexts.

Museums and a legacy of collecting

Museums are seen as powerful tools that reflect the societies that developed them, and as authentic depictions of history, society, culture, and identity, and thus their representations often go unchallenged (Maranda 2021:5), which can be dangerous. Museum narratives about societies have been shaped by anthropological, ethnological, and archaeological materials collected during fieldwork expeditions, where researchers have assumed authority over the interpretation of the society or ancient site under study (Maranda 2021:4). The accompanying exhibit narratives often draw upon field notes and anthropological information (Ibid), which, however, can be prone to misrepresentation due to the subjective nature of these accounts (Sheperd 1998; Ndoro 2001). The foundational concept of museums was to assemble and showcase diverse material cultures deemed "exotic," which were curated by societal elites. This is rooted in elitist practices and the historical tradition of cabinets of curiosity (Henning 2020; Maranda 2021:2,5).

South African heritage reflects the three different historical and political eras; colonialism, apartheid and the democratic. European colonialism commenced in 1910-1948, at this time heritage was curated from a Eurocentric point of view to uphold and depict European hegemony and white supremacy (Mdanda 2016). Heritage legislation only protected what Europeans deemed as heritage which were erected monuments[3] and statues (Ndlovu 2011)

[3] Natural, Historical and Monuments Act (no 6 of 1923) (repealed)

that depicted colonial conquest on behalf of the British Empire. The legislation excluded heritage that did not fit the scope, which included: cultural sites, relics and objects, this excluded a large majority of Indigenous societies' heritage. In 1948 the National Party came into government and institutionalised Apartheid (Van Schalkwyk 2014:15), socio-politically, racial politics and segregation were at an all-time high with the ruling party aiming to instil Afrikaner nationalism (Grobler 2006; Mdanda 2016).

Many archaeological materials collected from the 1890s to the 1930's was part of collection expeditions that would be used as proof of the disappearing native culture due to the introduction of Western civilization (Mataga & Chabata 2012). Cultural materials of indigenous societies were acquired to reaffirm racial ideologies that pushed the idea of "primitiveness" in indigenous societies and to advance the colonial system (Mostamayi 2020) by asserting Western cultures as more progressive than other non-wester cultures and to push their idea of supremacy (Daries 2024). Materials that did not depict 'authentic' tribal communities were discarded; this includes materials that depicted the Eurocentrically projected "modernism" (Grobler 1996:12). This put these collections at a disadvantage as they were decontextualised, introduced into museums and at times in contexts where they were deliberately undervalued, consequently, this misconstrued people's history through the narration of heritage from Eurocentric perspective (Motsamayi 2020:449).

Ancestral material and Western blinders

Material culture, such as ancestral heirlooms are bound by attitudes of their owners and ancestral lineage, which places an obligation on how people interact with them and their owner(s) (Gosden 2005; Mostamayi 2020; Pers. Comm Madzivhe 2024). Ancestral heirlooms stem from their respective social systems, which may be influenced by informal, individual values or cultural norms. These systems establish the identity, functions, regulations, and social boundaries associated with these materials (Kopytoff 1986; Godsen 2005; Motsamayi 2020). Upon their introduction to the formal institution of a museum, they are simultaneously exposed to the colonial and imperialistic system of commodification (Kopytoff 1986). In this exchange, value, identity, and other traits irrelevant to the new value system are relinquished; they get new value, and methods of management that correspond accordingly, and are ultimately assimilated into that formal system. They become "matters out of place" (Drazin 2020:73) when these materials deviate from their original, accepted bounds and rules, which

challenges the social norms in which they are currently situated. In this context, the challenged societal norms and value system is the commonization ancestral heirlooms as ethnological, anthropological, and archaeological artifacts. Consequently, newly attributed systematic rules of western curation are enforced upon the material including authority over the matters of handling, access and narration.

In non-Western societies, material culture is frequently linked to social and cultural idolatry, totemism, animism, and spiritual beliefs prevalent in these cultures (Gosden 2005), which are typically dismissed in Western cultures (Kopytoff 1986). Consequently, such materials are influenced by these views and those of their owners, imposing a duty on how individuals engage with the object and its owner (Gosden 2005; Mostamayi 2020; Pers. Comm Madzivhe March 2024). In addition, some have practices that are associated with them and give them meaning (Clavir 2013).

Kreps (2005:4) argues that collectors and anthropologists unfortunately did not feel the need to invest in knowledge and understanding of the different documentation and curation practices that were attached to the material culture they'd invested in collecting from non-western societies; hence, the lack of inclusion of indigenous curatorial practices in western museology. Herle (1994) depicts that this is the same for ancestral heirlooms that may have been utilized in healing or ritual contexts, these heirlooms possess distinct curation procedures that adhere to their cultural sensitivities that preserve their potency throughout the curatorial process (Ibid). Herle argues that their introduction to the context of museum only pollutes the potency that lies dormant in the heirloom.

The new context does not accommodate the boundaries, rules, practices and the intangible aspects of ancestral heirlooms because in most cases they are unknown due to the context of exchange or deliberate omission. By neglecting these aspects, curators forfeit the opportunity to revitalize their significance, thereby precluding society from engaging with the rich history of their identities and understanding the historical forces that shaped the past through material culture.

Missing: mis-represented, mis-identified, mis-managed

Museum curatorial practices are informed by the museum's ideologies and thus reflect the authoritative society's ideologies. Traditionally, curation revolved around the collection, documentation, management, preservation, and display of materials collected. The 17th century taxonomy was introduced with the materials being systematically ordered according to their representation (Davison 1991). This practice was seen as the best way of ordering knowledge and things into categories. In the 18th to 20th centuries, especially in Southern African heritage institutions, this practice was intertwined with evolutionary ideologies where cultural heritage was used as a tool to explain racial and civilizational evolution, whereby indigenous societies and cultures were depicted as primitive and European societies and cultures were depicted as civilised (Davison 1991:9-12). In this context, historical materials were categorized as otherness in terms of cultures through the generalization of their materials from a Western perspective; these are thereafter regarded as aesthetics or material behaviours that reflect those societies (Said 1979:44).

These misrepresentations have been so deeply engraved in heritage, politics and culture creation and narration that they have been taken as the truth when in fact are a skewed narration of both heritage and identities. These are maintained through museum structures, for example; the DNMCH, maintained and perpetuated identities created through the lens of the state (Rodéhn 2008:30-33) by using ethnic terms on their labels and maintained unequal powers of representation through the employment of state supported employees (State Aided Institutions Amendment Act no 4 of 1954; Mazel 3013) who also maintained the depiction of otherness (Grobler 2006:77-96) and the depiction of Afrikaner nationalism. This limits and downplays the perspectives from which contemporary societies can understand their identities as well as material (Nzimela 2021).

Misidentification of material culture occurred through the cataloguing and description section of curation, many of the materials were and still are mis-labelled, re-interpreted and at times mis-interpreted (Grobler 1996; Chipangura 2020; Mostamayi 2020). Through issues of language barriers, the use of Western languages and application of foreign nomenclature in cataloguing, ethnological materials of Indigenous South African societies were captured from an etic perspective to accommodate the understanding and entertainment of the so-called elite for whom the museums were meant to serve.

These misrepresentations, identifications contributed to the alienation of material culture from their previous provenance resulting in mismanagement. Names or terminologies are an important aspect of African idioms and symbolisation that assess the essence, characteristics and functions of material culture (Echekwube 2005; Ohihon 2014:27). Often, African words possess varying meanings that are context dependent. Knowing the original context in which a word is used provides contemporary society with insights into the intangible aspects associated with the materials, enabling individuals to understand their current applications and their evolution over time. These aspects are crucial for contextualising the materials, serving as umbilical cords that connect present cultures to their historical roots and link many South Africans to their ancestral heritage and traditions.



Figure 2: The different ancestral heirlooms kept within storage cabinets within the DNMCH archive (Image by Nzimela 2022).

The absence of information in terms of intangible boundaries associated with ancestral heirlooms during the curation process leads to unintentional mismanagement and the intangible contamination and pollution of the material. At the DNMCH, these materials are all stored in archive compartments accessible only to curators, researchers and those knowledgeable of the museum's contents and formally request access.

In accordance with Western conservation and preservation ethics that prioritize maintenance of a material's authenticity for the next generation (Mairesse & Peters 2019:9), the materials are kept in a cool stable room temperature, prioritizing the physical integrity of the material. These practices often reinforce boundaries that prevent interaction with materials (Namono 2021:29) and perpetuate a fear of cultural materials being deaccessioned.
Museological structures do not accommodate indigenous curatorial practices and treatments that may have been created to protect not just the physicality of the material but the spiritual integrity (Kreps 2005:4). Nor do they have vast information on them, which makes it difficult for contemporary curators to re-curate ancestral heirlooms or other material culture using their previous provenance's indigenous knowledge ways.

Current policy drafts, despite striving for greater awareness of indigenous practices related to material culture, fall short in their accommodations. The National Policy on the Repatriation and Reconciliation of Human Remains and Heritage Objects (2021) primarily focuses on human remains and material culture associated with burials. However, ancestral heirlooms obtained through slavery, colonialism, and apartheid, which perpetuated distorted narratives fall into the category of material culture that have been acquired unethically (National Policy on the Repatriation and Reconciliation of Human Remains and Heritage Materials 2021:8), as argued previously. Consequently, they warrant inclusion in the list of items requiring possible repatriation and a re-evaluation of their current curation methods similarly to human remains, and material culture associated with burials.

Curatorial Justice

Curatorial justice refers to the practice of showing respect and applying principles of justice when selecting and organizing a community's cultural materials (Ahmed 2023) alongside the inclusion of indigenous curatorial practices in museum structures (Kreps 2005). The framework assigns the curator the obligation of aligning themselves with the values and ethics of community members and shaping the public's perception through curatorial choices. Kreps (2015) defines it as a social practice that entails the curation of materials to reflect the sociocultural interaction between the artist, owner(s), and user(s), enabling the understanding of material culture by examining the influence of the owner, social, cultural, and historical aspects on the formation of materials, this view is supported by Hodder (1985;1994). Hodder (1985:5) argues that this allows for the comprehension of underlying

principles such as the original owner's views, and classifications to be known when one interacts and analyses the material. Ultimately, curating the collections in a manner that accurately represents these aspects. In addition, it aims to redress colonial dynamics of exclusion by including community members in the curation of collections to facilitate their restoration. It can also uncover concealed histories and showcase cultural continuity (Sandell 2006; Chipangura 2020).

A post-colonial lens and curatorial justice

Curatorial justice is best understood through post-colonial and new museology frameworks that emerged as a reaction to historical inequalities, systemic bias and cultural misrepresentation, as well as an examination of the constraining structures proposed by colonial systems that emphasise experiences of the colonised (Rogerson 2017:35; Burney 2012; Zwane 2021).

A post-colonial approach to framing curatorial justice is useful to critically examine the context within which material culture and their contextual information, now in institutional collections were acquired. Post colonial theory is most suitable as it exposes the evil matrimony between the enlightenment and colonial period and how these have shaped what we call heritage and identities (Corsane 2004; Mazrui 2005). It aids us in challenging power structures that shaped the interpretation and display of Indigenous societies and communities' material culture within a Western curatorial ethic, as well as from a hierarchical scale of civility, sociality, and spirituality, positioning Western societies as progressively advanced (Said 1979:7-9).

Currently, the pathologized depictions of African lifeways, traditions, rituals and beliefs (Zwane 2021:25), and depiction of the authentic oriental society are inauthentic because they are constructed by the external occident. The Occident is an eternal power that imposed its cultural representation, economic models and political systems of governance as the ideal, over colonised societies. In the context of heritage, the Occident has power over the curation and narratives of the objects, emphasising the notion that this perspective is generally authentic. In this regard, the voices, histories, and heritage of previous and Indigenous societies are deflated, seen as irrational, mythical and sometimes primitive because they do not fit into the Western structures of knowledge (Zwane 2021). It is in this context that the

study examines the museum literature surrounding ethnological material collections and South African indigenous traditions and beliefs, understanding that there is a need to re-examine these narratives.

New museology and curatorial justice

The influence of political and social systems of colonialism on social studies has been criticised (Vollgraaff 2018:374; Maranda 2021:4); in conjunction, the role of museums, anthropological and ethnological archives and their practices in contemporary societies is highly questioned under New Museology (Ibid). This framework arose in the 1960s and 70's democratic movements. It acknowledges the authoritative, unequal power relations that are present in museum practices and allows for approaches that promote "community inclusivity", respect and equity irrespective of origin and beliefs" (Vollgraaff 2018:374).

It argued for a museum to be a safe space that is socially progressive by allowing diversity in participation (Ibid). The common change needed depicted is the museum's policies and methods being open to include cultural and heritage methods of curation that are non-western and release power of authority over material collection's curation (Kreps 2012). Community-led initiatives, acknowledging social connections, cultural variety, and beliefs object narration and representation (Kreps 2015; Vollgraaff 2018) are an amalgamation of things that constitute new museology. It allows for marginalized and current community members to participate in all elements of the museum to ensure cultural and historical authenticity and cultural continuation through extensive and meaningful collaborations (Scott 2012:4) which is like what I imagine would constitute a curatorial just framework. While attempting to portray a diverse but cohesive legacy, South African transformation policies must exercise caution to avoid repackaging colonial beliefs; as well as to be careful not to use co-curatorial and production projects as methods to pacify the issues that still linger. Furthermore, there is a need for well-defined protocols for managing living and intangible heritage (Rodéhn 2008).

Curatorial justice aims to redress curation issues depending on the requirements of the specific collection or the preferences of the community (Kreps 2003; Scott 2012). Transferral of curatorial authority to community members is required and allows for diverse perspectives on how the material in the study should be curated, opening the stage to also dispute ideologies and identities that were previously unchallenged. The framework sees everyone's voice and contribution as an asset. The downside is that it may lead to different views and end

goals due to the vastness of the community's overwhelming number of individuals contributing to the discourse (Rogers & Rock 2016; Reilly 2019), furthermore, it is sometimes hard to define what or who 'the community" is, since there are various ways to classify and describe community members (Reilly 2019).

The process of selecting and determining the authority over narratives included in museum projects can pose challenges, as museums are often responsible for verifying the authenticity, cultural integrity, and ethical accuracy of collaborative endeavours (Cornejo González 2019). Even if the cultural provenance is known, it is uncertain whether they possess the knowledge to save the historical material collections of their predecessors. There may be limitations such as power clashes between authoritative parties regarding curatorial procedures and goals which commonly leads to failure of projects (Reilly 2019).

In other cases, institutions are hesitant to delegate curatorial tasks to the community due to a perceived lack of curatorial expertise in certain groups (Rogers & Rock 2016:73). Arguments such as the lack of testing with new curation and preservation techniques and prioritization of cultural considerations (Clavir 1996:100) could compromise the preservation of the collections because it may not conform to scientifical methods usually implemented in museums.

Curating the intangible

Curatorial aspects of naming, describing, and handling (including conservation and preservation) of non-western ancestral heirlooms and other sensitive materials need to shift to the centre and accommodate its spiritual aspect specifically. As mentioned, museums' policies and curators' views have changed dramatically over time. I propose that contemporary Indigenous curators from diverse backgrounds have only recently gained access to archives and are now beginning to grasp the lasting impacts of their predecessors' curation practices. Moreover, the approach of examining archives from an Indigenous perspective is a relatively recent development. Contemporary curators, within DNMCH for example, are doing their best within their given guidelines. Curators are working tirelessly towards being more inclusive and transformative in how they deal with sensitive materials. Elements of co-creation and co-production, involvement in provenance research and undertaking repatriation are some of the daring methods that are being used to bridge the gaps created by museums in the curation of sensitive collections (Seabela Pers. Comm October 2022; Mmapheko Pers. Comm July 2024) The current curation team goes as far as acknowledging the presence of

comatose energies from diverse parts of the world and within southern Africa through communication using Ntsu snuff tobacco (Seabela Pers. Comm October 2022). Tobacco in the form of Ntsu Snuff is used by people to communicate with their ancestors, the snuff is left opened so that the ancestors may use its essence (Bishop 1985). The various methods that will be used to see how the above can be achieved will be explored in the next chapter and will centre around attaining data that will be beneficial.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL PATHWAY TO JUSTICE

In this study I focused on obtaining redress for an apparent lack of understanding and respect for ancestral material such as *libetshu* within institutional collections, by encouraging curatorial practices that take cognisance of intangible aspects of such material. To achieve this redress, I used a mixed-methods approach (Shorten & Smith 2017) to collect and analyse data on ancestral materials in institutional and personal contexts. Mixed methods entail the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain in-depth insights into the material of study as well as a broad overview of opinions on curatorial practice within museum contexts. This dual approach enabled the collection and analysis of data that extended the scope of evidence and facilitated the exploration of relationships and trends within the data (Bernard 2017). This methodology generated nuanced insights into beliefs, narratives, and experiences of ancestral material such as *libetshu*.

I attempted a comprehensive analysis of the DNMCH's accession registers, related records and policies, to obtain a contextual understanding of the temporal and social circumstances surrounding the acquisition and curation of material culture collections over time. In addition, I conducted a critical review on relevant literature focusing on curation of ancestral material in institutional collections, in South Africa and elsewhere. Interviews were conducted with traditional practitioners and curators to gain insight into current curation approaches, beliefs about ancestral material. Object narratives were driven by an object biography approach.

Object Biography

Materials culturally produced are argued to have social lives, various owners and uses, and fluid contexts that often change, gain, and lose their meanings (Kopytoff 1986; Hodder 1994; Alberti 2005; Drazin 2020). An understanding of these fluid contexts is argued to be obtainable through understanding material's life history or object biography. This approach was used to reconstruct previous life histories and make sense of the previous owner's practices and reveal associated identities and social structures (Strathern 1988; Friberg & Huvila 2019). Friberg and Huvila (2019), state that an object biographical approach is useful for understanding collections that may lack contextual data, and others that may be found in

their ‘final life’ (Joy 2009:534). A relational object biography approach and wear-and-tear analysis are useful tools in recreating agency and thus, an object biography (Joy 2009; Burström 2014). However, use-wear analysis has limitations that include an inability to determine with precision when the use-wear on the material occurred (Joy 2009). In addition, one would need to be objective when conducting use-wear analysis to avoid any bias and/or pre-conceived notions about the material. Cognisant of these limitations, I drew from Buström 2014 and Joy 2009 to develop an object biography of *libetshu.*

Qualitative research methodologies, integrate interpretive and critical approaches, considered participants' perspectives through collecting data from individuals about their personal experiences, behaviours, and social environments to address knowledge gaps (Fossey *et al.* 2002:717). Interpretively, a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and historical contexts surrounding the material by examining individuals' subjective experiences was obtained. Critically, hidden truths about the subject matter and its management in museums were exposed, cognisant of the notion that museum management policies and collections were shaped by social and historical factors. Given that this study sought to develop a more inclusive, participatory, and empowering curation protocol, it was imperative to take cognisance of existing constraints.

The quality of any qualitative research was determined by the researcher's skill in accurately and really presenting participants perspectives and experiences whilst acquiring further knowledge (Fossey *et al.* 2002:723). In this study, knowledge was obtained through primary data derived mainly from interviews and survey questionnaires; and secondary data derived from grey literature including newspapers, white papers, museum reports, government and public official records, policy documents from the 1890s to the early 1900s, and archival records. This data was supplemented by literature review as supporting evidence.

Data collection

Interviews

In this study I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions as a guide since these provide for follow-up probe questions to clarify, enquire, and ask unscheduled questions (McIntosh & Morse 2015; Bernard 2017). Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to answer freely (McIntosh & Morse 2015), resulting in in-depth responses (Cohen & Crabtree 2006; McIntosh & Morse 2015; Bernard 2017). This was very beneficial

for acquiring rich data, considering the small sample size, due to the amount of time spent engaging with participants and the small sample of Indigenous knowledge holders on *libetshu*. Thus, focused more on content quality than quantity of participants. I was careful to check that respondents did not deviate from the topic and give socially acceptable answers rather than their true opinions. Biased responses were minimized by avoiding questions that might elicit biased answers and ensuring that the interview guide was rigorously structured to align with the research aims and objectives, and approval from the Wits Health Research Ethics Committee (HERC) guaranteed ethical integrity of the study.

Survey

I used surveying as an additional tool to collect information on the general public's understanding and views on museums, their processes, and divination collections. This information was collected, and conclusions were drawn about the greater population (Kelly *et al.* 2003). The method lent itself well to descriptive studies and could be easily quantified. It provided context for the present circumstances (Ibid). The disadvantage of this method is that the data produced lacked specificity, and the researcher had no control over the number of responses they receive (Ibid).

Google Forms were utilized to design the surveys. This survey administration software is provided by Google for free and the responses are easily organized and translated into Excel formats, as well as automatically collected by software that provides automated quantitative summaries of responses. Additionally, I could manage the data according to my desired method of analysis. This facilitated efficient and convenient data collection. The link to the survey was distributed via email and various social media platforms. This method is only challenging to individuals who do not have access to the internet for several reasons or who do not have computers or smartphones; otherwise, the method is straightforward.

Participant sampling and recruitment

The sample methods were selected based on the study's aims, objectives, and research questions. The study employed non-probability sampling approaches, namely, purposeful and convenience sampling. The approaches considered which demographic groupings would provide valuable and comprehensive information, allowing for a precise portrayal of the context (Fossey *et al.* 2002:726).

Purposive sampling refers to the selection of participants based on specific traits and characteristics that they possess. (Fossey 2002; Etikan *et al*. 2016:726). The selection process focused on experienced practitioners aged 25 and above who are initiated Sangoma and use *ditaola* and other ancestral heirlooms for divination. They have the potential to offer vital insights about the sacred items stored in the repository. The study recruited participants from Johannesburg as well as individuals who provide knowledge using online platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Two interpreters one fluent in Tshivenda and the other in Sesotho were acquired but luckily were not needed as most participants spoke in English and/ or IsiZulu.

The second group chosen consisted of the curators from the Ditsong National Collection of Cultural History and the Wits Art Museum. They were selected because of their extensive knowledge of the collection and their direct expertise in organizing divination materials. They provided greater clarity into their curatorial methods for collections related to divination, as well as their protocols for engaging with the community concerning these practices. The Purpose sample also enabled the incorporation of perspectives from marginalized and disempowered groups (Fossey *et al.* 2002:726), in line with the ideals of curatorial justice. The level of participation in the study was heavily influenced by the participant's availability and willingness to take part (Fossey 2002; Etikan *et al.* 2016:726).

The convenience sampling method is in parallel with the availability sampling method. This approach considered the participant's availability and offers convenience for both the researcher and the participant (Etikan *et al.* 2016:726). The participants were selected based on their convenient accessibility, either in terms of geographical proximity or availability, and their willingness to dedicate a substantial amount of time for the interview (Ibid). The strategy offered significant advantages since it was cost-effective and needs minimal work due to the availability of readily accessible participants. This is particularly useful for researchers with limited time for data collection (Fossey 2002; Etikan *et al.* 2016: 726).

The primary advantage of nonprobability techniques is that the emphasis is placed on the quality of the study data produced rather than the quantity of participants. The number of participants does not need to be determined if there is enough in-depth information that addresses the study topic (Etikan *et al.* 2016:726). Regrettably, the gathered data was insufficient for extrapolating the perspectives of the entire populace. This is a result of the inherent biases associated with non-probability sampling (Etikan *et al.*2016:726).

Data was collected from a third group, which consisted of the public in Johannesburg. The purpose was to evaluate their understanding of the DNMCH's collection, museum operations, and community participation rules. To do this, the minimum age of the participants had to be nineteen (19) years old and older.

Data analysis

Content and Discourse analysis

Content analysis, a research tool used to organize and elicit meaning from the qualitative data and extract conclusions from it was used to quantify the data. This approach enabled the identification of trends from grey literature and interviews, in a quantifiable manner. I used the interview questions as well as survey questions to analyse my findings. As well as the discourse analysis enabled me to interpret various aspects from the different responses given (Braun & Clarke 2016:6) by using language and, where possible, understanding the idiom and ideologies used over time. Organizing data into keywords and ideas common in all responses revealed keynote ideas that were explored in depth (Guest *et al.* 2020). This in-depth analysis allowed key ideas to be grouped and presented as results using tables, bar graphs, and pie charts (Kozak 2024). This research design was envisaged to understand ancestral materials in museums and related institutions, as well as their place in normal everyday life, particularly their historical and cultural significance, and how best they should be appropriately curated.

Research Ethics Consideration

I attended a research ethics workshop offered by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) of Wits University, to grasp the ethical principles and ideologies to consider when planning different sections of my research, with strong focus on data collection, management, analysis and results. An understanding of these principles at the beginning stages of one's research was important to minimise unethical practices that may transpire in the later research sections (World Conferences on Research Integrity 2010). Research ethics clearance was obtained from the Wits Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) before I could collect my data from interviews (See appendix 1 1). In addition, participants were informed about the aims of the project and their rights around issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Thus, participation information sheets, consent forms, interviews, and survey questionnaires were required reviewed as part of ethics clearance. Ethics clearance

attempts to ensure that participants are not harmed or disadvantaged in anyway during the research as well as in the publication of the findings. The findings of this study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DIS-ENTANGLING THE FINDINGS

This chapter disentangles the data collected and analysed based on the emergent trends and the focus of the interviews and survey questionnaires that sought to address the aim and objectives of the study. Whilst I referred to the ancestral material collected and labelled by van Warmelo as *libetshu* in the first two chapters, I henceforth use the term *Mankgwanyana*, as the preferred term based on my findings. The findings below are presented derived from the main headings of the interviews and survey questionnaires. Emerging trends are then interdigitated with these to establish a clear understanding between the set objectives and the public understanding of *Mankgwanyana* and related ancestral material in museums and related institutions.

Indigenous Knowledge holders/ traditional practitioners

Of the 22 invitations to participate in the study, 9 declined, 13 responded with interest, but only 4 were able to be interviewed. Indigenous Knowledge holders/traditional practitioners were interviewed and collectively identified as TKH 1 to 4, aged between 30 to 50 years. One interview was cancelled on the scheduled day due to the failure of the participant to submit acknowledgement of consent forms. The interviewees, two (2) females and two (2) males, had attended spiritual initiation schools. One female taught at a non-profit organization that focused on indigenous knowledge systems, training and consulting in consciousness education, and indigenous medicine. Both TKH 1 and 2 reside in Johannesburg although their ancestral homes are in Limpopo, TKH 3 is from Johannesburg and TKH 4 is from Pretoria.

The data in this category is thus based on responses from 4 individuals, although the projected sample size was originally ten (10). This small number of interviewed participants was augmented with the depth of knowledge and high quality of information obtained through semi-structured interviews that enabled probing aspects that arose during the interviews. The sampling strategy also provided a range of youth and elderly perspectives to

be obtained. Thus, despite the small number of interviewees, substantial data was obtained to answer my research question.

Curators

To understand the curatorial context and guidelines used by DNMCH regarding ancestral material like *Mankgwanyana*, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the curator of DNMCH archive. Although I initially sought to include other institutions with ancestral materials to interview ten (10) curators and examine their curatorial practices and guidelines with a specific interest on ancestral material collections, this was not possible due to time constraints. Thus, the number was reduced it to five. Of these, three declined and only one curator, Curator 1, hereafter (C1) from DNMCH and another, Curator 2, hereafter, (C2) from the Wits Art Museum (WAM) who possess extensive knowledge and considerable experience curating African ancestral materials, provided valuable insights for this research.

Mankgwanyana in DNMCH Archive

Respectful of DNMCH's Policy on handling ancestral materials and acknowledging their cultural sensitivity, I relied on pre-existing images of the *Mankgwanyana* (Fig. 2), taken before I was aware of the museum's policy. These images deviate from conventional scientific photography standards, as they do not feature a scale bar. This omission was intentional, as including a scale bar would have necessitated direct handling, which falls beyond my authorized scope concerning this material. In Figure 1, the object label indicates that the collector, van Warmelo, repaired the *Mankgwanyana*, although the specifics of the repair and the context in which it was necessary are unclear. I conducted a use-wear analysis to identify probable changes in the material fabric.

Object analysis

The first observation of the ancestral material is that whilst the item label indicates it has catholic pendants, these are notably no longer present, and it is uncertain when they went missing. Could their removal probably have been one of van Warmelo's 'repairs'? The damage to the wooden rods, including splits and evidence of reinforcement with wire and rope type material are evident in Figures 4 and 5. Figure 6 shows the material's division into two separate parts and the presence of the red and white beads that are absent in Figure 3,

while Figure 7 highlights a dark burnt like spot on the rod. The observed wear and tear may be attributed to prior handling. Archival curatorial records indicate that between October 2022 and August 2024, the only noticeable changes on the material were the loss of red and white (one) beads and the loosening of blue ones (Fig 3).



Figure 3 :Mankgwanyana in the DNMCH. Note the blue beaded string and wire/s used to repair the rods and the missing red and white beads. (Image by Nzimela in 2024).

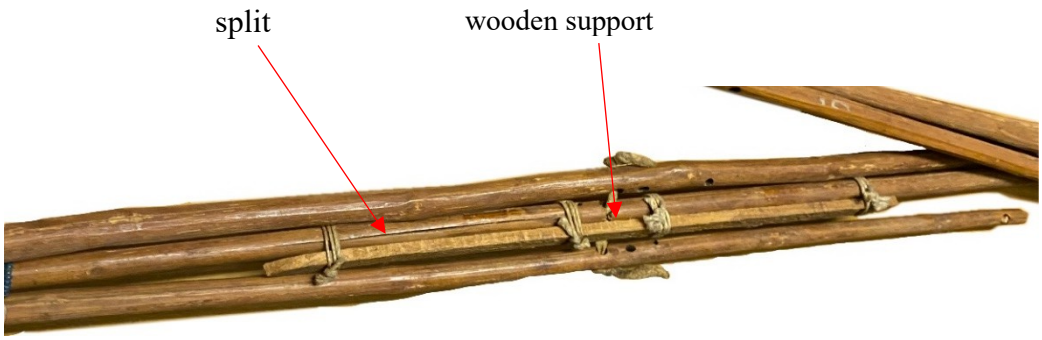


Figure 3: Illustrates the split of the wooden rod and a wire support tied at the end of the rod for reinforcement. Patination is also visible (Image by Nzimela in 2024).

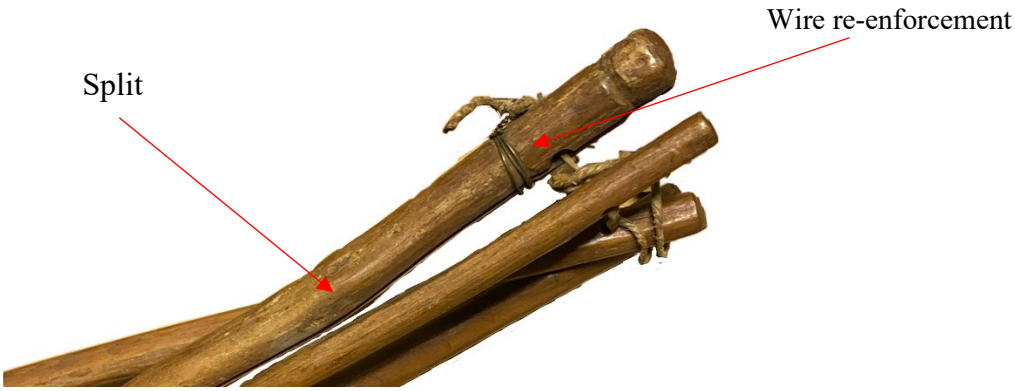


Figure 5 : Shows the split of the first wooden rod and wire reinforcement holding it together. Patina at the top of the rod is visible (Image by Nzimela 2024).



Figure 4 :The image on the left shows the Mankgwanyana separated into two parts. The image on the right shows red and white beads attached to the Mankgwanyana, some appear to have fallen off. There are also very dark spots on the rods (Image by Nzimela in 2022).



Figure 5: Highlights on darkened discoloured spot on one of the rods (Image by Nzimela 2022).

Expanding Knowledge from Traditional Practitioners

Re-contextualizing Archival Information

All the TKH indicated that they were not aware of the name *"Libetshu"* even the Venda-speaking TKH1, however, they were familiar with the SeSotho term "*Mankgwanyana*" that van Warmelo noted on the label. TKH2 noted that the "kxw" in the label *Mankxwanyana* may be an incorrect spelling and the correct spelling "Kgw" should be used instead. "Kgw" is a consonant used in the Northern Sotho language (Price & Gee 1988). The name of the original owner of the ancestral material was not captured by van Warmelo, yet this missing information would have helped contextualise the correct spelling. The collector probably thought that capturing the name of the owner was not necessary and could potentially attach ownership of the material, yet this was confiscated and now belonged to 'the state'. Table 1 provides the context of acquisition. The column on the right column has "[uncertain]" for method of acquisition considering the time context of colonialism, apartheid and the Witchcraft Suppression Acts. It also offers more information than was present before.

Table 1: Current knowledge on Mankgwanyana based on TKH.

	Current information in the museum	Current and data collected
Name	*Libetshu*	*Mankgwanyana*
Original Owner	Venda diviner	Owner Unrecorded
Acquisition method, location and year of acquisition	Confiscated – Sibasa, Venda	Confiscated/**[Uncertain]-** Sibasa, Venda, 1939
Accession number	ETH.8592	ETH.8592
Collector & Year	N.J van Warmelo -1939	N.J van Warmelo
Museum acquisition method	Donated	Donated
General use	Lazy tong type divinatory instrument	Could have been actively used in *umhlahlo* divination
Significance	-	Spirit-bound ancestral material
Supporting context	Venda name libetshu (comparatively modern), not a Venda object, but Sotho (they call it mankxwanyana). Repaired by me. Note 2 catholic pendants at tip. Photographed by me N.J van Warmelo 5.5.1944 Note also this is an object rarely obtained	Ancestral material serves as a spiritual guide and aids in locating missing items. Additionally, it facilitates the disclosure of concealed facts. When prompted with a question, it shifts either horizontally (left or right) or vertically (up or down) to indicate a positive (yes), negative (no), or uncertain (maybe) response. Additionally, it can communicate telepathically with its owner, providing answers to specific inquiries. This material is used by individuals who can employ it within their lineage; therefore, it is not restricted to a specific community.

Centring Significance and Ownership of Ancestral Materials.

Traditional practitioner's divining materials and those associated with them are bestowed to them by their ancestors, who also work through them via their corporeal body. These materials are shown to the practitioner through visions or dreams, and they are guided by their ancestors as to how to make the materials. Their ancestors also impart knowledge on the entire process, including the necessary elements, spiritual activation, and usage. These materials are bonded to both the maker and to the ancestor(s) who have requested for the presence and/ or use of the material. The same applies to the *Mankgwanyana*.

Ancestral materials are given to diviners for various reasons, others are for healing, and others are to protect the diviner themselves; therefore, the materials used to create divination tools vary depending on one's lineage, ancestor(s), and reason for the materials. Every

material used in the creation of these heirlooms is for a specific reason which is also relayed to the rightful owner of the ancestral material. This significance goes beyond physical attributes to spiritual activation during creation, activation, and use. These materials' importance is also tied to intricate ownership dynamics involving the current user, their ancestry, and environmental energies (TKH1 Pers. Comm March. 2024).

Curation

Diviners receive guardianship and authority over curation practices from their ancestors, who also impart valuable knowledge on caring for and handling ancestral materials through lineage and tradition. This knowledge is often transferred through tradition, apprenticeship, or family ties, considering social, environmental, and cultural contexts. Notably, these traditions balance ancient knowledge with contemporary societal awareness, reflecting cultural continuity (TKH1 Pers. Comm March. 2024). Given the significance and sacred nature of these materials, it is unlikely that their original owners would have willingly relinquished them to museums.

Use of iMankgwanyana



Figure 6:Depicts the Mankgwanyana being used by its owner (screen shot from video sent to Nzimela by owner).

Mankgwanyana is a divination material used in the active process of acquiring knowledge and information using an intermediary tool, the *Mankgwanyana*. It is used in the process of *umhlahlo*, this is where you ask the material a question and it responds to you. The tool is connected to the diviner and a specific energy field (Interview: TKH4 Pers. Comm July 2024) and one's ancestor(s); depending on the question asked, it will move left, right, up or down

signalling a yes, no or maybe. In some cases, it is used as a navigator to find lost items and/ or people, in this case, it directs the diviner (granted that the diviner has activated and requested the material to work outside its ordained boundaries) (Interview: TKH2 Pers. Comm March 2024). The process of making one differs for each healer.

Impacts of the Disassociation of Mankgwanyana

The consequences of i*Mankgwanyana*'s disassociation from its current owner are contingent upon the circumstances surrounding its separation and the spiritual binding charge previously activated by the owner. In the event of loss or theft, the owner may opt to await its return or, if it is not recovered, create a replacement, spiritually deactivate the original, and reactivate the new one in their possession (Interview: TKH1 Pers. Comm March 2024).

However, if the disassociation occurs due to confiscation or unauthorized removal from its owner, the consequences are primarily borne by the subsequent individual chosen by their ancestors to utilize the divination material. The removal of the material's genealogical footprint can lead to the physical manifestation of spiritual disturbances or misalignments, affecting not only the individual but also their family and lineage. (Interviews: TKH3 Pers. Comm April; TKH4 Pers. Comm July 2024) Mkhulu Khanyakude states that it can result in negative epigenetic behaviour (Makhubedu Pers. Comm January 2024).

Therefore, the introduction of these materials within the museum context is something that TKHS 3 describes as being “stuck” within the buildings of the archive; this is argued to potentially create an energy of unrest, and chaos within the museum environment. This, if the curators and visitors are spiritually inclined, with have a negative effect in how they feel when in proximity with the archive. Some storage compartments are not accessed due to the heavy energies that are present within them.

Proposed Sensitive Curation of ancestral material

TKH perspectives on curatorial practices around ancestral materials are captured by the two responses below:

TKH 1: "*The easiest way is just wearing gloves, but if you're going to touch it you must be cleansed you have to be pure; you can just clean your hands with ash. Sanitizer can also help. Gloves separate you from the object. If you're not married and you have sex in the last 24 hours you cannot touch, if you are on your period, if you are from a funeral wait 7 days unless you cleanse, certain foods like pork you can't eat pork with your hands and go touch it makes it dirty. You can still follow the same rules which healers use".*

TKH 4*: "Whatever that is sacred is meant to be handled by people who are in the same line of practice so honestly speaking they are not meant to be there they are stolen that is a fact, so if they can be able to get healers they can be able to connect to the owner's and ask them if they mind if they are kept within the museums and maybe they can get answers on how they must be handled so that they do not become an issue anymore".*

Whilst these respondents were positive about a curatorial practice that respects ancestral material, two others were of an opposing view as indicated below:

TKH2: *"What, for who and why are we restoring them? Because these only work through the person who has been given the objects. If we do not know the object, we don't know its use. Why do we have to keep it? I'm not saying through them away, discovery is very important, it creates curiosity, but we need to understand that it can only end as curiosity. It can only end for knowledge bases but beyond that then what is it for? If we say, should it be handled: as long as it is not in your power to use it, it is not in our human right as those who see it or whatever we ask is invalid because we don't know what it is for".*

TKH 3: "*To be honest with you. Divination objects have spirits in them. They literally have spirits in them which is similar to what people are using in Europe like Ouija boards and stuff like that. There's someone's spirit, that spirit will possess that tool and will derive a conversation between you as the recipient… (inaudible). So, keeping that object in one place without proper knowledge or training will be disastrous not only to people who are working in that particular environment but also to people who go to such heritage sites or museums to go and look at the object".*

These remarks indicate that the curatorial framework needs focus more on the curator and not the materials themselves as all materials need their curation method. The proposed activities are mostly to keep one's aura clean to refrain from polluting the materials when the curator is interacting with the materials.

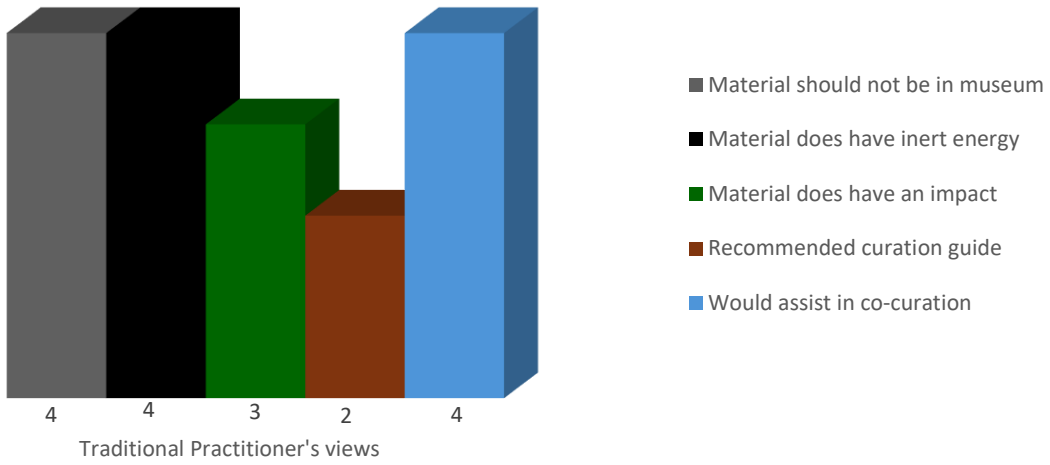


Figure 7:Responses from TKH interviews

Traditional knowledge holders consistently voiced apprehensions regarding the storage of ancestral materials in museums or similar heritage institutions (Fig. 9), citing concerns about the possibly present energies (3/4) that are present in these materials involved. Nonetheless, recognizing the current reality, all participants expressed a willingness to assist in the curation process, so assuring a more nuanced and appropriate portrayal of their past (Fig. 9).

Curator perspectives

The curators at DNMCH and WAM both preferred not to curate ancestral materials in their collections, due to their innate significance and the fact that they were incapacitated to curate them in a respectful manner to the material and their source communities.

DNMCH

DNMCH current curatorial practices, policies and a developing curatorial framework summarised in Figure 9, show that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) curation guidelines and DNCHM Heritage Assets Policy guide

current curatorial practice. DNMCH is moving towards augmenting these guidelines with an equally broad framework that calls for engaging various stakeholders, inclusion of indigenous language and terminologies, and the return of heritage material to source communities as a form of epistemic restitution.

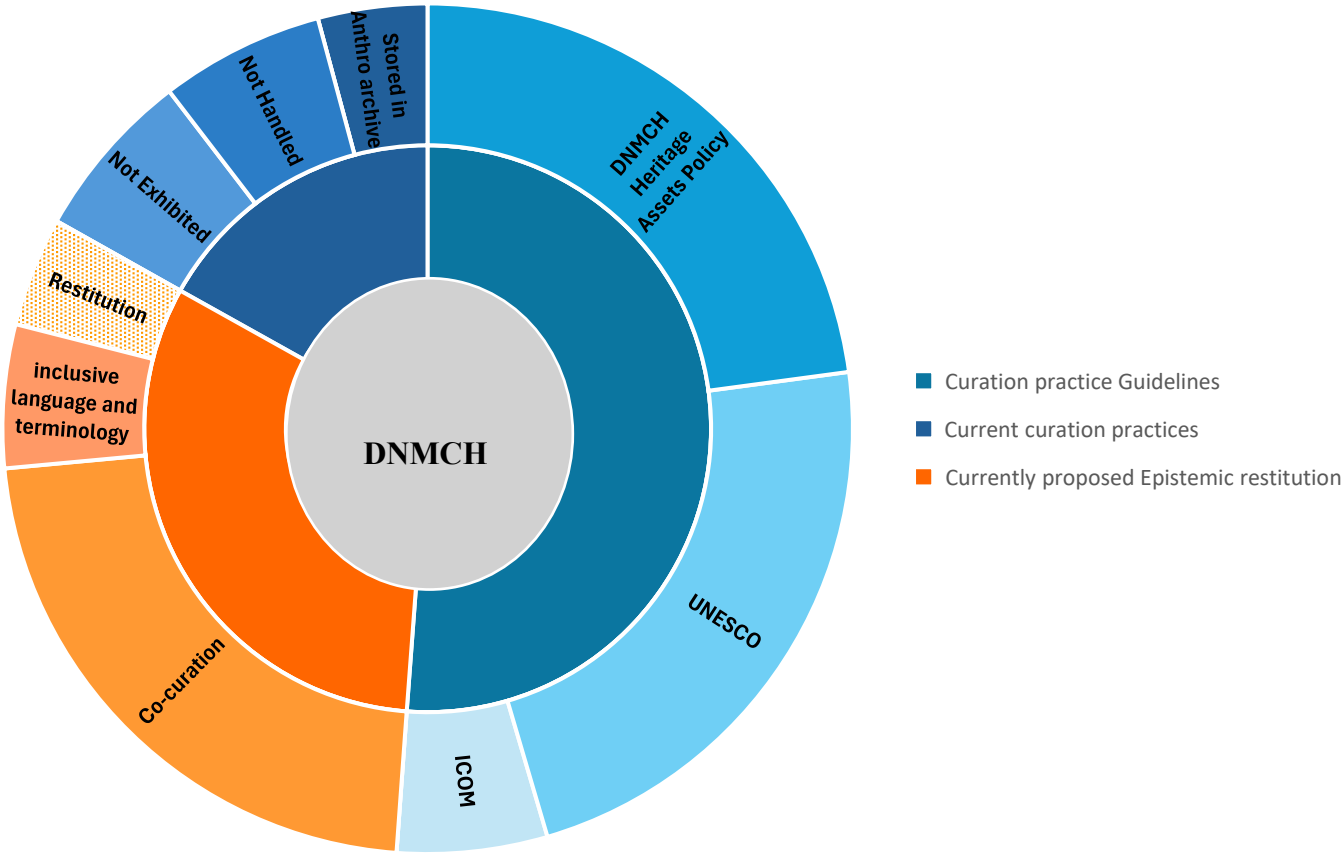


Figure 10 :Current and developing curatorial practices, policies and framework at DNMCH

According to the curator at DNMCH, there is a strong need for epistemic restitution of materials in the whole anthropological archive. Epistemic reparations require that epistemic objects such as ancestral material are co-curated or returned to those epistemically violated by their separation from the objects. Thus, the curator advocated a community-centred framework wherein source communities where possible, are consulted and participate in guiding the methodologies of handling their ancestral materials. For the curator at DNCHM, "we cannot be using Western ways of curating and conserving on African materials. So, we are looking not just at co-curation but giving the community space to guide us and taking the facilitating role instead of being the authoritative role" (Interview: C1, Pers. Comm August 2024).

WAM

At WAM, the bulk of ancestral material are currently housed in the Wits Art Ethnology Collection. However, other materials were purchased, given evidence of receipts acknowledging the purchase from stores and /or stalls that sell diverse types of divination items and *muthi*, an example of one is the Faraday market next to the Faraday taxi rank in Johannesburg. It must be noted that not all the shops are formal stores, some are informal with traders, in this study, I did not consider purchased items as the focus only on those that find themselves within the museum through other manners. According to the curator, WAM does not curate ancestral materials, and there are no specific guidelines for such collections. The curator considered that, located within an academic institution, some materials were obtained probably for teaching purposes within the social sciences department (Interview: C2, Pers. Comm July 2024). The second table (Table 2) is a summary of the museum and it curatorial practices, with a particular focus on ancestral materials. Like DNMCH, UNESCO, International Council of Museums (hereafter ICOM) and Wits Academic Collections Policy are the guiding principles of curatorial practice at WAM. WAM's curatorial practice includes a forward-thinking approach, wherein the artist has a guiding role, while the curator serves as a facilitator, thereby empowering the artist/owner with authoritative control over curation of an exhibition.

Table 2: WAM curatorial history and guiding principles.

Museum	Wits Art Museum
Time of conception and social context	1970- a political oppositional uprising against apartheid
Ideas behind museum conception	Academic purpose: to showcase African art and establish a platform for Africans to express their perspectives on the interpretation, documentation, and reception of African art.
Present Archives	African art and ethnology.
Presence of divination collection	Yes, Transferred to the museum from the Department of Social Anthropology, University of the Witwatersrand
Guidelines	Wits Academic Collections Policy, UNESCO, ICOMOS
Curation practice of ancestral material	Not curated, not exhibited, stored in the archive storeroom
Guidelines	Wits Academics Collections Policy, UNESCO, ICOM
Inclusive co-curation and co-production	Artwork is curated according to the artists' preferences; this includes labelling and descriptions of work. There is an Acquisition committee with different that decides whether artwork should be accepted.

The curator, and consequently, the practices of the museums are more sensitive in their approaches to divination collections and thus do not handle them anymore, this is also something stated in the DNMCH's heritage assets policy (Ibid.). The use of English within this archive is also put forward as an issue that is currently being attended to, it also reduces the context of its significance and further alienates it from its source provenance. It must be noted that the museum does not aim on having a sensitive protocol regarding the curation of the divination materials, "the plan is not to keep them, it is not to come up with how to curate them" (Interview: C1, Pers. Comm August 2024).

Co-curation: Creative Exhibitions

Located within a University setting, WAM embraced a unique form of co-curation through collaboration with the Art Department at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 2017/18 digital arts students were involved in WAM's 'digital premonitions' exhibition with the Fak'ugesi African Digital Innovation Festive and tasked to think of sensitivities around

curating. The task included interrogating the collection for ways in which they can curate and display material in a way that takes cognisance of how the material would have been perceived in their previous provenance. For example, they arrived at an innovative way of displaying a sacred crocodile mask that is not meant to be seen by many of people. Thus, as one got closer to the mask, it pulled a curtain to shield itself, subsequently creating a kind of sacred space, one in which such mask would have existed in its 'natural context'. The mask was displayed in a covered case with a curtain ring that would close as one got closer (Interview: C2, Pers. Comm July 2024). This is a creative way of thinking in terms of the curation of materials that are allowed to be exhibited but still require certain boundaries to be upheld by the curators and/or viewers.

Public perspectives

Demographic of public respondents

Twenty-one (21) members of the public aged between 19-24 years responded to my online survey questionnaire on DNMCH, posted on my social media platforms namely WhatsApp, Instagram. The age bracket of respondents is reflective of these seventeen (17) had not been to the museum, while four (4) visited but did not see the ancestral materials. The survey indicated that the public is not aware of that museums have collections in their archives especially ancestral materials; they are equally unaware of curatorial processes museum guidelines (Fig.11). This unawareness of what happens in museums could be a bias resulting from the age of the respondents. However, 57% of the respondents are aware of ancestral materials within their socio-cultural contexts as reflected in their views about them in Figure twelve (12), 43% were indifferent or did not know about them (Fig. 12).

The public's view on whether curators should curate collections alone is reflected by the grey responses in Figure thirteen (13) and the view on whether they have adequate knowledge to curate alone is reflected in the gradients of brown columns (Fig. 13). When asked whether only curators should mange museum collections 43% said they (curators) should be the ones curating the materials but in the same breath; 71% of the respondents rejected the idea that museums have adequate knowledge to curate collections with ancestral materials without community input (Fig. 13).

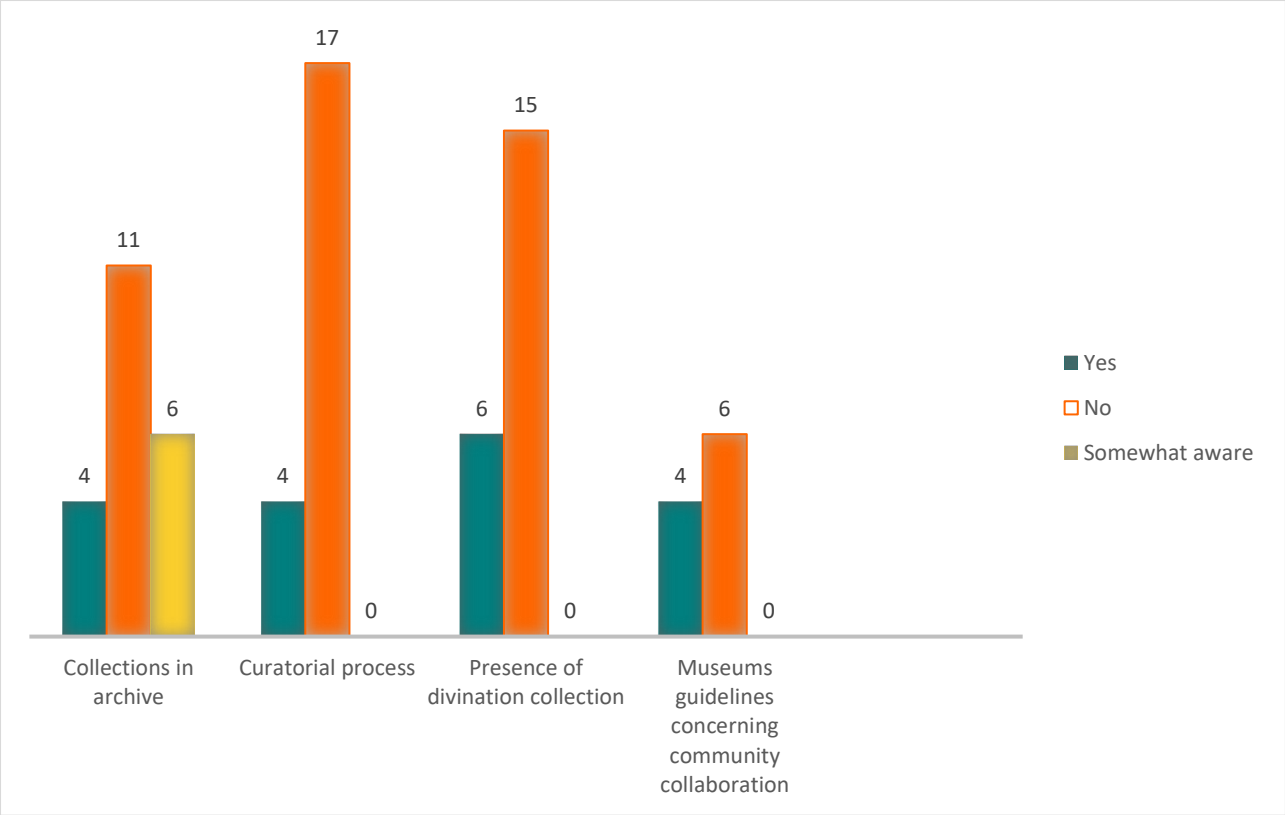


Figure 8: Participant's awareness of the archive, curatorial practices and guidelines

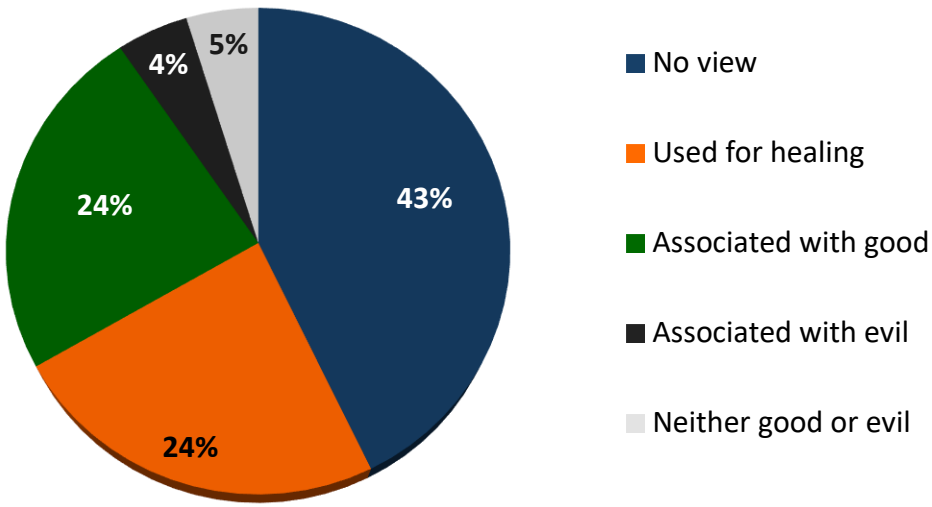


Figure 9: The public's views on divination materials.

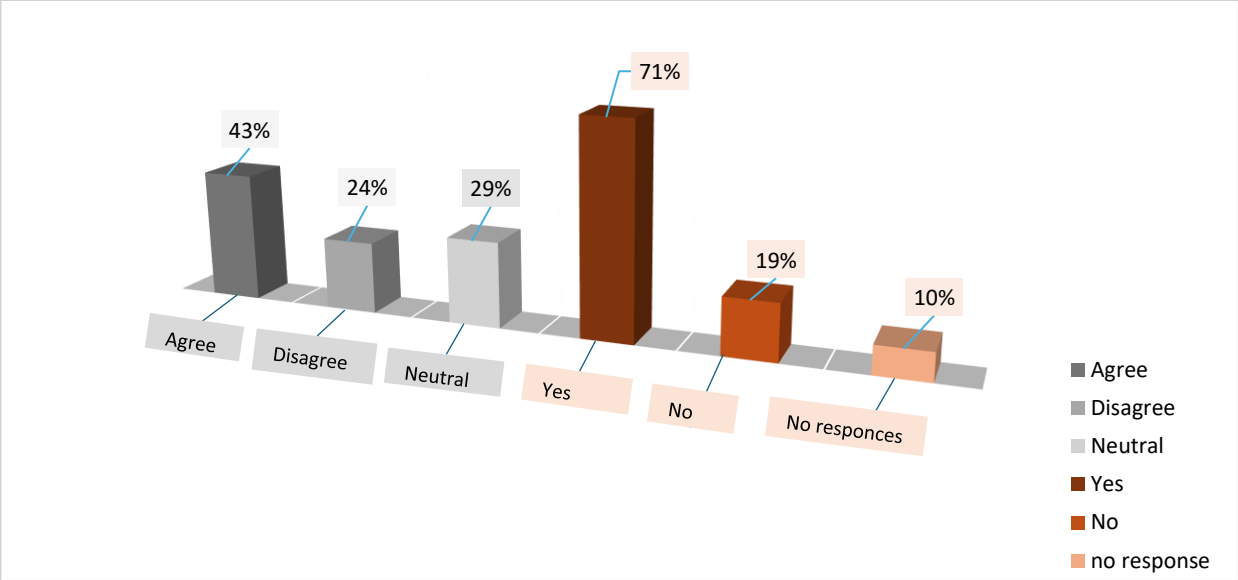


Figure 10: The public view on curation of ancestral materials in archival collections

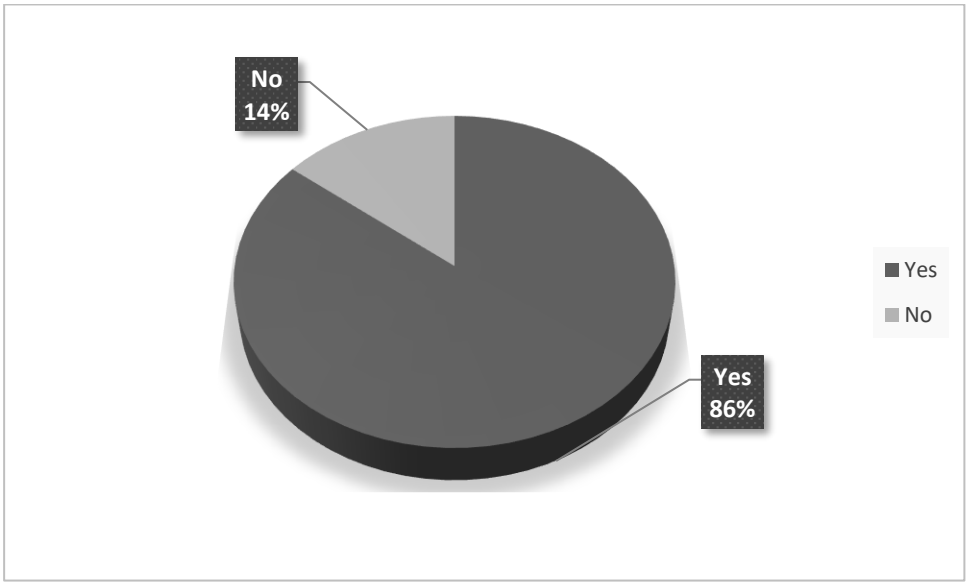


Figure 11: General Public's willingness to assist in curation processes.

Figure fourteen (14) supports the claim that co-curation is something the public is willing to embark on, 86% of the respondents expressed preparedness to contribute their knowledge and expertise to support the museum's curatorial practices (Fig. 14). This implies that there is potential to co-curate and collaborate with the public in the curatorial processes of ancestral materials that could be extended to other material culture within museum and related institutions.

Limitations

The study's design is subject to certain limitations, largely attributable to temporal and financial constraints, which limited the sample size of traditional practitioners from the Limpopo region and specifically from the Sibasa region. Although valuable contextual data was obtained on the *Mankgwanyana* from local practitioners, expanding the scope to include practitioners from Central and Northern Eastern South Africa, as well as those over 50 years old, would probably have significantly enriched the study. The sample size for both the traditional practitioners and the curators was small, the quality of information attained was of great value.

Data collection

I believed that online surveys would be a more expedient method of data collection; however, this was not the case. I realized that surveys have an exceedingly low response rate, and there is no guarantee of a response. Furthermore, it would have been more advantageous for me to conduct the surveys in person and interact with individuals in Pretoria, the city where the museum is situated. However, this would have also presented a safety concern for me as a young woman in South Africa, as well as a researcher.

Almost all TKH interviews were done online through WhatsApp video calls which is an option they chose. This came with ethical limitations as it was difficult to attain consent forms before the interview, something that Geier (*et al.* 2021) mention as a challenge collecting data through online platforms. I had to cancel an interview due to one participant failing to send their signed consent form after they had agreed and set a date to participate in the interview. Undertaking the interview without signed consent would have reflected research misconduct on my part. Apart from this issue, this method proved to be very beneficial as it was not complicated to use and majority of the participants used WhatsApp.

Whereas the public respondents were mainly the youth, the TKH were more elderly. Thus, the social media platforms afforded generational engagement with this study. It was important to engage the youth on platforms they are familiar with to create awareness of ancestral materials and indirectly impart knowledge, especially since these are the next generation of IKH and curators.

Cultural Bias

Whereas I had initially thought that ALL divination artefacts are sacred, I had to consciously dispel this ingrained notion to allow the materials to convey their message without any interference from me. This shift proved beneficial during the development of my semi-structural questions, which were subsequently approved by the Wits Ethics Committee. Furthermore, it provided guidance in the results section by illustrating the existence of sacred divination materials, as well as distinguishing these from those commercially available, inactive materials. I have depicted both realities and ensured that I have not exaggerated the importance of materials.

In summary, this chapter has generated information around three key aspects of this study, namely, the ancestral materials in the museum DNMCH; current curation practices; and the social-cultural context of *Mankgwanyana* and the curators and public's perspectives on the current curation of ancestral materials.

CHAPTER 5: RETHINKING CURATION OF ANCESTRAL MATERIAL

Curatorial Justice

In Chapter two I argued that curatorial justice was a useful framework within which to evaluate Western curatorial practices of African ancestral materials with the view to integrating indigenous knowledge systems into the processes. The curatorial informs the curation of materials in storage and on display, hence it is fundamental to museum collections and how material culture is handled. For curatorial justice to occur, this study has provided feedback from curators, Indigenous Knowledge holders and the public about possible alternatives to present curatorial guidelines within institutions such as DNMCH. In Chapter four, epistemic restitution was proposed as a framework that aligns and integrates ancestral material source communities in curation practices, taking cognisance of intangible values, and contemporary approaches that prioritize ethics, justice and cultural sensitivity. Much of the material culture within museum collections in South Africa, and around parts of the world, were obtained in a persistent, intentionally brutal manner that disrespected the objects and the people they belonged to. These confiscated objects sit within a continually contested space, viz, fulfilling the colonial agenda, entrenching empire and apartheid in South Africa and restlessly needing removal and reintegration with source communities (where possible). In this chapter I consider epistemic restitution as a curatorial framework for ancestral materials in museum collections, as reflected in the responses from curators, TKH and the public, as way to mitigate this restlessness.

Epistemic restitution: curation derived from Indigenous knowledge

TKH and others such as Bruchac (2014), Kreps (2005) and Chirikure *et al.* (2017) note that pre-colonial communities had heritage management systems that accommodated both the intangible and tangible values of material culture. According to TKH, curation of ancestral material should depend on personal and/ or societal values, and whether such material is considered sacred or not. However, TKH acknowledge that since ancestral material used in a ritual context, communicating to spirituality, its handling should be informed by its associated values. Such understanding is important for materials stored or displayed in museums and related institutions.

Epistemic restitution thus embraces tangible and intangible values as part of the curatorial process of ancestral materials or related objects. Within the curation practices, this means being aware of different if not all aspects of the material in which you are curating, knowing the tangible and intangible values, boundaries and sensitivities attached to it so that it can be curated in a manner that affords it dignity. It is not just about respectful handling such as not putting on gloves, it is also about being aware of whether you are qualified to handle these materials (IQOQO discussion: Mpagho Pers. Comm January 2024). This poses the sentiment (as noted by all TKH) that one may be qualified as a curator to interact with these materials but at the same be unqualified because they do not fit the true, traditional required requirements of being a rightful custodian of the material as this is based on various aspects that can only be known by the owner, source community. Hence the act of repairing the *Mankgwanyana* by van Warmelo was an act of invasion because he is not qualified to do so as he did not have permission from the owners (previous owner and their ancestors) to undertake guardianship over the material, his right was only afforded to him by government and the legislation.

The rightful guardian, original owner or provenance family would be aware of the significance, multifaceted tangible and intangible aspects regarding the care over the material. The absence of this vital information within the context of museums further proves the argument posed that that majority of ancestral heirlooms that were active in divination were unethically stripped from their provenance, even if this is not reflected within the archival records. If they were gifted or handed or bought under the right circumstances, the owner would have at least told the next owner the necessary information to ensure respectful curation. The involvement therefore of spiritual intercessors and traditional knowledge holders in the process of curating may be a fruitful move in the right direction.

For example, the idea of the authority over the methodology of curation being dependent on one of the owners (Ancestral spirits and diviner) shifted my thinking pertaining of developing a curatorial protocol that would accommodate all materials, and forced me to step back as a researcher and ask myself, “Who am I? As a mere researcher, what authority do I have to propose a blanket approached protocol over these collections?

But it forced me to shift how I looked at ancestral materials in a homogenous unit which informed the across-the-board approach which would not have will not achieved the desired

aim of curatorial justice because all the materials come from different families and in the larger context from different lineages and thus require their unique method.

Rodéhn's (2008) critique of homogenization of museum practices inspired me to avoid adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to curatorial practice. To facilitate community-led curation, I propose a protocol focusing on guiding curators, researchers, and individuals interacting with the materials. A tailored curation and condition report form (Appendix I) was developed, building on a previously successful template that I had used in my honours project (Nzimela 2021). This form ensures that interactions with community stakeholders and traditional practitioners are documented, thereby maintaining a community-driven approach to curation.

If the source community is unknown, traditional practitioners who are spiritually tasked with this can use *inhlolo* (spiritual consultation) as a method of attaining information, as proposed by Zwane (2021). As one would be able to gain "insights on current and past situations" (Zwane 2021:66) about the material in the study. This could also be a useful method of trying to find the source provenance if it is unknown. It must be put forward this process may not be as easy as stated, approval and an agreement between the traditional practitioner's ancestor who is assisting as well as the spiritual owners of the material within the museum would be needed to proceed.

This form has broader applicability, extending to other institutions, even those that claim not to handle materials. However, they may still be obligated to handle materials as part of the restitution or authorized destruction process, necessitating knowledge of proper handling techniques to prevent spiritual pollution during deaccessioning, transportation to the source provenance, and ensuring compliance with established protocols (Mkhulu Manz'Olwandle Pers. Comm. August 2024). The aim of the study is thus achieved through the development of Appendix I.

Contemporary curators and current curation

Both museums do not curate their materials due to ack of knowledge and understanding of the different ancestral heirlooms. Repatriation, facilitated by provenance research could offer long term solution that would allow these materials to be kept in their respective performative environments even if these environments do not have similar conservative or preservation methods as the museum. Figure 3 shows us that even within stable, contained

conditions in the DNMCH archives materials are still susceptible to alteration and deterioration, so the material aging in its rightful context should not be a problem. The employment of the Appendix I condition report alongside image attachments would help with tracking changes concerning the material itself. Alternatively, collaborating with spiritual intercessors and traditional knowledge holders could bridge this knowledge gap, alleviating concerns surrounding the handling of ancestral materials. Notably, both traditional knowledge holders and curators have demonstrated a willingness to adopt co-curation approaches for ancestral materials.

Contemporary curators, and researchers need to be aware of the privilege that archival institutions afford them in terms of authority over handling, curating and narrating the materials and not to abuse this, like van Warmelo did, to also be aware and make space for rightful stakeholders to be included in curation processes. The DNMCH and WAM curators show that it is possible to challenge Western curatorial frameworks and consequently the curation practices by creating capacity and shifting curation power to different stakeholders such as the owner, source communities or public and by curators taking on the privilege of being a facilitator (Fig. 10 and Table 2). Other institutions have undergone a paradigmatic shift, adopting an object- and community-centred approach that considers the entire lifecycle of materials, including their eventual repatriation or disposal. This marks a significant departure from traditional practices, where the dominant focus was on possession and conservation, often resulting in the unnecessary retention of materials within archives. These institutions demonstrate a willingness and capacity for change within curation practices. Notably, they exemplify new museology approaches, showcasing inclusive and adaptive museum practices. Inclusion of diverse, relevant stakeholders in the narration of anthropological and ethnological collections is beneficial in that it can result in valuable contextual cataloguing data for archival records (Table 1), it can assist contemporary curators with the current issue of lack of supporting documentation which is a widespread issue in South African museums.

Public involvement

Social media platforms, specifically WhatsApp and Instagram, proved effective in engaging the public across various age groups. Notably, most respondents (19-25 years old) represented a relatively young demographic, potentially influencing their responses and perspectives. The inclusion of participants aged 19 and older was crucial, as they represent

future curators who will shape societal views through their work in museums. Their perspectives are essential in re-curating material culture, bringing valuable insights that might otherwise be overlooked due to age-related biases. To achieve balance, TKH interviews captured the views of the older generation, fostering mutual awareness about ancestral materials in museums and ensuring a more inclusive approach to curation.

Nonetheless, despite the significance of inclusive curation approaches, considerable obstacles remain in lack of knowledge of contents of the museum. The storage of these ancestral heirlooms in museums and other similar heritage institutions still poses considerable issues, especially for the descendants of the original owners (TKHS). The problem is exacerbated by the absence of contextual knowledge, which impedes source communities and descendants from identifying their items. The lack of exhibiting divination collections, respectfully so, at institutions such as DNMCH and WAM unfortunately intensifies this problem, as it prevents communities from even being aware of the existence of these heirlooms. Although, even if they were aware of their existence, they do not have the names of previous owners which may make it even harder to identify their own family heirloom as well as cause problems in the process of restitution when having to prove status of claimant as a descendent as required by the National Policy on the Repatriation of Human Remains and Heritage Objects (2021:18).

From Erasure to Restoration

Since the inception of museums, the contemporary curatorial landscape has experienced substantial changes. Today's curators are required to address the diverse social and socioeconomic requirements that accompany diverse populations. It is essential to ensure that museum objectives are in accordance with the requirements of the community to promote curatorial justice and promote healing. However, the transformative endeavours of curators are impeded by the outdated language and terminologies of heritage institutions, which are evident in policies, catalogues, labels, and exhibitions. These constraints perpetuate limited definitions of a "museum," which in turn restricts the scope of curators within conventional boundaries and can limit how they choose to include communities within their institutions.

The road to undoing the damages caused by physical, descriptive and language dis-association will take a long time to undo, but it is not impossible, curators would just have to be intentional in their quest to restore principles of justice and ethics in how material culture

is managed and narrated along with and their source communities. It seems to be that terminology, and language is a problem overall in heritage institutions. Contemporary curators have made significant strides in acknowledging the implications of past curatorial practices (Interview: C2 Pers. Comm. July 2024). However, one crucial aspect often overlooked is the substantial investment required for meaningful change. Specifically, sustainable funding, adequate time, and human resources are essential for thorough data collection, research, and travel to provenance areas (Interview: C1, Pers. Comm. August 2024). This limitation is particularly pressing, as archival institutions nationwide face unsustainable financial backing and insufficient human resources (Motsamayi 2020; Montlanthe 2021).

Re-analysing van Warmelo

The THK data underscores the significance of ancestral heirlooms and associated tangible and intangible practices, which were meant to be transmitted through generations for purposes ordained by God and one's Ancestors. Consequently, spiritual intercessors would not relinquish these items voluntarily, especially not to government representatives. This reinforces the notion that van Warmelo's actions, undertaken under the guise of "On Her Majesty's Service" (Fig. 1), were equivalent to deceit to attain ancestral materials. Furthermore, his complicity in academic dishonesty, by disregarding the exploitative and racist use of academic research by policymakers, raises significant ethical concerns. In the same breath through, his publications exemplify how language can be wielded to influence power structures, effectively curating cultural segregation.

van Warmelo used his influence as a government ethnologist to maintain power to confiscate ancestral and related materials such as *Mangkwanyana* (Fig.1) both for the state and his personal interests as evidenced by his large collections for example at DNMCH and University of Johannesburg. Today many of these materials are at the mercy of the labels van Warmelo assigned to them and many may never be re-associated with their host communities. van Warmelo’s father studied ethnic South African groups through ethnomusicology, and this is probably how van Warmelo took an interest in ethnic languages. However, indigenous nuances of language may have been lost to him and his father of Dutch ancestry. Thus, although van Warmelo could speak ethnic South African languages, his spelling and pronunciation of words would be different and mean something else if wrongly spelt or pronounced. This is evident in the label provided in Figure 1.

Language can be used as a powerful tool for resistance, as evidenced by the TKH data, which shows ancestral material's significance and performative context (Table 1). The deliberate shift towards inclusive language and terminologies, as envisioned by DNMCH, enables diverse voices to emerge, challenging the dominant narrative of van Warmelo. This approach could also facilitate the identification of source provenance by using people's and clan names as placenames, such as eMaZizini in Drakensburg, KZN, named after the Zizi clan who used to reside there. By addressing language barriers, these strategies reconnect material culture with its provenance, ultimately challenging dissociative practices within museums and heritage institution.

Social context of iMankgwanyana

Ancestral materials are more than just artefacts they are active agents in that they are materials used for communication between the healer and their guides but at the same time, within the context of the museum they still communicate things about their owner, their context the museum as well. The use-wear analysis indicated natural wear and tear from frequent use of *Mankgwanyana.* Thus, it is beneficial to examine deterioration and "death" of a material in the context of African and / or Nguni cosmology wherein it is believed that upon death individuals transition to the ancestral realm aided by ritual performances by the living (Ngubane 2004, Martin *et al.* 2013). It is essential that such "death happens with the consent of the ancestors so that one may take their rightful place in the spirit world" (Martin *et al*. 2013:25). Similarly, disintegration and /or death in the life cycle of ancestral materials could also be a method of releasing it and possibly the dormant spirit within the material from the tangible aspect of the material within the confines of a museum. This perspective would be helpful for contemporary curators, to shift away from the obsession of keeping collections and understand that it is okay to de-accession materials or find other creative ways to sensitise the public about the collections within their archives (Interview: C1 Pers. Comm August 2024).

Chapter 1 and 2 depict the unproductive narratives that perpetuated unrealistic idealizations of ancestral identities and negative stereotypes about traditional practitioners can be constructively revised. By reframing these narratives, it is possible to showcase the materials and their communities of origin in a respectful and positive manner, aligning with the values and experiences of contemporary communities.

The *Mankgwanyana* is not just a confiscated lazy tong type divinatory tool but also, as depicted by TKH, evidence of diversity and cross-culturalism in that different communities used the material in their own unique manner, it can be seen as a symbol of spiritual guidance in times of unfamiliar circumstances as it served a medium of communication between the diviner and ancestors. It is a symbol of justice with the ancestors being the jurisdiction in that it was also used to determine one's innocence or guilt. It is also a symbol of colonial resistance in that it, alongside other materials were legislatively banned because of their ability to give solutions against colonial injustice and possibility of exposing colonial authorities as one of the many causes to chieftaincy, socio-political, social and environmental hardship and instability for generations to come. The significance and necessity of *Mankgwanyana* within society is also highlighted by the fact that regardless of the harsh legislation placed on the spiritual performances that rendered it illegal, the *Mankgwanyana* was and still is being used. *Mankgwanyana* are made in various ways according to the owner(s) taste and based on what and how they will perform. The only common design is the zig zag that allows *Mankgwanyana* to move (Fig. 8).

Its use as the material in study used to advocate for sensitive, equitable curation for itself and divination collections at large can also add to it still being seen as a symbol of justice. In contrast, it is also evidence of oppression and violence (Seabela 2024) because of the manner of their disassociation but also because their disassociation may be causing spiritual havoc for its provenance family. Lastly the collection causes unease for the curator who works with them.

Good and bad exists in everything, so it is important to narrate both truths when discussing ancestral materials, given that these different narratives of the *Mankgwanyana* are extremely important as part of epistemic restitution, exposing the hidden truths about the contexts of ethnological collections. In addition to this, it shows that even in contemporary society it is possible to challenge inauthentic and idealised ancestral identity narratives created by previous authorities.

Implications of the study

The implications align with Kreps' (2005) argument that to properly curating indigenous materials require a critically understanding and examination of the owner's beliefs, socio-cultural context, and historical background. Crucially, the results highlight the need for a

paradigm shift in curatorial perspective and ideology towards an epistemic restitution-focused approach. Consequently, museums and similar institutions would need to examine their policies and practices to ensure that they align with these approaches because it is possible to curate ancestral materials as well as other material culture in an authentic manner.

This study has shown a possibility of bridging the knowledge gap prevalent in many heritage institutions regarding African ethnological materials. Through inclusion of different societal stakeholders and simultaneously, rectifying previously excluded source communities in material narrations, it builds on curatorial discourse on co-curation (e.g. Golding 2013; Chirikure *et al*. 2017; Chipangura 2020; Chipangura & Mataga 2021) and offers a platform for diverse voices and ideas on just curation methods. Contrary to previous assumptions (Mostamayi 2020), this study demonstrates that re-curation of ethnological materials is, in fact, feasible. Contemporary curators can challenge dominant narratives and practices within heritage institutions, effecting change through even subtle adjustments, such as adopting a sensitive approach to materials. This marks a significant departure from traditional curation frameworks, where materials were often acquired and curated without permission, neglecting crucial aspects of their provenance. By acknowledging the value of source communities' and the public's contributions, curators can revise existing narratives and adopt more inclusive practices. Notably, despite the existence of international, national, and institutional guidelines, curators can still exercise cultural sensitivity and respect source provenance preferences when curating materials. Ultimately, curators must recognize the limitations of their knowledge when working with materials from diverse cultural backgrounds, embracing a more collaborative and humble approach to curation. By embracing this approach, it is possible to ensure that curation practices are not in conflict with the values of their source community (Clavir 1996:103).

Curation of ancestral materials necessitates extreme care, particularly when considering their spiritual significance. Accession records and receipts can provide valuable insight into the material's provenance, revealing whether it was obtained through legitimate means or unethically disposed of by its original custodians. Moreover, the political context surrounding the acquisition of these materials must be acknowledged, especially for those collected during colonialism and apartheid. A disclaimer should accompany materials with uncertain provenance, highlighting the potentially problematic circumstances of their acquisition.

Ancestral materials in museums and related institutions should be regarded as potentially stolen or forcibly removed materials until thorough provenance research can confirm their legitimate acquisition. In terms of narration, it is crucial to recognize the power of language and description. This study refrains from using problematic terms to describe ancestral materials or traditional practitioners, instead opting for respectful and accurate terminology. The language used in descriptions and narratives is equally important as the methodological handling and preservation of materials. Furthermore, this research demonstrates the possibility of challenging previous narratives and introducing new information relevant to contemporary society. Ultimately, curators and the public share responsibility for shaping the narrative of their history and society.

Recommendations

Regarding curatorial protocol, the proposed framework serves as a temporary solution for curators. A truly just protocol cannot adopt a one-size-fits-all approach; instead, each ancestral material requires a unique protocol to fully respect and dignify its significance. Achieving this necessitates a longitudinal study with sustained financial support, enabling future researchers to collaborate with relevant departments and traditional authorities. This collaborative approach will facilitate the development of unique protocols for each material, prioritizing repatriation or deaccessioning for divination collections unless owners' consent to museum curation.

In the interim, the proposed framework can be employed, but innovative curation methods are essential. Museums should explore creative approaches, such as those discussed in the WAM interview, to curate materials within the museum context while establishing boundaries. Thinking outside the box and leveraging various technologies can help resolve curatorial challenges. By embracing innovative solutions, museums can ensure respectful and dignified curation of ancestral materials, ultimately prioritizing the needs and preferences of the source communities.

Future Research

Future research directions could fruitfully explore large-scale contextual and provenance investigations of materials within anthropological and ethnological collections, extending beyond divination and associated materials. A comparative analysis of how various institutions are integrating these collections into contemporary contexts would also be

beneficial. Furthermore, incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into scientific research methodologies, as advocated by Zwane (2021), presents a promising avenue for innovation. Specifically, integrating indigenous epistemologies into data collection processes might be interesting to examine.

The potential of indigenous knowledge systems remains largely untapped, and their systematic integration into academic research holds significant promise for enriching our understanding of diverse cultural practices and belief systems. Pursuing these research trajectories could contribute meaningfully to the decolonization of knowledge production and foster more inclusive and interesting scholarly inquiry within the heritage avenue.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX I: Contextual and conditional report form

<table>
<tr><td>Identification</td><td></td><td rowspan="6">Reference Photo</td></tr>
<tr><td>Accession Number</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Material Name</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Provenance</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Collection method</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Materials used</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Dimensions</td><td>L</td><td>W</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Brief description:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Curation/ Handling Consultation conducted with traditional Practitioners: Y / N</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Handling, conservation, and exhibition protocols:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Traditional Practitioner:
----------Sign:
----------Date:</td><td>Traditional Practitioner:
----------Sign:
----------Date:</td><td>Traditional Practitioner:
----------Sign:
----------Date:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Curation/ Handling Consultation conducted with necessary source community? Y / N</td></tr>
<tr><td>Community member name:
----------Sign:
----------Date:</td><td>Community member name:
----------Sign:
----------Date:</td><td>Community member name:
----------Sign:
----------Date:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Condition Assessment</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Condition of the material:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">General appearance: Are there any cracks, tears, chips, splits, stitches;(If possible, please indicate this down below and on the attached photographs)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Are there any surface scratches, dirt stains, mould, rust: (If possible, please indicate this down below and on the attached photographs)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Losses: (If possible, please indicate this on down below and on the attached photographs)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Repairs done and why:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Examined by:
Date
Sign: _____</td></tr>
</table>

ANNEXURE II: Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Nzimela

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	PROTOCOL NUMBER: H23/11/**21**
PROJECT TITLE	Engaging collections: Libetshu in the Nicolaas Jacobus Van Warmelo Collection, Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, South Africa
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss Y Nzimela
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies/
DATE CONSIDERED	17 November 2023
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Minimal
EXPIRY DATE DATE 21 February 2024	20 February 2027 CHAIRPERSON _____ (Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr C Namono and Mr D Katsetse

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and A SIGNED COPY returned to the Secretary electronically. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. I/we agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low Risk studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.

_____ ___21___/__02___/__2024___

Signature Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

ANNEXURE III: Ditsong Museums of South Africa Permission

DITSONG
MUSEUMS OF SOUTH AFRICA
an agency of the
Department of Sport, Arts and Culture

6 February 2024

Dear Ms Yola Nzimela,

We have considered your request for access to our collections to conduct your master's research.

Permission is granted for you to access the Anthropology Collection to do research at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History. Since your study aims to examine whether the curatorial justice framework can be used to achieve justice for divination collections within museums, you may access the Divination objects that are in Van Warmelo's collection within the museum. We only request you follow the guidance of the collection's custodian in working with sacred objects.

Permission is also granted for you to collect data from the archive as well as the curatorial staff to access our collections archives and database, as well as the Libetshu object.

If they personally agree permission is granted to interview custodian of the collections and any other museum staff you need to interview to collect data for your research.

We would request a copy of your complete thesis for our library collection and that any data kept at the university's Rock Art Research Institutes data servers, which is under the Department of Archaeology be deleted after five years.

Wishing you the best with your project,

Tersia Perregil
Acting Director Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History and Manager: Heritage Assets

DITSONG: Museums of South Africa
Incorporating
DITSONG National Museum of Natural History, DITSONG National Museum of Cultural History, DITSONG National Museum of Military History
DITSONG Kruger Museum, DITSONG Pioneer Museum, DITSONG Sammy Marks Museum, DITSONG Willem Prinsloo Agricultural Museum, DITSONG Tswaing Meteorite Crater

Members of the Council: Adv. MJ Ralefatane (Chairperson), Ms. Z. Dlamini, Ms. C. Fani, Mr. M. Maseka, Dr. A. Mbeleya, Ms. Z. Ngobi, Dr DHD Ngobese, Mr. HH Nkanyane, Mr. G. Ontong

APPENDIX IV: QR Code to the video of Mankgwanyana



Figure 15: QR Code generated by Nzimela 2024 depicting the video of how the Mankgwanyana works.

Link to the video: https://myqrcode.com/en/qr/6fec8c29