# RECLAIMING
## AFRICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE
## FOR THE POST-COVID ERA

*DR. DENISE LIM & SONYA SOLANKI*

# Reclaiming African Heritage for the Post-COVID Era: A Yale IPCH Study

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Writing from the hindsight of early 2023, the global heritage community can only now begin to fully process the shifting realities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. As events were unfolded in real time, we watched with great anxiety as already precarious professional and community preservation networks endured rapid disruption that manifested as job loss, funding retrenchment, program closures, and reduced access to sites, collections, courses, grants, and the interpersonal connections that underpin heritage practice. Dr. Denise Lim's study, *Reclaiming African Cultural Heritage for the Post-COVID Era*, was one attempt to capture representative experiences of both loss and possibility during those most uncertain moments. Commissioned by IPCH, the goal of this study was to develop a body of high-quality data and analysis with the ability to inform the change-makers among us in re-building a thriving, sustainable heritage sector across Africa.

One of the core missions of the IPCH is to engage with the urgent research needs of cultural heritage communities outside of Europe and North America. In the Institute's context, "research" aspires to be truly multi-disciplinary, as tackling the challenges of cultural preservation requires connecting the best methods and minds across the arts, humanities, social, and physical sciences. With support from The Arcadia Fund, a UK charity, IPCH has begun to work to establish trusted, reciprocal relationships with heritage practitioners in Africa in the form of teaching and training partnerships, data gathering, and advocacy for growth, recognition, and sustainability.

Modern African heritage is authored and stewarded by a workforce of brilliant, passionate, dedicated people, but the summary truth is this: trainees and workers in this field have been badly impacted by the pandemic. Though as Dr. Lim's study amply demonstrates, those who persevere are resilient, creative, and fiercely eager to drive lasting change.

Alison Gilchrest
Director, Yale Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage

# Author Biographies

**Dr. Denise Lim** is an **independent consultant** for the Yale Institute of the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (IPCH) and the **principal researcher** for Yale's COVID-19 impact study, *Reclaiming African Heritage for the Post-COVID Era*. Dr. Lim has a B.A. in English and Sociology from Bryn Mawr College, an M.A. in African Studies, and a Ph.D in Sociology from Yale University. Dr. Lim has worked for over 16 years in the transdisciplinary sociology of diverse African communities, with regional expertise in South Africa and its diverse cultural practices. She is currently a curatorial postdoctoral scholar at the Stanford University Archaeology Collections (SUAC), and has co-taught a course entitled, *The African Archive Beyond Colonization,* where students curated a virtual exhibition featuring 15 of SUAC's highlight African artifacts spanning from Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and the Sudan. She is currently co-teaching *Museum Cultures: Exhibiting the African Imaginary* and will organize an on-site exhibition of SUAC's Nile Valley collections on May 27, 2022.

**Sonya Solanki** serves as **research assistant** to Dr. Lim on Yale IPCH's COVID-19 impact study. She recently graduated with an honors degree in curatorship from the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Arts, Centre for Curating the Archive. Although she comes from a background in strategic marketing and communications, Sonya is passionate about applying her research skillset to the African arts and culture sectors. Her honor's degree research focused on the significance of Indian classical dance as it relates to her positional identity in contemporary South Africa. This year, she is completing her master's degree in museum and cultural heritage studies at the University of Pretoria. Sonya examines the history of Simonstown in Cape Town, exploring the town's history of colonial occupation, slavery, and apartheid-era forced removals through collective and familial memory.

# Acknowledgements

# Abstract

As modern African heritage passes through the hands and hearts of diverse African professionals trained in multiple methods of preserving and transmitting culture, this COVID-19 impact study honors all the participants who embody the rich living traditions and legacies of distinct regional contexts. Though every sector of cultural heritage has been hard hit by the ongoing pandemic, these consequences are far from geopolitically monolithic. When considering the entangled relationships that countries in the global North have with those of the global South, it cannot be ignored that there are fraught legacies of imperialism and colonial extraction, violence, and oppression that continue to have complex effects on Africa's cultural landscape. This study acknowledges those histories, but also attempts to go beyond a colonialist view and explore how African cultural heritage professionals view and represent themselves.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; pandemics; African cultural heritage; African cultural economy; tangible heritage; intangible heritage; heritage workers; cultural heritage management

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# Introduction

As recent studies indicate, African arts, culture, and heritage have been severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic since its onset in 2020. During a virtual forum held for different ministers of arts and culture, the former African Union (AU) Commissioner of Social Affairs, Amira El Fadil, organized a virtual benefit concert in May 2020. The event was aimed at encouraging several AU member states to mobilize resources for a continent-wide COVID-19 Response Fund (Martins & Shule 2020, 477). Little did the AU know, however, that such campaigning efforts would barely scratch the surface of what diverse African populations would require and demand in the years to follow. The COVID-19 pandemic merely amplified and exacerbated pre-existing social crises and conflict. As a result, the recovery and revival of several cultural heritage sectors throughout Africa has been slow and gradual. It remains to be seen what the long-term effects of the pandemic might be given that the social and political climate of every country remains unpredictable and fluid.

*Reclaiming African Heritage for the Post-COVID Era* is a pilot study that offers a prototype for producing data-driven projects that do not merely reproduce settler-colonial ideologies implicit in social scientific methods. Rather, this study is an opportunity to unsettle normative ways of conducting research so that evaluations of the global impact of COVID-19 on African cultural heritage sectors can acknowledge the inherent structural inequalities that exist in the very disciplines and professions that purport to produce value-neutral knowledge about African people and places. One of the key challenges in designing this type of survey lies in determining how cultural heritage is defined, socially constructed, and practically reinforced. What *is* cultural heritage and how is it defined as a profession in the job market throughout multiple African contexts?

As South African scholars Benson and Prinsloo argue, the complexity of defining "culture" and "cultural heritage" is rooted in "peace treaties which addressed the territorial transformation of Europe after World War I and the peace movements of the late nineteenth century" (2013, 29). Derek Gillman argues that cultural heritage "has become a feature of the contemporary cultural landscape in many countries. People feel that their heritage is distinctive if often hard to define. They are proud of their past and also keen to capitalize on it, and thus tourist literature is full of references to the heritage of the nation, of the region, and of the city" (2010, 1). Heritage is not only made valuable through a country's tourism sector, but justified by:

> "…governmental regulation and now provides an important part of the background to discussions about private rights, common ownership and general welfare. But the idea of heritage is not immemorial, and we can reasonably ask questions about its origins and about how much weight we should give to this idea, aside from the economic benefits just noted" (ibid).

Law professors James Nafziger, Robert K. Paterson, and anthropologist Alison D. Renteln posit that the term "culture" is an internationally protected human right where both Article 15(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes that those belonging to ethnic, religious, and

linguistic minorities "shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of the group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess their own religion, or to use their own language" (2010, 67).

The invocation of such quantifiable binaries as "majority" and "minority" may resonate as incongruous in the African context depending on how one defines cultural identity relative to their society's racial, ethnic, linguistic, or religious heterogeneity. Rather, the invocation of such terminology in international legal discourse implies that "minority" is a euphemism for marginal social status. International policies designed to protect "culture" implicitly contends with historical relations of power that rendered specific sociological categories of difference subordinate. Being given "minority" status has less to do with quantitative statistics and is rather a descriptor of one's fraught and traumatic relationship with a hegemonic group. In the case of postcolonial African countries, these binaries conjure the historical memory of the European colonizer as the superior "One" and the colonized as inferior "Other."

As the French-Tunisian writer, Albert Memmi, theorized in his seminal work, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), Western understandings of the marginalized or oppressed are rooted in dialectical thought. "Memmi describes the bond that creates both the colonizer and the colonized as one which destroys both parties, though in different ways. As he draws a portrait of the Other as described by the colonizer the colonized emerges as the image of everything the colonizer is not" (Hartsock 1987, 191). In the African context, questions of cultural patrimony are inextricably linked with histories of colonization that denied African peoples of their own cultural capital. For this reason, it is worth exploring the tensions between UNESCO's definitions of cultural heritage. One definition promotes a spirit of global cosmopolitanism where cultural heritage belongs to "all mankind"; the other recognizes national particularism and the right of specific cultures to claim cultural ownership, property, and reparations (Benson & Prinsloo 2013, 30-31). It was our aim that we would not only design a survey that would elucidate the "glocal"[1] tensions in these definitions, but also confirm whether these resonate from the emic perspectives of diverse African cultural heritage professionals.

# Methodology

In our study, participants defined African cultural heritage as encompassing the tangible and intangible manifestations of their specific culture's past—a cherished legacy left behind by previous ancestors in the form of traditional customs, values, and beliefs expressed in the art, architecture, and archaeology of intergenerational communities. Based upon economic impact surveys administered by

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[1] "Glocal" or "glocalization" is a portmanteau of *globalization* and *localism*. This neologism came into popular usage beginning in 1995. Though the term is widely used in disciplines as diverse as geography, sociology, and communication studies, some scholars trace the etymology of the word to the Japanese word 土着化 (*dochakuka*) which was an agricultural term used to describe the adaptation of farming techniques to local conditions (see Roudometof, "Glocalization"). South African scholar, Mfaniseni Fana Sihlongonyane, uses the concept to argue that though globalization and Africanization are often imagined as diametrically opposed, there is merit in exploring "the glocal encounter between the two discourses by looking at how the local is created within the discursive terms of global culture and vice versa as well as the material crossovers, within and between the two discursive categories" (2020, 452).

ICCROM in 2020, we defined the cultural heritage profession as encompassing the following 12 sectors:

1. Government and privately funded museums
2. Historic sites and monuments
3. Heritage and cultural tourism
4. Government and policy
5. Environmental conservation
6. Communications and digital media
7. Library information and archives
8. Education
9. Archaeology
10. Art
11. Architecture
12. Privately owned business

This pilot study not only tests the feasibility of such a project, but also forces researchers to evaluate how culturally sensitive and appropriate their survey instruments and methods are, particularly for researchers commissioned by institutions in the global North. Though the bulk of this project was conducted in collaboration with colleagues, research assistants, and practitioners in South Africa, we can still be met with much understandable skepticism, mistrust, or resistance from participants from other African countries given the specific contexts and nuances each offer. We feel we owe it to all those who so generously gave their time and energy to participate in this survey to remain open to improving this instrument to ensure a truly representative, diverse, and inclusive sample population whose views are heard and respectfully characterized.

In designing our study, we collected both quantitative and qualitative data. We thank our colleagues at the University of Pretoria who aided Yale Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (IPCH) in compiling a list of cultural heritage professionals, students, and apprentices throughout the African continent. Given that our professional networks were initially concentrated in South Africa, the recruitment list for South Africa was far more comprehensive. This demonstrates the importance and value of collaborating with local colleagues to find more representative samples for a specific country. For other African countries included in the survey, we either used the snowball method to recruit more participants or researched a list of universities and cultural institutions with a well-developed website to attract more participants.

In May 2021, we first sent a recruitment flyer in English to solicit participation (see fig. 1). Because this directory covered mostly Anglophone African countries, we endeavored to expand this sample pool by having our recruitment flyer translated into other major languages, including Modern Standard Arabic, French, Portuguese, Kiswahili, and isiZulu. With additional resources, we recommend that future researchers translate their recruitment instruments into as many major African languages as possible. We are sensitive to the fact that how we define cultural heritage may differ from one cultural context to another. Language is one way in which we transmit and translate different epistemological frameworks across place and time.

# African Cultural Heritage & Preservation: A COVID-19 Impact Study

On behalf of the Global Consortium for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (GCPCH), the Yale Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (IPCH) and the University of Pretoria (UP) have been undertaking a continent-wide survey to **evaluate how the current COVID-19 pandemic has impacted cultural heritage and preservation training programmes throughout the African continent.**

This is your last chance to participate and complete the **10-minute** survey here:
COVID-19 Online Survey Questionnaire

Results will be presented and discussed as part of the October 2021 GCPCH meeting, hosted by the UP's Master's in Tangible Heritage Conservation Programme.

This survey is available in **Arabic, English, French, Kiswahili, Portuguese,** and **isiZulu**. Collection of data for this study closes on **July 31, 2021.** Please feel free to forward and distribute this online survey questionnaire to as many relevant colleagues working in any field of cultural heritage and/or preservation on the African continent!

For any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the primary investigators, Dr. Denise Lim (denise.lim@yale.edu) and Alison Gilchrest (alison.gilchrest@yale.edu).

**Figure 1.** Screenshot of recruitment flyer disseminated by email between May and July 2021.

We are also aware that not everyone has equal access to a stable internet connection or technological resources. Those who participated in the study are far from a comprehensive list of all cultural heritage professionals working across the continent. These were individuals who happened to have access to internet, received and read our recruitment email, and voluntarily gave their time to participate. A truly representative sample could be collected if research teams located in each African country were able to collaborate to offer accessible options for recruiting, disseminating, collecting, and interpreting a large dataset of survey responses. Between May and September 2021, 84 participants completed an online questionnaire distributed using the Qualtrics platform. Of those 84 people, 31 volunteered to participate in individual interviews over the video-conferencing platform Zoom. These interviews lasted anywhere between 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. Our study participants represented about 14 different African countries including Algeria, Botswana, Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Madagascar, Morocco, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. In this continental map (see fig. 2), each of the numbers listed within the highlighted countries are raw numbers. In total, 46% of our sampled population were living and working in South Africa.
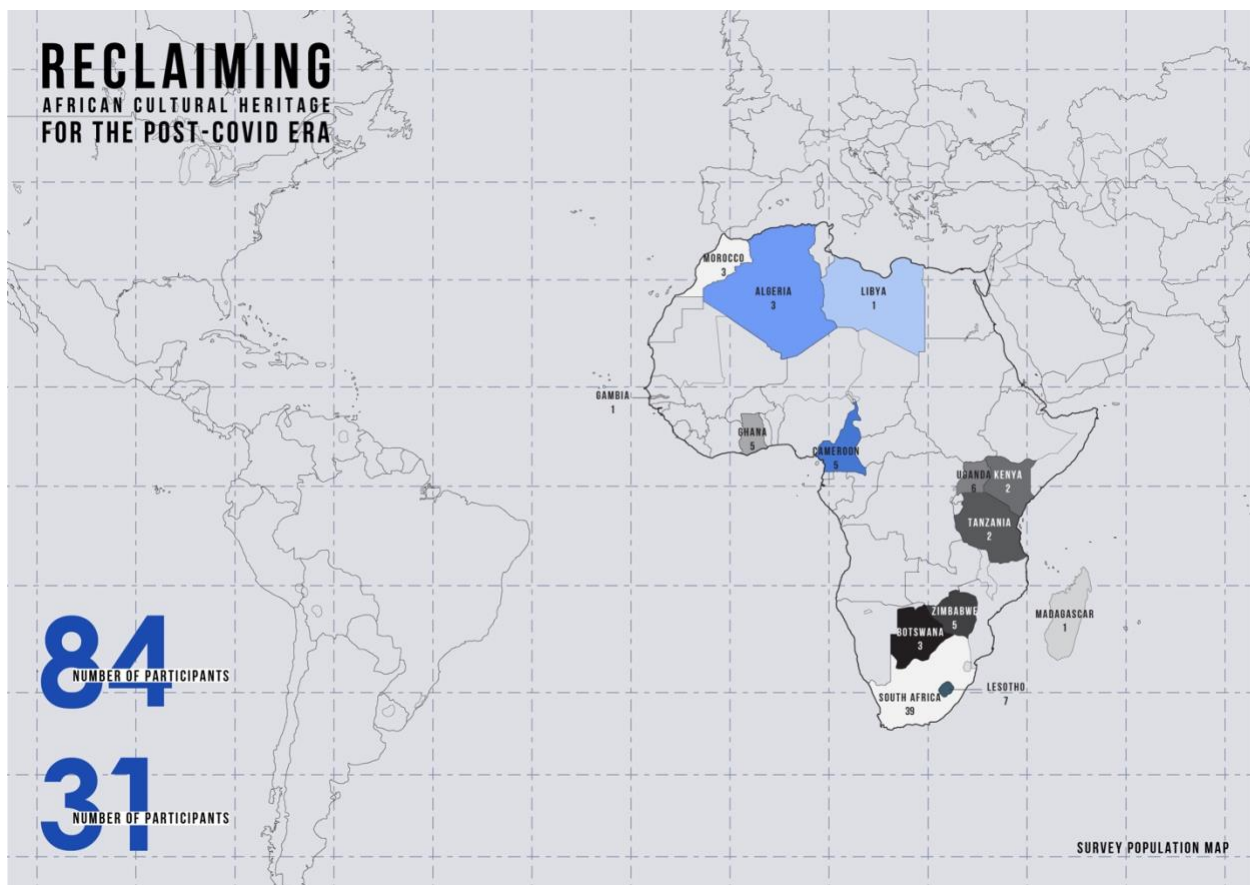


**Figure 2:** Map of survey population by country and number of participants per country.
*Graphic design by brickstreet studio in Johannesburg, South Africa. April 2022.*

# Quantitative Survey Findings

The following data visualizations offer a summary of some of the results we were able to cull from the data captured in this online survey. Though our total sample size was 84 participants, we made it optional for participants to share personal demographic information such as gender identity, race, ethnicity, and age. Though demographic identity categories are social constructs that are defined in complex ways throughout multiple societal contexts, some categories were simplified for our descriptive statistics.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of gender by employment status. Of the 50 participants who identified as male, a vast majority (88%) were unemployed. However, these included participants who were enrolled in further undergraduate or postgraduate education, as well as those undergoing an unpaid apprenticeship or internship. Employment was defined as either a paid part-time or full-time job. Of the 34 participants who identified as female, two-thirds (67%) were employed. In the distribution of gender by highest level of educational attainment, we see that though our sample was male skewed, females were found to be more highly educated than their male counterparts across all educational levels. Amongst those with a bachelor's, master's, or alternative diploma, over 50% of participants were female. 90% of those with a Ph.D degree were also female.
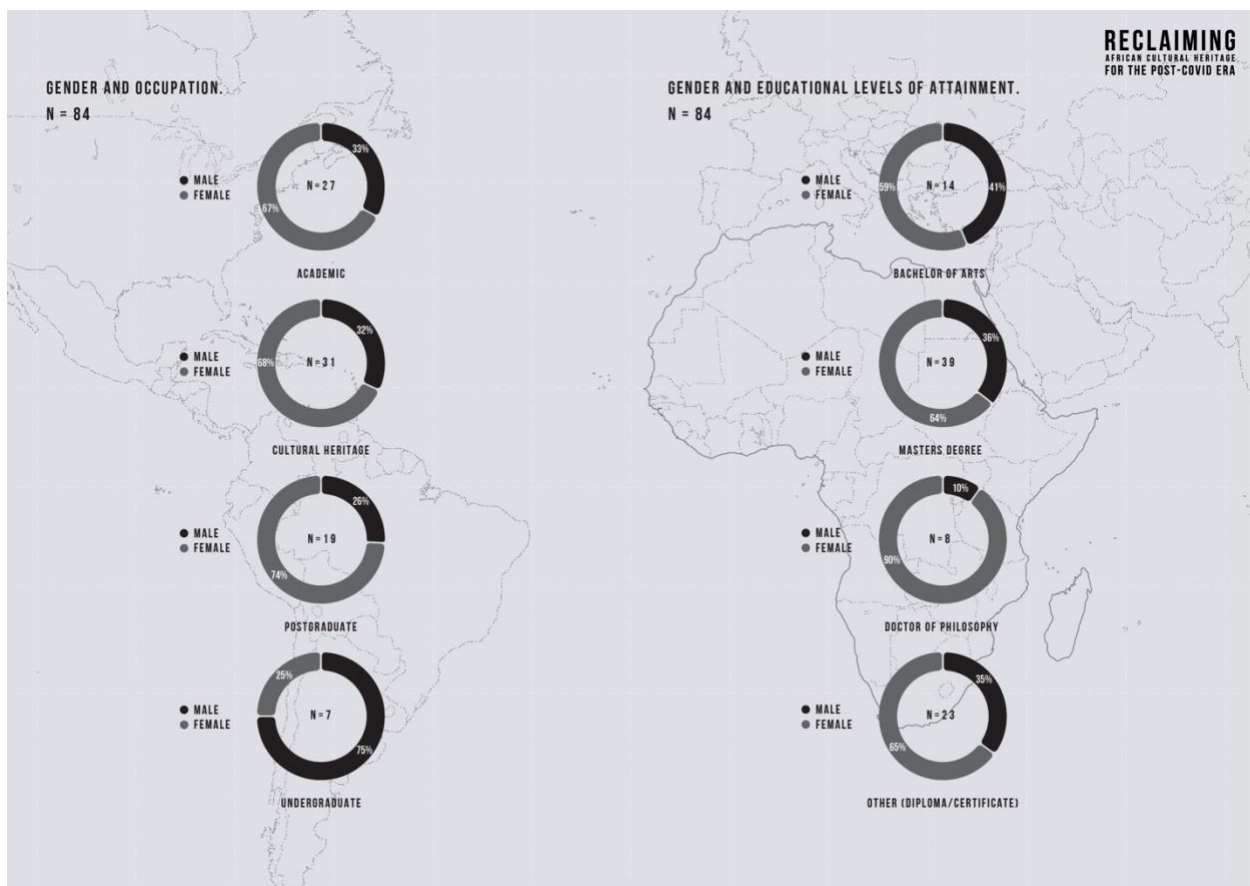


**Figure 3.** Distribution of gender by employment status (left) and gender by educational attainment (right). *Graphic design by brickstreet studio in Johannesburg, South Africa. April 2022.*

Race as a social construct is challenging to navigate for a continent-wide survey that is vastly heterogenous. Race is a modern Western idea with etymological roots emerging as early as the fifteenth century with the advent of European conquests. Though genetic studies in the late 20th century began to refute the notion that human species could be divided into groups based on phenotypical and behavioral differences, the term "race" in sociology remains an important variable to analyze in social stratification studies. Though racial categories are by no means universal or fixed, the question was inserted in our survey to test whether such constructs made sense to our participants. Unsurprisingly, those from South Africa used racial categories of "Black," "white," or "Coloured" given that these were inherited classifications from colonialism and apartheid. Respondents from North, West, and East Africa were more likely to answer the question of ethnicity or cultural identity in lieu of race.

Questions regarding race, ethnicity, and cultural identity were all designed as text box entry so that participants could opt to self-describe and explain their choice in terminology. One benefit of a mixed methods approach is that while a wholly quantitative survey can be detrimentally restrictive given the periodic absence of participant explication, qualitative interviews force researchers to integrate nuanced etic and emic understandings of contested categories of identity. Our data visualizations divided the responses by those who self-described as Black, white, or 'other.' The latter category in our data visualizations merely indicate respondents who identified outside of binary racial frames. These include but are not limited to those who self-described as "African," "a citizen of the world," "mixed race," and so on.
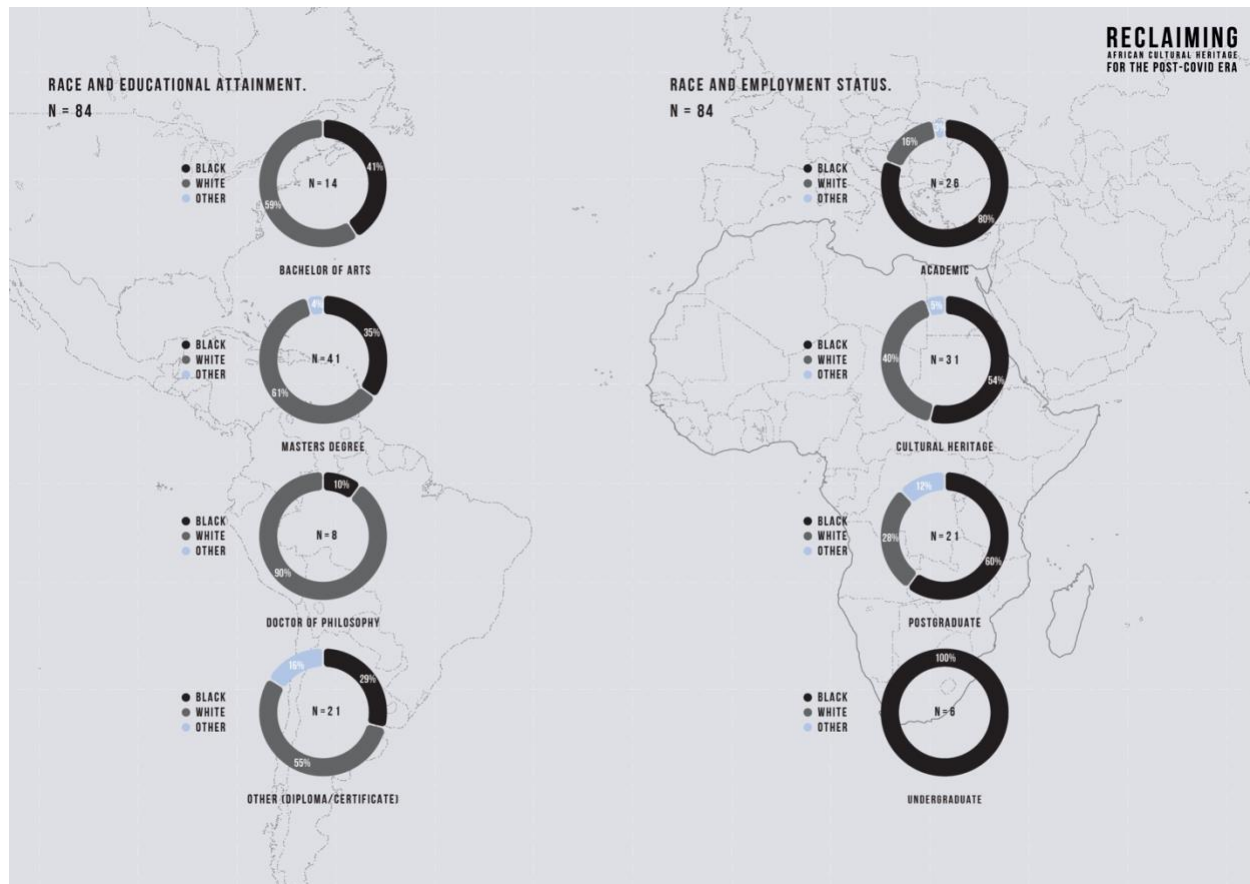
**Figure 4.** Distribution of race by educational attainment (left) and race by employment status (right).
*Graphic design by brickstreet studios in Johannesburg, South Africa. April 2022.*

Collecting demographic information such as race or ethnic identity allows researchers to identify whether there is equal or asymmetrical representation of various racial or ethnic groups in the cultural heritage sector. Our survey data shows that across all educational levels of attainment, respondents predominantly identified as white (see fig. 4). Amongst those who identified as neither Black or white, these tended to hold an alternative diploma or certificate qualification, suggesting that many on the African continent may not enter the cultural heritage labor force through traditional pathways of tertiary education. Most participants who identified as Black (41%) indicated they had a bachelor's degree.
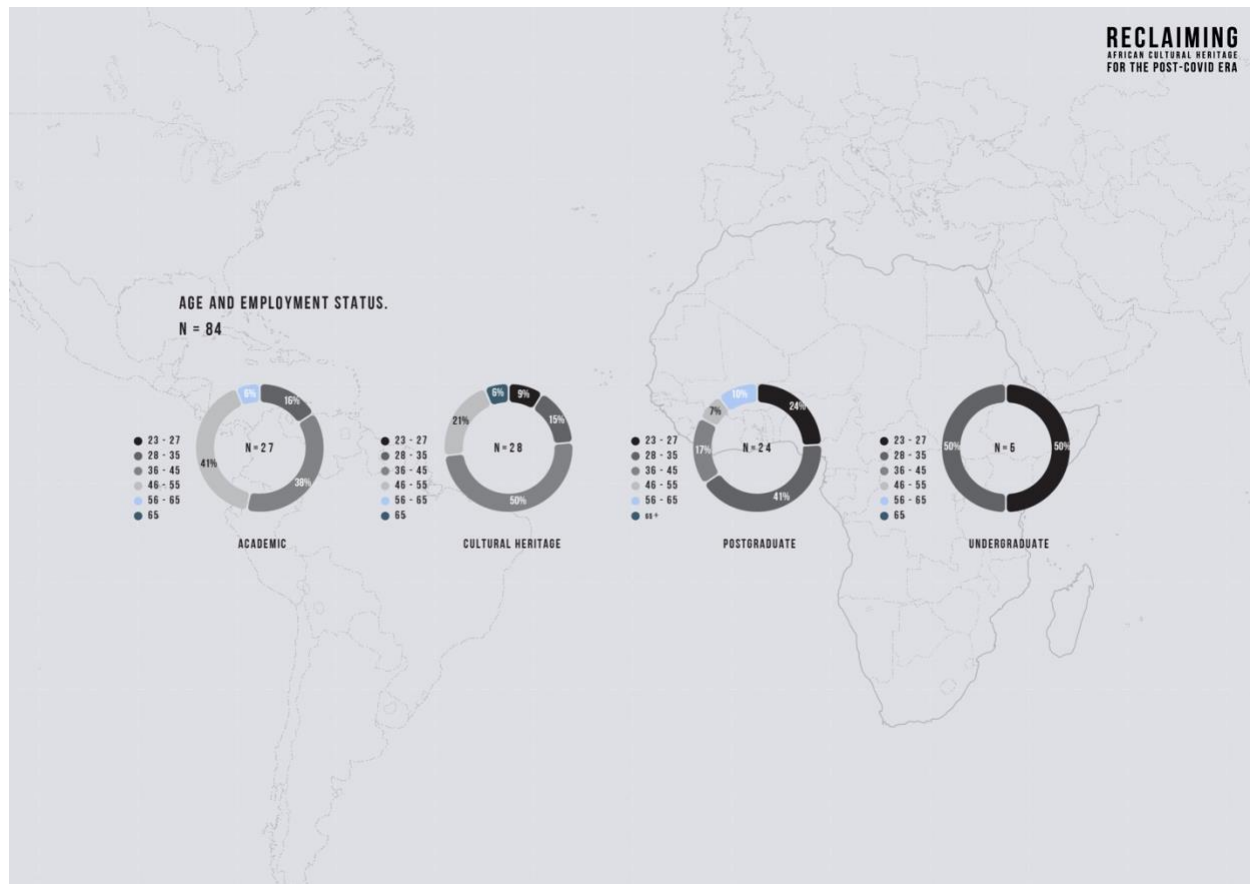
**Figure 5.** Distribution of age by employment status for each occupational category.
*Graphic design by brickstreet studio in Johannesburg, South Africa. April 2022.*

Participants were asked to characterize their employment status by indicating if they were academic faculty or staff, working in cultural heritage, or an undergraduate or postgraduate student. Figure 5 displays the distribution of age by employment status for each occupational category. The youngest cohorts (ages 23 to 27) are underrepresented in the working sector, whether it be in academia or cultural heritage sectors. Most participants working in the academic or cultural sector are between the ages of 36 and 45. Our data shows that younger cohorts are involved in either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, and older participants work primarily in professional cultural heritage sectors, followed by those who are undergoing postgraduate studies or work as academic staff.
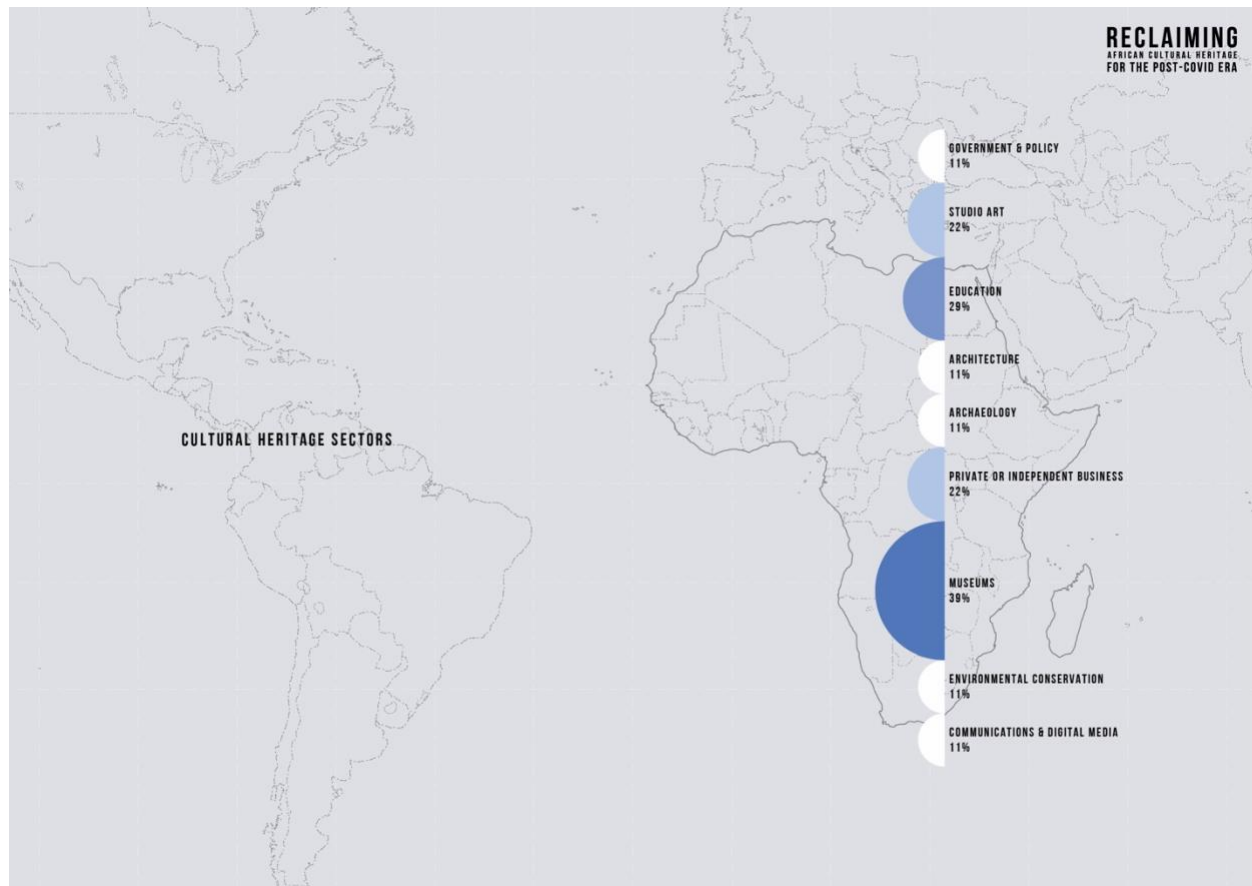
**Figure 6.** Distribution of sample population by identified cultural heritage sectors.
*Graphic design by brickstreet studio in Johannesburg, South Africa. April 2022.*

In Figure 6, the size of each half-moon shape is proportional to the percentage of participants who identified working in one of the 12 cultural heritage sectors referenced earlier. Among those already working in cultural heritage, we found that 39% of participants were working in museums, 22% had a private or independent business, 22% were in studio art, and those working in government and policy, architecture, archaeology, environmental conservation, and communications and digital media amounted to 11% each.
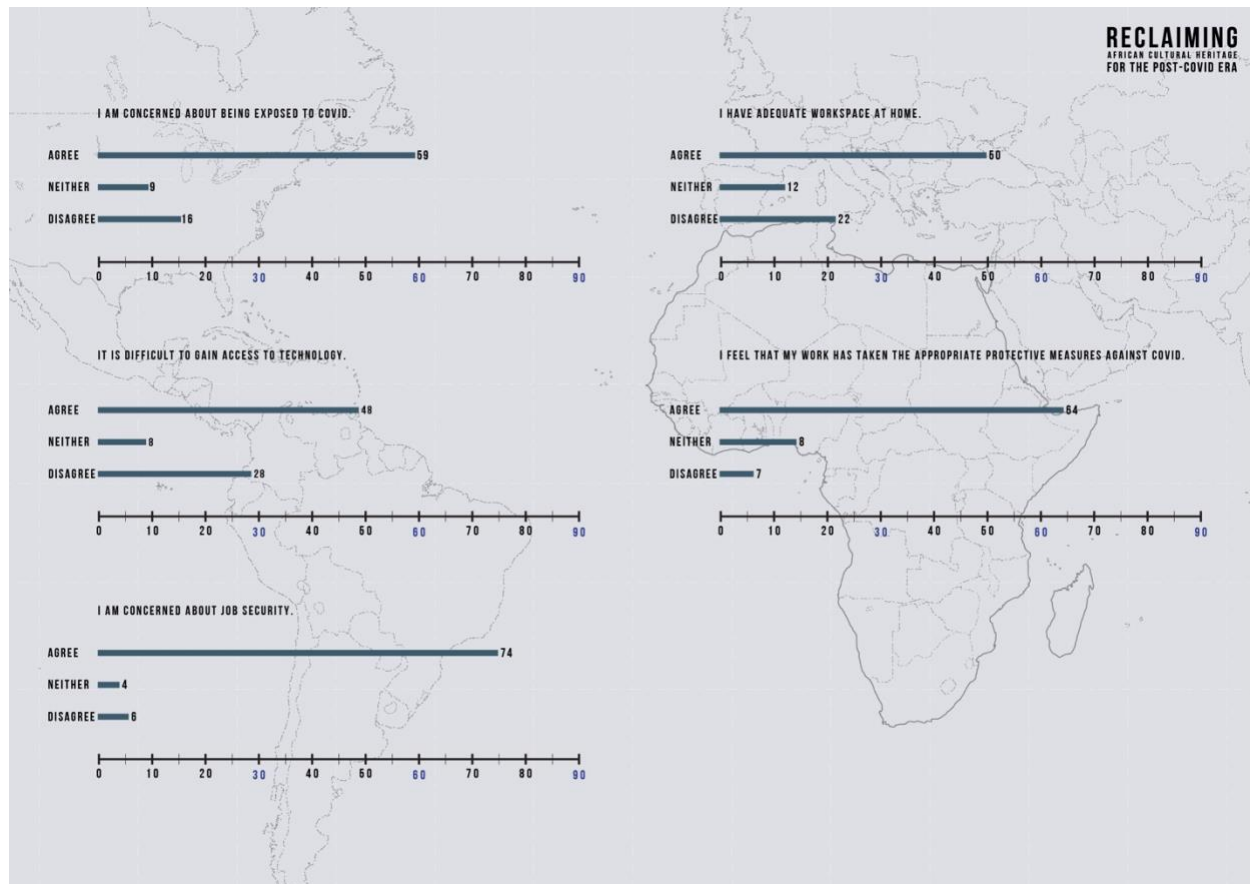
**Figure 7.** Scaled responses to questions regarding how COVID-19 has impacted the workplace. *Graphic design by brickstreet studio in Johannesburg, South Africa. April 2022.*

Participants were given statements to which they could respond on a five-point scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree (see fig. 7). We combined responses of strongly and somewhat agree or disagree as the distinctions between these were not statistically significant enough to warrant their separation. When asked whether they agreed with a series of statements related to the impact of COVID-19 on their work, a vast majority of respondents (88%) expressed concern about job security. However, 76% of respondents agree that their place of work has taken the appropriate protective measures against COVID-19. At least 70% of the sample maintain that they are concerned about being exposed to the virus. Though 59% of the sample feel that they have an adequate workspace at home, 57% of respondents expressed difficulty with gaining access to technology.

**Figure 8.** How participants prefer to conduct their work before, during, or after the pandemic.
*Graphic design by brickstreet studio in Johannesburg, South Africa. April 2022.*

When asked how work was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic (see fig. 8), the majority indicated that it was conducted entirely in person. The second largest ratio comprised those who said they had a hybrid model of working virtually and in-person. When asked how they had been conducting training *during* the pandemic, the majority stated they were using a hybrid model of working both virtually from home *and* meeting in-person. When asked how they would prefer to conduct their work or training after the pandemic, the majority indicated that they would like to maintain working virtually and in-person.

# Qualitative Interview Responses

Qualitative interviews focused on open-ended questions related to cultural heritage. The following is the complete questionnaire administered to all respondents who agreed to conduct an individual interview:

# Interview Guide

## Basic Demographic Information

1. Could you please state for the record your full name? (If consent is given for a real name)
2. Could you please state for the record the self-selected pseudonym that you would like to use for this study? (If consent is given for a pseudonym)
3. Where were you born?
4. What gender do you identify as?
5. What is your age?
6. What race do you identify as?
7. How would you describe your ethnic or cultural identity?
8. What is your marital status?
9. Do you have any children or dependents? If so, how many?
10. How many people live in your household?
11. What is your personal annual earned income?
12. What is your household annual earned income?

## Education

13. Please describe all your tertiary degrees, what subject they were in, and which universities you received them from?
14. What institution are you currently working or enrolled in?
15. What is the name of your specific field or department?
16. What project(s) (if any) are you currently working on?
17. What are your primary research interests and what inspired you to focus in these areas of your work?

## Impact on Training

18. How would you define cultural heritage and how did you get involved with cultural heritage in your country?
19. What skills do you feel you gained in your training in cultural heritage, and what skills would you like to see passed down to the next generation of cultural heritage professionals?
20. Can you describe how you used to carry out your studies, training, or work before the outbreak of COVID-19? How has this changed during the pandemic?
21. What has been the most disruptive to the continuation of your training or work?
22. How have you been able to adapt to challenges brought on by the pandemic, if at all?
23. Have you seen any benefits or improvement to your work despite any limitations imposed by the pandemic? If so, please describe.
24. In your opinion, what has been the impact of COVID-19 on professional development and employment opportunities in your field and in your local area?
25. How would you describe the types of opportunities that exist in your field before and since the outbreak of COVID-19? How do you look for or find these opportunities?
26. Can you think of an example in which cultural heritage and/or conservation in your country has been directly impacted by the pandemic?
27. Can you describe what you think would be most helpful in strengthening and improving your sector of cultural heritage work in your country?
28. Is there anything else you wish researchers understood about your circumstances?
29. How would you define cultural heritage and how did you get involved with cultural heritage work in your country?
30. How have you been able to adapt to challenges brought on by the pandemic, if at all?
31. Can you describe what you think would be most helpful in strengthening and improving your sector of cultural heritage work in your country?

Of the 84 participants who completed an online survey questionnaire, 31 agreed to participate in follow-up interviews. Their responses have been summarized and organized first by the dominant cultural heritage sectors represented, including visual art and art conservation, archives, archaeology, cultural tourism, and heritage sites. Those working as academic staff or undergoing postgraduate training in tangible conservation are discussed later to provide a general sense of how prospective or early career conservators are faring in the African labor market during the ongoing pandemic. Note that those who provided permission to share their real identity have been listed, whilst respondents who opted to keep their identity confidential selected a pseudonym that is indicated by an asterisk. Those who opted to remain anonymous are simply referred to by limited identifiers such as country of origin and occupation.

## *African Art in Museums and Galleries*

**Christian Nana Tchussieu** is the director of the Blackitude Museum in Yaoundé, Cameroon. His personal journey to working in Cameroonian art was unique, as Christian described initially being interested in the natural sciences before transitioning into studying marketing, communications, institutional management, and cyber-journalism. As he was always inspired by literature as a child, he articulated that though he'd studied diverse subjects, he was always committed to promoting Cameroon's diverse cultural arts and giving it more public recognition. One way that Christian believes cultural heritage can be enriched is by not perpetuating the dislocation of Cameroonian art from its temporal context. He described always looking for ways to link older collections with what feels relevant to the contemporary moment. Christian expressed passion for inspiring new discourses around these collections, whilst also adapting to new developments in technology to incorporate digital tools, methods, and products in art exhibition and design.

Christian views cultural heritage as "the ensemble of rich resources which must be kept and better kept for the good of the community and humanity." He believes that we should move away from Western norms of thought and create stronger links between collections and their originating communities. Christian felt that knowledge must be shared with local youth to help them understand the past of the regions they originate from. Before the pandemic, Christian was leading a project focused on assessing the functionality of museums across Cameroon. This initiative was halted by the pandemic and many institutions struggled to survive. Christian described seeing professional development suffer at great expense during the current global health crisis. As the concept of the museum was still considered nascent in Cameroon, he argued that museums already lacked resources before the onset of COVID-19. He felt that the number of available job opportunities did not match the number of qualified or skilled laborers needed to work in museums.

Christian found that most museums had to adapt to changing conditions by creating a larger social media presence. Christian emphasized the importance of collaborating with other invested stakeholders to creatively strategize and imagine new possibilities for Cameroonian museums despite increasing budget constraints. Christian emphasized the need to decolonize primary, secondary, and tertiary-level education that challenges the primacy of Western standards of art and instead encourage

deeper appreciation for Cameroonian arts and culture from local perspectives. He felt more effort should be made to digitize museum collections, strengthen the public's access to a stable internet connection, and use different kinds of interactive virtual platforms to improve visitor experience and foster greater collegial collaboration and exchange.

Similarly, **Ulrich Dimitri Kenmegne Kom** is a young artist from Cameroon who graduated from the Institut de Formation Artistique (IFA) of M'Balmayo in 2013. Many of his own works include paintings, murals, graffiti, and the decoration of fabrics. Ulrich is a young entrepreneur who started the DECART Galerie[2] in 2019. With a personal background and interest in painting, his gallery explores the connections between contemporary Cameroonian art and diverse modes of display. He is interested in questions of material culture throughout Africa and how to inspire the youth to pursue and invest in further developing these art forms. Ulrich shared that at the onset of the pandemic, many students struggled when courses were moved online, as many were not well-versed in remote teaching and learning. Despite facing immobilization in several sectors of Cameroonian cultural heritage, Ulrich felt strongly that youth can create new opportunities. Designing virtual exhibitions, for example, seemed to welcome a new set of visitors to the DECART Galerie, where he felt culture could be more readily accessed by a younger audience. For him, the pandemic showed how adaptable people can be and that some have created space for innovative professional development opportunities. Ulrich emphasized, however, that there is still a need to further develop appreciation for cultural creativity and production amongst local community members.

While respondents such as Christian and Ulrich used their passion to manage art galleries and museums, individuals like Thina Miya went on to demonstrate the importance of conservation in reimagining the social role of national art. **Thina Miya** is a young South African woman who currently works as a conservation curator for the Constitutional Court Trust. The Constitutional Court is not only the highest court in South Africa, but a deeply significant site designed with complex social, cultural, and political symbolism. Opened first by former President Nelson Mandela in 1995, the court is part and parcel with Constitution Hill, a living museum with a 100-year history that tells the story of incarcerated South African women and men who were historically held within the walls of the Old Fort, the Women's Jail, and Number Four ("About Constitution Hill"). Included amongst these are world-renowned activists such as Nelson Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, Fatima Meer, and Joe Slovo. Part of what makes this site so unique is that it not only operates as a museum, but as a functioning high court that remains open to the public and boasts of an impressive national art collection curated by former Justices Albie Sachs and Yvonne Mokgoro (ibid).

Thina studied fine arts at the University of Johannesburg but has been working to curate exhibitions that meet the accredited standards for artwork preservation. Through her studies, she was inspired by museums and the policy structures that surround them. At the time of the interview, she was working on a publication for the Constitutional Court that details the full catalogue of artists and artworks that inform the trust's collection, including conservation treatment reports that artworks have undergone. Thina felt she had gained invaluable knowledge on different people's customs and the meaning of different objects throughout diverse South African heritage sites. Although the

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[2] The name of the gallery is parsed from the French word *decouverte* meaning "discovery" and *artistique* meaning "artistic" in English.

pandemic hindered in-person interaction, Thina felt that the one advantage of the pandemic was that there was a lot more time for research-based work and publications, as well as opportunity to assess their collection management system and policies. For Thina, making research accessible to the public was equally as important as preserving the specific artworks themselves. Thina's own workplace provides an example of how other African governments can reimagine the role of art in the design and function of judicial or legislative sites that carry complex and fraught historical meanings.

## *Archives and Museums*

Where visual art and conservation can play a significant role in judicial buildings, the work of **Alexio Motsi** demonstrates how a background in library information and archives can influence how institutional memory is stored, catalogued, and disseminated. Alexio was born in Zimbabwe and received a master's degree in records, archives, and record management from the University of Dundee in Scotland. Motsi is a 53-year-old man who has been working as the preservation manager at the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa for over 20 years. His primary research interests are related to the preservation of endangered records and explores indigenous methods of preservation that predate European colonial encounters. When asked how he came into cultural heritage work, it was his personal research in the ancient Timbuktu manuscripts of Mali that sparked his interest. He stated that in the African context, most of the techniques and methods of preservation that university students are taught have a Western origin. But when he learned about the Timbuktu manuscripts, he stated that:

> …this was the first time that I had to look at something that goes back to the thirteenth century, that is still in good condition, and there's been no Western influence in its preservation. That sort of attracted my interest, as to whether there are any indigenous methods of preservation that have been used on the African continent. I found this to be fascinating because I think the knowledge that you then get from there is quite interesting. A lot of it is based on the involvement of the communities.

Though there were political skirmishes and military coups in Timbuktu that damaged about 4,000 manuscripts out of a total of 100,000, what surprised Motsi was that most of these manuscripts were safely and secretly moved to a secure location by local community members. No external governmental bodies, organizations, or institutions intervened to do this. Rather, it was local communities who took it to be their duty and obligation to be the stewards of these sacred manuscripts.

Currently, Alexio is involved in digitizing records in the National Archive using governmental COVID-19 recovery funds. The initiative has allowed for 163 unemployed youth to gain experience in the arrangement, description, metadata development, scanning, and conservation of over 1.5 million records. The South African government's support of national archive preservation provides an example of the great benefit such action can have in boosting local economies. In neighboring countries such as Lesotho, however, such support is lacking. **Matlotliso Mafale**, for example, is a young Basotho woman who works at Lesotho's National Library and Archives within the Ministry of Tourism, Environment, and Culture. She argued that the COVID-19 pandemic meant that fewer

researchers were visiting the archives as the institution did not have the technological infrastructure to offer online services. Matlotliso felt strongly that the government ought to prioritize training staff in learning new digital tools and methods to keep their resources relevant and accessible to the general public.

Echoing Matlotliso's sentiments, Alexio described the pandemic posing a major threat to the 60 kilometers' worth of records held at their facilities in Pretoria, as the risk-mitigating duties required to save these documents could not be easily performed by staff without specialist knowledge and training. Alexio had to obtain a special permit to personally visit the archives twice a week to perform the necessary preservation duties. The physical nature of this type of labor made adapting to the virtual world and physically digitizing records more difficult. However, Alexio argued that working remotely forced his team to increase productivity, prioritize digital transference of archives, and improve the organization's overall marketing efforts. He posited that since virtual events became ubiquitous during the pandemic, this helped save costs and afforded his colleagues greater opportunities to engage with global professional networks.

Alexio defined cultural heritage as being "the footprint of our existence." He felt that without culture, we have no identity; culture differentiates us from other living organisms because it means we continue learning from the past through diverse materials—whether it be tangible or intangible ways of life. He believes that his role as an archivist is to document historical information for future generations. Alexio mentioned his gratitude for postgraduate programs such as the University of Pretoria's master's degree program in tangible heritage conservation. Without conservation training programs, Alexio fears that future generations of African youth may lose the skills required to preserve complex forms of African heritage. Particularly as it relates to indigenous methods of preserving, he stated that there was still much to learn in spaces where these practices thrive. In his opinion, cultural material was better preserved by the people who honor the originating cultures who made them.

**Tersia Perregil** echoed similar sentiments, as she was a book preservationist and librarian by training and currently works as the heritage assets manager at the Ditsong Museums of South Africa, an amalgamation of eight museums spread across the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality and Johannesburg. These museums hold diverse collections encompassing flora and fauna, paleontology, military history, cultural history, geology, anthropology, and archaeology. Tersia herself specialized in library and information science. She has been working on updating the museum's database so that heritage assets and value are accounted for and verified. She is interested in collection management systems within the South African context. During the pandemic, museum staff had to apply for permits to visit the space in-person at least once a week to monitor collections. This meant that in-person work was severely reduced, and Tersia learnt how to create new processes more efficiently and critically evaluate current policies and strategies. As the Ditsong Museums falls under the Department of Sports, Arts, and Culture, Tersia mentioned that it seems when government departments need to be retrenched, arts and culture is often the first to experience budget cuts. Despite these restrictions, Tersia described her years working in museums as being marked by a greater shift away from Eurocentric ways of doing things. She herself advocated for the transparent acknowledgement of colonial European pasts and the rehabilitation of community-centered methods of researching,

curating, and designing exhibitions. It was Tersia's belief that museum education needs to be decolonized.

**Judith Opoku-Boateng** is one such example of someone who takes practical action to decolonize archives at her local university. Judith is a 49-year-old Ghanaian woman who completed her bachelor's degree in sociology and political science. She also holds a master's degree in archival studies from the University of Ghana. Judith currently works at the Institute of African Studies and J.H. Kwabena Nketia Archives at the University of Ghana. She works on multiple projects, including collecting vintage photographs from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s from the personal collections of various individuals throughout Ghana. She also digitizes national heritage photos for the Ministry of Information and stores music archives that researchers request to have translated and transcribed for further study. She is passionate about audio-visual heritage preservation, and like many other respondents in the study, feels that cultural heritage is worthy of preservation and emulation. Like Alexio Motsi, Judith archives for posterity.

Judith describes life before COVID-19 as being lively and dynamic, characterized by photographic field trips, cultural festivals, and listening sessions for patrons. She described feeling somewhat nostalgic for the days when the space would be fully booked with visiting classes or bustling with international visiting researchers. During the pandemic, the university closed and there was little traffic going through their archival spaces. Judith and her colleagues, however, used the time as an "incubation period" to clear backlogs, collect contemporary archives from local communities, and continue enriching their database's metadata. When asked what she wishes she could pass on to the next generation of cultural heritage professionals in Ghana, she shared that her main concern was to make archiving an attractive profession for young people. She shared that many of the students she works with say that they thought of archival preservation as "dirty" work. But as Judith sees it, she considers archiving to be a form of activism and urges researchers to respect the work of archivists. To her, these objects are precious.

Judith used the analogy of archival materials being much like human babies who need specialized care. As she said, "If there's some kind of threat to the materials, you have to be able to identify it. Babies can't even express themselves. So, you have to be a proper parent to these materials." Judith takes her commission as a cultural steward seriously and hopes that subsequent generations will do the same as they reinvent and expand what African cultural heritage means today. Judith's interest in sound archives also found resonance in an **anonymous respondent** who works at the District Six Museum in Cape Town. District Six was a former inner-city residential area where those the apartheid state classified as Coloured, Cape Malay, or mixed-race predominantly lived. In 1966, the apartheid regime declared the area a white residential area and by 1982, over 60,000 residents were forcibly removed, displaced, and relocated to the Cape Flats ("About District Six"). This respondent has a background in archaeology, public history, and museum and heritage studies, but like Judith Opoku-Boateng, they are passionate about reframing oral histories as crucial cultural archives. This respondent worked on a three-year funded project aimed at strengthening the museum's oral history program, including the digitization of archives for public education and awareness. They not only worked alongside former District Six residents on public mural projects, but they emphasized the importance of oral stories in rehabilitating histories that were erased, marginalized, or neglected before South

Africa's democratic transition in 1994. This interviewee felt that oral history has a powerful place in understanding people's everyday experiences with apartheid and how it informs contemporary identity politics in Cape Town. They are most interested in how residents make sense of their community's legacies and promoting awareness surrounding the historical processes that shape them.

The museum collections at the District Six Museum are undoubtedly diverse, spanning ephemera such as personal photographs and possessions donated by past residents of the area. The sound archive, however, is the heart of the collection and requires museum staff to continually collaborate with District Six community members to keep these stories alive in collective memory. Before the pandemic, the museum was active in conducting workshops for local youth and wanted to use digital technology to engage new audiences. The museum epitomized community-based praxis, where staff were always collaborating with former District Six residents to reinvent permanent exhibition displays or hosting school outings to develop interactive public programming. However, the museum struggled during the pandemic to translate this activity into the virtual realm, especially since methodologies in oral history are best suited to in-person, social interaction. Though the museum struggled to financially stay afloat during the first year of the pandemic, staff shifted toward developing a strong social media strategy in order to rethink funding efforts, re-examine the museum's business model and sustainability, and open virtual exhibitions and an online store for local and international visitors.

This respondent believes that it was not solely the COVID-19 pandemic that negatively impacted professional development in the museum sector, as they felt it was already in a poor state in South Africa. They argued that the systemic issues seen in the lack of financial support for museums must change at the tertiary level of education where more museology, conservation, and archiving courses should be offered. Though the museum has welcomed many younger people to staff who come from an academic background in anthropology and curatorship, this respondent felt that this new generation of heritage workers still need time to grow into their positions, as much of museum work is learnt through on-the-job training. Particularly when it comes to the specifications of oral histories, new staff must be cognizant of the ethics of storytelling and how expanding access to these narratives can motivate local communities to take ownership of how their histories are publicly framed.

The theme of memory recovery and in-depth local knowledge was pervasive throughout the responses of interviewees employed in archives. **Jordan Saltzman** was another such woman who currently works at the archival collections of the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre (JHGC). As a place of memory, education, and global human rights, the JHGC not only focuses on the historical impact of the Holocaust in South Africa, but on the more recent 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Jordan herself has a background in archaeology and philosophy but believes that the archival collections of museums are integral to social development. Jordan conceives of South African cultural heritage as very different from other countries, where she perceives South Africans to be more open to talking about difficult pasts. Though her journey into cultural heritage began with researching material cultures, she became increasingly interested in intangible heritage because it felt far more reflective of people's personal identity and memories.

Public events such as guest speaker events and school visits stopped after the first wave of national lockdowns began in March 2020. Jordan described the museum adapting to these changing conditions by learning how to use podcasts and webinars to engage the public, staggering school tours over a few days, and continuously checking in with their museum volunteers and Holocaust survivors. There was more time to focus on archiving stories and creating more digital content. The museum also received funding during the pandemic, which was used to organize and digitize their archives, put items on permanent display, develop a resource room, a lending library, and a renewed volunteer program. The museum's international audience also grew during this time. When reflecting on how her institution was able to adapt during the pandemic, Jordan recommended that other cultural heritage institutions focus on uplifting local people and think ahead concerning the risk factors that could damage the collections that local communities hold dear. She felt there was always room for South African museums to improve institutional leadership, prioritize working with local youth, and focus on supporting the majority of South Africans who remain economically, politically, and culturally neglected or underserved.

It is no coincidence that those working in archival management share a passion for how history is taught. **Lindinxiwa Mahlasela** is a historian by training and a specialist in museums and heritage. He has always been interested in how storytelling has a role in identity construction. Lindinxiwa works for the Bayworld Museum in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, a natural and cultural history museum with educational programming focused on marine life, reptiles, maritime, and local history. He is most interested in examining stories of the past, particularly those relating to Black South African history. He defines cultural heritage as the value of history and the role that memory preservation has in enhancing identity and engendering racial reconciliation. Though Lindinxiwa works at a maritime museum, he felt it was important to introduce histories of Black civilization to his institution to ensure that these stories are protected from the violent disregard it was assigned in the past.

Lindinxiwa would spend most of his time in the museum storeroom—curating, reading about artifacts, and taking visitors through guided tours of the museum. Once the pandemic hit, however, the museum created a team of essential workers that could go into the museum. Mahlasela was quick to begin utilizing virtual platforms and attempted to make the museum more accessible online, with hopes that their collections could be preserved for innovative use in the future. Of concern was the lack of education and awareness about museums amongst local Black communities. Lindinxiwa admitted that it was not until he was an adult in university that he realized he could work in a museum. As he acknowledged the lack of diverse racial representation in the museum sector, Lindinxiwa felt that professional development for Black South Africans remains a challenge. Not only are people of color unaware of opportunities that may exist, but he has observed a low influx of young people coming into the field. South Africa's racial politics pervade as employment opportunities in top positions remain largely reserved for white counterparts.

In his experience, many of his white colleagues hold little interest in his own research in Black histories and do not prioritize acknowledging these legacies in their museum exhibitions. This hinders transformation from within the museum space. Lindinxiwa felt that public attitudes toward the cultural space needs to shift to thinking about cultural heritage, tradition, and pride as an important agent of change. For him, diverse cultural heritage sectors should be considered an indelible part of

national economic development. To convince the Black majority of South Africa, however, Lindinxiwa felt strongly that museums be truly inclusive and create more opportunities for Black academics to operate in positions of power. Lindinxiwa saw much potential in reforming the museums that already exist. He hoped to see South African museums move away from Western methods of collecting, organizing, and displaying objects that have long marginalized Black histories.

## *Cultural Tourism and Heritage Sites*

Though the global pandemic centered healthcare professionals as critical frontline workers, individuals such as **AbdelHamid Salah** are a testament to how heritage workers are also first responders who protect and rescue heritage sites embedded in dangerous contexts of natural disaster, conflict, and crime. AbdelHamid is Chairman of the Egyptian Heritage Rescue Foundation (EHRF), a non-government organization based in Giza. The EHRF collaborates with the V&A Museum in London to run the Culture in Crisis program, an international organization aimed at protecting the world's cultural heritage and local communities that suffer cultural loss through conflict, criminal acts, or natural disaster. Within his role at the EHRF, AbdelHamid described his job as one of disaster risk management and emergency response for cultural heritage. He felt that this specialization is particularly needed in Egypt given the widespread looting of ancient artifacts. Though international looting of Egyptian archaeological materials by Europeans has been widespread since the colonial era, AbdelHamid argued that a new wave of heritage theft started in the 2000's. The 2010's, for example, saw to the loss of millions of public manuscripts from Lebanon and Islamic art had been exposed to bomb attacks, making evacuation missions a necessity.

AbdelHamid currently works on governmental rehabilitation, restoration projects, and NGO-based projects involving risk management and assessment, disaster management, mitigation strategies, and progressive strategies. AbdelHamid emphasized the need for cooperation between government, NGO's, private investors, and funding organizations, as these have historically privileged tangible conservation over intangible heritage. For him, the pandemic had serious effects on the field of cultural heritage in Egypt. At EHRF, for example, 90% of projects were on-site and halted due to the series of national lockdowns prompted by the pandemic. In a space where funding was already limited, cultural heritage in Egypt became even more neglected. AbdelHamid argued that with more funding, cultural heritage could be given more stability in the context of civil conflict. More could be invested in capacity building, mentorship, and developing helpful educational curricula. AbdelHamid believes what is most important is to provide on-site training and empower local people to care for their own cultural heritage.

**Dr. Grant Parker** is a professor of Classics at Stanford University, but draws connections between Roman imperial culture and Africa. Though he lives and teaches in the United States, Dr. Parker is originally from South Africa and his research interests are focused on histories of enslavement in the former Cape Colony and the role of memory in major South African monuments and memorials. As a result, Dr. Parker frequently visits South Africa to collaborate with national museums on collective memory projects. In his book, *Transformations of Memory*, he devoted several chapters to discussing South African museums and the historical memory of former President Nelson

Mandela. Having worked with the Iziko Slave Lodge in Cape Town, Dr. Parker collaborated with a local photographer to produce a video installation highlighting the lesser studied sites of enslavement throughout the Western Cape province.

Dr. Parker posited that attempting to define cultural heritage was a complicated question, particularly in South Africa where exploration of the nation's past can be met with historically separatist views of heritage. When facing contestations over which historical perspectives to highlight, Dr. Parker felt that open access to multiple perspectives is a key factor in ensuring curatorial accountability. Presenting several perspectives on the same historical events is one way in which nuanced understandings of time and place can be formed. Before the pandemic, Dr. Parker spent significant time visiting various heritage sites and museums, speaking to a diverse set of cultural heritage professionals. When these activities were forced to cease at the start of the pandemic, Dr. Parker found it necessary to draw from his own interests in digital humanities to help improve the Iziko Slave Lodge's website. In doing this, he was able to demonstrate the value of using digital platforms as democratic spaces for local and international colleagues to develop new research questions from archival materials that had not been previously publicized. Though he felt South African museums already had little resources to begin with, Dr. Parker advocated for African and Africanist scholars abroad to use their resources to support local communities and heritage workers.

One avenue through which local economies have been commonly supported is that of cultural tourism. **Kat\*** has a tertiary degree in development and tourism, and currently works for both the South African Department of Forestry, Fishery and Environment, and for the Africa World Heritage Fund (AWHF). At the AWHF, Kat's role involves capacity building across Africa, organizing public programs, pushing for sustainable conservation, and securing heritage funding. Though he never anticipated working in cultural heritage as a profession, the ongoing pandemic caused him to rethink how he could connect with local Johannesburg residents to garner a deeper appreciation for culture through tourism. Kat has gained valuable experience and described feeling as if he were constantly learning on the job. As a local city tour guide, he has learnt how to effectively share local knowledge with diverse visitors, making people aware of how cultural traditions and values fit into everyday life in an increasingly globalized world.

During the pandemic, the AWHF had to focus on innovating new methods of communication that challenge the status quo. Although he felt that only a small number of colleagues at the Department of Forestry, Fishery, and Environment shared similar priorities as the AWHF, he felt that his presence in both institutions had great impact given the need for more people of color to be represented in the tourism sector. Kat sees first-hand the need for more governmental support so that the cultural sector can thrive. Though he works in a major city, Kat described wanting to promote cultural appreciation amongst communities outside major South African cities, creating a new blueprint for cultural heritage in public education curricula.

Beyond South Africa, individuals such as **Makame Juma Mtwana** have several years of experience working in Tanzanian cultural tourism and heritage sites. He is currently the director of the Zanzibar Stone Town Heritage Society, a local non-government organization that aims to restore and preserve this historic trading town along the Swahili Coast. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage site, Stone Town was a cultural hub of traders and migrants from across Africa, the Arab regions,

India, and Europe. Though Makame feels Stone Town is an important world heritage site, conservation efforts for this site have been abused by investors and adversely impacted by the influence of modern architecture. During the interview, Makame recalled when the first president of Tanzania said that "a nation without culture is like a tree without roots." To him, culture is something that is ever-changing and dynamic. Even with the effects of globalization and mass media, he believes that people should still try to do things the way their ancestors did.

His NGO consists of almost 200 staff members and all their activities revolve around direct community engagement. Before the pandemic, they would organize conferences that brought diverse cultural heritage professionals to Tanzania, covering topics such as the management of natural resources, issues of eco-sustainable tourism, and educating residents on how to contribute to the preservation of their town's legacy and contemporary life. However, members of the Zanzibar Stone Town Heritage Society struggled during the pandemic. Few were trained in how to use or affordably access the technology required to maintain effective communication and critical conservation projects. Though staff have slowly adapted to remote work, Zanzibar's reliance on the international tourist industry meant that many residents suffered economically during various waves of national lockdown and international travel restrictions. For him, the pandemic has highlighted the need to depend more on the investment of local community members and pour more resources into further developing domestic tourism.

**Mona\*** has a bachelor's degree in environmental history, heritage, and culture, and currently works in the Ministry of Tourism, Environment, and Culture in Lesotho. His interests involve the management of heritage resources, particularly those related to the conservation of San rock art. The San are indigenous people of Southern Africa, spread across what is now known as South Africa and Botswana. Some of the oldest rock art paintings have been found in caves that date back 73,000 years. Mona is most interested in studying the cultural influence that San rock art had on the Basotho people that are now dispersed throughout Southern Africa. Passionate about the possibilities of decoding the messages held within these rock art paintings, Mona has taken the time during the pandemic to develop an online database for major rock art heritage sites and created a mobile application that can be used as a decision-making tool to document and monitor various sites. He is currently implementing conservation measures at the Liphofung Historical Site, a cave that was historically used by San and other Neolithic people with a vast collection of rock art and archaeological deposits from the Stone Age. Mona learnt a great deal before the pandemic by travelling locally and internationally to learn how other countries develop and implement initiatives geared towards the management, protection, and conservation of such rich heritage resources.

By contrast, **Dr. Susan Keitumetse** is the new UNESCO Chair for African Heritage Studies and Sustainable Development and is a researcher at the University of Botswana's Okavango Research Institute. She is the author of the seminal text *African Cultural Heritage Conservation and Management: Theory and Practice from Southern Africa* and holds a Ph.D in African cultural heritage and sustainable development from the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. She is interested in assessing the lack of cultural attention given to African wilderness and nature parks. When asked about the challenges of trying to continue her work during the pandemic, Dr. Keitumetse mentioned how crucial it was that she go out and be with the local communities whom she regards as the rightful stewards

and gatekeepers of Botswana's natural landscapes. She also mentioned how it is crucial she travel with her students to carry out assessments and identify key stakeholders and community leaders to work with on a face-to-face basis. Though she has access to internet to work remotely, she felt that this was not always a culturally appropriate means to sustain her community partnerships.

When asked what would be most helpful in strengthening and improving the cultural heritage sector in Botswana, Dr. Keitumetse mentioned the need for political buy-in. As she put it, one of her primary missions was to raise awareness regarding the importance of cultural heritage in Africa. For local governments to invest, she felt that African cultural heritage professionals needed to be strategic in building partnerships with international organizations such as UNESCO. Where cultural heritage was under threat amongst vulnerable populations, Dr. Keitumetse advocated for engaging with youth to raise the next generation of ambassadors who will tend to important areas of tangible and intangible heritage.

## *African Archaeology in Practice*

The relatively weak state of African archaeology today is due in large part to histories of colonialism where indigenous knowledge and practices used for millennia was marginalized, ridiculed, or banned (Chirikure 2020, 505). But as many of our interviewees had a tertiary degree in archaeology, their testimonies demonstrate the commitment our participants had to reclaiming archaeology for projects of social justice and empowerment. It is worth noting how these interviewees consistently saw the potential that their discipline has as a vehicle to redress past wrongs. Many of our respondents applied their professional skillset in settings as diverse as world heritage sites, museums, private environmental consulting companies, and public archaeology projects that merge academic research with indigenous knowledge production.

**Christopher Ssebuyungo** is a young museum professional based in Kampala and working at the Uganda National Museum. Though his educational training and primary research interests revolve around archaeology and rock art in Eastern Uganda, he has over 11 years of experience working in the museum. Gaining such skills as object handling, curation, research, documentation and conservation, cultural heritage for him "concerns things that local people have decided to cherish and pass on to generations." It gives us historical knowledge and has all to do with peoples' past, present, and future. In our interview, Christopher was most concerned with questioning the museum as a site of knowledge, interrogating how Ugandans can feel a sense of ownership for their cultural heritage. He works in collaboration with the Uganda Paleontological Expedition, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline, Koobi Fora Field School, and the MuseumFutures Africa Project. These missions relate to a range of issues, from studying Uganda's past life forms in paleontology and assessing the impact of governmental infrastructure projects to re-imagining museums throughout the continent.

In his estimation, the pandemic not only impacted the progress of many of Christopher's projects, but it accelerated the need to invest resources into digitizing resources or improving the museum website given that they could not welcome visitors on-site. For example, he cited an application called Wikimedia that allows for new information about museum objects to be added. Despite the challenges of working remotely, Christopher felt the pandemic has allowed him more time

to conduct research and improve accessibility to the Uganda Museum's resources. As Christopher argued, the professional scope for entering the museum in Uganda is limited; more development is required at the primary and secondary school levels. There are fears that the cultural heritage job market is losing talented youth to other careers. To strengthen the industry, Christopher advocates for continued engagement between key stakeholders in African cultural heritage who can share practical experiences, challenges, and success stories. He called for increased engagement with students, in-house capacity building, and developing higher-quality photographic inventories of museum objects. Researchers should remember that they must develop sustainable partnerships with local community members and museum professionals, whilst recognizing the need for first-hand knowledge and institutional support.

Similarly, **Munyaradzi Elton Sagiya** is a 35-year-old man from Zimbabwe who currently works at the Bindura University of Science Education. His undergraduate and postgraduate degrees were in archaeology and museum and heritage studies. He was motivated to enter these fields as he grew up near the world heritage site of Great Zimbabwe, the historic capital of an ancient kingdom near Lake Mutirikwi and the town of Masvingo. Munyaradzi's research is an attempt to understand the past through the integration of both personal indigenous knowledge and academic archaeological research. He is currently working to document and archive the historic and cultural practices of stonemasonry that were central to Great Zimbabwe.

During the pandemic, heritage sites had to restrict the number of people visiting, depriving sites like Great Zimbabwe of the proper preservation required to sustain it. The pandemic has encouraged many people involved in these sites to embrace and invest in technology, whilst also highlighting the continued need to train local people to acquire the specialized skills required to maintain it. Munyaradzi felt that there needs to be growth of public-private partnerships in the field, where different sectors of government should work together to revive previous intergovernmental organizations that prioritized cultural heritage. When asked what he wished international researchers understood about the Zimbabwean context, he stated there was the need to engage in debates regarding decolonizing heritage. From his perspective, this sociopolitical movement not only critiques how Western knowledge was and is privileged in postcolonial countries like Zimbabwe, but they reflect how rediscovering ancient traditions and practices can rehabilitate the loss of histories that predate colonial encounter.

Though archaeologists in Zimbabwe chose to apply their skills at heritage sites, individuals such as **Tafadzwa Muchanyangi** leveraged his expertise in archaeology to work in a private consulting company. Tafadzwa works at Waterkings Environment Consultancy and conducts environmental impact assessments for projects related to mining, manufacturing, construction, infrastructural development, and agriculture. Though his current projects include doing work on gas exploitations in Lupane and conducting impact assessments for a mining company in the town of Zvishavane in the Midlands province, Tafadzwa's postgraduate research focused on Zimbabwean heritage monuments and how they differ to neighboring African countries. He worked to create heritage site inventories that can be digitized and publicly disseminated. During the pandemic, Tafadzwa observed that many companies did not have the funding for external impact assessments. He felt there was an urgent need to update and reform national legislature for Zimbabwean cultural

heritage work. For example, though the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) is a premiere heritage organization in the nation, its legislative mandates have not been reviewed or updated since 2000. For Tafadzwa, prioritizing cultural heritage is not merely a matter of money, but finding ways to continually preserve cultural heritage in the labor market by preparing new graduates to apply their skillset in diverse occupational settings.

One **anonymous respondent** from Kenya was a trained archaeologist living and teaching in the United States. Their projects are based in Kenya, including excavations at the highland region of Mau Narok (precluding the Rift Valley) and Mount Kenya West. Their projects prioritize facilitating processes of knowledge co-production. Much of their primary research interests stemmed from collaboration with local Kenyans invested in prehistoric research as an integral part of contemporary cultural heritage. They want local communities to receive archaeological information in a way they can embrace and have autonomy in decisions regarding their historical legacies. According to this respondent, cultural heritage is "the whole body of knowledge and material things of the past that were made, used by our recent and remote ancestors. They are not just tangibles, but also ways of thinking and doing things." They are concerned with closing the gap between work done in the cultural heritage field and how it is taught in academia. They believe that people need to understand cultural heritage as part of their identity. This is particularly important in cases where identity has been distorted or narratives have been imposed onto people through asymmetrical power relations.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, work was carried out through multiple site visits. Personal funds were sometimes used for preliminary research, whilst external fellowships were used to support local community members to be trained in archaeological excavation. This respondent often prioritized involving Kenyan museum professionals, researchers, and residents to build a truly collaborative archaeological community. Locals could earn some money from helping on-site, and they collaborated with local museums to organize public talks, events, and exhibitions. The pandemic came with several challenges, including barriers to travel, difficulty in renewing funding, and connecting with multiple specialists. They had to make use of the messaging platform WhatsApp for continued communication with locals, sending satellite images, and training local people to do archaeological work without the direct supervision of professionalized experts.

In the cultural field, this respondent believes that more should be done at a school curriculum level to advocate for the importance of cultural heritage. The pandemic slowed down this type of work in Kenya, where training within the museum diminished and archaeological field schools stopped. For this reason, building pride in national heritage is imperative. This respondent felt that Kenyan cultural heritage work should not be merely seen as excess labor in capitalist modes of production but reclaimed as an invaluable resource that belongs to the people. The social value of heritage must be recognized at the governmental level as financial support and educational resources become available. The responsibility of cultural preservation should be decentralized to allow local people to take more ownership, protect, and take pride in their own heritage. For this respondent, cultural heritage is not only interdisciplinary but transdisciplinary, necessitating collaboration between and among various communities to promote social justice.

**Bako Rasoarifetra** is a 67-year-old, French-speaking Malagasy woman who holds a Ph.D in Languages, Literatures, and Civilizations from the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations

Orientales (INALCO) in Paris, with specializations in archaeology and heritage. Though she presently works in the Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Antananarivo in Madagascar, she is a historian by training and was attracted to archaeology because of the emphasis on reconstructing history through researching material cultures. She not only studies iron and stonework from archaeological sites throughout Northeast Madagascar, but she documents the iconography of the university's art and archaeological collections with a focus on restoring delicate textiles. Bako is most interested in projects that enhance Madagascar's tangible and intangible cultural heritage in ways that can best protect sacred heritage sites, benefit local communities, and inspire others to participate in cultural heritage preservation.

Bako helps research teams organize archaeological projects at historical sites, directs outreach campaigns aimed at protecting local communities, and deals with issues of patrimony at contested heritage sites. Before the pandemic, Bako would bring student interns to ethnology labs to train them in how to document collections from museum and excavation sites. Particularly during the first year of the pandemic, excavations, grants, and practical teaching were suspended. Some lab work could continue if social distancing precautions were taken, but they could only work for a limited number of hours and had to shift towards hybrid forms of labor. Bako described taking more time to publish articles and participate in international webinars.

However, Bako felt that distance and online learning has yet to be developed in Madagascar. As a result, students' integration into professional fields of cultural heritage was stunted. Bako emphasized the need for networks of heritage professionals to share diverse and well-supported employment opportunities for early-career Malagasy heritage workers. There is still a need to train a new generation to become museum curators, architects of built heritage sites, and material conservators of objects that preserve Malagasy heritage for future generations. When asked what could be done to enhance the cultural heritage sector in Madagascar, Bako saw considerable potential in encouraging young people to apply their skills in digital technologies:

> I think we need to develop the digital sector, train dynamic and competent young people with
> a spirit of creativity, and innovative ideas to work in this field. What is missing in Madagascar
> is the professionalization of the personnel of the cultural heritage sector. Already we have
> taken a step forward in the field of museums.

Since 2019, storage rooms across 12 museums in Madagascar had been upgraded thanks to the support of international organizations such as UNESCO and the Japanese government, which funded a Reorganization of Museum Storage program initiated by ICCROM. Though international funding helps, Bako argued that it is not enough. Like other study participants from Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, Bako felt there ought to be greater investment in the capacity-building of local communities.

# Raising a New Generation of Heritage Workers

**Dr. Rachel Mariembe** is in her early forties and works at the Institute of Fine Arts at the University of Douala. Dr. Mariembe was the first person in Cameroon to defend a Ph.D on preventative conservation and has devoted her career to educating new generations of Cameroonian youth to undertake the work of cultural heritage preservation. In addition to teaching and training students at university, she has worked as an associate curator of an exhibition shown at the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac in Paris, France and is involved in restitution efforts in various German museums. She is also writing a book on the continuity of preservation practices for objects and collections held by the chiefdom of Cameroon. Though she argued that the pandemic has been good for individual research, it has been detrimental to many of her students who lack access to necessary resources to survive. Attempting to migrate cultural heritage work and training online has been nearly impossible where internet costs remain unaffordable and inaccessible. Dr. Mariembe stated that she and her colleagues have had to build resilience and adapt to using online channels to connect. But to strengthen the cultural industry during the current environment, Dr. Mariembe believes the government should provide greater financial support to institutions who have experienced severe loss of income.

But as Alexio Motsi stated previously, South Africa is one of but a few African countries that boast of a postgraduate program devoted to tangible heritage conservation. As one of the lecturers of the master's degree program at the University of Pretoria (UP), **Isabelle McGinn** has a multi-disciplinary background in fine arts, archaeology, museum studies, anthropology, and historical heritage studies. She works as a museum objects conservator, a lecturer, and course convener of UP's program. Isabelle's understanding of cultural heritage has evolved as she has worked in many different museums and believes that people can sometimes be limited by their own biases and preconceptions of what defines culture. Isabelle emphasized the need to practice keeping an open mind when encountering differing points of view, especially when studying contested cultural histories.

One of the biggest challenges of training students in material conservation was the restriction on meeting in-person at lab facilities where students needed access to tools and objects to practice applying technical skills. Isabelle and her colleagues ensured that students were still provided with home toolkits and ran virtual workshops to guide students through various conservation techniques step by step. Particularly as Isabelle observed the closing of three major South African museums, she stressed the importance of cultural heritage work during times of crisis. To strengthen the cultural industry in South Africa, Isabelle emphasized the need to advocate for the important role that conservators play in preserving cultural heritage and promoting greater appreciation of diverse South African communities.

Another **anonymous respondent** who was both a lecturer and paintings conservator in Cape Town similarly advocated for the need to impose fewer boundaries on cultural heritage. Though tangible conservation has historically been object-focused, this respondent observed that the field has shifted toward a more community-based approach that acknowledges the need to ethically steward the intangible stories that objects tell. In their opinion, tangible conservation has never been more important as it is in our current moment. For example, on April 18, 2021, a wildfire that sparked in

Table Mountain spread to the University of Cape Town's campus from Sunday to Monday. Amongst the university's significant losses, many of the artifacts kept at the Plant Conservation Unit offices and the Jagger Reading Room were destroyed. These included many notable objects of African history. Select students and staff from UP's M.A. program were amongst the first responders to travel to Cape Town to salvage and restore what remained. This respondent cited this incident as an example of the type of frontline work conservators contribute during times of environmental disaster.

At the onset of the pandemic, this respondent used the time to learn how to utilize new technological tools to train young students and apprentices online. The widespread use of video conferencing platforms such as Zoom allowed this respondent to recruit scholars, practitioners, and instructors from around the world to organize virtual workshops for local students challenged by the limitations and barriers imposed by the pandemic. Though this respondent felt it remains to be seen how the ongoing pandemic will impact the profession, they argued that work in art conservation was already limited pre-pandemic and that the museum industry requires greater governmental support and opportunities for new graduates.

Amongst those who participated in follow-up interviews, five students were enrolled or finishing their coursework for the master's degree program at UP. **Daniéle Knoetze** is a 31-year-old woman from South Africa with a background in visual studies. She is passionate about restoration and conservation and believes that younger generations need to start caring about protecting South African heritage. She is herself involved with investigations of techniques used to treat collections held at the Pretoria Art Museum. Daniéle felt that the pandemic forced her to shift her mindset to working from home and finding a balance between trusting herself and relying on her peers. To strengthen the cultural heritage industry in Africa, she felt that more employment and training opportunities should be publicized and targeted at new graduates who come from conservation training programs like UP.

**Laura E.'s\*** educational background is in social anthropology and heritage studies. Her dissertation examined the work of South African artist, Diane Victor, who creates works on paper from candle smoke and burnt book soot. She is interested in exploring Victor's process in-depth and thinking through how art conservators contend with temporal longevity and material ephemerality. Laura felt the UP program gave her a greater understanding of diverse material objects, how to store and preserve them, and how to communicate with different institutions as she records the intangible heritage of objects. Contact classes and practical labs had to stop during the pandemic, so Laura mentioned how students received take-home kits with basic tools such as scalpels, tweezers, a bone folder, optimizers, and a digital telescope. As a result, there was more experimentation at home and constant communication between her peers and instructors. Online seminars helped the students connect with conservators and heritage practitioners from all over the world.

Though students tried to make do with their provisions, others like **Jabulile Ntuli** still struggled amid national economic downturn. Jabulile is a 27-year-old woman with a background in history, politics, and museum and preservation studies. Her dissertation was centered on the history of South African protest photography from an art conservator's perspective. She is interested in unpacking how these photographs were preserved and how they are used in the present. Ntuli believes there is no single way to describe cultural heritage, but that it relates to past experiences, stories, and memories. In contemporary South Africa, cultural heritage is something that links the past with a

living present. For her, heritage is determined by the collective spaces you inhabit and occupy, the shared values that inform your identity. She stated that the master's degree program at UP allowed her to gain curatorial skills in her work at both the Javett Art Centre and the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre. She has not only worked as a tour guide but learned how to document and create condition reports for objects.

During the pandemic, she lost her job at a library and was forced to move back home where poor network coverage hindered her ability to continue her studies. The university assisted her with a new laptop and provided her with data bundles so she could use low-data programs such as Blackboard to access course materials. Despite these challenges, she appreciated how the pandemic allowed for greater exposure to international professionals. Jabulile hoped that this would continue, as this type of professional networking has opened doors for students who struggle to find local employment. As opportunities to gain training in conservation have historically been limited for Black students, Jabulile emphasized the importance of diverse cultural representation in this sector. As an example, she described her own experiences with having to handle human remains in a lab. As the norms and values of her own cultural background do not permit her to handle bones, she highlighted this issue to her instructors for future consideration. The inclusion of diverse cultural groups in cultural heritage work means acknowledging any preconceived biases and reinventing what it means to be a steward of cultural objects.

**Mosotho\*** is a 43-year-old woman from Lesotho who moved to South Africa to gain skills in tangible heritage conservation for the benefit of her country. She is also on a research team for a new museum being built in Lesotho. Though her coursework at UP was mostly practical and required a lot of time in labs, doing fieldwork, and perfecting these skills with practice, adapting to online learning during the pandemic proved especially challenging. Similar to Jabulile Ntuli, Mosotho struggled to deal with poor network connection and data costs when forced to return to Lesotho during national lockdown. This deeply impacted her ability to access heritage field resources and there was widespread loss of income as an older student with her own family to care for and support.

**Mabafokeng Hoeane** is a 28-year-old woman and traditional healer with an educational background in anthropology, history, and film. She was amongst some of the first cohorts to graduate from UP's master's degree program and focuses her work on the history of Black South African women. In her interview, she discussed feeling as if people of color were generally not made to feel included or welcomed to museum programs where art conservation has been dominated by white South Africans. Mabafokeng described her experience of learning South African history as one-sided and found anthropology especially problematic as a Black woman. She felt it was her prerogative to accomplish what her elders could not in previous generations—including attending university or entering professional fields where there is little representation of Black people. Mabafokeng expressed her passion for shifting the way Black history is told and changing perceptions on the role of traditional healers in South Africa. She is currently working on a monograph endorsed by the university and aims to make academic writing more accessible to general audiences.

Mabafokeng's main objective is to change the way sacred objects are brought into museums. She has witnessed how indigenous artifacts have not been properly treated, handled, or curated in institutional contexts. These artifacts have been brutally treated and recorded without regard for the

values of originating communities. She spoke of how the apartheid government never considered the needs or expertise of originating communities, and this is evidenced by the vast number of objects she sees sitting in museums that should only be handled by traditional healers. The issue is larger than repatriation, as those objects should not have been kept by museums in the first place. Although Mabafokeng and her colleagues also struggled to adapt to the pandemic, she notes that this period helped to expose the reality of what is happening in the cultural sector. Though she is amongst a handful of trained and qualified Black conservators in the country, she still struggles to find work despite the great need. Mabafokeng wants decisions in government to be made with greater transparency regarding the marginalization of many indigenous cultures' history and advocated for greater solidarity between conservators and originating communities. She felt more resources should be directed at digitizing and archiving what exists in collections to bring about serious conversations on how museums can reform their collecting, preservation, and curatorial practices.

Though **Zineb Akabbouch** was not a student in UP's master's degree program, she was also a recent graduate whose employment prospects were compromised during the pandemic. Zineb is a 32-year-old woman who was born, raised, and trained in Morocco. She received her master's degree in wood art and completed technical specialization in graphic design, visual communication, and heritage restoration in Casablanca. Zineb chose to pursue this profession as she felt it was honorable to "heal" these objects and give them a second life. When asked how she would define cultural heritage and why she feels it is an important field in Morocco, she stated:

> Cultural heritage represents my identity and my memory. It informs me about the logic of physical and ideological belonging to my society and my country. It surpasses the notion usually limited to materiality because, on another hand, it represents an immaterial entity, abstract and transmissible through ideas, traditional habits, stories of places and people that my grandmother tells me. Cultural heritage traces a link between the past and the present, it can make scenes and historical moments come alive. It is a collective memory and a form of protection against oblivion and the consideration that this resource means the recognition of the culture and the know-how of my ancestors.

Zineb's definition of cultural heritage is important, as it is not only shared by most participants in the study but also explains the relevance that cultural heritage has today. Nearly every participant interviewed reiterated the importance of empowering African youth to take up the mantle of stewarding both their tangible and intangible heritage.

# Future Steps

Our study participants speak to the importance of empowering local youth to study different sectors of cultural heritage, create more practical training opportunities, and for tertiary institutions to include courses that both decolonize and reinvent African museology, conservation, and preservation. Not only should national governments and local communities be incentivized to take pride in preserving their own heritage, but they should mobilize their own cultural capital to create sustainable employment opportunities. As some scholars of African cultural heritage management have forewarned, the application of participatory management has historically held mixed results in

countries such as Benin, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Though many of our respondents endorsed community participation, previous studies "demonstrate that the discourse of community participation is sometimes overly ambitious in its intents and, from a practical point of view, is not easy to apply. This is because communities are neither universal nor homogenous" (Chirikure et al. 2010, 30). As the interests of cultural heritage professionals may not always align with local community members, more evaluative research ought to be conducted based upon an up-to-date and comprehensive dataset of heritage institutions, programs, and projects that aim to redress past wrongs left behind by colonial powers. Such research would provide a larger dataset of case-studies from which other professionals can learn. How can African cultural heritage workers meet the challenges that the pandemic poses to their local context? How can they do so without replicating neo-imperial power structures or disenfranchising local people further?

Though our interview data shows that many jobs in African cultural heritage are predominantly in museums, archives, and heritage sites, the pandemic has economically depleted these industries and left an uncertain picture of recovery. Particularly as heritage professions become inevitably entangled with contestations of collective memory, politics, and identity, many of the continent's cultural workers seek to recover heritage for social healing and justice. Our results demonstrate how some African cultural heritage professionals are adapting their training to bolster a labor infrastructure that best befits their context. They recognize the agency and resilience of the originating communities they work for, with, and alongside, and propose ethical ways to raise public awareness regarding the importance and relevance of African cultural heritage on the global stage.

Our hope is that this study provides a blueprint for how future quantitative and qualitative researchers can adapt and improve upon our research design to contribute more representative data. In designing a study with a hybrid approach, we intend for potential insights to be backed by robust samples (at least N=100) and qualitative richness that enables us to understand the texture of human experience behind the numbers. With a larger quantitative sample, there are greater possibilities for exploring various intersections of data, performing comparative analysis, and developing predictive models that can better elucidate issues such as decision-making challenges in the sector. Future researchers could investigate the cultural heritage sectors that exist, what characterizes them, and correlate this to the cultural heritage practitioners that are present in those spaces.

This study has been an integral step in strengthening our network of cultural heritage practitioners across the African continent. Should a study like this be commissioned on a larger scale in the future, we would engage with more local field agencies willing to assist with questionnaire translation and in-depth interviewing. We recognize that this study displays a significant South African skew. In the future, we hope to achieve greater variability in African regions and cultural heritage sectors. We endeavor to link these analyses to actionable results and outcomes that assist funders and cultural heritage organizations to be strategic and intentional in their efforts. Ultimately, we hope studies like ours can inspire and incentivize governments, communities, researchers, employers, and young people to care about their cultural heritage. Collaborative research allows us to provide a roadmap grounded in rigorous methodologies and powerful insights. With continued expansion of this study, we hope to find truly practical solutions that resonate amongst diverse African cultures embedded in complex spaces, places, and times.

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