

The politics and patina of lace craft: a critical assessment of the significance of South African 'Koppies' Lace

by

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Fig 1. A square handkerchief or tray mat. Bobbin lace. Silk. White. Circa 1850. 26 x 26cm. (Author's photograph)

*Making a gentle music,
As beneath her labours grow
'Downs' of delicate net-work
White as the winter's snow.*

The Old Grandame by John Askham (1868)

1. Introduction

The world is interwoven through textiles (Sethi, 2020).

I own one piece of antique lace. It was bought as a birthday present from a museum gift shop in the town of Darling in the Western Cape, South Africa, some time in 2009. This was shortly after I began lessons to make bobbin lace. I recall that the date for the lace, handwritten on a label on the reverse of the frame¹, had been identified as the mid 1850s. It is a handkerchief or tray mat with a hexagonal centre of fine silk cloth



Fig 1.1 Detail of Fig 1. Lace handkerchief

encircled by first a broad and then a narrow band of bobbin lace in silk thread. The design is mostly Torchon ground (ground is also termed *reseau*²) with sections of Dieppe ground. The pattern (or *toilé*³) uses a type of tally stitch known as a leaf, also called a petal or wheat ear, creating six clusters of several intricately

intertwined six-petalled “flowers”. This simple design is quite misleading, as a tally leaf is a particularly difficult stitch to perfect in bobbin lace. But this has been repeated, with consummate precision, over a hundred times in the *toilé*. The lace is for the most part in good condition, but the stitches are pulling apart in two sections. Firstly they pull apart at the seam where the work begins and ends, which is where the threads meet and are knotted together (see Fig 1.1). Secondly, the stitches pull apart along the outside edge between the broader and narrower band of *reseau* (see Fig



Fig 1.2 Detail of Fig 1. Lace handkerchief

1.2). The simpler outer band seems to have been made separately and added onto

¹ This label is now lost. Insects have eaten the paper label.

² The background fill of the lace design (Earnshaw, 1980)

³ The pattern of the lace design (Earnshaw, 1980)

the broader and more ornate inner band using fine buttonhole stitching. The piece is clearly more decorative than functional. The time and effort to work the particular choice of design elements and to work in silk thread would have been a considerable investment. The consistency and quality of the stitching also suggests a craftsman with considerable skill. I know nothing else about this piece of lace. I have always wondered if such a piece could be made whole again, both as a restoration of the tangible object, but also whole in terms of its intangible context.

This piece of lace encapsulates the perspectives of this research. It is a hand-crafted object, it requires some kind of conservation or restoration to retard the degeneration, and it lacks a known historical context. It is also my inspiration to discover more about lace: lace as object, the history of lace, the place of lace within the museum and part of a collection, and the conservation of lace. Subsequent to my original focus on bobbin lace practice, my interest over the last ten years has extended into lace knitting, counted cross stitch embroidery, and weaving. It has also moved from bobbin lace to include needle lace. This means my interest has broadened into textile in more general terms. There is less focus on fashion and the sartorial and more focus on understanding textile objects as totalities: in context, as projections and part of relationships, rather than as isolated things.

My primary interest in lace is from the perspective of a craftsman. For this research, the definition of craft is drawn from the work of Howard Risatti (2007). Craft is generally a “skilled occupation, dexterity, ability to perform or ingenuity in design” (Risatti, 2007:16) of a specific object that usually has a “practical physical function” (Risatti, 2007:17). Any craft can be defined in terms of material (e.g. fiber), or technical process (also called technique, e.g. weaving), or working method (e.g. stitching), or type of object (e.g. tapestry) (Risatti, 2007:15). For this dissertation the main focus is the lace itself, the tangible object, and its production as a crafted object. In the process of developing my research topic and investigating the lace object, the discussion has evolved as an exemplar of its central thesis: that a tangible object is never merely the object itself, but is embedded in the intangible. A complex web of contexts that enliven the object, and an understanding of the object is bound “in to a network of reference and connection ...part of a constellation” (Thomas, 2013:47).

I am a lacemaker and textile crafter. My interest has no tangible origin. I don't come from a long line of crafters, and I'm not building on a family trade. To me, lace objects are fascinating confections, aesthetically pleasing in and of themselves, and an intricate construction. I simply decided I wanted to be able to craft them, to understand their mystery. In learning the process of making a lace object (and several other crafted textile objects since) I have also learned how calming and therapeutic the embodied experience is of making these objects, leading to a flow state⁴. A byproduct of this understanding of process is that it adds to an appreciation of the object. Risatti (2007:188) notes the essentiality of process to an object's identity, where "the act of making can have a direct bearing on the object's meaning and the social world we construct through that act" (2007:188). Understanding the object is a way of understanding the maker of the object and the social construct(s) of the maker. This develops empathy for what has been created and who created it.

My general perception was that lace, and I'm referring to antique lace, is undervalued by society at large, not only in a financial sense, but more so in a social sense. Museums may be able to place a price tag on lace, but this is due to specialist knowledge of the item and the links to the scarcity of a piece, or to specific narratives of the piece that make it unique or exceptional. Most laypersons may not be aware of what antique lace⁵ is, or was, or know its history or where it once fit in the social hierarchy. Some may know lace, but ask what the point is of lace in the modern era. Who would have the time to produce it handmade, and why? Who or what might lace represent in a contemporary world? The value of the object is therefore not necessarily only in the object itself, but in an understanding of its history. Its value is in the events it connects with, its story, and the people that surround the object, and their stories. It is a vast constellation of ideas.

My unravelling lace piece prompted attempts to unravel my own interest and love of lace craft. This led to my secondary interest: the perspective of the conservator and lace within the museum collection. On the one occasion I had the opportunity to visit

⁴ In psychology a "flow state" is a mental state in which someone performing an activity is fully immersed in and focused on the enjoyment of the process (see Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

⁵ I am differentiating here between antique and modern lace, as modern lace is probably well-known as lingerie object or clerical vestment (see Buttress, 2013).

the Victoria & Alfred Museum in London, the incredible collection of lace that held my interest the longest. Lace is intricately beautiful to my eye. I am fascinated by how it is made and preserved. Interestingly, the relationship between the craftsperson and the conservator as restorer is not uncommon. As early as 1836, the British Museum employed “a craftsman⁶ (*sic*) to clean and repair objects in the collections”. This tradition was established in many United Kingdom national museums and art galleries in the late nineteenth century and continued up until the 1970s (Caple, 2000:52). Sheila Landi, previously a director of conservation at the Victoria & Albert Museum, has done more than anyone to establish and cement the importance of textile conservation field since the 1970s. She notes that there has been a shift in focus for people interested in a career in conservation in recent decades. Originally, prospective candidates were mostly from an art background (such as art history, textile design, and costume embroidery). But this has shifted to an interest in the object as scientific analysis. Landi states that it doesn’t matter if you’re “interested in the human level or the molecular level” of the object, but she does note that an “instinct of art is much more difficult to acquire” (Landi, 2020). For the restoration of such objects as lace, it should be obvious that more than an instinct is required to restore or conserve an object so fine and intricate. It requires considerable dexterity and knowledge of its construction. A deep understanding of the technique or process is needed to achieve a quality restoration, because “how we understand the technique helps in the conservation” (Meejul, 2020).

The discussion focuses on the value of lace and what this entails, so the need to conserve lace as a tangible heritage object frames parts of the discussion. This leads in to numerous theoretical issues. One of the contexts that becomes so clear when dealing with craft objects is that “bodies are linked to objects” (Mataga, 2020). There are people and stories that give a voice to the object. These bodies must have a reason for creating the object, and thus the object “embod[ies] complex intentionalities and mediate[s] social agency” (Hoskins, 2013:75). Even though the bodies are no longer there, the object itself can tell us something about those people, however limited or incomplete that narrative may be.

⁶ For this discussion the non-gendered term “craftsperson” is preferred, but original wording of quotes has been maintained for accuracy.

Tilley (2013) notes that without things, the objects of material culture, we are far less capable of understanding the identities of people and societies to the extent that “we would neither be ourselves nor know ourselves” (Tilley, 2013:61). He goes on to note that these material forms both “mirror pre-existing social distinctions, sets of ideas or symbolic systems” and reproduce, legitimize, or transform “values, ideas and social distinctions” (Tilley, 2013:61). The social, and the echoes of the society that create a craft object, are therefore to be found in a deeper understanding of the object. This can reframe our understanding of a previous context, as well as allow us to revisit our own contemporary views and assumptions.

And finally, there is a tertiary interest that emerges from this investigation and adds the historical context to the discussion. Emily Hobhouse is a name that was known to me and most likely to anyone with a passing interest in the South African War, also referred to as the Second Anglo Boer War (ABW), and early 20th century South African history. Hobhouse’s philanthropy and dogged attempts at bringing the issue of the suffering of women and children in the British concentration camps in South Africa during and after the ABW is well-documented⁷. Because of her support, she becomes entwined in Afrikaner heritage intersecting with numerous famous names. These include Field Marshal Jan Christian Smuts who served as Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, the famous author Olive Schreiner, and Rachel Isabella (Tibbie) Steyn, wife of the last president of the then Orange Free State, Marthinus Theunis Steyn. All these important figures shared a love of correspondence and frequently shared intimate details of their lives with Hobhouse and she with them. Hobhouse’s link to lace was, however, a revelation. Her name repeatedly appears when reading about lace in a South Africa context, the establishment of spinning and weaving schools, and ultimately the establishment of a lace school in the Free State. While she never directly leads the lace school, as opposed to her hands-on input for the spinning and weaving schools, it is clearly her impetus that brings the enterprise to fruition. Understanding Hobhouse and her influence shapes an understanding of the place of lace within South African history. The Koppies Lace School she helps establish becomes an interesting and unique moment in South African industrial history. All who played a part in this

⁷ See more detailed discussion later in this thesis.

endeavour, including the students, are now gone, but the objects they created and what these objects represent are still to be found. The Koppies lace pieces are important tangible history objects that speak to a specific moment in South African and Afrikaner history.

My research more generally considers how tangible heritage objects can speak and how these intangible utterances are the intrinsic value of any tangible object. Specifically, I want to explore how Koppies lace can be restored as important textile within the South African museum context. Ingold (2000:345 quoted in Thomas, 2013:54) notes that “the forces involved in the making of both artefacts and organisms are not contained within any surface or boundary, and actually extend between any entity and its environment”. Textile objects can tell us a great deal about people and places at points in history. I argue that textiles within the museum should be given a more prominent role in describing our humanity and telling our story, as “textiles are the relics of cultural exchange” (Rittinaphakorn, 2020) as much as any other less fugitive material. Virginia Postrel, an author and columnist, boldly claims that “textiles made the world” (2020) when writing about the development of civilization, but from the perspective of textile development. The economic and cultural impact of textiles is often neglected in discussions of historical progress and broader trends. As Tilley notes, the real value of objects is in understanding the object in its larger context. This is particularly relevant to craft objects, as it is “through making, using, exchanging, consuming, interacting and living with things, people make themselves in the process” (Tilley, 2013:61). Craft therefore becomes a reflection of our humanity and an understanding of craft gives us insight into ourselves as people, our relation to our environment, and our place in history.

2. Methodology

The perspective for this research is ultimately that of a conservator. It begins with the tangible object and then expands into the intangible. Risatti, in his in-depth explanation to tease out a theory of craft, explains how an understanding of the nature of a craft object ultimately requires the additional knowledge of how the object “fits into the continuum of its historical tradition” (Risatti, 2007:10) but *begins with how the object is made*. He notes, since craft objects are mostly applied or functional objects that the “function remains long after radical changes have occurred to the social and cultural institutions that originally brought them into being” (Risatti, 2007:28). Within the changing context of a post-apartheid South Africa and the changing nature of museums globally (see Section 5 for discussion), understanding the object objectively first is an important point to the discussion of the place of the object and the value of the object within the museum. Analysing from the starting point of function it therefore considers the object simply as object at first, before framing that function in the larger social and historical continuum. I expand my discussion into intangible elements to support my analysis, but the starting point is the lace itself.

2.1 Layout of the dissertation

This dissertation includes sections that discuss the theoretical details that underpin the thesis (Section 3), historical context (Section 4) and a specific focus on Koppies lace in a South African museum context (Section 5). The lace objects in the various collections are highlighted (in sections titled Lace objects 1, 2 and 3) to develop the supporting evidence. The lace objects are divided into three larger categories⁸, which simplifies the description of the objects. Some objects are discussed as individual objects, and others as groups of similar objects to avoid repetition. These descriptions are jointly discussed, compared and contrasted in the analysis section (Section 6). The lace object descriptions make use of the Historic Objects Production Sequence (HOPS) details (Caple, 2000), but are discussed in essay format without breakdowns for each heading. A conclusion (Section 7) also considers possibilities for further study.

⁸ These categories will be explained in the analysis section.

2.2 The tangible object

I apply the HOPS framework (Caple, 2000:75) for the analysis of the tangible lace objects. I focus on the information that can be obtained from studying the objects directly, both as a historic document and as an aesthetic entity. This is done by studying “an artist or craftsman (*sic*), the work they produced, their materials, technique, the subjects they depict, [and] the style or expression of their work” (Caple, 2000:75). Risatti explains this by noting that craft objects “capture the efforts of their makers and make these efforts visible and palpable for us to see and comprehend” (Risatti, 2007:196). Caple notes that Kirby Tolley refers to this type of analysis of the craftsperson and their depictions and styles as the analysis of *connoisseurship*.

For this research, however, I do not focus on a specific craftsperson. For the most part, the individual lacemakers are nameless as is so often found in the history of lace production. If the craftsperson is known, it is difficult to connect them directly to a specific object⁹. There are mentions of the patrons who bought lace, or owned lace, or who donated lace to specific collections, but the craftsperson is usually anonymous or listed as a school, studio or group. For this research, the group of craftspeople belong to the Koppies Lace School¹⁰.

The focus of the analysis is mostly on the work produced and the technique and style of the pieces, as this is where more evidence and detailed history to support the discussion exists. Many of the objects produced were student projects, so there are many duplicates. In some cases, the object is discussed as a type within the larger collection. The HOPS analysis considers, among other aspects, the capabilities of the craftsperson (drawn from Caple, 2000:78). This includes their expertise – how they discovered, acquired, and then shared the skills they required for their craft. Secondly, it includes the aesthetics involved in the crafting – in this case notably those aspects of design that are specifically South African. It also includes the technique applied, the

⁹ Interesting to note that for some pieces of Koppies Lace held in the Huis Emily Hobhouse old age home in the Free State there was a list “with additional information on the lacemakers” that may have linked specific lace makers to specific pieces. However, this unique document seems to have been lost (Smalberger, 2020).

¹⁰ The Koppies Lace School existed from 1909 to 1938. The history will be discussed in more detail in later sections.

actual quality of the skillset; and the function of the crafted object and the relevance of this to the context of the object's creation.

Caple notes that objects possess three forms of identity: object identity (the object performs a function in society), contextual identity (an object is associated with other objects that signify and reinforce a social order or context), and experience identity (an object embodies and signifies past experience and carries ideas of the past into the present)(after Hodder, 1994 in Caple, 2000:75). Some of these identities play directly into the contemporary discussion surrounding museums and collections within museums, specifically their contextual identity, such as: What should be collected? Who should decide on what is to be collected? Who does the collecting? Who does the collection or object(s) represent? How do collections add to knowledge? What knowledge is being added?

The lace objects that form part of this dissertation represent a very short period in South African (specifically) Afrikaner history – a window of 27 years in the early 20th century. They exist as a direct result of the impacts of the 2nd Anglo Boer War on the local Afrikaner community. This discussion investigates a group reaction by white South Africans, mostly women and young girls, in the aftermath of this historical conflict with Britain¹¹ and one instance of what they produced during this period. After 1994 and the dismantling of the apartheid government and policies, the relationship to this moment has changed as the focus on heritage has shifted to the diversity of African heritages that have ostensibly been erased from as early as the 17th century on South African soil and the African continent in general. The contextual identity of lace, and Koppies lace in particular, can be misappropriated and associated with apartheid-era Afrikaner identity and symbolic ethnicity constructs. This should not overshadow the experience identity of the objects. The latter allows us to (re)consider experiences from history as told by the object itself and to articulate these into the contemporary era.

¹¹ It must be noted that Black South Africans played many parts in this conflict on both sides, including their own, but the general lack of knowledge of these facts is one of the instances of how these histories have been erased (see Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007 and War Museum of the Boer Republics, 2017).

2.3 The intangible context

Because “all objects are culturally and contextually sensitive” (after Tilley, 1994 in Caple, 2000:75) objects need to be understood in terms of the culture and date from which they derive. The craftsman and their objects need to be studied alongside “the full appreciation of the time and culture in which they worked” (Caple, 2000:75). Risatti’s contention is that we “reconstruct something of their [the object’s] original meaning by reconstructing how they would have appeared within their original cultural context” (Risatti, 2007:130). Like Risatti, Caple moves from the tangible object to the intangible context. This is why the historical context of the objects are also considered and elaborated upon.

The temporal and cultural context is the early 20th century in South Africa, specifically within the Afrikaner population and culture after the ABW of 1899 to 1902 in the (then) Orange Free State (previously Orange River Colony) and the Transvaal. Koppies (the town) is situated in the Free State¹². The ABW had a devastating effect on the nascent Afrikaner population as they transitioned into minority rule by negotiating self-governance as separate from the colonial British Empire that controlled a pre-Union¹³ South Africa¹⁴.

Risatti’s discussion of craft includes the need for understanding the purpose of a crafted object, alongside its applied function, as “together they illuminate the larger significance of craft as an expression of human culture” (Risatti, 2007:55). These functions and purposes are discussed in relation to the historical context and to the contemporary place of craft and textile craft in the modern museum. The intersection of Hodder’s identities, Risatti’s purpose and functions, and Caple’s craft ability shapes this methodology and the appropriate analytical tool. This is effectively what Risatti refers to as a functionological analysis. It shifts emphasis from “simple form, appearance, or topography to the complex interrelationship between material,

¹² Koppies is located near the Renoster River in the Free State. Originally the name was derived from the name Kopjes (Dutch for “hills”) after the farm of Honingkopjes or “Honey Hills”. On contemporary South African maps Koppies is named Kwakwatsi (in the SeSotho language), located in the Ngwathe Local Municipality of the Fezile Dabi District in the Free State.

¹³ This version of history is deeply problematic as this transition of power completely neglected and failed to recognise indigenous and Black cultures and other non-white cultural groups at the time (see the work of Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007). This discussion is, however, outside the limits of this dissertation.

¹⁴ South Africa became a Union in 1910 and a Republic in 1961.

technique, form and function” (Risatti, 2007:131). This would include an analysis of the work’s connection to the social structure out of which it developed (Risatti, 2007:131). I explore these concepts to demonstrate the value of craft objects in general, but lace in particular, and therefore the potential value to the museum and the social and historical impact of a lace collection.

2.4 The study of lace at a distance

It should be noted that this research has taken place during a global pandemic, and this has had an impact on the methodology. Ideally the objects under discussion should be viewed in close-up and as hands-on tangible objects. Textile especially has an additional tactile factor¹⁵ that makes up part of the understanding of the nature of the object. However, this has not been possible due to lockdowns and other restrictions. This has meant that photographs take the place of the tangible objects for the purposes of this research. Landi notes that a close examination of the object is preferred even required “to know the object, so as not to misinterpret the object”. She believes that “photography doesn’t always show what you want to show” or in this case what you want to see (Landi, 2020). E. Keats Webb, an imaging scientist of the Museum Conservation Institute at the Smithsonian Institution¹⁶, takes this potential for misinterpretation further when she notes that viewers imbue photographs with authority, even though they are in effect a translation of reality (Webb, 2020). This is why it’s important to make this manipulation overt.

Three of the key items for this research are in the Iziko Museums Textile Collection in the Social History Centre in Cape Town. They were accessible and photographed in high resolution by the author before the pandemic restrictions were implemented. Access to several other lace collections from the War Museum of the Boer Republics in Bloemfontein was achieved through access to digital images of these collections.

¹⁵ Textile has a visual factor, based on colour and pattern; a tactile factor based on the texture of the fabric or the material(s) from which the fabric is made and how it is made, e.g. depending on the type of warp and weft of a weaving pattern the “fall” of the fabric changes; and even an audio factor in the sound the fabric makes as it moves against itself; other fabrics and objects, and the wearers themselves.

¹⁶ Webb’s work seeks to improve the digital provenance of images themselves, and she tests and applies a range of photographic methods, including Photogrammetry, X-ray radiography, ultraviolet (UV) and infrared (IR) radiation options, to the study of heritage objects, over and above the usual optical light photography.

These images had adequate resolution sufficient for this analysis. Unfortunately, not all items had been previously photographed, so the entire collection is not always accessible, even as photographs. So while there are some limitations to the data set, there was sufficient good-quality imagery to do the necessary analysis for this dissertation.

2.5 Lace as ethnographic object

This research also reconsiders lace as an ethnographic object. This is an overt choice to “other” the lace object. This is out of character with the usual interpretation of the term “ethnographic” as presently and generally used in the museum context and applied to collection objects.

Applebaum (2010 in Hudson, 2013:11) notes “the fundamental senselessness of the category” that was previously and is presently misused to categorise not technique or material, but a generic culture of origin “presuming a perspective grounded in European culture and historical notions” (Hudson, 2013:11). As Hudson (2013) suggests there is a tendency to associate the ethnographic with the epithet of “other”, so “‘ethnographic’ seems to stick to the objects whose origin is outside Europe” (Hudson, 2013:5).

Hudson (2013) notes that this particular habit of using “ethnographic” as a “catch-all category for ill-defined but distinctly ‘other’ set of material heritage persists among museum and heritage professionals... [and] carries a load of preconceived meanings” (Hudson, 2013:4). These preconceptions include ideas of inferior cultural development projected onto the object, and the exoticism of the object within a different belief system (Hudson, 2013:4). The concept has therefore become “shorthand for original, living cultures, action, or creation embedded within an unfamiliar, not European society” (Hudson, 2013:11), with an emphasis on the unfamiliar and non-European. Lace would not in this sense be considered “other”, because it is fundamentally “of Europe”. But, there are other, more salient, elements to the elaborated concept, which makes it useful for this investigation to reconsider lace from an “other” perspective, especially as the European can be considered as the other within the (South) African museum.

The more useful aspects attached to the label of ethnographic object include Pye's (1995 in Hudson, 2013:7) characterisation of the ethnographic object as a "document" potentially containing important evidence. This may include information related to its materiality that can be contained within its construction, or in the larger context of its place within a particular historical moment. All these factors help to develop the narrative of the socio-cultural context of the object and to potentially understand that context in a more nuanced way. As social artefact, the object is a record of a particular construction of objective materiality at a moment in time and within a social hierarchy. It can speak to ideas of the personhood and labour involved in its creation. Hudson (2013) describes ethnographic collections as "groups of objects [that] will provide valuable insights into the documentation of the living community from which they were removed" (Hudson, 2013:4) and this can be any community, including European communities, which contradicts the stereotypical application of the ethnographic label.

The collecting process of such objects is generally linked to a sense of urgency, before the objects "stop being produced in the same way, due to disruption of the [indigenous] community's way of life or traditional practices" (Hudson, 2013:4). Lace is generally considered to be a dying craft in the 20th century. This means there is a clear disruption in the process of the lace object's production and a very clear urgency to record the practices and contexts of these traditions¹⁷. Obviously, this application removes the "indigenous" label and inferred racial bias, to include any or all communities. There are many endemic communities within the European context that carry on these fading traditions for which "indigenous" would not be the appropriate term. But the concept of a localised and isolated group that needs to be recorded and documented is applicable.

Hudson's (2013) discussion specifically examines the ways in which textiles have been considered "ethnographic" and whether this affects their conservation or restoration treatment (Hudson, 2013:3). Treatment here refers to mechanically and chemically treating an object for conservation purposes. But this is equally relevant to express how one reacts to or interacts with the object subjectively and considers it

¹⁷ A number of lace types, e.g. Alençon needle lace, and Slovenian and Croatian lacemaking, are inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/>).

ideologically: how we respond to the connotative meaning of the object within a larger concept of contemporary objecthood. Drawing on the above, the redefined ethnographic object is part of a collection conceived and constituted to “stud[y] and preserve cultural information” (Hudson, 2013:6). As Hudson suggests the term “ethnographic” should be used to describe “the *actual life of the people* who made and used the object”¹⁸ (Hudson, 2013:11). It should be used regardless of the perceived nature of the relationship between those people or any culture, to some supposedly dominant or preconceived hierarchy of superiority, and without the plausible biases of such a condescending approach.

For this research, I redefine lace as an ethnographic textile, eschewing the biases inherent to that concept, in order to study the materiality of lace from the perspective of the relationship to the changing cultural context(s) of that material construction. I am deliberately and overtly “othering” lace as an object of whiteness within a (South) African context and what this means for its value to the museum. This is done in order to understand the relationship between various groups that make claims to and about lace’s perceived place in a historical context and within the collection.

2.6 Terminology

There are two major lace types based on the technique used to create the lace, namely bobbin lace and needle lace. Bobbin lace uses wooden bobbins. Thread is wound around these bobbins to give weight and tension to the multiple paired threads as they are twisted around each other to form the pattern. Needle lace is made with a thread and needle using simple variations of a button-hole stitch. The working thread is wrapped around central threads (two or more depending on the thickness required). In extreme instances, it creates a distinct raised edge or *cordonné*¹⁹. The thread can be twisted or wound around the needle multiple times before it passes through or around other threads. Ostensibly a stitched lace, needle lace is far more robust than bobbin lace. Needle lace is therefore better suited for clothing and as a fashion accessory. By contrast bobbin lace is usually sewn onto a large ground of machine

¹⁸ Italics in the original.

¹⁹ The English translation for the term is a *gimp*. This term is however predominantly used in bobbin lace, and while it is a highlighted thread, it is not built up or wrapped as in the manner for needle lace.

net lace²⁰ or linen fabric to give it added strength and durability if it is to be used as clothing. This simplicity and robustness may be a key reason for the preference for needle lace as technique at Koppies. This research focuses on the needle lace objects.

Needle lace is built up with different types of buttonhole stitch, stitched on an outline structure of thick threads that are tacked along the lines of a design or pattern. The pattern is drawn out on parchment paper. The type of buttonhole stitch can vary depending on the number of twists in the stitch or by



Fig 2. Kant [Lace] (Hobhouse) Collar, Italian. Needle lace. Cream. (Accession no. 01000/00000 (2) War Museum of the Boer Republics)

incorporating knotting in the process (Levey, 1983:2). Virginia Churchill Bath, a textile conservator of the Art Institute of Chicago, notes that needle lace is “an essentially simple process”, considering that it requires only needle and thread as basic tools. But it is a process “that nevertheless requires precision, ingenuity, delicacy of touch, and an understanding of how to design in transparency” (Churchill Bath, 1974:54). Emily Hobhouse comments on exactly these skills as observed in the needlework that the Boer women and young girls created in the concentration camps she visited.

²⁰ Machine net lace is a form of lace made through mechanical means. This process and the machines that mass-produce this lace appeared in the 1750s and used stocking knitting methods to produce lace net. Chemical methods of producing net were also pioneered at this time (see Levey, 1983).



Cutwork²¹ (in Italian *punto tagliato*) is an early form of needle lace worked on a fine linen cloth that acts as a ground (Levey, 1983:13). Visually it looks very much like modern *broderie anglais* which is a type of embroidery. Cutwork and *reticello*²² are also

Fig 3. Kant [Lace] (Hobhouse). Small tablemat, reticella with bobbin lace. Edging, Italian Needle lace. Cream. (Accession no. 01000/00000 (25) War Museum of the Boer Republics)

often referred to as embroidery laces (TRC, 2017b). A gridwork is cut into the cloth and separated by overcast woven threads. The work includes looped needle woven bars or buttonhole stitch diagonal lines that span the gap from woven thread to woven thread to create intricate geometric patterns, usually with decorative *picots*²³. *Reticello* (meaning “small net” in Italian (TRC, 2017b)) is an extreme form of cutwork relying less and less on a background fabric as it evolved. As a method of working with thread, *reticello* was in use by 1482, according to a reference in a decree of the Metropolitan of Siena. But the term *reticello* wasn’t used till 1591 (Churchill Bath, 1974:58). *Reticello* uses relatively simple geometric shapes limited by the warp and weft of the remaining ground fabric. Adding diagonal lines allows for triangles and these can be developed into star and medallion patterns (Churchill Bath, 1974:63). The distinguishing feature of *reticello* is that the ground work forms a strict vertical horizontal grid with patterns predominantly based on a grid of squares (Churchill Bath, 1974:64).

²¹ The museum inventory for Fig 3. Indicates the tablemat is *reticella* lace and that wording is reproduced here. However, as per the definitions, it is closer to cutwork or *punto tagliato*.

²² *Reticello* is also referred to as *reticella*

²³ A *picot* “the small projecting loop or tiny knobs that decorate both needle and bobbin laces” (Levey, 1983:122)

Reticello designs slowly evolved to remove more and more of the cloth ground, and so they become less bound to a pattern imposed by the structure of the woven background material. Eventually so little of the cloth ground remained that other methods of holding the threads in place as they were worked were developed. This leads to *punto in aria* which means “point in the air” (Churchill Bath, 1974:69). For this method, threads called *filis de trace* are couched into position through pricked holes on layers of parchment and fabric, and then overworked with various combinations of buttonhole stitches. Where the design doesn’t touch, little buttonhole stitch bars called *brides* or *legs* link the various segments. These *brides* can also include *picots*. Larger areas of the design can be filled with any number of buttonhole stitch ground(s).



This method allowed the design to be more varied using curving

Fig 4. Kant [Lace] (Hobhouse). Edging. Reticella. Needle lace. Cream. (Accession no. 01000/00000 (21) War Museum of the Boer Republics)

lines. It moves away from the stricter geometry of *reticello* and is not limited by the weave of a ground cloth. The term *punto in aria* was in use by 1528 (Churchill Bath, 1974:60) so it can be assumed that between 1482 and 1528 these methods had diverged sufficiently to become their own individual styles.

This style of *punto in aria* that can be seen in the teaching piece created by Emily Hobhouse (see Fig 5. below). It clearly shows the process from design on parchment, to couching stitches and *filis de trace*, and then to final completed pattern²⁴ (moving from left to right).

²⁴ The design is reminiscent of Genoese rose point bobbin lace of the 17th century.

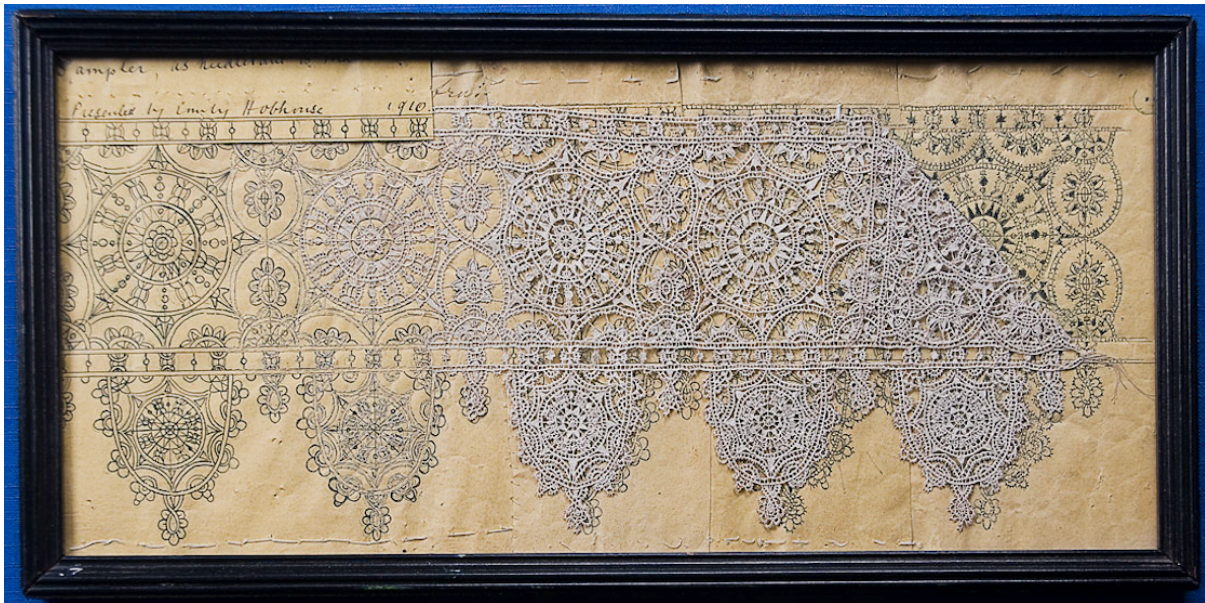


Fig 5. Kant [Lace] (Hobhouse) Edging (framed [on parchment]), *punto in aria*, Late 19th Century. Needle lace. Cream. (Accession no. 01000/00000 (19) War Museum of the Boer Republics)

From *punto tagliato* to *reticello* to *punto in aria*, there is a continuum in development of the technique. If we consider *reticello* as a midpoint between these two extremes, then it is clear why the term is often used to describe any and all of these types depending on the author. Levey (1983) notes this confusion and the interchangeability of many of the labels given to most of the different types of lace. The label therefore is not always correctly applied.

For this research, cutwork (or *punto tagliato*), *reticello* and *punto in aria* are clearly defined as different patterns with different degrees of openness and rigidity in the designs. The label is assigned based on an analysis of both the technique and the design employed. Even so, it is often still difficult to clearly apply all the characteristics of each type with absolute certainty. Using the term *reticello* for Koppies lace is problematic, as the needle lace produced is generally considered *reticello*. But technically this is not necessarily the case. Whether Emily Hobhouse herself would have made these distinctions, or applied the terms incorrectly, is not known. The general consensus seems to be that the needle lace produced at Koppies is *reticello* as this is how it is often labelled in museum inventories. This analysis suggests that in most cases the needle lace is in fact not by definition *reticello*.

3. The study of lace: a theoretical framework

Has the pen or pencil dipped so deep in the blood of the human race as the needle?" Olive Schreiner (in Adamson, 2018:491)

3.1 Lace as representation

The *politics* of the title of this dissertation refers to the general discursive approach of this research, concerned with “the effects and consequences of representation” (Hall, Evans and Nixon, 2013:xxii). But, it is also linked to the notion of “how power is exercised” (Flyvbjerg, 2001:132) in the context of public deliberation and praxis (Flyvbjerg, 2001:129). The *patina* of the title refers to a “coloring [sic] appearing gradually... [on an object] indicating great age [and] esteemed as being of ornamental value” (dictionary.com, 2020). This draws attention to the perceived value of a tangible heritage object, in this case a crafted object as described by Risatti (2007). To frame this discussion of the cultural value of Koppies lace theoretically, I will draw on the work of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall and his concept of representation, apply Bent Flyvbjerg’s phronetic social science approach to the structure of the argument, and focus on the nature of craft as a key component to understand this particular context.

Museum collections are made up of either natural artifacts, such as objects found in nature (e.g. fossils or specimens) or cultural artifacts, which are objects designed and produced by humans within particular historically specific cultural contexts (such as textiles, weapons, clothing, habitats, music and art). These cultural artifacts therefore represent aspects of the culture that produces or produced them, usually within a narrow spatial and temporal context. Hall’s concept of representation considers these cultural artefacts in terms of their meaning to a culture. That means it considers how a particular culture, through the use of language or images, speaks or thinks about a cultural artefact at a particular point in history. Stuart Hall writes in the introduction to *Representation*, that people and cultures

“give things meaning by how we [sic] *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the value we place on them” (Italics in the original) (Hall et al., 2013:xix)

Representation is therefore *practised* within a socio-cultural context using material objects. It is an ongoing and iterative process. The meanings derived from this practice have a purely *symbolic function* (Hall et al., 2013:11) and are not inherent to the material quality or value of the object, nor constant through different contexts of space and time. How we feel about Koppies lace depends on several factors. It depends on who we are and our vantage point, our personal or subjective attitude, as well as what we know about the lace and the context of the lace. The understanding of context grows as we discover more objective historical data that we can attribute to the object: the where, when, who, what and how.

It is important to note that the lace created by Koppies Lace School students is also an overtly political act. Not only was the establishment of the school an attempt by Emily Hobhouse to empower Afrikaner women to become self-sufficient, but Hobhouse was doing this in direct opposition to the desires of the British establishment. Hobhouse, a pacifist, saw it important to build bridges between the Brits and the Afrikaners after the devastation of the 2nd Anglo Boer War (1899 to 1902). (See the final report to the Transvaal Industries Board, 1908 (Hobhouse-Balme, 2012:523) on pg. 51) She saw it as important even though she was ostensibly one of the aggressors. Ultimately her reputation paid the price. She was labelled a traitor, hence Elsabé Brits book title *Emily Hobhouse. Beloved Traitor* (2016). Beloved by the Afrikaner and traitor to the British: how she is represented, and who represents her, changes our relationship to her.

Stuart Hall refers to the primary mechanism for the generation of meaning as a *language*, but notes that a *language* can be “any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organised with other signs into a system which is capable of carrying and expressing meaning” (Hall et al., 2013:5). Within the context of this research, lace and the lace collections become the objects of this language or “representational system” (Hall et al., 2013:xxi) to produce meaning regarding their value. Lace is the tangible heritage object. The cultural context of the production of lace and the contemporary socio-cultural value of lace are the intangible elements of this research. These notions are echoed in the discussion of both Risatti (2007) and Caple (2000) as mentioned above. The value we place on cultural objects, in this context specifically textiles and especially lace, is therefore, as Hall suggests, directly

related to the way contemporary culture represents the production and significance of textiles. The place of cultural institutions, such as museums, and the collections they house, becomes an important part of this representation.

For Stuart Hall, the meaning we attribute to any social artefact is *produced* through a *constitutive* cultural process: an ongoing interaction between social objects and historical events (Hall et al., 2013:xxi). The meaning for a social artefact is shaped within a specific cultural context, at a specific time, and with a specific set of influencing factors. This meaning, Hall contends, crystallises through social, cultural and linguistic conventions (Hall et al., 2013:8) but is ultimately transitory. Much like social norms, this meaning is never “*finally fixed*” (Italics in original) (Hall et al., 2013:9).

Franz Uri Boas, an American anthropologist, refers to meaning within society as “not something absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes” (Boas, 1974:62). This suggests that a culture’s ability to understand itself is its limitation, and this limits the meaning it can distil from its own creations. All the social actors involved in this practice are therefore *construct[ing]* meaning using some form of representational system of concepts and signs, what is referred to as a “Constructivist or Constructionist approach” (Hall et al., 2013:11). Research of a cultural artifact therefore needs to be anchored in the context studied “probing archives, annals, and individual documents” (Flyvbjerg, 2001:132) and interrogating the “socially and historically conditioned context” (Flyvbjerg, 2001:130) created by this larger context. This is done in order to gain a deeper understanding of the object in its time and place, but also to construct a contemporary understanding of the object, or to shape the contemporary understanding.

These various conventions as suggested by Hall et al., constitute the more formal generalised expression of a topic, also termed the *discourse*, in which meaning is generated. Hall *et al* defines discourse as “how our knowledge about ‘the social, the embodied individual and shared meanings’ comes to be produced in different periods” (2013:28). He draws on the work of Paul-Michel Foucault, French philosopher and social theorist, to link representation to the concept of *discourse*. Hall notes that Foucault reiterates the point that discourse is historically specific. But Foucault’s emphasis is on power relations within the *discourse* and between *discourses*, those

“rules and practices that produced [*sic*] meaningful statements and regulated discourse in different historical periods” (in Hall et al., 2013:29). Foucault noted these *discursive formations* (in Hall et al., 2013:29) appear across a range of texts, practices, and institutional sites in society. As our understanding of knowledge in a social and cultural context is often driven by larger narratives, e.g. driven by media, politics, religion, etc, meaning is often created by the interaction of these larger “units of analysis” that represent a more “widespread authority” (Hall et al., 2013:27).

Society and cultural contexts, especially institutions, therefore shape our understanding of a social artefact, but due to changing perceptions within society and cultural contexts, and changes in institutional policy and government regulation, there is the concomitant shift in an understanding of what is produced by society. Therefore, the meaning of an object changes for that society. Foucault discusses the interesting notion of specifically significant “radical breaks, ruptures and discontinuities between one period and another, between one discursive formation and another” (in Hall *et al*, 2013:32). It can be argued that the changes in our relationship to textile due in part to the industrial revolution (see Postrel, 2020) and the contemporary disinterest in craft are such a rupture. In a South African context, post-apartheid socio-political changes are also clearly such a social rupture. Such breaks from previous social constructs are attempts to reject a specific historical construct with which we no longer agree.

Lace is a cultural object or social artefact and conveys meaning. However, that meaning has changed over time and therefore the value we place on lace has also changed. Lace encompasses what Rassool terms a “visual form of knowledge” (2001:48) where such objects create different meanings for the observer and can construct particular narratives based on how the objects are arranged or grouped. This suggests that this research will always include the bias of the author, as who I am and how I relate to the lace objects determines a substantial part of the interpretation of the object. Likewise, the objects that I arrange to construct my argument are biased by my subjectivity. This does not make the observation any less valid. It merely means the analysis and interpretation is plausibly contestable.

Hall et al. suggests we can analyse meaning “not by interpreting their [the object or thing’s] content, but by looking at the underlying rules and codes through which objects

or practices produced meaning” or their context(s) (2013:22). Context here refers to the broader social and cultural events and conventions that are spatially and temporally specific to the production of the object itself. The context therefore leads to an interpretation of the object “in terms of the wider realms of social ideology – the general beliefs, conceptual frameworks and values systems of society” (Hall et al., 2013:24) at a specific historical moment. It should be noted that there will inevitably be a degree of *cultural relativism* in the understanding of the value of lace within any particular social and cultural context. This “lack of equivalence” (Hall et al., 2013:45) is what necessitates the discussion proposed by this research.

Flyvbjerg notes that practice is more fundamental than either discourse or theory (2001:134) and research of the meaning of an object-within-context requires a “focus on the actual daily practices which constitute a given field of interest” (Flyvbjerg, 2001:134). This allows the researcher to see the connectedness between objects and events. The discussion should move from the minutiae of the “small, local context, which gives [a] phenomenon their immediate meaning” to include the “larger international and global context in which phenomena can be appreciated for their general and conceptual significance” (Flyvbjerg, 2001:136). This research therefore frames the uniquely personal objects of lace, which as an ornamental fashion accessory are limited to human dimensions, alongside their production, and the larger impact of these objects and their production historically and culturally. Flyvbjerg suggests that narrative is “an ancient method and perhaps our most fundamental form for making sense of experience” (Flyvbjerg, 2001:137). With that in mind, this research will narrativise the data.

3.2 Lace as craft object

Craftsmanship [sic] in craft objects fosters a worldview that projects the creative imagination firmly within a humanly defined, a humanly scaled, and humanly understandable tangible reality (Risatti, 2007:196).

Howard Risatti’s discussion in *A Theory of Craft. Function and Aesthetic Expression* (2007) demonstrates that the craft object is “a fundamental expression of human values and human achievement that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries as well as social, political and religious beliefs” (Risatti, 2007:xiv). Such objects offer

meaningful examples of “our shared heritage as human beings, a shared heritage that in many ways outweighs our superficial differences” (Risatti, 2007:xv). Risatti’s argument aims to install craft as a category separate from art and design, rather than subordinate to or subsumed by either. Risatti’s fear is that if craft disappears as a distinct activity and as a concept, the unfortunate consequence of this would be “the unique approach to understanding the world that ... the craft object can offer will be lost” (Risatti, 2007:xiii). His treatise is therefore an attempt to show the importance of craft in the development and expression of human values (Risatti, 2007:xiv). It resonates with the objective of this research: to show the value of craft objects, especially those considered less important within the museum environment, such as textiles and lace.

Risatti’s notion of a craft object’s transcendence is idealistic, though the consequences of losing our connection to craft are proving true. The reality of a post-industrialised world means that most traditional crafts, such as spinning, weaving, and pottery, which were central to our survival as a species and which elevated the craftsperson, are now completed by machines. Both the object and its value are cheapened. The concomitant labour of what is considered craft is also cheapened and the craftsperson is relegated. Where labour is cheap, historically one finds that craft descended down the social order, so slaves or servants became the crafters. This relegation is apparent in the South African context (see section 4.3) as well.

Risatti notes that craft objects are “real objects” that have a tangible physical existence (Risatti, 2007:86). Craft objects “choreograph the hands’ and body’s movements by making the user respond, literally and figuratively to the objects’ physical properties, to its structure, weight, and texture” (Risatti, 2007:114). Simultaneously, however, these objects are shaped by the abstract “conscious conceptualisation of the relationship between necessity, purpose, function, form, material, and technique” (Risatti, 2007:63). This gives them a social existence that “stems directly from their physical existence” (Risatti, 2007:86). Here again we see the tangible and intangible nature of the meaning that surrounds objects in general and craft objects in particular. We also see the numerous ways in to analysis of the object via either the object itself or the context(s) linked to the object.

In the modern world, where so little is still produced that is “well-worked and well-crafted” (Risatti, 2007:14), as descriptors for the handmade, craft objects have become “mute” (Risatti, 2007:65). When a connection between the scale and propriety of an object and things in nature is lost it transforms “our [society’s] conception of and our connection to nature and to man-made things” (Risatti, 2007:114). The loss of craft or at least an understanding of or connection to craft is therefore problematic in terms of the social health of contemporary society. Risatti advocates that it is imperative to renew our understanding of craft objects and their importance to our “sense of our humanity” (Risatti, 2007:114). This discussion attempts to unmute craft objects within specific collections and demonstrate the value of the craft objects to the larger social context.

The social life of a craft object relates to such an object’s “unique individual expression” (Risatti, 2007:155). Craft objects help to “shape how we see and understand the world, the things in it, and our relationship to these things” (Risatti, 2007:184). There is a “realisation of technical manual skill in connection to actual physical materials” (Risatti, 2007:157) and the unique relationship that handmade craft objects have to the human body (Risatti, 2007:184).

For Risatti, to examine the handmade is to explore how tangible objects “reflect our social structure and help shape our social values” (Risatti, 2007:152) and how such a critical activity can add “metaphorical meaning and cultural significance” (Risatti, 2007:153) to the understanding of the object itself. Understanding and appreciating craft “is about seeking ways to be in the world that recognise the importance of human values and human relations” (Risatti, 2007:186). More importantly this grasp of the deeper meaning of the craft object is “open to any and every beholder... who attends closely enough to the object’s objectness. When this happens, the object reflects back to the beholder a deeper experience of effort, work, and skill” (Risatti, 2007:205).

These Koppies lace (craft) objects, the handbags and handkerchiefs, collars and jackets that make up the various collections, represent a specific socio-political action by a specific group of people at a specific historical point in time. The fact that they were made by young girls in an isolated rural setting, or that they were not overtly political, does not alter the fact that these small pieces of lace had larger socio-cultural

impacts. It is important to identify the connectedness between objects and events. History repeats itself. While Koppies lace, the object, is no longer generally recognised or valued, we can still learn from Koppies lace, as something groundbreaking for its context.

This discussion therefore revisits the symbolic function of textile in its historical context. It highlights not only the links to the individual, personal stories of these items. But it also highlights the notion that the things we make have value, and that we need to understand the value in making.

One of the foundational spaces where we come face to face with tangible history is in the museum context. Representation in museums is therefore crucial where there is the opportunity to learn about objects in a larger context. For textile, this includes what such objects mean to society and to our humanity.

3.3 The lace collections

The focus of this research is on three institutions that house collections²⁵ of lace that include lace pieces and objects attributed to either Emily Hobhouse, the Koppies Lace School, or students and staff from the school. These are: the Iziko Museums textiles collection in Cape Town in the Western Cape, the War Museum of the Boer Republics in Bloemfontein in the Free State, and a collection of works produced by the students of the Koppies School housed within the Huis Emily Hobhouse old age home in Koppies in the Free State.

There are 2286 objects listed as lace in the Iziko Museums inventory. The inventory is divided into separate categories for each type of lace and the items are listed per category. In the 2010s, the original paper and card documents were transferred onto an Excel spreadsheet that includes, among other things, the item number, description, country of producer, date of origin, date acquired, history of item, and general comments. This inventory includes both the textile lace objects and a number of

²⁵ The information contained in the Iziko Museums inventory suggests a number of interesting avenues of research, including how the collections relate to the museum's collecting policies and politics, who donated the items and what motivated them to do so, and the demographics of the donors, to name a few. These discussions are however outside the scope of this dissertation.

accessories to lace (e.g. patterns and tools). Two of the items listed are themselves collections of items (e.g. the Bertram House and the Binkes Fonides collections). There is no fine breakdown of the content to indicate specific styles or types of lacework, so the actual number of individual items for each different category of lace may differ with further investigation and classification. The objects were initially recorded into the Iziko Inventory by Ms Wieke van Delen who worked as textile curator from 1986 to 2014. Before Ms van Delen the textile curator was Dr Irma Eckert (retired in 1986), a Hungarian textile specialist who wrote on the history of Kalocsa Embroidery²⁶.

An analysis of the items in the Iziko Museums collection²⁷, by date acquired and per lace category, indicates that the majority of acquisitions for the collection were made during the 1960s and 1970s, with the peak being the 1970s (703 items in the decade). Over half (55%) of the total collection was acquired during these two decades. In the 1980s the acquisition rate dropped by 54%. The 1990s see a similar low figure of acquisitions as the 1980s (~350 items per decade) and the Binckes Fonides collection of 2002 is the only significant acquisition of the decade (21 items and the largest single acquisition for the decade). This is one of the last acquisitions of lace that is recorded. The latest acquisition date is for a piece of crochet work in 2003. Similarly, the largest single category of lace is machine lace (538 items). This makes up almost a quarter (24%) of the total collection. The next largest category of items is crochet work (227 items). There are only three pieces of clearly-identified lace in the Iziko Museums textiles collection that are attributed to Emily Hobhouse or the Koppies Lace School.

The War Museum collection consists of several smaller groupings of lace objects including The Emily Hobhouse²⁸ collection, the Johanna (Rood) Osborne collection, the Goldie van Reenen collection, and the AS van Blerk collection, along with some other individual pieces. The Hobhouse collection consists of 47 pieces of lace. Of these pieces, 42 were collected by Emily Hobhouse as she travelled through Europe

²⁶ See Eckert, Irma. 1935. A kalocsai hímzés eredete és fejlődése I. [The origin and Development of Kalocsa Embroidery I] *Szegedi Füzetek* II. 55-64 and Eckert, Irma. 1936. A kalocsai hímzés eredete és fejlődése II. [The origin and Development of Kalocsa Embroidery II] *Szegedi Füzetek* III. 47-59.

²⁷ Due to pandemic restrictions during the data collection period, not all the documentation was accessible from all the museum collections. It is proposed that this imbalance be corrected in future follow up research.

²⁸ For simplicity the collections will be referred to by the surname for each collection.

while researching different types of lace that would be appropriate for her proposed South African lace school. At present 27 of these pieces are on loan until 2021 to the Vroue Landbouvereniging van Kaapland (the Cape Women's Agricultural Association) and housed in the Textile Museum in Jubileum Huis, Stellenbosch. The Osborne collection consists of a lace carreau²⁹ with bobbins and seven pieces of lace, one of which is a unique short jacket. The Van Reenen collection consists of 28 pieces of mostly linen lace patterns, and the Van Blerk collection consists of 13 pieces of both needle and crochet lace.

There are approximately 45 pieces of lace in the Huis Emily Hobhouse old age home collection produced by students of the Koppies Lace School. Some of those students went on to become residents of the old age home.

In the Iziko Museums collection, Koppies lace makes up far less than even 1% of the lace collection, whereas 100% of the lace viewed from the War Museum of the Boer Republics is Koppies lace. The latter were obviously collected because they link to the ABW context which overlaps with Emily Hobhouse and her endeavours.

For this research the lace ascribed to the Koppies Lace School is divided into three categories for analysis. These are (1) the templates, (2) Koppies lace, and (3) unique work. The templates are exemplars of the style that Emily Hobhouse hoped to produce. Koppies lace includes novice and adept work. Novice work refers to student projects that display limited skill and are quite rough, whereas adept work, refers to work produced by students either later during their studies or after completing their studies at the lace school. These exhibit a high proficiency in skill, but remain copies of the templates to some extent. Unique work refers to work of a consummate skill that displays innovative interpretations of the basic skills, some pieces which are *sui generis* to the local context. These pieces are described in detail in the "Lace objects" sections of this dissertation.

²⁹ A carreau is a kind of cushion used for making lace. The front is lower than the back and as the lace is made it is wound onto a cylinder at the rear of the cushion (<https://www.wordnik.com/words/carreau>).

Lace objects 1: the templates

Emily Hobhouse travelled extensively throughout Europe during the early 1900s to gather information on the making of lace. During her travels she collected many pieces that she proposed to use as exemplars of specific styles. Many of these pieces have found their way into museum collections and are sometimes referred to as Hobhouse lace or Koppies lace. It is however incorrect to label these template pieces as Koppies lace as they were not produced at Koppies, nor were they necessarily produced by any of the students from Koppies. It is not even clear if the pieces were ever at Koppies or used or seen by the students themselves, though Johanna Osbourne did have some of the pieces in her possession in 1931³⁰. Johanna Osbourne (nee Rood) may also have seen and handled them, as she travelled with Hobhouse and studied lacemaking at her side. These were likely to be merely reference pieces that Hobhouse used to study the technique and create patterns that could be taught to the Koppies Lace School students by Johanna Osbourne. The templates cover a broad spectrum of laces, from bobbin lace to needle lace, including English, Irish, Italian, Belgian and French examples. The needle lace pieces, regardless of their place of origin, are the focus of the discussion in this section.

Lace object 1.1: the black collar



Fig. 6. Hobhouse lace. A square black collar or dress yoke. *Reticella*. Cotton. Black. Centre back neck-to-edge width 9,5cm. (Accession no. SACHM84/227 Iziko Museums)

³⁰ Correspondence dated 11 November 1931 from the O.F.S Home Industries Board detailing the transfer of some of the pieces of lace to the War Museum, Bloemfontein (sic) mentions that some pieces are in Mrs. Osbourne's possession (The Fleck Collection: 1860 to 1953. Free State Provincial Archives).

This Iziko Museums inventory for SACHM84/227 Koppies Lace (1910–1920) describes this item as “A square black collar or dress yoke of Koppies lace (Reticella Style). The two centre-front points at the neck edge have been turned back and



Fig 6.1. Detail of Fig 6. Fragments of attached cloth

fastened with a stitch. Fragments of black cloth are attached to the outer edges indicating that it has been used as a dress yoke. Material: cotton. Colour: black. Centre back neck-to-edge width: 9.5cm”. The inventory further states “A typed label accompanying the collar said: ‘Black lace Italian Collar. Given to Kathleen Murray by Miss Emily

Hobhouse as a sample of the laces she was teaching the Boer Women at Kopjes [sic] in the Orange Free State hoping they would create a lace industry there just as she started the spinning and weaving in the Transvaal”.

As previously noted, this is not in fact a piece of Koppies lace, but should rather be called Hobhouse Lace³¹. The dates are also possibly incorrect, as the school was begun in 1909 and Hobhouse never visited the school itself. So, it can be assumed that the teaching pieces were collected before this. The piece, if intended as an exemplar, would be pre-1910 at least. Hobhouse was travelling with Johanna Osbourne in Italy in early 1909, and did return to Italy in June 1910 without Osbourne (Hobhouse Balme, 2012:523). Osbourne, in the meantime, had returned to South African via London and set up the school by October 1909 (Brits, 2016:194). It is plausibly Italian from the period that Levey (1983) refers to as the “period of instability”, namely 1867 to 1914 (p. 108), and is therefore comparatively modern and part of the revitalisation movement in the lace industry at that time. It appears to have been cut away from fabric it had been sewn onto, which suggests it was worn as part of a garment. It is therefore more likely that it was a contemporary piece in the early 1900s rather than an antique piece at that time.

³¹ I have made this correction to the label in the figure. The original reads “Koppies Lace” not “Hobhouse Lace”.

The piece is arguably *reticello* as the design shows a rigid horizontal and vertical framework that underlies the curves of the different design elements. However, it is unlikely that it was made using the technique of beginning from a fabric base, which is definitively *reticello*. The lines suggest a *punto in aria* approach using *file de trace*. This also suggests that it was a modern piece drawing on the traditions of all the previous forms.

This black lace collar splays open when laid flat (as seen in Fig 6.), but when draped over the shoulders, it would have presented as a square, with a larger outer square edge and an inner smaller square around the neck. The piece is open at the front and

the inner corners of the neck edge on the front lapels are turned back into a tube shape and fastened with a stitch. These tubes are now flat and the hardening of the material in this area suggests they may have been starched at some point. The design is very formal and regular, made up of visual elements such as four spoked wheels, large and small pomegranates, small fans, half



Fig 6.2. Detail of Fig 6. Inner edge corner folded back to form a tube (left of image)

wheels, window panes with triangles, and edgings of single, double, and quadruple trails. The outer edge is a straight edge, while the inner edge is made up of small single arcs, and larger double arcs, both with three *picots* on the edges.

Lace object 1.2: the small table mat



Fig 7. Kant [Lace] (Hobhouse). Small tablemat, *punto tagliato* with bobbin lace edging. Italian needle lace. Cream. (Accession no. 01000/00000 (25) War Museum of the Boer Republics)

The small table mat is identified as a Hobhouse piece and a clear example of cutwork or *punto tagliato*. It is not by definition *reticello*³². Most of the background fabric remains to clearly show why it is cutwork. Areas of the fabric have been removed and the subsequent stitching both frames and edges the open spaces. *Reticello* style patterns fill these spaces with delicate tracery as seen in the square windows around the outer edge and the leaf veins on the central section. The lion is of needle lace worked into the large central square and the many eyelets that surround the inner section are stitched with looped thread to gather the fabric threads together and create these small openings. This is an example of two types of lace, as the outer edge is most likely bobbin lace and looks not unlike the pattern referred to as the French Fan or Toad's Foot.

³² I have again made changes to the label. This was referred to in the inventory as *reticella* lace and this has been changed to *punto tagliato*.

There is no date given in the inventory so it is not possible to accurately date the piece. This style of working continues into modern embroidery fabrics, referred to as *broderie anglais*, and without a clear provenance or chemical testing is difficult to date. The piece seems in very good condition and it is supposed that, without any evidence to suggest otherwise, that it is also fairly “modern” coming from the late 1800s during the “period of instability” mentioned earlier. An original cutwork piece could date from the early 1500s and this is highly unlikely. An analysis of the fibre itself would be diagnostic. Flax fibres would indicate an older piece as opposed to cotton fibres. Flax can be dated with a degree of accuracy as some species are lost at specific points in history.

The object is self-contained, i.e. it clearly wasn’t stitched or attached to anything else. It could be argued that it was designed to be a handkerchief, though the design clearly makes it more of a decorative piece. It may indeed have been used as a decorative handkerchief or pocket ornament, though they were usually made from silk. No dimensions or material is listed in the inventory³³.

Lace object 1.3: the *reticello* edging



Fig 8. Kant [Lace] (Hobhouse). Edging. *Reticella*. Needle lace. Cream. (Accession no. 01000/00000 (21) War Museum of the Boer Republics)

³³ It should be noted that the inventory for some of the War Museum of the Boer Republic pieces was an abridged version used to list a number of items on loan to the Textile Museum in Stellenbosch. It is plausible that a fuller list of details exists at the home institution. Access to any originals was unavailable due to limitations during the pandemic.

This edging is a particularly clear example of what *reticello* should look like. It shows the box-like pattern that is created when using a fabric ground and removing sections of warp and weft. However, this does not mean that it was created in this fashion, as the design can be simulated by stitching the boxes using the *punto in aria* method and *filis de trace*³⁴ to create a similar outline.

Each box is divided diagonally and decorative *brides* carry leaves, flowers and pomegranate shapes. The edging is made of multiple loops with pineapple-shaped points. No dates³⁵, dimensions or material are listed in the inventory (see footnote 19).

Lace object 1.4: the cream collar



Fig 9. Kant [Lace] (Hobhouse). Collar. Needle lace. Cream. (Accession no. 01000/00000 (20) War Museum of the Boer Republics)

This cream needle lace collar is an interesting example as it bears striking resemblances to a piece of work produced by Joanna Osborne (see *Lace object 3* section). The inventory lists it simply as needle lace. It is not *reticello* as the box-like pattern is missing, which suggests that a method similar to *punto in aria* was used.

³⁴ This image is an example of the limitations of researching using photographs only, and specifically photographs that are not recorded at a high resolution. Zooming in on the object would allow for clarity of the stitches to definitively indicate how the object was stitched. This is not possible with this image at this time.

³⁵ It should be noted that design elements are often used for dating purposes. However, because designs are repeated at different times in history, especially in the late 1800s, old designs were reused and reimagined, making this technique of dating highly problematic and potentially inaccurate.

However, *punto in aria* tends to be more geometric in its design (see Hobhouse piece



Fig 9.1 Detail Fig 9. Red squirrel, oak leaves and acorns. (Accession no. 01000/00000 (20) War Museum of the Boer Republics)

Fig 5 above). The inclusion of leaves, flowers, and looping scrolls suggests that it is much later than *punto in aria* proper (circa 1500s) (TRC, 2017a). It is more likely that this is a piece of Aemilia Ars Society needle point from the late 1800s circa 1867 to 1914 (Levey, 1983). The latter design included elements of the Art Nouveau and later Art Deco movements. It is interesting to note that some of the motifs in the design are also used in Osbourne's work. The acorn and oak leaves suggest a European origin, and if the design is accurate the squirrel

represents a red squirrel³⁶. The design also includes a centerpiece of a phoenix or eagle, which is a motif often seen in the Aemilia Ars Society needle lace pieces that were based on the designs of Archangelo Passerotti from the 1500s (see Fig 10. below). These historical designs were mixed with *Art Nouveau* elements after designs by Alfonso Rubbiani and Achille Casanova, which created a modern lace with a distinctive style (Levey, 1983:113). This piece is arguably a piece of Aemilia Ars lace (in Italian *punto in aria di Bologna*), possibly procured directly from the society as Emily Hobhouse, Johanna Osbourne and Ruth Fry were all in Italy in 1909 visiting, amongst others, the Aemilia Ars Society in Bologna (Brits, 2016:190).



Fig 9.2 Detail Fig 9. Phoenix/eagle. (Accession no. 01000/00000 (20) War Museum of the Boer Republics)

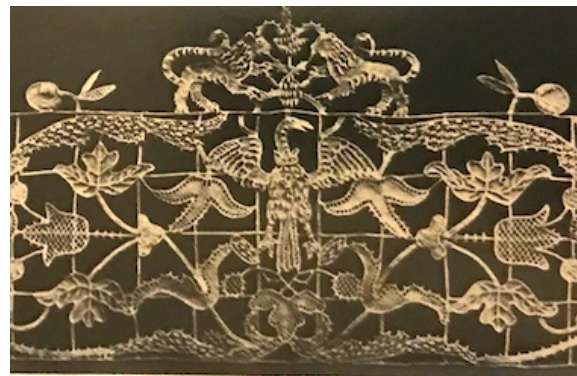


Fig 10. Italian needle lace. Aemilia Ars Society, Bologna. c.1900. From designs by Passerotti. Fig 473. Levey, 1983.

³⁶ Possibly the Eurasian red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) found throughout Europe, including in Britain and Italy.

The collar is displayed flat, but the shoulders are lifted over small bolsters of display fabric. It is assumed that the centerpiece of the phoenix/eagle must be the front of the piece, so it would then be worn on a garment that closes in the rear. The piece would have created a low slung, square neck in front and back with a longer bib in the front. It is plausible that the piece faces the other way with the centerpiece as part of a longer cape at the back. But this is unlikely given the amount of detail in the design that you would simply never see unless the wearer turned their back on the viewer. The design includes leaves, acorns, scrolls, *brides* with double *picots*, and an edging of elaborate flower pots that appear on all but the two outside vertical edges. A number of the objects have different needle lace ground designs that fill the object. No dates, dimensions or material are listed in the inventory (see footnote 19).

Lace objects 1 summary

These lace pieces were collected by Emily Hobhouse as examples for teaching purposes and are referred to in this discussion as templates. They became the reference material for Hobhouse to design and create her own lace and also learn the techniques she hoped to teach her students. They were potentially also examples to show the students themselves. Emily Hobhouse, however, never teaches at the school. Johanna Osborne (nee Rood), originally from Ermelo in Mpumalanga (then Eastern Transvaal), became one of the first lace teachers in Koppies along with Lucia Starace from Italy (Brits, 2016:194). Osbourne was also the first principal of the school. Osborne and Starace were both taught lace in Italy at the Aemilia Ars Society, so needle lace and the types discussed above would have been known to them. The selection of the needle lace pieces is a subset of this larger group of templates that includes many other types of lace and different techniques. This selection was made purely to delimit the size of the data set along a clear and definable division.

4. The history of lace: a historical framework

Heritage is a poultice for the trauma of loss and the shock of the new

(Caple, 2000:14)

4.1 Lace as textile

Beverley Gordon is *Professor Emerita* of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on the history of textiles and fashion, and theoretical aspects of material culture. She describes the intangible impacts of textiles and materials and their social meanings in *Textile. The Whole Story* (2011). She stresses the symbolic function of fabrics in a larger social context that ignores the specificity of fashion and style. In her discussion, she considers how fabric creates family, builds community, or relates to a sense of spirituality, outside of sartorial specifics of period or nationality. For Gordon, not only can fabric be an “embodiment of the relationship between individuals” (2011:121), but it can also “mark group identity” (2011:126), noting in passing that this is done semiotically. As tangible materials, fabrics can “concretise an intangible, fleeting quality that we can’t quite grasp” (2011:248) and as such serve as metaphor functioning on many different levels. While Gordon clearly considers fabric and textile to be extremely important within the social and cultural context, she does note that the nature of our relationship to fabric and textiles and the construction of such has changed radically over the last few centuries as their manufacture has moved out of the home and into the factory. A similar change in attitude can be identified within museums, where fabric and textile are not a significant part of the collections on display. Curators at Iziko Museums, for example, note that very few items from their textile collection, held in the Social History Centre, are ever on display to the public (Esmiol, 2019).

Ebert et al. (2018:134) note that textile production “has never featured as one of the ‘big themes’ of ancient history” as researchers at the Centre for Textile Research at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark attempt to reassess the “roles of traditional textile crafts in the twenty first century world” (2018:5). Lace as craft and industry has waxed and waned over the last five centuries, from expensive textile and viable commercial industry to hobbyist pastime or artistic pursuit. Santina M. Levey’s impressive text *Lace. A History* (1983) charts an arc that stretches from the mid 16th century (1560s) to the early 20th century (mid 1910s). She laments the slow collapse

of both the machine and hand-made lace industries globally after the First World War. She notes, however, that hand-made lace as a viable commercial venture dies only after the Second World War, and “has subsequently been revived as a thriving craft, practiced both by professionals and by a growing number of amateur lace-makers” (Levey, 1983:117).

The impact of the tangible objects created by the textile crafts should not be underestimated. They even resonate into other fields, such as science and contemporary art. Ghazaleh Jerban notes that the Core Memory Plane for an IBM computer manufactured in 1960 was “hand woven by Hilda G. Carpenter, a laboratory assistant”. Similar computer rope memory woven cores were nicknamed “LOL Memory” by NASA Engineers, named after the “Little Old Ladies” who carefully wove the memory from copper wire (Jerban, 2019). Contemporary art by South African textile artists like Pierre Fouché draw on these centuries-old crafts to produce new interpretations of the application of particular aesthetics of the craft to interrogate social issues. Pierre Fouché’s works include large installations and smaller framed pieces that can take up to three years to produce. They attempt to “[capture] the complexity and breadth of the human experience and ingenuity” (Pierre Fouché, 2020).

4.2 Writing about lace

The majority of published work on the topic of lace focuses on historical and production aspects of the tangible. They include histories of lace, including when and where they originate (e.g. Levey 1983 and Jourdain and Dryden 1984), or types and identification of lace (e.g. Earnshaw 1980 and 1983, and Toomer 1989). It also includes pictorial coffee table publications of specific collections (e.g. the Victoria and Albert Museum lace collection in Browne 2004) and many hundreds of titles that cover the practical production of each of the many variations and styles that can be described as lace or lace work.

A discussion of the intangible of such work, such as the status and function of fabrics and textiles within society, and such topics as the meaning and value of lace to our understanding of the social and the cultural, is less common. There are a few academic texts that take a more ideological approach to thread work and attempt to

build more complex academic arguments. *The Subversive Stitch* by Rozsika Parker (1984) focuses specifically on the place of embroidery in the shaping of femininity and the feminine role in society, is one example. Susan Cahill's (2007) Masters dissertation focuses on issues of gender in lace, embroidery and needlework. Joy Buttress's PhD thesis (2013) is titled "The metaphorical value of lace in contemporary art" and is a practice-led inquiry looking into the associations of lace and the body in art works. Mary C. Beaudry's (2006) book *Findings: The material culture of needlecraft and sewing* considers needlecraft as material culture and the signification of gender. More recently, and more closely related to lace, Carol Anne Quarini explores how the simple net curtain embodies concepts of the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic sphere in her PhD thesis titled *The domestic veil: exploring the net curtain through the uncanny and the gothic* (2015).

A number of recent publications illustrate clearly how textile, and specifically lace, can be revisited to illuminate different aspects of textiles within the social sphere, as well as within museum collections. Gail Baxter's (2016) UCA Brighton PhD thesis on lace and the archive integrates theory and practice to interrogate general notions of the archive and specifically what historical significance can be gleaned from lace collections. Baxter's thesis is titled *Re-viewing lace in archives: connecting the lacunae* and is an attempt to uncover how the gaps in archives "impact an understanding of [tangible] objects [such as lace]" as these lacunae "affect the way in which textiles in archives are understood" (2016:7). These "multiple, interpenetrating interpretations ... [are an effect] of fragmentation, layering and contingency on the archive" (2016:7). This is due to the decontextualisation of the object through the loss of associated experiences and emotions and other relevant related contextual objects. This loss of context explains the waving of the intangible that is so important in understanding the value of the tangible object. Baxter ultimately notes that lace collections, usually seen as just the pieces of lace, in fact extend beyond the lace itself into other objects, such as paintings (e.g. portraits showing lace) and fashion (e.g. lace trim on dresses). These other collections form part of the museum holdings, but may not have been overtly labelled as lace. These lost connections become one of the gaps her research attempts to define. From her detailed analysis of these missing pieces, Baxter concludes that "lace was not merely an expensive decorative fabric ... [but] a unit of currency that was traded at many levels of society" (Baxter, 2016:177).

This contradicts the more general perception that lace was only conspicuous consumption on the part of royalty and the rich.

The view of lace in archives is biased toward the consumer and not the producer, when taking into consideration the information that is missing from the archival records (Baxter, 2016:103). And so, while the lord or lady who wore the lace is known, the lacemaker(s), usually young women, are seldom if ever recorded and become simply anonymous. Baxter's discussion clearly illustrates the need for detailed contextual information on the textile pieces in a collection. This would build up a broad and richly-described context to aid in the understanding and significance of a textile.

Within the South African context academic articles that analyse textiles are few. Most recently Erica de Greef attempts to decolonise the contemporary museum and "reframe various museal practices and principles" (2019:v) in her PhD dissertation entitled *Sartorial Disruption*. She investigates aspects of the sartorial, specifically trousers, in three historically separate collections from three separate museums that have now amalgamated as part of Iziko Museums. Her discussion considers "fashion" and "dress" as separate or segregating concepts used historically by her chosen sample to treat Western "fashion" as different to African "dress". She documents and interrogates the items' entries into the museum collections, their classification, and their display within the museums. She also notes how the different museums offer "distinct, and often divisive definitions of gender, politics and social-cultural attitudes" during these processes that reflect a "wider divisive museal practic[e] that persist[s]" (2019:v). Her work sets out to reimagine "histories and their related identity narratives" (2019:v). It is therefore of particular interest, as it demonstrates the usefulness of this theoretical and methodological approach for textile-related objects and the present discussion.

In a more practically orientated discussion, Wieke van Delen (1986) discusses a specific mantua in the Iziko Museum textile collection, systematically detailing the method of construction in order to better understand its origins. This research is ultimately unable to pinpoint where the garment was made with any absolute accuracy. But it still shows that during the life span of the item, a considerable portion of which

is assumed to have been in Cape Town, the garment was definitely repaired or altered using local skills and seamstresses.

If the search shifts to lace specifically, then Wieke van Delen's (1983) article on Valenciennes Lace in the (then) South African Cultural History Museum (now Iziko Museums) collection is the only local article that critically examines a piece of lace from a South African museum. It is not, however, a piece of Koppies lace. The article is a technical discussion of the construction of two pieces of this style of French lace. It gives an in-depth description of the technique and a brief discussion of the history of lace in general, focusing on this style in particular. The article mentions that the specific piece of lace was in fact on display (presumably some time during 1983) in a lace exhibition at the museum. The piece is dated as mid 18th century and before 1780, due to a number of technical details the author highlights. There are several mentions in the text of restorations that have taken place. These are discussed in terms of technique.

The visual image in Fig 1 on p. 35 (Van Delen, 1983) notes the "attempts at restoration" that are only just visible, and how the piece consists of two strips that were joined into one piece using a *point de raccroc* (from the French verb meaning "to hook up again"). The join is very neatly and finely achieved, however, it is not very strong and is unravelling in places. Van Delen assumes that the piece has been washed and bleached, as the thread has lost its red tinge, typical of real Valenciennes lace (1983:42). There is an additional damaged strip where the piece may have been attached to clothing. This has been restored with fine overhand stitches. Such intimate descriptions are essential to understand the history of any piece of material and to focus on the producer and production of the piece.

What is considered lace or lacework incorporates a broad range of techniques, including different designs, styles and types. Most were originally produced as expensive high-society fashion accessories. And while a surprisingly large number of museums in South Africa (such as Iziko Museums, War Museum of the Boer Republics, and the Cape Women's Agricultural Association Textile Museum in Stellenbosch, and museums in Worcester, Robertson and Swellendam) house collections of lace and similar textile craftwork, there is no real history of lace

production in a local context, barring the notable exception of Emily Hobhouse's textile schools in the early 1900s and, ultimately, her lace school at Koppies in the (then) Orange Free State. So, while the numerous local collections clearly demonstrate that lace was reaching South African shores and part of the social sphere, very little research has been published on lace and the impact of lace within the South African context.

4.3 Textile craft in the early South Africa colonies

Lace patterns are created using intricate patterns of crossing and twisting of threads, using needle or bobbin. But the general look of lace can be reproduced using simpler techniques, such as knitting and crochet. It is interesting to note that early examples of knitted lace made in South Africa do exist. This suggests an unusual confluence of European influence and local industry where domestic lace production was concerned. This tradition continues into the contemporary era with many examples of lace made in South Africa by local crafters copying traditional designs from Europe (see, inter alia, the Cape Lace Guild, Pretoria Lace Guild, and the Wits Lace Guild).

Ross (1980), in research describing 18th century Cape Town, notes that slaves in the Cape during the time³⁷ of the Dutch East India Company (also known as the VOC) had achieved "a certain amount of skill" (Ross, 1980:4) in a number of crafts, such as carpentry and baking. In a 1795 audit by the Dutch, as they handed over the Cape Colony to the British, 534 people are listed as slaves in such craft-related positions. These included lady's maids, and "seamstresses and knitters" (Ross, 1980:7). This was observed by the Dutch traveller C. de Jong in the late 18th century, and W.J. Burchell who visits Cape Town in 1811 refers to "females [slaves who] fill the station of mantua-maker³⁸" (Ross, 1980:9). By the 1820s, 191 slaves were registered as "seamstresses" and 59 as "knitting 'maids'" by the Slave Office of Cape Town and the Cape District (Bank, 1991:233). During December 2019, a piece of knitted lace from the Jeffcoat Collection was on display at the Iziko Museums Slave Lodge. It is alleged to have been knitted by "*Melati, a slave*" in the 1830s. The baby cap and piece of lace

³⁷ The Dutch colonize the Cape in 1652 and control Cape Town and its surrounds almost permanently till 1806. There is a brief period of British rule from 1795 to 1803 and then again after 1806 the Cape returns to the hands of the British.

³⁸ A mantua is an article of women's clothing in style in late 17th and early 18th century and was an elaborate draped and pleated full body dress.

are accompanied by a note that reads, “Knitted by a slave of my grandmother’s and worn by me in 1838” (Iziko Museums, 2019). There is no other information about the knitter or further context. This all suggests that talented textile crafters were available to copy and reproduce European imports with some skill, even if the technique may have been adapted to the available instruments and skill sets, such as Melati’s knitted rather than bobbin lace objects.

Such South African examples are few, but they do represent an important aspect of the social within South Africa at certain points in history. Understanding our relationship to textiles then compared to now will allow us to investigate another view of the social sphere and how and why this has changed over time. While lace was a luxury product, it was most often produced by the working class, as an additional means of income – though not a very lucrative one.

4.4 The Hobhouse contribution

There was a brief moment after the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899 to 1902) when Emily Hobhouse attempted to create a home industry in South Africa. She established several crafts schools (Hobhouse Balme, 2012:501) in the (then) Orange Free State and Transvaal. Similar attempts were being made in the early 20th century by a number of countries to revive craft industries, including lace (See Levey, 1983). However, the idea for the Hobhouse schools soon shifted focus to teaching weaving and spinning as more sustainable, useful and profitable for Boer farming wives, with the possibility of generating income after the war. A lace school was put on hold as several weaving and spinning schools were established in various centres between 1905 and 1908. The lace school idea was revived in 1908 and by 1909 was established in Koppies (War Museum, 2017:141). Having studied lace herself, Hobhouse is known to have designed at least three lace patterns, “Môre is nog ‘n dag” (Tomorrow is another day), “Geduld en Moed” (Patience and Courage), and one named after a South African shrub “Wag-‘n-Bietjie” (Wait a while) (Brits, 2016:194).

The life and work of Emily Hobhouse is documented in great detail by, among others, Brits (2016), Eales (2014), Hall (2008), Hobhouse-Balme (2012, 2015, 2016), Seibold (2011), van Reenen (1984), and by Hobhouse herself in her *The brunt of the war and where it fell*, originally published in 1902. The focus of these discussions is mostly on

her humanitarian efforts in South Africa after the end of the Second Anglo Boer War. But it is her impact on the development of home industries and her relationship to textile and specifically lace that I wish to highlight.

Emily Hobhouse first mooted the idea of developing a home industry in South Africa in 1903 in a letter to Patrick Duncan, the Colonial Treasurer. In correspondence with Sybella (known generally as Issie) Smuts (nee Krige), wife of Jan Smuts, Hobhouse felt that “lace making would be a cottage industry ideally suited to the Boer girls” as it was “character building, demanding, as it did, patience, cleanliness, absolute thoroughness, delicacy of workmanship and appreciation of outline and design” (Hobhouse-Balme, 2012:503). This highlights Risatti’s theoretical notions of craft requiring “declarative memory” and “procedural/motor memory”, respectively the sophisticated technical knowledge of materials and their properties, and a high degree of technical manual skills (Risatti, 2007:99). Emily Hobhouse observed the basic potential for these skills in the women and girls she met in the concentration camps on her previous visits to South Africa.

As early as April 1904, Hobhouse travelled to Venice and was introduced to Burano lace. She then moved on to Brussels and then to Ireland. It was in Ireland that Alice (Mrs J. R.) Stopford Green persuaded her that lace was a luxury and that spinning and weaving might be more suitable as items that could be sold, but could also provide homes with dish cloths, blankets, rugs and other textiles. While spending the summer in Somerset she sketched carvings in nearby churches to use for her designs. In November of 1904 the *South African Woman’s and Children’s Distress Fund* became the *Boer Home Industries and Aid Society* (Hobhouse-Balme, 2012:505) in order to continue her work with Afrikaner women and children who had suffered during their detainment in concentration camps.

Emily Hobhouse and her entourage arrived in Cape Town in 1905 and opened the first spinning and weaving school in Philippolis, in the Free State, on 13 March with six students (Hobhouse-Balme, 2012:506). This number grew to 13 girls in two weeks (Brits, 2016:158). Brits’ biography of Hobhouse notes that it was clear there was a great need for training opportunities for poverty-stricken girls and women (Brits, 2016:161). Hobhouse was determined to use local products such as Merino wool to

make flannels, mixed wools for rugs and carpets, as well as local Lincoln and Angora goat wools. Margaret Clark notes that the country was still war-stricken and so the “technical processes of the industries had to be pioneered afresh”. So Emily Hobhouse set about “experimenting in sound and useful articles possessing the inherent beauty of their hand processes”, weaving cotton, flax and silk and producing dish clothes, rugs, mats and ultimately tweed cloth (Hobhouse-Balme, 2012:507). At an open day for the Philippolis school in April the same year, Hobhouse had her lace designs on display, but only she was making them at this stage (Brits, 2016:158). Little over one year later, Hobhouse held an exhibition in Johannesburg in April 1906 of “bales of cloth, rugs, tapestry, shawls, blankets... tweeds, linen, cotton teacloths and other items” that were all for sale and “all of them in lovely colours” (Hobhouse-Balme, 2012:511).

In February 1907 Emily Hobhouse returned to London. The visit included a Normandy holiday where she looked at Alençon lace and tapestry before returning the same year to the Transvaal. The number of spinning and weaving schools was slowly expanding, and by May 1908 she held a Cape Town exhibition of the goods produced by her schools. The exhibition in the old Good Hope Hall included

“heavy rugs of many hues, two rooms for curtains and *portieres* [doorway curtains], rugs and carpets on the floor, table cloths, chair covers, two long stalls of blankets, shawls, Dutch bonnets, *couvre-pieds* [short quilts] and sundries, two long stalls entirely given to tweeds, and small ones for white and cream cloths... including a French tailored tweed travelling costume... and long white coat... turned back with embroidery” (Hobhouse-Balme, 2012:520).

In her final report to the Transvaal Industries Board in 1908 Hobhouse states

“the work carried on by their [herself and school staff] means has brought interest, education, industry, and a certain amount of prosperity into dreary homes and desolate villages. It has brought back courage and resolution, and more than all, helped to foster that spirit of brotherly kindness between Dutch and English on which the future welfare of South Africa depends” (Hobhouse-Balme, 2012:523).

She returned to England in October 1908 with the 19-year-old Johanna Rood (later Mrs Osborne³⁹) and in early 1909, they travelled together with Ruth Fry to Rome, Bologna and Venice. In June 1910 Hobhouse was in Italy, at the time considered the leading manufacturer of lace, learning lace at the Aemilia Ars Society. The Aemilia Ars Society in Bologna was specifically set up in 1898 to train lace workers to set up and administer their own enterprises (Brits, 2016:190). It is here they met Lucia Starace a relative of Marchesa Harriette de Viti de Marco. In October 1909 it is Starace and Osborne returned to South Africa and set up the Koppies (then Kopjes) Lace School in Northern Free State in an old military barracks. Johanna Osborne remained at Koppies as principal from 1909 to 1931.

Hobhouse's last attempt at travel to South Africa was in 1913 to attend and unveil the Women's Monument, the first monument in the world dedicated to women and children (Brits, 2016:201). But ill health required that she turn back to Cape Town and ultimately return home. Emily Hobhouse died at age 66 on 8 June 1926. A funeral service was arranged in South African to inter her ashes at the foot of the Woman's monument on 27 October 1926. It is the first and only state funeral to date for a foreign national (Brits, 2016:292).

We know that Emily Hobhouse was in Burano, Venice and Bologna in Italy. While in Italy, she was taught lace by the Aemilia Ars Society. She was also in Brussels in Belgium, and travelled through Ireland studying lace initially, and then also spinning and weaving. She would also have seen Alençon lace in France. She would therefore have known of Burano lace, possibly Genoese lace, and definitely have been taught *reticello* and *punto in aria* needle lace. For the latter, she would have specifically been taught *punto in aria di Bologna*, in which Aemilia Ars specialized.

While there is no doubt that Emily Hobhouse drove the creation of the Koppies Lace School through her tenacity, strong will, contacts and fundraising, Johanna Osborne established the lace school and guided it from its inception in 1909 until she finally handed over the principalship in 1931. Miss Jacoba (Henna) Klue and Miss Hannah

³⁹ For simplicity and consistency this research refers to Johanna Rood by her later married name of Johanna Osborne.

Kriel (both possibly ex-students, but definitely previous instructors at the school) took over leadership. Miss Kriel became the principal after Mrs Osborne (Herald, 1988:3), and headed it up from 1931 to 1938.

The school was closed in 1938, ostensibly for financial reasons. The depression in South African from 1929 to 1933 may have played a part in this, as the materials for the lace were still being imported. In 1938 the Department of Public Welfare (Departement van Volkswelsyn) appointed a commission to determine the survival of the Lace School. In their decision, they note that “ná agt-en-twintig jaar tog duidelik bewys is dat die maak van kant nie in ons volksaard lê nie” (“after twenty eight years there is obvious proof that the making of lace is not part of our cultural nature”) (Wessels and Heunis, 2013). It was clear that the school was not economically viable and, as throughout history, lace was once again a luxury item, available to the rich, but produced by the working class. It is unclear what instigated this specific comment regarding the intrinsic nature of lace to Afrikaner culture. By the 1930s there was a resurgent Afrikaner nationalism on the rise (Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007:288) that pitted Afrikaans against English for cultural dominance. The Afrikaner Broederbond (Brother Bond) and its public arm, the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (FAK) (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations), were founded in 1918 and 1929 respectively, with the primary focus of promoting Afrikaans culture and economic action in a coordinated way. By 1938 a national re-enactment of the Groot Trek (Great Trek) created enthusiasm for the “Afrikaner Cause” (Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007:290), which would have re-ignited the English/Afrikaans tensions of the ABW. It is possible that the Koppies Lace School, with its links to Emily Hobhouse and as a reminder of the ABW, was something they wished to remove. This cultural erasure is in total disregard for the reality that the majority of Koppies students, staff, and beneficiaries were Afrikaners.

Lace objects 2: Koppies lace

Koppies lace is the term used to refer to those lace pieces produced by the students of the school, preferably during their time at the school. Whether the work was produced as a student (novice) or after they left the school (adept) is difficult to clearly delimit without accurate provenance and dating. It is assumed that some students would have continued their lace work after leaving the school, so the differentiation between novice and adept is preferred for this research. As stated previously, much of this provenance information is no longer available or was simply never documented. This is why the present differentiation is based on a visual analysis of the quality of the stitching and the general appearance of the piece. It is subjective and speculative. It is hoped that in future, with more accurate provenance, this discussion can be more finely-tuned.

The students of the Koppies Lace School were all young girls from the local farming community. The school had been set up in an old military barracks on the banks of the Renoster River (Brits, 2016:194). As was always Hobhouse's intentions, these craft initiatives were meant to benefit impoverished communities and develop skills that could be used to build home industries. However, in Koppies many of the students were unable to travel to the school. So Osborne and Starace travelled on horseback to visit the students in their homes (Brits, 2016:194).

Lace objects 2.1: the beginner pieces



Fig 11. Koppies lace. Object from the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection in Koppies, Free State (The item is not accessioned or inventoried with no attached number).

The simplest piece of lace in the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection is this simple fabric square, where a central panel has been removed, and the edge stitched with a simple overlock stitch. The edge includes irregularly spaced loops, and a basic criss-cross pattern of diagonal *brides* fills the negative space. The stitching is basic buttonhole and is very crude in execution. A second piece from the same collection is clearly a practice

piece and is also unfinished. This shows the work in progress following the *reticello* method, where threads of the ground fabric have been removed and the remaining threads encased in stitches to create the very rigid geometry of the piece. These negative spaces are then filled with diagonals and wheels by adding additional threads and encasing these in buttonhole stitches. These



Fig 12. Koppies lace. Object from the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection in Koppies, Free State (The item is not accessioned or inventoried. The no.13 attached was for a list now lost).

very simple designs and the repetitive nature of the design suggests that these are practice pieces and therefore very likely student work.

Lace objects 2.2: exercises and samplers

A staple of beginner handicraft work, even in the modern era, is the sampler. Most examples are made by beginner embroiderers, especially in the case of counted cross stitch embroidery. There are different examples of this type of practice work found in the

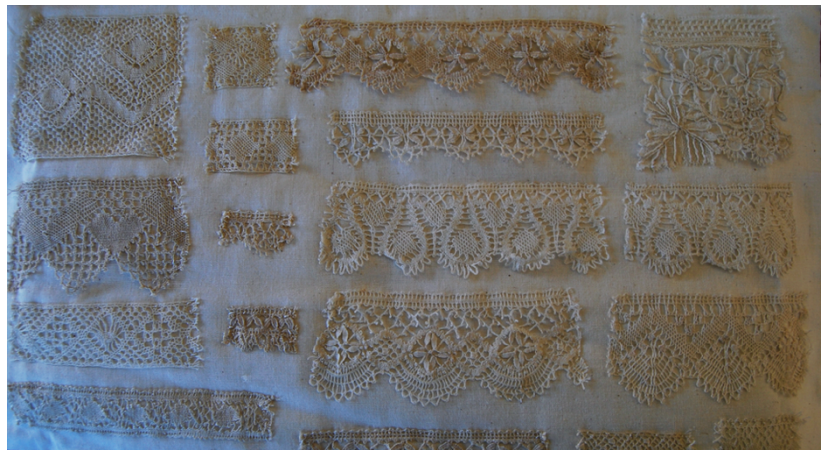


Fig 13. Koppies lace. Objects from the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection in Koppies, Free State (These items are not accessioned or inventoried).

Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection. Fig 13. is a selection of bobbin lace practice pieces. Such pieces will encompass only a few repetitions of the whole pattern to gain an understanding of the design and technique required to achieve it. Similar examples can be seen in knitting dictionaries, where the written directions and a chart of the pattern accompany an image of a finished section. Another interesting piece represents a sampler in the *punto tagliato* style. Each lane of stitching fills the negative

space with a different pattern, some simple and some fairly complex. If this was a student piece it was most likely by a more advanced student. The material itself is quite coarse and the technique is laboured. There is no functional aspect to these samplers. They are therefore clearly student exercises or learning pieces.



Fig 14. Koppies lace. Object from the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection in Koppies, Free State (The item is not accessioned or inventoried. The no.17 attached was for a list now lost).

Lace object 2.3: the linen collar⁴⁰



Fig 15. Koppies lace. A small, flat linen collar, ornately trimmed and with filling of *reticella* Lace. Cotton on linen. White. 1920s. Centre back width 7cm. (Accession no. SACHM87/311 Iziko Museums)

The Iziko Museums inventory describes this item as probably made by a pupil of the lace school at Koppies. If correct, this is a very unique piece, as it is directly attributed to a student of the school, though the student is nameless. The donation was finalised by telephone but the donor omitted to identify themselves.

This piece could be described as in the tradition of *punto tagliato*, but it is probably more accurate to refer to it as *broderie anglais*. Sections of the background fabric have

⁴⁰ See Addendum A for enlarged image.

been removed and the edges stitched over or filled. The description refers to *reticella* fillings, but is more accurately simply needle lace buttonhole stitching. *Reticello* nomenclature can however be used to describe the filling. The notion that it could be a piece of student work is supported by observing the rear of the piece which is far less controlled and as neat at the facing side. The reverse⁴¹ shows loose threads, irregular pickups of the thread, and floating and travelling threads that a more professional and accomplished craftsman would not have allowed or would have hidden better.

The collar consists of coarse linen fabric and cotton thread. Circles and teardrops have



Fig 15.2. Detail Fig 15. Linen collar. Teardrop fill.



Fig 15.4. Detail Fig 15. Linen collar. Join.

been cut out of the fabric and filled with buttonhole stitch loops, *brides* with picots, triangles and twisted threads. The edges have been trimmed in blanket and buttonhole stitch and the outer edge has single and double arcs with picots. The teardrops are filled with triangles and the circles with twisted threads, simple *brides*, and four-point stars. There is some embroidery zigzag relief stitching and scalloped buttonhole embroidery around the larger circles. The collar is in two pieces that have been stitched together roughly as mirrored halves. A comparison to the Black Collar (see Lace objects 1) clearly shows the difference in quality of the stitching.



Fig 15.1. Detail Fig 15. Linen collar. Circle fill.



Fig 15.3. Detail Fig 15. Linen collar. Arc and picot edge.



Fig 15.5. Detail Fig 15. Linen collar. Zigzag and buttonhole embroidery

⁴¹ The reverse of the piece was not photographed.

Lace objects 2.4: the card cases⁴²



Fig. 16. Koppies lace. Linen card case with *reticella* style lace work on the front and a *picot* edging. It is lined with a slightly padded cream coloured satin. Linen. E cru. Early 20th c. 14 x 9,5cm. (Accession no. SACHM86/220 Iziko Museums)

The Iziko Inventory notes that this item “was given to the donor’s mother by the principal of the lace school at Koppies (Orange Free state) a Miss Botha who was a personal friend of the family in c.1910 (before the First World War). Miss Botha was probably the last principal⁴³ of the lace school and later married and became Mrs Cole Hamilton”. Again the piece is described using the term *reticella* but it is more closely related to *punto tagliato* in design and overall impression.

The War Museum inventory notes that this piece (Fig 17. on the following page) was made in the Koppies Lace School by Johanna Osbourne and was given to the donor, Mrs E. S. R. Bell. The item was donated to the museum in 1976 and bears a striking resemblance to all other examples of the card cases across all the collections. The fact that it was made by Johanna Osbourne while at the lace school is significant as this would indicate an adept piece of Koppies lace, possibly made to demonstrate the technique and project to the students. Osbourne had been trained in Italy and was herself training the young lace makers.

⁴² See Addendum B and C for enlarged images.

⁴³ Janis Savage in an article for the International Organization of Lace (Bulletin, 2012) indicates that Johanna Osbourne is the principal of the Koppies Lace School from 1909 to 1931. From then until its closure for financial reasons in 1938, it was run by Miss Kriel and Miss Klue. There was a Miss Joey Botha who became a teacher at the school after Lucia (sometimes Louisa) Starace returned to Italy in 1912 (Wessels and Heunis, 2013:10), but it is not stated that she was ever the principal at the school.

It is not clear exactly when the piece was made, as Osbourne was at the school for over 20 years. But the neatness and skill of the finish, as well as the additional embroidery frame, would suggest it was a later piece of work from a more confident lace maker.



Fig 17. Kant handsakkie: Roomkleurige toevou kant sakkie, gevoer met fluveel materiaal [/Lace handbag: Cream coloured folded lace bag, lined with velvet material]. (Accession no. 05079/00002 War Museum of the Boer Republics)

Similar pieces are found in the lace collection of the Emily Hobhouse Old Age home. There are at least two card cases (see Fig 18.) and one other object (Fig 19.) that



follow the same

Fig. 18. Koppies lace. Objects from the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection in Koppies, Free State (These items are not accessioned or inventoried. The nos.1 and 5 attached was for a list now lost).

design of the card case, with an intricate cover pattern of diamonds filled with diagonal designs. But instead of opening, the latter object



Fig. 19. Koppies lace. Object from the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection in Koppies, Free State (The item is not accessioned or inventoried. The no.34 attached was for a list now lost).

has been stitched closed and filled to create a small pillow or pin cushion. The stitching and technique for the card cases is fairly advanced, whereas the small pillow is quite

basic and of a coarser material and finish. The object (1) in Fig 18. above is a very close copy in terms of design to the version that was made by Johanna Osborne (Fig 17.). But on close inspection, the needlework is not as neat or as skilful. It is possible that the card cases were made by more advanced students or ex-students following a design or template by Osborne. The pillow is an interesting anomaly and it is not clear why it is not of the same quality as the other, similar objects. It is noted that the lace school closed in 1938 due to financial reasons, so the coarser materials could be an indication of cost-saving measures, especially for younger students who were still practicing. Most of the materials for lace were imported⁴⁴ from Europe as the quality of the thread was better for lacemaking, but this was obviously more expensive⁴⁵.

Lace objects 2.5: the handbags and handkerchiefs



Fig. 20. Koppiess lace. Objects from the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection in Koppies, Free State (These items are not accessioned or inventoried. The nos. attached were for a list now lost).

The majority of items from the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection are handbags and handkerchiefs as seen in the various images above and below. They range from the more elaborate and individualistic to the simple and geometric. It is noted in a *Rooi Rose* (1999:116) magazine article about the history of the school, that it is Osborne who decided to move away from pure *reticello* techniques and allow the students to develop their own patterns by observing nature. Such changes to the curriculum, if documented, would also help to date the student work. The handbag in Fig 20.

⁴⁴ A newspaper article notes that the lace was made from imported Irish linen thread (Herald, 1988:3).

⁴⁵ "All the necessities for making lace were imported which made the lace very expensive, which was also one of the reasons why the school closes" (translated from the Afrikaans) (Volksblad, 1968a)

numbered 4 is referred to as Johanna Osborne's marriage bag (Afrikaans: trousakkie) in an article by Wessels and Heunis (2013), but whether this



Fig. 21. Koppiess lace. Objects from the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home collection in Koppies, Free State (These items are not accessioned or inventoried. The nos. attached were for a list now lost).

was made for her or by her is not clear. There is a clear range in terms of skill for all these objects, both in terms of technique and design. Some designs are more elaborate and innovative and would have required more work and more dexterity to achieve.

Lace objects 2 summary

There are clear differences in the level of skill between objects in the same set. The most obvious example can be seen in the stitching of Osborne's card case versus the card cases in the Hobhouse Old Age Home collection. This could suggest that she was better trained, or that she was producing objects as templates for the students. There are obviously a number of standard student projects, based on how many similar objects appear in the collections. The difference in technique would also suggest that they were attempted at different points in the development of this skill or attempted by different age groups. Because of the recurring objects that make up clear sets, it can be assumed that there was a curriculum in place. The curriculum, if constantly applied, would help to show the progression of the objects along a skill trajectory and would therefore be useful in identifying when they were made.

It is important to note that these collections only exist due to the concerted effort of interested individuals who wanted to keep alive the memory of what was achieved at Koppies. The momentum to collect these mementos centers around the establishment of the Lace Memorial in 1968, 30 years after the school closed. Mrs Osborne was present and unveiled the memorial. Several ex-students of the Lace School (namely,

Mrs Beb du Toit, Mrs Rika Meyer, Mrs Johanna Steenkamp and Mrs Riatjie de Wet) gathered any existing pieces of Koppies lace in the run-up to the unveiling of the Lace Monument in Koppies in 1968 (Herald, 1988). It is unclear whether they collected only student work (i.e. created by students while at Koppies) or later work made by ex-students. The monument is in memory of Emily Hobhouse and to honour a then 80-year-old Johanna Osborne (Volksblad, 1968a) for their contributions to Koppies. Specifically, the efforts of Mrs Riatjie de Wet (a student of the Lace School at 12 years old) that helped to restore a semblance of the collection and ensure they were displayed at the Emily Hobhouse Old Age Home (Herald, 1988:3). Her correspondence with a number of people and institutions about the collection continued till 1997.

5. Koppies lace in a changing museum

Given its complexity, lacemaking remains a time consuming craft, making antique examples particularly valuable fragments of history (Tanaka, 2018).

Identity politics⁴⁶ have shaped much of contemporary global society since the mid 20th century in terms of social and political action and the drive to gain power and recognition in the context of historical inequality and injustice. Under such circumstances, whiteness is perceived in a particular way and these perceptions carry connotations and mythologies, some true and some false, depending on your point of view and where you are positioned in the argument.

In a changing socio-political environment, such as the global discourse surrounding the meaning of museums in and for contemporary culture, or the local discourse of social transformation in South Africa, meaning is contested in this struggle. The contemporary social context of South Africa is complex and contested due to a long history of the forces of globalisation (colonial, economic, cultural imperialist, etc.) impacting on endemic cultural heritage (see SAHO, 2011). Ideological discussions in South Africa cannot ignore the impact of European colonialism on social and cultural aspects of a pre-colonial Africa, and the choices made by museums and for museum collections during that time.

The focus of the colonial-era museum and what the collections should entail, and how and what to collect, is at odds with the political need to change in a changing South Africa. So, an endemic lace made by white South African Afrikaans-speaking women and young girls during the formative years of Afrikaner nationalism is difficult to separate from the impressions of the Nationalist Afrikaner Apartheid regime of 60 years later. And while the lace may be a valuable fragment of history, they are a complex object to justify in terms of contemporary national historical value.

⁴⁶ A discussion of identity politics falls outside the parameters of this research, but for an introduction to a number of key texts, see Neofotistos (2013).

5.1 The whiteness of lace

Lace is intrinsically identified as a European⁴⁷ product. Histories of lace (see Goldenberg 1904, Jourdain and Dryden 1984, and Levey 1983) note the European origins of the various techniques. They give general hints to the evolution of lace⁴⁸ before the first mentions of what is considered “true” lace objects made in Italy in the 1500s⁴⁹. Since the 16th century the majority of types and styles have therefore been named after European towns, areas, or counties. These designations were determined by where it is accepted the original pattern or technique is meant to have originated or been fully developed. Lace nomenclature is French by default, due to the dominance of the French industry at several times during lace’s 400-year heritage. However, the greater global reach of the colonial British Empire means the naming of lace tends to follow the English tradition, as the social elite and monied classes carried their textile traditions with them.

Examples of endemic lace production are found outside of Europe, but usually ascribed to colonising processes or modern adaptations of existing industries that incorporate these transplanted techniques. Beyond Europe, it is therefore expected to see lace produced in the United States, Australia and South Africa with their colonial heritage, though mostly these days as a hobby industry. Other colonised nations and

⁴⁷ European refers here to the subcontinent, but within the South African context, it carries the additional connotation of “white” or “whiteness”. The term tends to conflate the diversity of the European subcontinent, with all its countries, cultures, and languages, to a single uniting factor of race. The word can be used in a derogatory sense or simply to denote anything that is not African in origin, or the antithesis of Africa(n).

⁴⁸ Contemporary archeological findings do hint at the possible origins of lace in the techniques of similar, older essential survival crafts. Needle lace, one of the earliest forms of decorative lace from the 16th century, bears a striking similarity in technique to the process of fishing net construction, the earliest such example is the net of Antrea dated to 8300 BCE, which was made using twine, a wooden needle and a wooden block called a “lace” (Henry Cowsls, 2017). A threaded needle was repeatedly passed around the lace and knotted to create the net. Similarly, examples of knitted textiles, such as an Egyptian child’s sock, made using a single-needle looping technique (Wu, 2018) have been found to be over 1700 years old. The technique of netmaking is demonstrated in M. Diderot’s 1771 *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers par une Société des Lettres*, vol. VIII (Planches) (see Levey, 1983: Figure 93).

⁴⁹ Goldenberg (1904:11) states categorically that “it is a well-established fact that ... there is absolutely no indication, of even the slightest value, that points to the existence of lace before it was made by the Italians and Belgians”.

those exposed to domineering colonising economies, such as India⁵⁰ and Japan⁵¹, incorporate these lace traditions as vibrant production lines within their own pre-existing broader craft industries.

At the same time the visual perception of lace is that it is white. Most representations in art show a crisp white collar, cuff or edging of sparkling lace (*The Laughing Cavalier* by Frans Hals, painted in 1624, is perhaps the most well-known example). Household cleaning manuals of the era (see Toomer, 1989) focus on achieving unblemished white (read clean) lace. The bleaching of thread (see Levey, 1983:52) was an important topic for lace sellers to ensure a market-ready product, even during the 15th and 16th centuries. However, in practice it is more likely that lace was a light cream or ecru, which is the more natural shade of undyed and naturally bleached fibers (whether cotton, flax, or silk) at the time. Modern lace may indeed be pure or brilliant white, but this is due to modern dyes and production processes that allow for thread to be produced with a more vibrant colour palette and modern bleaches. Some lace traditions produced types of lace in black silk thread, such as the black Blonde lace used for Spanish mantilla veils since the early 19th century (Britannica.com, 1998).

Until the 20th century, lace was not really a white object, but it is an object of whiteness within the contemporary museum. In an effort to divorce the subjective implications of specific interpretations of whiteness from lace, I prefer to “other” the lace objects that are the data for this dissertation and label them as ethnographic objects. I am, however, removing some of the misconceptions associated with this term (see section 2.5) and redefining ethnographic objects as “artefacts that represent disrupted production of fading traditions and the personal labour within endemic communities that create them, and that help to describe the life of the people who made them”. The

⁵⁰ The Centre for Sustainable Design – India (CSD, 2013) notes that lace was introduced into India by Christian missionaries, such as the bobbin lace of Kazipet, Warangal introduced in the 1940s and the crochet lace of Narasapur, West Godavari. In some cases, oral histories suggest colonial wives introduced bobbin lace (Bell, 2011). More traditional forms of metal thread trimming (*Gota* in Hindu) sometimes identified as lace is in fact woven on looms (See Watt, 1903 in TRC, 2017a) and therefore not lace by definition.

⁵¹ Jourdain and Dryden (1984), updating Mrs Pallister’s history of lace from 1875, include the latter’s note about the lace produced by the Japanese, “[t]he versatile Japanese have copied the Honiton method of making lace. The government have encouraged a school at Yokohama for pillow lace making, under the supervision of an English lady, where they turn out lace of a distinctive Japanese character” (p. 417).

European heritage and history of lace, its dispersion through colonialism and European proselytisers, and the perceived whiteness of the textile itself, create a perception that links lace to whiteness and shifts the meaning associated with the object into a socio-cultural discussion and the discourse of whiteness. Within South Africa whiteness is not a single construct from an ideo-political perspective.

De Kock (2006:184) discusses ways in which the study of whiteness can be applied within the South African context and refers to *symbolic ethnicity*, a tendency in the discourse to confuse “whiteness with nationality ... [and] in relation to European ancestry”. While there is no substantive argument to suggest that lace as a form can be seen as anything other than European, and therefore no real confusion in terms of identity, it is difficult to identify its whiteness. However, the consequences of this impression of whiteness within the South African context and the changing face of the museum (see section 5.2) has an effect on the status of lace in the museum. These impressions are heavily influenced by lace’s *symbolic ethnicity*, the ideological connotations that label these objects as European, and the implied whiteness, which reshape lace’s perceived value to the (South) African context. Whiteness studies is a useful framework with which to (re)evaluate the impression of lace as collection and historic artefact and the fragility of this particular social object.

One focus of whiteness studies is how whiteness is “artificially constructed within particular social settings and contextual variations” (Kolchin, 2009a:6). A discussion of whiteness can therefore assume that as a social construction the concept is changeable and changes as social forces interact. The supposed “naturalness” of dominant whiteness is one such aspect. Furthermore, contemporary social discourse will reshape the concept and entrench a particular interpretation within a particular historical period and within a particular socio-cultural context. What it means to be white, and the place of whiteness in the larger framework of history, is not set, but changeable and challengeable. Likewise, the objects produced by any culture and their connotative meaning share this changeability. As stated above, the objects produced within or by a society cannot be wholly separated from the society that creates them (Appadurai, 2006) and therefore the impedimenta (including stereotypes) that come to represent any cultural or racial construction reflect back onto the objects or social artefacts that these cultural groups create. Lace takes on the

mantle of whiteness and in any renegotiation of the concept of whiteness, it potentially becomes collateral damage in the outcome of that transaction, for no other reason than how it is perceived, and what it is supposed to represent.

De Kock (2006) notes that the constructions⁵² of race generally serve the interests of white power. It locates whiteness “not in the epidermal ‘reality’ of white skin but in complex economic and political processes and practices” (De Kock, 2006:180). Historically, this plays out quite obviously in the shaping of racial boundaries in South Africa, especially under the National Party, where the legislative and economic power remained firmly within the control of a white minority and with limited to no government representation for any other racial group. Professor Njabulo S. Ndebele (former Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town) notes that the emergence of whiteness studies acknowledges a more nuanced, intersectional way of approaching (white) identity. This is especially true within a South African context where “whiteness has become so de-legitimised by virtue of its complicity with apartheid that it has often been rendered ‘blank’, a taken-for-granted negative essence” (De Kock, 2006:175) and “uniformly complicit for the sins of racial discrimination” (De Kock, 2006:178). Any discussion of whiteness within the South African context would therefore assist in de-essentialising whiteness and building a more nuanced application and conceptualisation of the term.

The focus on lace as object is also motivated by the need to fill in a further gap in the application of whiteness studies, where there is a tendency “to ignore material reality” (Kolchin, 2009b:2) and how this relates to the construction of whiteness. For this research, the concept extends into the role that material objects may play in establishing and maintaining hegemonic whiteness, or conversely, how material objects may in fact play no functional role in maintaining whiteness, but are still perceived as having this effect. That said, De Kock suggests that there are “performative and determinative *effects* of concepts related to race on people’s sense of who and what they are” (2006:182). So, while lace may not have an intrinsic cultural

⁵² This research assumes change with regards to racial construction within social contexts as a *fait accompli* and notes that a consideration of the nature of these changes is outside the scope of the present discussion.

identity, lace may have the ability to shape identity through a reflection on its historical identity.

Historically Koppies lace as an object of whiteness can be linked to white British colonialism, through the connections to Emily Hobhouse, and to white Afrikaner nationalism, through the various national government institutions that funded and promoted Koppies during the years of Afrikaner political dominance and governance. Added to this is the simple fact that most of those involved in Koppies were white Afrikaners. This demonstrates the problem of *symbolic ethnicity*. Lace is seen as an object of whiteness because of its links to white aspects of South African history, and then to Afrikaner history. By extension it becomes complicit in historical white Afrikaner injustice.

It is clear from Hobhouse's correspondence that Koppies was established solely to uplift a white Afrikaner community. There is no mention in the biographies of Hobhouse, or her own writing, to suggest there were any Black students in any of the schools she established. As a luxury item, it is only an upper class (read white) that would benefit from what the school produced. It is clear that economically, mainly whites would have been uplifted. Socially, there are clearly identifiable racial boundaries that were historically the norm for the period, but this does not suggest that Koppies was overtly maintaining these boundaries and it is not apparent how the lace objects themselves could have achieved this.

Politically, at the time, circa 1938, lace was considered antithetical to the Afrikaner nature, so was not seen as part of Afrikaner whiteness. But because of other historical connections, the connotations remain. In this instance it is more appropriate to suggest that the material objects produced constructed class (rich vs. poor) or perhaps culture (English vs. Afrikaans) rather than race (white vs. Black). However, it is an unfortunate reality that race and class were one and the same thing in the South African context at that time. It should be noted that today crafts still play a fundamental role in the upliftment of developing communities both in South Africa⁵³ and globally.

⁵³ The crafts sector in South Africa is promoted by the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture (DAC) (<http://www.dac.gov.za/content/craft>).

5.2. The South African museum context

Cultural and symbolic meaning is “locked away” behind catalogues and in cupboards (Mataga, 2020).

The idea of what is of value to conserve in museum collections is directly linked to what an object represents, the historical context of that representation, and the arguments that frame any contemporary socio-political imperatives. While lace objects may be aesthetically pleasing, and for some technically pleasing, they can be constructed as representations of and representative of white colonial legacies with little or no connection to a representation of an endemic African heritage⁵⁴. There is no known endemic textile analogy to lace within the African context⁵⁵, both Sub Saharan and Mediterranean, which further alienates the object from its locale. However, weaving and textile-making (read fabric) do have diverse and extensive histories in Africa (see, inter alia, Spring 2012, Spring and Hudson 1995, 2002, and 2004).

Museums in a post-apartheid South Africa have faced a number of challenges in the last two decades. This can be deduced from even a cursory survey of articles and conference proceedings in relevant academic journals, such as the South African Museums Association Bulletin (SAMAB). Various authors make important points relating to South African museums and heritage sites on such topics as transformation, representation and identity, the changing nature of collections, and the relationship between cultural history and collections. Within a South African context, there is a clear contestation of what (or who) collections represent and how a different perspective of heritage needs to be integrated into the discourse. These issues impact

⁵⁴ The concept of an African heritage is a complex and disputed topic, as heritage and culture are not only complicated concepts in and of themselves, but the historical events that shape African history make absolute definitions difficult. South African History Online notes that in a country like South Africa, similar to many colonised African countries, “there is not one heritage, or an easily delineated set of distinct identities” (SAHO, 2011). A full discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

⁵⁵ Nigeria, as one example, has a large contemporary “lace” industry, but this is an import industry since the 1960s, bringing in mainly Austrian and Swiss industrial embroideries, often confused with real lace (Plankensteiner, 2013) and erroneously referred to as Nigerian Lace. This is an instance that does highlight the interconnectedness of global textile traditions in the 20th century.

all aspects of the sector, but not least those departments dealing with fabric and textiles.

The challenges facing museums in South Africa are considered by both Bundy (2001) and Vollgraaff (2013 and 2015) in what Bundy refers to as the “context of transition” (Bundy, 2001: 53) and the concomitant issues around access, content and relevance, and legitimacy and ideology (Bundy, 2001:50). Bundy and Vollgraaff’s analyses are 15 years apart, but Vollgraaff notes how very little seems to have changed in the intervening period. For any society or culture in transition, these institutions take on an important and pivotal role in representing the past and integrating this with contemporary ideology and social upliftment.

Within the context of transition, Bundy (2001) discusses how the position of the museum must change to contribute to new ways of engaging with its primary purposes as an institution of culture and heritage, and within a changing society. One of the enduring debates in museum transformation in post-apartheid South Africa is the search for an African Museum (Vollgraaff, 2015:42), an institution that can re-imagine the function of the museum in a transformed South Africa, especially in light of the country’s complex and conflicted past (Bundy, 2001:52). Among many other things, future exhibits will need to negotiate and (re)present not only this period of transition, but the re-visioned history and heritage or previous eras.

Vollgraaff’s (2013:23) analysis of the South African museum sector is that it lacks a coordinated strategy to resolve ongoing transitional issues and “two decades into the democratic era, museums still grapple with their role in South African society” (Vollgraaff, 2015:45). Vollgraaff raises a number of issues regarding the challenges faced by museums as “agents of social change” (Vollgraaff, 2013:23). She revisits this discussion in her analysis of the history of policy development through numerous committees and working groups (Vollgraaff, 2015). Her conclusions note the lack of progress in the sector while remaining positive for the future. An important aspect of the discussion, especially for this research, is the emphasis on the role that museums play in building an “evolved society” (Vollgraaff, 2013:25) and how non-Western societies have influenced museum practice “by contributing to the knowledge of living heritage and intangible culture as part of museum practice” (Vollgraaff, 2015:47). Dr

Bongani Ndhlovu, executive director of Iziko Museums, refers to this as “letting the community speak through the object ... showing the connections between communities ... rethinking how we look after the objects” (2020) and links this to the discussion of the benefits to the local community and ways of building traditional knowledge into prevailing structures. These discussions suggest that museums should become spaces where community-based “heritage practices are transferred ... [and] can continue to exist” (Vollgraaff, 2013:25), such as storytelling, crafts, and performances.

Within South Africa, museum collections have become “burgeoning accumulations of objects, many of dubious provenance, significance and value” (Keene, 2005:10) which are not necessarily reflective of cultural heritage or the specific focus of the museum. One of the drivers behind the amalgamation of the various Cape Town museums and satellite sites and their collections into one Iziko Social History Collection was to create “greater access and facilitate new ways of looking at collections, opening up possibilities for re-interpretation of the collections for research, exhibition and education” (Ramncwana and Hisham, 2011:15).

Collections as clusters of objects are also as important as single instances of an object. Ciraj Rassool, senior professor in the Department of History at University of the Western Cape, argues that objects within a collection, when used out of context and genericised or essentialised, distract from the potential of a collection to generate holistic meaning (2001:47). Way-Jones (2005:20) notes that collections should reflect the geographical uniqueness of the cultural heritage within the local community. Collections therefore should be “the means of our engagement” (Keene, 2005:10) with culture and cultural heritage, rather than an end in itself. The technical challenges of designing best practices for collecting in a contemporary South Africa are discussed by Vollgraaff (2015). But more interesting is the notion that this problem faces forwards and backwards. Museums need to consider what and how they collect going forward, but also what to do with the collections they have already acquired. In such cases, the value of what is entrusted in a museum collection is not necessarily solely a financial consideration. For Rassool, an important aspect of museum collecting after the 1990s is to achieve “representivity” and to “give back a recovered heritage” (2001:43) while

intervening in the production of historical knowledge and contemporary social representation (2001:46).

The construction of identity is a complex aspect within the social sphere, and museums play a part in this process. Solani and Mpumlwana's (2001) frame the place of museums within this argument, highlighting some of the complexity within a South African context. They discuss new models for representation of identities in the context of a transforming museum, as they propose to examine "what to keep from the old established institutions and practices and how to apply them in the changed situation" (2001:86). They question how museums can remain relevant and representative of a multicultural majority curating "as an integral part of Africa" rather than a "pocket of Europe in Africa" and "rooted in the experiences of the country and continent" (2001:86). Their discussion also notes that museums play an integral part in creating new identities (2001:83), suggesting that museums and heritage sites need to manufacture shared identity from divergent and selective memories: a complex mix where different identities may share traditional practices, and shared identities may diverge considerably in practice. Representations of identities, whether in displays or narratives, need to reflect this complexity.

The discussion of the construction of identity includes textiles, and specifically clothing, in the South African museum context. Gwintsa's (2001) *Costume and Multivalency* discusses material culture as a phenomenon of identity with reference to her own curated exhibition exploring "modern adaptations of traditional costume and the stereotypical dress codes sometimes exhibited in museums" (2001:94). She discusses the interpretation of the curated object not as an "alienated" and disconnected object, but rather as a contextualised mix of contemporary and historical, the private and the public. Her argument suggests that there are gaps in museum collections, as banks of national heritage, as some "new objects (but also ... lost or forgotten objects) may not meet museum selection criteria, [but] they may historically be significant cultural records" (2001:95).

Gwintsa argues that an object properly contextualised has significance, as it reflects a "living and constantly changing culture" (2001:96). Way-Jones also makes an argument for how a documented history of costume plays an important role in research

(2005:20). This includes for the analysis of styles and materials, or how costume collections provide a useful reference to dating other artefacts, such as photographs and paintings, and how this can be used to enliven history and spark conversation in the context of education. Even historical alterations to garments are interesting as they clearly show “changing circumstances” (Way-Jones, 2005:20) for a particular person or group.

Representations of the objects and the choices made for those representations, much like the objects themselves, are understood to be culturally and politically embedded in visualisations or visualities (Davis, 2011:8). West and Schmidt suggest that the “politics of visibility” seek to maintain white hegemony (2010:4). This is present historically within the museum institution and the narrative(s) that the museum constructs through its display and collection policies, and ultimately the choices made about the application and implementation of these policies. Hence the tension for a (South) African museum, as the politics of visibility within the institution itself are in dispute.

Haraway (1991) notes how deeply cultural assumptions can penetrate into concepts that are supposedly value-neutral. Visual representations can overshadow the material referent, the object itself, to create a new perceived reality with equal weight in the mind of the audience. Baudrillard (1994:2) refers to this process where it is “no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real”. The object’s neutrality slips, based on changing perceptions shaped by the socio-cultural context, and a once highly-valued European status symbol such as lace becomes a neglected object reframed outside of a dominant narrative. It is important to remember that this changeability is central to the nature of social-cultural ideological construction. What is disputed and reframed in the present may well be disputed and reframed again in the future, repeatedly. The question is what to do with the object in the collection that may have lost its centrality or neutrality at a particular moment in an ongoing and potentially infinite dispute.

5.3 The fragility of lace

Appadurai’s (2006) *The Thing Itself* highlights that objects and people are not distinct categories and “that the transactions that surround things are invested with the

properties of social relations” (2006:15). The antiquated lace object does not only recall the age of the object, and the distance from the contemporary, but also the context and the social constructs linked to that context, which may also be at a distance ideologically. Appadurai also notes that the object “never los[es] some of the magic of their human makers” (after Marcel Mauss) and retains an “underlying metric of labor” (after Karl Marx) (2006:17). As in the case of any crafted object, the human and the context of the humanity of an object’s production is never fully relegated⁵⁶. This aspect always plays some part in the consideration of the object. The value of the lace object is the value with which it is imbued by the contemporary social context and social players. But this is still linked to the perceived social value within a temporal context and the perceived financial value within a changed context. Lace that may have been a king’s ransom in the 17th century, may no longer demand such a price on an open market.

However, it may still be considered an exemplar of the style and tastes of a particular period and therefore have value in its uniqueness, either for the collector or for the museum. Its provenance may prove an impressive historical ownership which can also influence the economic value of a piece. It is important to remember that lace was produced by the equivalent of, in modern terms, sweat-shop labour. Historically, lacemakers earned a small percentage of the value of a product that went on to be sold for many times those amounts to the richest individuals⁵⁷, though still at certain points in the history of lace, this was considered a very good wage.

Within the museum and a collection, this fragility translates into object volatility. “What is at risk”, says Appadurai, “is not just the aura or authenticity but the fragility of objecthood itself” (2006:15). For Appadurai, objects require action to resist changing identity. They require commitment to the project of maintaining the object as a specific object linked temporally and spatially, both “a permanent object and a repository of permanence” (Appadurai, 2006:16). The museum becomes the agent in that process

⁵⁶ While lace was worn for conspicuous consumption by the richest of the rich, it was produced by the poorest of the poor for the barest of wages.

⁵⁷ King Charles I spent £1000 on personal linens and laces in 1625 (Earnshaw, 1980:10), the equivalent today of £185,000.00. A lacemaker in the 17th century would have been paid 5d per day (Jourdain and Dryden, 1984) or £3,89 in modern terms. In 2020 the National Living Wage (NLW) in the UK is £8,72. (Conversions made with www.measuringworth.com)

of suspension to resist change, an agent in maintaining permanence. This aspect of the museum is a point of contention in times of larger socio-cultural upheavals, where ideological change is fundamentally self-evident. Objects are caught in this dynamic, especially objects that represent some aspect that is under dispute. Within the South African context, museums are negotiating this ideological shift with varying degrees of success (as discussed previously), driven for the most part by the concept of what a museum represents or should represent in the contemporary context. The decisions being made obviously have an effect on the objects in a collection, as their permanence and position are questioned. Most affected are those objects that are difficult to align to a new vision of, or for, the (South) African museum.

5.4 The conservation of lace

Antique textiles are all organic materials. They have a limited lifespan by their very nature. Regular use shortens this lifespan (as in the case of clothing, linen, and fashion accessories, etc.) and the destructive nature of cleaning processes and chemicals required to combat the ravages of that regular use. Lace, already delicate by design, is even more at risk from these factors. Even when placed in storage, general decay through aging is not halted, merely slowed. Textiles are therefore highly fugitive in nature. They require substantial care to maintain, usually for a very limited and shorter period when compared to more hardy objects of stone, porcelain or metal.

Lace, along with many other textiles, does not take priority for many museums globally. Textiles are only emerging recently as an important area of study, and with the complexity of their upkeep alongside so many points of focus in the evolution of museums in the South African context, it is not difficult to understand the lack of focus on such objects. Lace is therefore fragile, both in the construction of the object itself, as an organic object subject to decay, and in the construction of its representation within a collection and the narrative of a museum: how people perceive lace and the part it plays in the history the museum projects.

Lace in the museum is a clear example of a “congealed moment ... in a longer social trajectory” (Appadurai, 2006:15). Lace as object has existed for at least 400 years, but during this time has ranged from an expensive social status symbol for conspicuous consumption, to a cheap, mass-produced commodity, and from a thriving industry to

a hobbyist pastime, from clerical vestments to sexy lingerie. Each piece of lace from a different context, with a different location and time period, is such a congealed moment. It represents changing fashions and fortunes of all those involved with this textile's production and the economies and institutions that shaped lace's history. For the specialist, each style of lace locates, in its pattern and manufacture, the identifiers of these specific moments in place and time. By comparison, the layman's concept of lace, an elaborate confection of baroque thread and ostentatious floral design, locates the object merely within a *different* moment in time. It is not only as an antique that can be hundreds of years old, but also antiquated, a *memento mori* of the grandiose pomp and ceremony of defunct royal courts, and outmoded ideas of social status and hierarchy translated into textile.

Conservation of heritage artefacts is not a recent imperative. Some of the more recognisable names in the field were established over half a century ago. One of the oldest such units is the Museum Conservation Institute of the Smithsonian, which was established in 1963 (Smithsonian, 2018), The American Institute for Conservation was established in 1972 (AIC, 2015), and the eponymous Getty Conservation Institute was opened in 1985 (Bridgland, 1995). The establishment and development of several important textile research centers in the last two decades make it clear that an understanding of society's relationship to textile and fabric is finding new relevance in global heritage discourse, which is naturally linked to such artefacts' conservation.

The following brief list is merely for illustrative purposes:

- The Textile Research Center in Leiden, Netherlands (TRC Leiden) is an independent center for textile research set up in 1991 to “give the study of textiles, clothing and accessories their proper place in the field of the humanities and social sciences” (TRC Leiden, 2020).
- The International Textile Research Center at the University for the Creative Arts, Farnham United Kingdom (ITRC UCA) was established in 2014 to incorporate the various centres and networks at the university working with fabric or textile, such as the Anglo-Japanese Textile Research Center (AJTRC) which had been established in 2004 (Millar, 2017).

- The Center for Textile Research in Denmark (CTR Denmark), integrated with the Saxo Institute at the University of Copenhagen, was established by the Danish National Research Foundation in 2005 to focus specifically on textile history and archaeology (CTR, 2020).

The value of lace is linked in part to its economic value, which plays a part in understanding how specifically lace is valued in society. Without a clear and unambiguous provenance, dating lace can be difficult. Lace designs, usually particular to a period and location, have been copied by industrial competitors during the height of lace production and by contemporary craft lace hobbyists, so the design is never an absolute surety of date or place. Many forms of lace have been copied in the 20th, century following documented antique designs. Unless the thread itself is of a modern type (or synthetic or a synthetic mix), there is little to clearly distinguish the modern from the antique in terms of design and manufacture. Only chemical analysis and microscopic investigation can determine this with any real accuracy, but these processes can be time consuming and expensive.

Contextualising an object, or objects, within collections, is one way of reconstructing the heritage value of the object. Determining the objective, factual data of the object and rebuilding the historical and socio-cultural context, all adds meaning to the object. This meaning is what gives an object value within the heritage context. Koppies lace becomes an example of where this process is so important. These objects are forgotten, or seem insignificant, when in fact they highlight an important moment in South African history, at the confluence of significant events and involving major historical figures. The most generative meaning construction of any object is through an intersection of larger historical contexts, smaller more personal narratives, and embedding the object in its environment. One can never discount the impact of a single object on history and on our understanding of history. It is imperative to conserve Koppies lace as a collection, even though, it is a dispersed collection of objects.

Conserving this collection would provide access to future researchers to interrogate aspects of contemporary social issues through historical examples. Brooks and Eastop (2011:xiii), quoting Jones and Holden (2008), note that

“what we conserve is a statement of what we respect, who we are and who we wish to be. Conservation ... refreshes the values of the past – giving us an understanding of where we have come from – but also reflects values for the present and the future”.

The above highlights the importance of the role of heritage institutions in building a respectful society. Museums' choices of what to display and what not to display are therefore taking up a specific position with regard to the historical significance of an artefact, such as textiles, and how to understand and to treat the topic. Museums and their collections are interwoven into how these narratives are shaped.

As Beverley Gordon (2011) suggests, the issue is related to contemporary society's relationship to textile, which translates into the position of heritage institutions' relationship to textile. The literature suggests that contemporary collections in general must contend with the impact of a number of ideological and related issues. Economic and funding issues are foregrounded, but the lack of specific attention to fabric and textiles would suggest that these are more likely to be neglected due to a lack of understanding of what textiles represent socially and culturally. These larger issues then impact on the conservation of textiles, especially lace, which is generally perceived as an exclusive and expensive, and now obsolete, fashion novelty from a bygone era.

In the contemporary era, the practice or manufacture of textile production is relegated to either large scale factories, as a commercial concern, or small-scale hobbyists within the domestic sphere for purely pleasurable craft pastimes. Cultural and heritage institutions, such as museums, therefore become major players within the discussion and discourse of tangible craft objects. The objects in museum collections become an important source of evidence for revisiting historical contexts. If as Gordon (2011) suggests, there is a disconnect between the perception of textile and its value in adding to an understanding of the social context, then it is important to reconnect with textiles and crafts. It is important to reweave the narratives that highlight the value of textiles to society, and to ensure that collections that are potentially most at risk, are conserved for the future.

Lace objects 3: unique pieces

Sui generis describes something that is of its own kind or unique. The “uniqueness of Koppies lace” (Rooi Rose, 1999:116) is a combination of relaxing the strict *reticello* needle lace technique that was initially taught to the students, coupled with exploring alternative designs that favoured local patterns drawn from nature. Both these innovations were driven by Osborne. In the context of Koppies lace, two specific pieces of lace stand out. These are Osborne’s needle lace jacket, and perhaps the best-known object of Koppies lace, the Wag-‘n-Bietjie Collar.

Lace object 3.1: Johanna Osborne’s Jacket⁵⁸

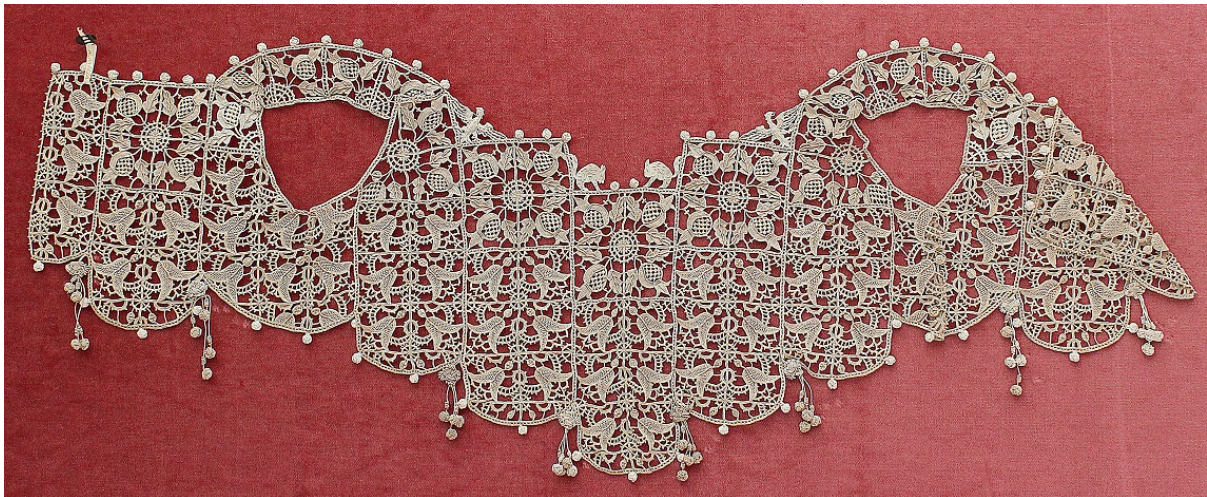


Fig 22. Koppies lace. Osborne collection. Lace Jacket, sleeveless. Needle lace. Cream. Framed against pink upholstery material. (Accession no. 07518/00003 War Museum of the Boer Republics)



Fig 22.1. Detail Fig 22. Designs

This jacket is a beautiful example of *punto in aria di Bologna* that was taught at the Aemilia Ars Society. It draws on generic elements of needle lace and *reticello* designs. The overall pattern is made up of squares criss-crossed with diagonal lines and *brides*, including pomegranates, oak leaves, floral designs, and wheels.



Fig 22.2. Detail Fig 22. Gordian Knots

⁵⁸ See Addendum D for an enlarged image.

Quite unique to the design are the “Gordian Knots” that surround the edges and dangle from the bottom edge. The origin of the design for these “knots” is not clear as nothing analogous is documented in such seminal texts as Santina Levey’s *Lace. A History*



Fig 22.3. Detail Fig 22. eagle/phoenix design

so it is not clear if this is a piece that was created by Osborne or simply belonged to her. The overall structure is geometric and reminiscent of *reticello* and *punto in aria* unlike the cream collar that is more organic and floral in design, with flowing lines inspired by the Art Nouveau movement.

(1983). As previously noted for the Cream Collar (Fig 9.) the eagle/phoenix motif appears, along with the red squirrel and oak leaves as seen in the Aemilia Ars Society designs. This piece is part of the Osborne collection of the War Museum of the Boer Republics and was donated by a Mrs Betsie Osborne in 2013. The collection also includes a few items donated by Johanna Osborne herself in 1962,



Fig 22.4. Detail Fig 22. red squirrel design



Fig 22.5. Detail Fig 22. Aemilia Ars metal tag

Several knots are a different colour thread, but it is not clear if these have been replaced as part of a restoration process or if they were intentionally originally a lighter shade of thread. The stitching is extremely meticulous, and such a large piece would have required a significant investment in time and effort. The work produced by Koppies was on occasion sent back to Italy to the Aemilia Ars Society as a quality check of what was being produced. This piece has the Aemilia Ars tag attached, but whether this was to identify it as being made at Aemilia Ars or simply certified by someone at the Society is not clear. This is an enigmatic

piece, because if made by Osborne, it would be a consummate piece of lace work that

documents the beginning of the development process from strict *reticello* to the freer designs in Koppies lace.

The jacket was worn over the shoulder and the armholes are clearly visible. It is not clear if it closed at the front or at the back as there are no tabs, buttons or ties to suggest how it was held closed, if at all. It is unlikely that it would have opened at the back. This would have meant the wearer would have to have assistance to dress and it would have needed to be laced with a separate lace which is no longer part of the object. If it does open to the front, this would mean the squirrels and eagle/phoenixes are worn over the shoulder blades and therefore mostly out of view.

Lace object 3.2: Wag-‘n-Bietjie Collar⁵⁹



Fig 23. Koppies lace. Emily Hobhouse lace collection. Lace collar, “wag-‘n-bietjie” leaf and flower motif. Needle lace. Cream. (Accession no. 01000/00002 War Museum of the Boer Republics)

⁵⁹ See Addendum E for an enlarged image.

The Wag-‘n-Bietjie⁶⁰ Collar is a Hobhouse design, and one of only three designs documented. This piece was however not worked by Hobhouse but by Miss Jacoba (Henna) Klue (Herald, 1988:3, a point repeated in Volksblad, 1968b) in approx. 1915. Miss Klue was later an instructor at the Lace School, but is not clear if this piece was made while she was still a student or as an instructor. It is noted that it was done under the supervision of Johanna Osborne (Rooi Rose, 1999:116).

The wag-‘n-bietjie is a small to medium sized tree with zig-zagging branches, pairs of



Fig 23.1. Detail of Fig 23. Floral elements

thorns, and flowers that are found in dense bunches in the axils of the leaves. The flowers have distinct pointed petals, usually five, and the fruit grows in clusters. All of these elements are found in the design of the pattern. The design is also bilaterally symmetrical with the left and right of the center line being identical. These observed elements of the tree are linked by *brides* that at times are thicker to denote the thorns. For verisimilitude, the design includes a locust on each shoulder. The piece is



Fig 23.2. Detail of Fig 23. Locust.

a collar and splays out when displayed flat. Worn over the shoulders, it would represent as a square bib with a round neck. It is unclear if it was open to the front or the rear. This may have depended on whether it was meant for a child or an adult. The playfulness of the inclusion of the locusts suggests it was for a child. It is not clear whether the locusts were an accent to be seen, so a frontpiece, or a hidden detail to be discovered, so at the rear of the design. Children were usually dressed by an adult, so it is possible that this collar closed at the rear and the locusts were a whimsical chance discovery for the viewer.

⁶⁰ The wag-‘n-bietjie (translated to wait-a-while) is a tree, also called the “buffalo thorn” or *Ziziphus mucronata*. It is distributed throughout the summer rainfall areas of sub-Saharan Africa, extending from South Africa northwards to Ethiopia and Arabia (SANBI, 2007).

The buttonhole stitch used is quite simple, and there is little variation in the stitch throughout the piece. More adept work would be a finer stitch (though this does depend on the quality of the thread), and there would be more variations throughout the work, e.g. the stitch pattern that fills the leaves, would not be the same for the flowers and the locusts. This suggests that it is still a student piece, though arguably a more advanced student.

Lace objects 3 summary

Without knowing the exact provenance of Osborne's Jacket it is difficult to confirm the relationship between these two pieces. Had both pieces been created by Osborne one could compare and contrast both technical and aesthetic elements to demonstrate the development of the style. However Osborne's Jacket still represents the stricter style of the technique that Osborne would have been taught at the Aemilia Ars Society and therefore at the opposite end of the continuum in terms of design from the Wag-'n-Bietjie Collar. This does show the innovation and progression of the application of the Aemilia Ars technique. It is important to realise that the Aemilia Ars style was a merger of *reticello* and *punto in aria* techniques fused with Art Nouveau design elements of the early 20th century. Aemilia Ars itself was therefore a *melange* of different styles and techniques. Osborne was merely extending this innovation by allowing the technique to adapt to the local skill set and aesthetic appreciation of the girls in her school.

6. Analysis and discussion

The main aim of this dissertation has been to consider the place of lace within South African museums and the value it brings as a tangible heritage object to the heritage discourse. The discussion has highlighted the arguments around the value of craft and the relationship of craft to society. It has emphasised the value of textile as a heritage object and the need to restore textile to the discourse of heritage as a significant and generative tangible object. It has also added to the story of lace in restoring the historical context of lace produced in South Africa. These discussion points have attempted to highlight something as fragile as lace and as fleeting as the Koppies lace School in the importance to South African history and heritage.

The pieces of Koppies lace discussed are a snapshot of the diversity of needle lace produced in South Africa in the early 1900s. The objects were all personal, made by and either worn or used by mostly Afrikaner women and children. There is no physical evidence on the objects to suggest such use⁶¹, though the assumption is that they must have been worn or used at some time. Most of the lace reads as white, but close inspection shows it is cream-coloured⁶², and the use of black, cream and ecru demonstrate the fallacy of white lace. The pupils producing these objects at the Koppies School were all young girls, ranging from 12 to 18 years, and it is therefore assumed that the crafters here were for the most part teenage girls. Generally the stitching is extremely neat and uniform requiring a steady hand and consistent tension of the stitches. The pattern elements are often small and difficult to stitch and therefore time-consuming.

Much like the evolution of style in Europe, where local industries developed regional peculiarities, in the same way Koppies lace was an evolution of previously recognised styles. The students were taught the techniques of *punto in aria* and *reticello* lace, but allowed to develop beyond these more formal constraints. While mostly classic

⁶¹ The objects have all been looked after with great care, so there is very little wear and tear on the objects. It is likely that many of them have only ever been stored or on display. There are examples of general aging in terms of discoloration and some staining, but this is common in textile articles kept under less-than-ideal circumstances.

⁶² It should be noted that aging of the thread may play a part in enhancing this impression. If the organic thread is not properly cleaned then corrosion can take place during storage.

patterns were slightly reinvented through modification, in a few cases the patterns and designs were highly innovative.

6.1 HOPS analysis lace objects 1

The template pieces are all clothing embellishments, such as collars and edgings, or decorative accessories, namely handkerchiefs, bags, or tray mats. All the objects are clearly primarily aesthetic in function, as is ultimately true of all lace. Lace handkerchiefs can't be used to blow one's nose. Lace bonnets do not keep you warm or shield you from sunlight. Lace objects are generally purely decorative and therefore a luxury item. They emphasise adornment and class and are an obvious example of conspicuous consumption. These pieces all demonstrate a high level of fine craftsmanship which, based on Hobhouse's work ethic, was probably what she expected of her students, and her ideal.

It is likely that most are not original antique items from the period they represent, but copies made in the late 1890s and early 1900s. At the time they would have been contemporaneous, whereas now they are themselves antiques. The work produced by the Aemilia Ars Society in particular was a concerted effort to draw on older traditions and invigorate the lagging lace industry at the turn of the last century (Levey, 1983:113). The lace that the Aemilia Ars Society produced drew on 450 years of experience and knowledge to keep those skills alive, while still being comparatively simple in terms of materials and tools. The Society also innovated by merging the traditional with the contemporary, by combining classic lace technique with Art Nouveau and later Art Deco designs.

6.2 HOPS analysis lace objects 2

Johanna Osbourne, as the principal of the Koppies Lace School, was carrying on a tradition of revitalising the production of lace and lace industries as begun during the late 19th century. She was introducing this idea from Europe into South Africa with the help of the formidable Emily Hobhouse. The Aemilia Ars Society in Italy drew on older traditions and a number of styles to create a hybrid of *reticello* and *punto in aria*. These influences are clearly visible in the student work from the Koppies Lace School. There is a broad range of influences in the designs, from Genoese lace to Burano lace, and some items that are clearly influenced by Venetian gros point needle lace. These are

all plausible design influences, as Emily Hobhouse and Johanna Osbourne would have been exposed to these during their travels in Italy in the early 1900s. The complexity of the pieces produced suggests that the students were able to learn these ostensibly foreign techniques and designs and include them in their own needle craft repertoire.

Generally the more advanced items are functional accessories, either decorative handkerchiefs, or bags and card cases, or decorative accessories, such as dress collars. Keeping costs down was important in initiatives that were meant to teach the struggling poor an income generating skill in a post-conflict and recovering economy. In terms of lace, being predominantly decorative, learning these skills allows local communities, and especially women to create aesthetically pleasing fashion(able) items that would otherwise have been beyond their reach financially.

The skills and materials for the student work covers a broad range and with accurate dating this may suggest a sequence. It is plausible that an appropriate or more successful curriculum developed over time, based on the abilities and interests of the students, or that styles changed due to the change in principalship in 1931 (after Osbourne left), or due to fashion. It could simply have been an indication of the school's waning finances. Even though Emily Hobhouse's spinning and weaving schools had been highly successful, they still could not create the necessary fineness of thread for lacemaking. Lace thread therefore had to be imported. This would have meant that lacemaking was not profitable enough to be self-sustaining. It ultimately led to the closure of the school.

6.3 HOPS analysis lace objects 3

The Wag-'n-Bietjie Collar clearly demonstrates that not only were accumulated knowledge skills being transferred and applied, but that ingenuity was being used to create a unique product. The aesthetic is uniquely South African, drawing from the Free State landscape. The design elements include the results of keen observation skills by referencing endemic flora and fauna, along with a sense of whimsy. This object shows a basic proficiency of needle craft but is not at a consummate level. The design, however, reflects a very personal experience of the world and would have been aesthetically pleasing and sentimentally evocative. It is important to remember

that this design is attributed to Emily Hobhouse, so essentially this would have reflected her experience and sentiment as much as the lacemaker's. Hobhouse, being British, was after all the foreigner in this context and Henna Klue, the lacemaker, the local girl.

6.4 General comments

Lace builds on basic needle crafts techniques that have a very long history and use simple and easily accessible materials. The materials are cheap and if not close at hand, easy to manufacture (from raw materials if you have the craft knowledge, such as the craft of spinning). The materials, and in most cases, the objects themselves, are easy to use, store, and to travel with. They can be taken up at any moment, even between other tasks. This malleability allows an object to be created bit by bit over a long period of time. The final product is lightweight and easily transported. The only necessity for needlecraft work is good light and Hobhouse also observed this of the African climate⁶³. At the time these objects could still have been used as clothing accessories, whereas today they have been taken out of use and are primarily found in collections and on display in museums.

⁶³ In Hobhouse's discussion of cottage industries, she notes "The light on the South African tableland was excellent for close work" (Hobhouse-Balme, 2012:503).

7. Conclusion

Restoration and conservation are about more than preservation (Appadurai, 2006:15).

Inadvertently, this dissertation *became* an example of the very process of restoration, of giving meaning to a tangible heritage object, through building context, such as histories, persons, and stories. It is only a partial restoration due to its limited scope. It is impractical to presume that someone visiting a museum needs to undertake a masters dissertation to gain a better or deeper understanding of a single item on display, let alone to achieve this for each and every item. What I have learned from this exploration is rather how much such an understanding of an object can add to its meaning and significance, and the social and cultural value of the object as a piece of heritage. An obvious next step would be reworking of these facts into something that a museum audience can connect to and learn from. This would be an act of translating specialist knowledge into the context of the museum display, so that it is engaging, enlightening and entertaining. Each object within the museum, no matter how small or how fragile, has the potential to do this.

Koppies lace is a truly South African endeavor in the textile field and an early example of the first attempts at factory-type production in a country that did not have large scale factories at the time⁶⁴. While Hobhouse always envisioned the weaving, spinning, and lace schools as feeders for the development of home industries, the schools themselves were fashioned on a factory-style format and process. It is therefore an interesting example of early 20th century textile production history and speaks to the origins of this sector.

Emily Hobhouse chose craft to fill the space left by war, famine, and economic and emotional destitution. Craft raised the spirits by providing skills, and communities and benefactors rallied around her endeavors, building a sense of achievement and creating community. Such skills enabled potential income generation and engendered self-sufficiency for the individual. But in the broader sense, they created a network of

⁶⁴ Large scale factory development only began shortly before World War I (circa 1912) and is embedded in the South African economy by the mid 1920s (SAHO, 2019).

support and financing from both the fledgling Afrikaner government and institutions, and rich and philanthropic British sympathisers. This in itself is an impressive feat of reconciliation.

Emily Hobhouse is a well-known name for most South Africans, and there is no doubt that she was the instigator for the establishment of the Lace School. But Johanna Osborne was the real lynch pin. Osborne was the first teacher and principal, at and of the school, Osborne allowed the students to break away from the *reticello* lace they are taught and develop their own patterns, drawing from the Free State environment. This is again building on an inspiration from Hobhouse, based on how her wag-‘n-bietjie lace pattern was drawn from the local flora, but they developed this work in unison. This discussion therefore begins to fill in the gaps with regards to the real relationship between Emily Hobhouse and the Koppies Lace School, and Hobhouse’s relationship to Joanna Osborne. More importantly, it highlights the real part that Osborne played in the establishment and success of the school. This is not always highlighted in many texts on Hobhouse’s life. The interest in Hobhouse’s philanthropy in Europe overlaps with the setting up of the lace school at this stage in her life, and so biographies tend to shift focus to her other causes in Europe and neglect her correspondence with Osborne⁶⁵.

Koppies lace is unique and exceptional in terms of what it represents and why it comes to be in the first place. It is an overt attempt by Emily Hobhouse at reconciliation between the English and Afrikaner nations after the atrocities of the ABW. It simultaneously acts as a social and economic upliftment project and skills development programme, teaching young girls and orphans a useful skill to generate income and household articles for personal use. It is an early example of industrial production in South Africa that is initiated and driven by a woman. It is intended to foster self-reliance and community-building. These are important lessons that can be taught through an appreciation and understanding of the collections of Koppies lace. This is best demonstrated in the deep and shared affection that the Afrikaner nation had for Hobhouse’s efforts at the time, her interment (as British subject) at a cherished

⁶⁵ There are examples of letters written to Johanna Osborne by Emily Hobhouse in the War Museum of the Boer Republics collections. Unfortunately, due to pandemic restrictions the original work in the Bloemfontein archives could not be accessed.

Afrikaner monument to the suffering of women and children, and even today, their enduring fascination with, interest in, and respect for her life and work.

7.1 Further study

There are a number of potential areas of development for future research:

As tangible heritage objects, it is important to develop a thorough and defined typology of Koppies lace. This dissertation separates out the different “authors” of the lace only in the broadest sense, noting student vs adept lace maker, but Koppies lace, as defined in this research, needs more detailed study and thorough documentation. It would be important to coordinate and integrate the various collections to create a visual archival reference of the various collections and an accurate and collated accession and provenance document, especially for future researchers and to improve accessibility to the visual data. Following from this, it may be possible to speculate on the development of the curriculum at Koppies Lace School and the influences on the designs by the succession of teachers.

As the true influence behind the success of the Koppies Lace School, Johanna Osbourne and her correspondence with Emily Hobhouse needs to be researched and documented to develop a richer context and detail of the development of the school. This correspondence does exist, and references can be found in the work of Rykie van Reenen (1984) and Hobhouse Balme (2012) with more detail potentially available in the Free State Archive Depot’s The Steyn Collection and the Hobhouse Trust in Canada.

The relationship between hand crafted lace and machine crafted lace is another interesting point mentioned briefly in the discussion that highlights the nature of the crafted object. There was no machine lace produced at Koppies, so this topic therefore falls outside of this dissertation, but future research could develop the discussion of lace as craft and explore this relationship in more detail to elaborate on the complexity of the concept of craft and the nature of the hand made.

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Addendum A: Lace Object 2.3 the linen collar (from Iziko Museums)



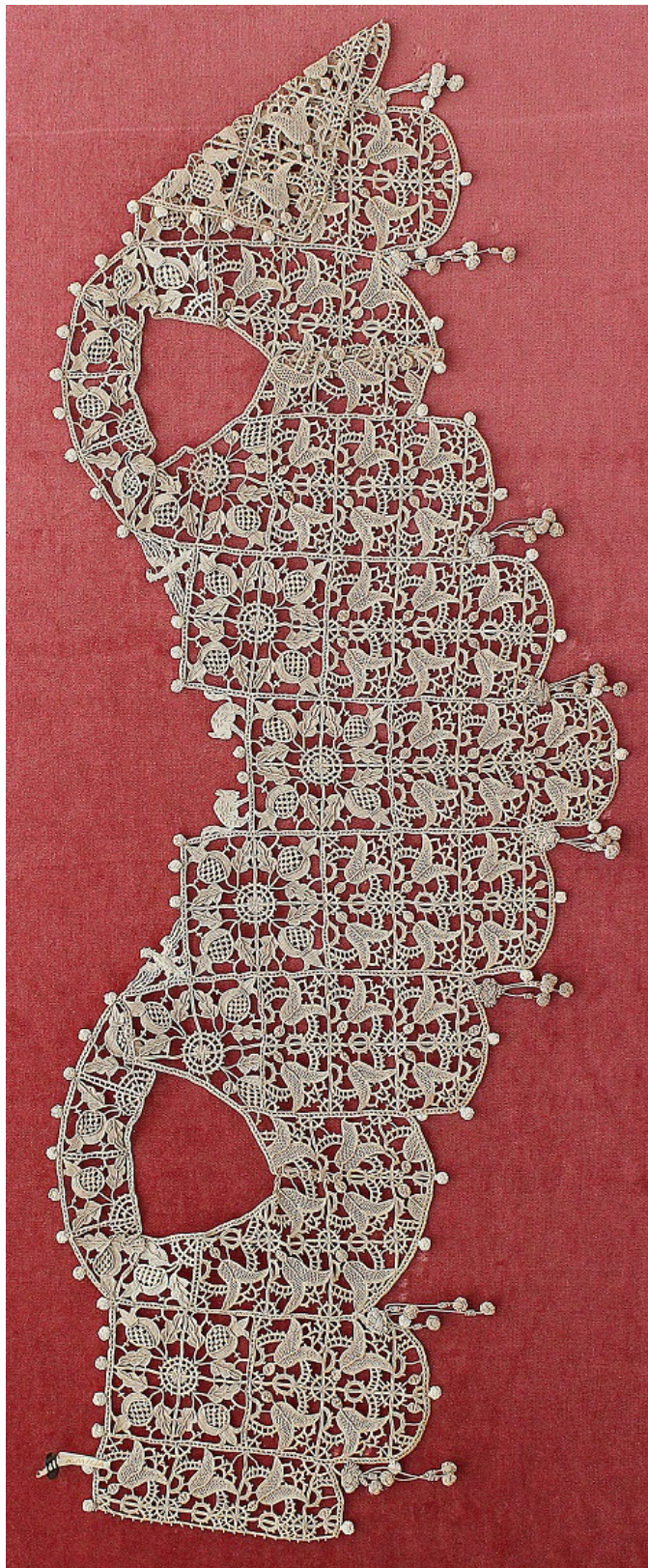
Addendum B: Lace Object 2.4 the card cases (from Iziko Museums)



Addendum C: Lace Object 2.4 the card cases (from The War Museum of the Boer Republics)



Addendum D: Lace Object 3.1 Johanna Osborne's Jacket (from The War Museum of the Boer Republics)



Addendum E: Lace Object 3.2 Wag-‘n-Bietjie Collar (from The War Museum of the Boer Republics)

