

The *Isimodeni* Style: Traditional Beadwork, Zulu Trinket or South African Sartorial Tradition on Durban's Golden Mile?

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Abstract

Beadwork is a well-documented aspect of the socio-political culture of isiZulu speaking groupings in Southern Africa. Whilst scholarship on beadwork deals largely with the denotative and connotative value it offers wearers, this article's contribution relates both to its commodification and apolitical value by confronting a general assumption that a beadwork style known as *isimodeni* (modern beadwork), produced as a trinket for tourists along Durban's racially stratified Golden Mile since the 1960s, is an authentic representation of a Zulu material culture. The paper probes how traditional beadwork and rickshaw rides (with both highly decorated carts and pullers) were earmarked by tourism officials of the time, as commodities that could serve a demand for colourful exoticism and accessible "Zulu" culture. Methodologically, the article draws on the visual analysis of beaded artifacts and photographs, in addition to ethnographic data derived from unstructured interviews with bead-workers on Durban beachfront, to examine how a beadwork tradition transformed into a "Zulu" tourism commodity, and then transmuted into a nationalized, form of ethnic identity and sartorial tradition.

Keywords

Zulu, beadwork, *isimodeni*, Durban, tourism

Introduction

My grandmother came here in 1968. That time there were 16 women who arrived in Durban. Five were from KwaNyuswa, five from Ndwedwe near Inanda, three from the KwaMashu Township, and three from Hammersdale. They would sleep on the streets at night, returning each morning to the Beachfront. After some time they were chased by the police. But a British woman who was visiting the beachfront contacted the Rotary Club saying that she, and many of her friends, had bought a lot of stuff from the street sellers and that this was valuable. So they put pressure on the Municipality to issue trading licenses to the women. First, they thought that maybe they could sell their traditional beads, like *ibandé*, a round belt, and *ibhamba*, a flat belt. Later they started to make the beaded dolls, beaded nets for putting over the tables to stop flies, ponchos, straps for eyeglasses and bracelets.

Constructed cultural representations rooted in localness, and aimed at domestic and international tourism in Durban (Naidu 2011) have underpinned a commodification continuum in, what was up until 1994, the racially stratified site of the Golden Mile - a mile long road, lined by sea-facing five-star hotels and luxury apartment blocks. Durban is a prominent holiday city in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), on the South African east coast, and is famed for its beaches, beachfront promenade and distinctive rickshaw pullers. Rickshaws were ‘imported’ to Durban by sugar baron, Sir Marshall Campbell in 1892 and became a vital part of the early social and political economy of Natal (Brown 1989).

The above interview conducted with 48-year-old bead-worker Sindy Phewa, assists in introducing and contextualising this article, which considers how aspects of a beading tradition were transformed into trinkets, but also sold as “Zulu” material culture, along Durban’s Golden Mile. Significantly, beadwork became intrinsic to the ethnic-tourism identity surrounding the rickshaw service, and the holiday “keepsake” economy (figure 2) that flourished along the Mile.

The interview also identifies that bead-workers were from Durban’s hinterland; it dates the formalisation of beadwork trade at the site; it implies that white police and tourism administrators regulated bead-worker trade; and it identifies a shift, from the selling of their material culture, to a process of responsive product development, pandering first to a “whites-only” consumer sector. The interview also confirms the success of a “value” argument, a quality which prompted members of the local Rotary Club to champion against city administrators, demonstrating a residual value for the

tribal, the exotic (Kasfir 2007) and for ‘localness’, amongst white residents and administrators. This value, is evident in a second interview, in 2012, with beachfront bead-worker Sindy Shezi:

It is all about demand. Those days when a lot of whites, in 1985 were here, they just wanted the bright colours. They never told us what colours to choose or how to make it, but we would watch what they bought, and then make it. Look at this headband that I made, it’s ANC (in the colours of the African National Party Colours). Now people come here and they want ANC, IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party) or NFP (National Freedom Party) colours. People also ask for *isigege* (traditional beaded skirts); *inkehle* (hat of a married women); and *imblaselo* (modified western wear) so we make them, it's the fashion now (Gatfield 2014, 303)

The interview offers indicators that a responsive process of beadwork production continued during the 1980s, in which the demands of both white and then black customers seeking either colourful holiday keepsakes, political signifiers, traditional wear or the latest fashion, were met.

Thus, this research examines the historic, hegemonic, material-cultural, ethno-tourism aspects, which underpinned the micro-economies that formed along the Golden Mile. The paper thus considers the Golden Mile as a “circuit of culture” (Du Gay 1997) in which moments of representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation (Leve 2012) are considered critical in the formation of a beadwork commodity known as *isimodeni*, or modern beadwork, produced by Black female bead-workers from Durban’s hinterland during the 1960’s.

The paper probes how beadwork and rickshaw rides (which were literally and figuratively showcases for the artwork) were earmarked by Durban’s tourism officials as commodities to fulfill a need for “local colour” (Bell et al. 2016) or ethnic tourism value, linked with place and Zulu identity essentialisation, or Zulu-ness (Klopper 1996). Methodologically, the article draws on the visual analysis of beaded artifacts and photographs, and on ethnographic data derived from unstructured interviews and focus groups with bead-workers, as well as folk historians. These consultations assisted in understanding how a material cultural tradition transformed into the *isimodeni* tourism commodity, but also how this commodity was then expanded to represent a nationalised ethnic identity.

The representational functions of beadwork to denote and connote meaning for its wearers and viewers is primary in the discussion around the major beadworking styles, determined by colour, design, and discrete methods of making, which have been prevalent from the 1930s. Whilst scholars (Tyrell 1968, Wickler and Seibt 1989; Jolles 1993; Morris and Preston-Whyte 1994; Van Wyk 2003; Boram-Hayes 2005; Winters

2008; Dube 2009; Preston-Whyte 2014) have suggested that these styles represent particular regions or socio-political groupings; this paper addresses the fluid nature of beadwork style, concentrating on how *isimodeni* emerged methodologically, as a stylistic anomaly.

A significant impact on the development of the style came through the implementation of influx control, imposed on black people on Durban's beachfront in the period preceding the issue of trading licenses (1890 – 1968) in 1968. Prior to this legislation, the only black people allowed on the Golden Mile were rickshaw pullers, who subsequently emerge as significant actors in the beachfront circuit of culture. Thus the quest for African exoticism and the accessible, "tribal Zulu" (Stevenson and Graham-Stewart 2000) found a footing in Durban's tourism zone; the rickshaw pullers responded to the attention, but also seemingly to prodding, by altering their cart and outfit aesthetic with each political shift in beachfront administration. At the same time, as this political impetus, contributing factors played into this aesthetic production such as the bricolage of beadwork styles, creative sartorial self-identification by referencing rural material culture, and by appropriating western aesthetic influences.

It is thus posited that bead-workers began by selling wares made in the *Ndwedwe* or *isinyolovane* style - the dotting of multicoloured beads on a black field (Winters 2008; Gatfield 2014) - particular to regions inland from Durban. *Isinyolovane* was slowly "merged", through their contact, with the "Nongoma style" characterized by stepped (triangular) rhomboid motifs (Boram-Hayes 2005) used as the aesthetic basis for the rickshaw puller's outfits and carts. What emerged, was a confluent *isimodeni* style.

Following the 1968 issue of trader licenses to bead-workers (1968-1994), ethnic tourism remained in the control of government officials who recognised the commercial value that colourful trinkets, produced by local isiZulu-speaking bead-workers, could play in furthering Durban's "local colour" agenda. Thus, after 1968, the *isimodeni* trinket was identified as a commodity that would not only compliment Durban's colourful holiday milieu, but could satisfy the assumptions of incognizant tourists who believed they were buying examples of authentic Zulu material culture. Finally the paper examines how, in the wake of the 1994 democratic elections, older styles representing political conflict were shunned, in favour of *isimodeni's* apolitical value, and thus adopted as a new fashion, and as a national symbol of a post-apartheid South African ethnicity.

Beadwork as Representation

The symbolic nature of beadwork is well documented. Much scholarship on traditional Southern Nguni beadwork from South-East Africa argues that beadwork is more than mere adornment (Tyrell 1968, Wickler and Seibt 1989; Jolles 1993; Morris and Preston-Whyte, 1994; Klopper, 1996; Stevenson and Graham-Stewart, 2000; Van Wyk 2003; Boram-Hayes 2005; Winters 2008; Dube 2009; Wells 2006; Gatfield 2014; Preston-Whyte 2014), considering that the combinations of pattern, design and colour facilitate a

means with which to connote and denote meaning for the wearer and viewer. For example, it is largely forbidden in Zulu society to openly discuss matters of personal intimacy, love, and sexuality, resulting in beadwork becoming a mode through which to connote ideas and emotions (Wells et.al 2012,76). Beadwork may therefore be seen as an emotionally charged conduit, with which to foment, signal, distance or reveal unspoken sentiments or political polarities.

Thus authors acknowledge that beadwork ‘flags difference - like tartans of Scottish clans’ (Van Wyk 2003,14). A belt or apron can, through its color, design and pattern, denote information about the wearer’s political status and membership (Wickler and Seibt 1989). Beadwork may also denote age, group or family status. In general, colour combinations are said to be characteristic of regions and are hence assumed to indicate one’s provenance and ethnic identity (Jolles 1993, 42-43).

Although beadwork can indicate ethnic or regional roots, these identities have not always been fixed, people were ‘uprooted, often within their histories’ (Van Wyk 2003,14). Scholars, therefore, appear to favour the term “style” (Dube, 2009; Jolles, 1993; Van Wyk, 2003; Boram Hayes, 2005) to indicate that colour palettes; methods of making; manner of wearing, and pattern were continually being renegotiated.

In these respective ways beadwork has been implicated within the conflicted social geographies and history of the KZN region. For example, under the apartheid system in the late 1940s isiZulu speaking people were required to live in set aside “homelands”. Here people came under the control of traditionalist leaders, subordinate to the government. This move ‘inflamed old divisions’ and created new splinter groups and new beadwork styles (Boram-Hayes 2005, 41). In this way, the *Isishunka* Style (Wickler and Seibt 1989; Jolles 1993) was replaced by the brighter coloured *Umzansi* Style, from Msinga in Northern KZN (Boram-Hayes 2005). The beadwork of the region can therefore be viewed as capricious: fashionable (Stevenson and Graham Stewart 2000), subject to influence, political climate, aesthetic trend, but also to the supply of beads (Preston-Whyte 2014).

Since the 1930s various discrete styles emerged in the region (Boram-Hayes 2005; Van Wyk 2003; Jolles 1993) as follows: the Eshowe Style (characterised by its bars of red, yellow, royal blue and green on a mostly white field); the Ndwedwe Style (a multi-coloured colour dotting style, on a black field); the Southern Natal Style (very similar to the dotting at Ndwedwe, but in smaller glass beads, often bearing single phrases, or fir tree motifs); the Maphumulo/Mvoti Style (lace-like technique, in a triangular, striped or checked motif in green, black, navy, royal blue and accented in orange or pink, on a white field); the Msinga style (comprised of localized styles including the seven-colour *Isishunka* Style, the newer *Umzansi* Style (navy, green, white, opaque red), the multi-coloured Msinga *Insinyolovane* Style (including yellow); the *Isilomi* Style (navy, turquoise, sap green, white, opaque red, and black); the *isiPhalafini* Style (which omitted

the turquoise), along with the Msinga Isimodeni Style (known for its key-like jagged design and large letterforms, often in orange, black and green). Further, regional styles include the Nongoma style (a mixture of diamonds and triangles, commonly identified in red, green, black and white, but which occurs in other colour sequences denoting the region's districts); and the Escort Style (characterized by distinct strips bearing pictorial subject matter, seen in *izibheklane* or capes, in red, green, orange and blue surrounded by complex white beaded surrounds). To these, Van Wyk (2003) adds a style particular to the Drakensburg region, very similar to the Escort Style (but which appears to replace red with pink and makes use of borders of turquoise and long tassled details); and finally a Bhaca Style (from the Richmond area. This style is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study).

These styles continue to reflect the importance of local identities, and symbolically function as a reminder to the Zulu king that as independent identities, they could break away if they felt the need (Boram-Hayes 2005). Beadwork can, therefore, be seen as 'complicit' in recasting social geographies, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa, where new found freedoms and the influences of modernity have reconfigured the role of this craft.

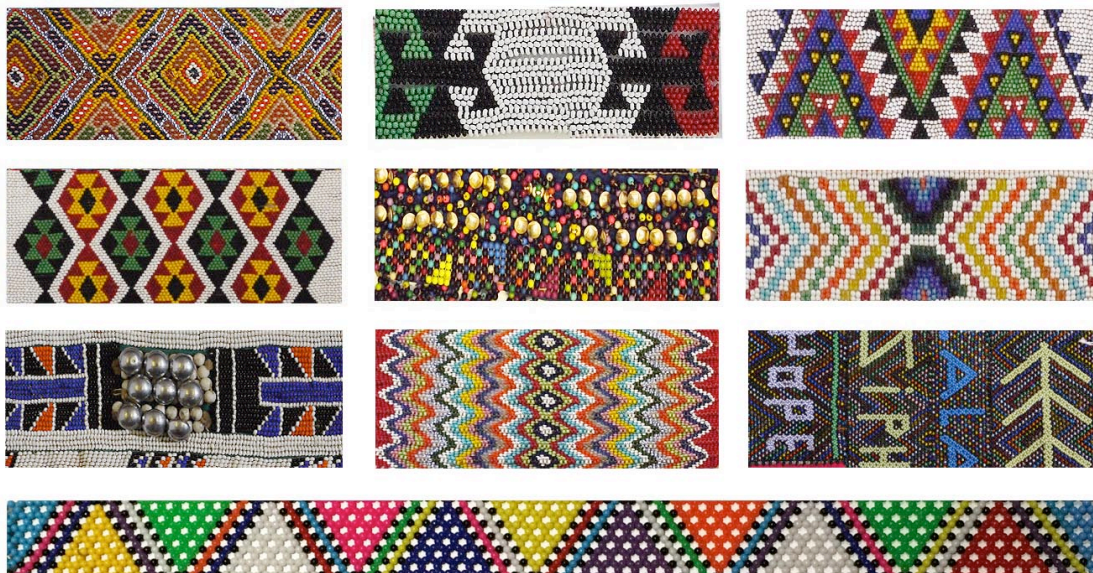


Figure 1: Top and Middle: Various examples of regional styles distinctly different from the Isimodeni Style (bottom). Styles reproduced with kind permission from Phansi Museum. Photos: Rowan Gatfield.

Distinguishing the *Isimodeni* Style from other styles

It is understood, from isiZulu speaking informants, that “*isimodeni*” translates as “the modern style”. Whilst the author first heard the term in KwaNuyswa in 2011, Jolles

(1993) encountered the term in 1960 in Msinga, used to describe beadwork that was stylistically different, or ‘modern’ - as influenced by the migrant labour system (his examples are dissimilar from beadwork found on Durban beachfront). This distinction, between modern and older styles, thus denotes that some styles were deemed to be out of date, no longer relevant, or too distanced from the western fashions, textiles, and newly coloured beads reaching rural areas via migrant workers.

The methodological separation of old styles from newer ones, began with the visual analysis of 200 beaded items sold in curio shops and on sidewalks in Durban. This analysis involved identifying, recreating and dissecting prevalent design and colour themes digitally, which were then matched with or separated from historic items found in texts, museums and archives. This analysis was supplemented by fieldwork, examining beadwork at the Reed Dance at eNyokeni in Northern KZN in 2013. These results were compared with items for sale (for both African and tourist consumption) in Cape Town, East London, Johannesburg, and Pretoria. The items included traditional attire such as *isigege* (beaded skirt) and *ibande*, (beaded belt) in addition to trinkets such as keyrings, beaded tin mugs, bracelets, bangles, mock ties, and headbands.

At these sites, a pattern comprised of individually coloured triangles, separated by a beaded line of black beads was evident. This pattern, the author learned from bead-workers, was known as *Isimodeni* Style, and that for them this merely signaled that it denoted a modern fashion, or that it was “Zulu beadwork for tourists”. The aesthetic difference, between this and older styles, became increasingly evident as systems of colouring, design and production were identified, collated and themed.

A series of unstructured interviews with bead-workers confirmed these trends: In early 2011, interviews were conducted with 15 female bead-workers on Durban’s Beachfront, with an aim to understanding the origins and identity of *isimodeni*. Responses included:

It’s all Zulu beadwork, or ‘I am an artist so this product is a creative response to how I feel’; or ‘its simply the fashion now’, or ‘ I decide on the design as I see fit’; or ‘I simply make what I see others making’; or this beadwork is from the region I’m from; but mostly, ‘my mother, or my aunt, taught me this and I’m not sure who taught her’.

These responses offered little definitive indication of the beadwork’s origin or unique identity, other than that it was broadly representative of the Zulu identity. Yet, some seemed ambivalent about its identity denotation, seeing it as purely a consequence of a creative process, supposedly disconnected from denoting polity or region and instead, as being contemporary and fashionable. It was revealed that this style had been passed between generations of hinterland bead-workers. Interviews also revealed that Durban’s migrant rickshaw pullers are exclusively from the North, at central Nongoma, Mandlakazi, Ceza, and Mahlabatini.



Figure 2. Zulu women selling curios on Durban's Golden Mile in 1977. Photo: Peter John.

Controlling “Local Colour” and a responding Rickshaw aesthetic

Ever since the first decade of the twentieth century, Durban has been South Africa's premier seaside destination (Hughes 2012, 141). Besides its port, and sugar industry, seaside tourism has been its primary source of income resulting in 15 000 tourists being attracted to the city in 1908 (Maharaj et al., 2008). Seaside tourism was bolstered by the decisions of city administrators, who set about controlling the racial and spatial features of the city, passing legislation to control the entry of black people, and restricting their domicile to separate residential locations (Popke and Ballard 2004, 101). Although controls restricting the movement and occupation of Africans in Durban had existed from the nineteenth century, legislated influx control after 1968 enforced segregation and was centred on the view that Africans should only enter urban areas to ‘minister to the white man's needs’. Thus, a curfew was established in 1869, compulsory carrying of an identification pass in 1901, and the *Native Locations Act* promulgated in 1904. The latter allowed for the establishment of segregated urban locations for Africans (Maylam 1990,

4-5). However, an exception was made for Rickshaw pullers in return for their role in fulfilling the city's transport and tourism agendas. Migrant labour was tolerated, providing it was cheap, constant and controllable (Maylam 1990, 2). Thus labour migrancy facilitated a burgeoning tourism economy.

In 1902, in the post South African War period and imminent to a unified British South Africa, Durban boosters targeting British tourists employed the concept of "local colour" (the supposedly unique customs, manner of speech, dress, or special features of its inhabitants) or, in other words, "inhabitants of colour", no different in the minds of promoters, to the value of Venetian gondoliers or London cockneys in promoting a destination (Bell et al. 2016, 202). In this instance "local colour" made reference to the isiZulu speaking ethnic majority in Natal Colony, whom together with an emphasis on Durban's British modernity, helped immigrant boosters construct a particular "Durban identity" (Bell et al. 2016, 217). Given their presence in the city (as transportation) rickshaw pullers appear to have been the first targeted as the focus of "local colour".



Figure 3: LEFT: 'Uniforms', modified with porcupine quills, horns, feathers.

RIGHT: Early uniformed puller. With kind permission by Ethekwini Local History Museum.



Figure 4: White horns and a triangular motif, apparently not made from beads, but instead a “sewn intervention” This coincides with the issue of “kitchen boy uniform” – a calico, top and shorts suit, worn by male servants and pullers (figure 3). Illustration: Rowan Gatfield

Literature on this male transportation service, introduced in 1892 to Durban’s docks, city centre and beachfront promenade (Brown 1989), together with the visual analysis of some 100 available images of Durban rickshaws, points to a consistently revisited visual tradition, in the period preceding the 1968 issue of licenses to bead-workers. This is evident in their costumes, headdresses and cart decoration (Brown 1989; Bell, Beaven and James 2016). These elaborate decorations not only speak of the competitive nature of the pullers, but also of the increasing demand by British visitors for exotic “entertainment”. The following piece (cited in Bickford-Smith 2016,170) from a guide entitled *Durban, the Brighton of South Africa*, captures how native individuals were viewed, within early Durban:

In the main street a raw Kafir girl in beads and blankets, just from the kraal, may be seen walking alongside her civilised sister, radiant in all the glory of a fashionable European gown, with picture hat and high heeled shoes to match ...a mingling of the most primitive savagery and most advanced civilisation.

The extract points to a residual lens, framed by a general disdain for black people. However, this tourism marketing excerpt highlights that the colonial imagination simultaneously valued the exotic, ‘the untouched and the primeval’ (Kasfir 2007,100) within these “civilised” spaces. This lens was not only restricted to British tourists: local residents and visitors from the interior also viewed Black people in the “Brighton of South Africa” with the same disdain (Preston-Whyte, 2001).



Figure 5: Colourfully clad bathers with rickshaw. Durban Beachfront, 1940's (National Geographic Creative 2018). Photo: Melville Chater.

The marketing of Durban as a seaside destination was initiated through the formation of the Beach and Entertainments Committee in 1914 and later administered by the Durban Publicity Association (DPA) in 1922. The DPA identified that rickshaw pullers, and Zulu Dancers could fulfil the requirements for “local colour” to entertain British audiences. The rickshaw puller service in particular, sent a message that the ‘black working class had been tamed’, and that the visual hybridity in their “dress” signified that they were urbanised and only ‘semi-proletarianised in another fashion’ (Bell et al. 2016, 217). By the 1950s the DPA had adopted the rickshaw as their logo (Posel 1996). The

pullers were afforded unprecedented access to Durban's Golden Mile for the amusement of their white patrons, paradoxically in a manner (figures 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8) previously unseen.

Black men in the colonial state, required to abide with European dress codes and decorum, were known for their creative and sometimes self-affirming, sartorial modifications (Hamilton 2016). Not surprisingly, therefore, rickshaw outfits were eclectic compositions, referencing a rural homestead economy (ie. the hunt, intricate beadwork and regimental/militaristic feathers and skins) but simultaneously constructed in an assemblage that would have been 'unthinkable outside the urban leisure milieu of Durban' (Hughes 2012,190).

The compilation of rickshaw history and available images reveals that the rickshaw pullers were both agents and objects of local colour – facilitating its success (through the creative outfits, headdress and carts), while being influenced, first through competition for customers, and later through the prompts of third parties (figure 6).



Figure 6: Although posed, these images of soldiers visiting Durban in 1940, indicate that the rickshaws were an important tourism asset (Parade Magazine 1945).



Figure 7: Evidence of a multi-coloured triangular system emerging in the 1950s. Illustration is based on headdress horns seen in Figure 9. Illustration: Rowan Gatfield.

After winning the general election in 1948 (Bickford-Smith 2016) the National Party implemented the *Group Areas Act* (1950) and *Separate Amenities Act* (1953), in which the best beaches, hotels, and tourist attractions were reserved for the exclusive use of whites. Tourist-related products were developed on a significant scale along the ‘Golden Mile’ from the 1950s to the 1970s, culminating in significant investment by the Durban City Council in the early 1980s (Maharaj et al. 2008, 271). Notably, these authors intimate, to an increased “local colour” offering, by developing the residual rickshaw value, but also through the issue of trading licenses in 1968, as mentioned by Sindy Phewa.

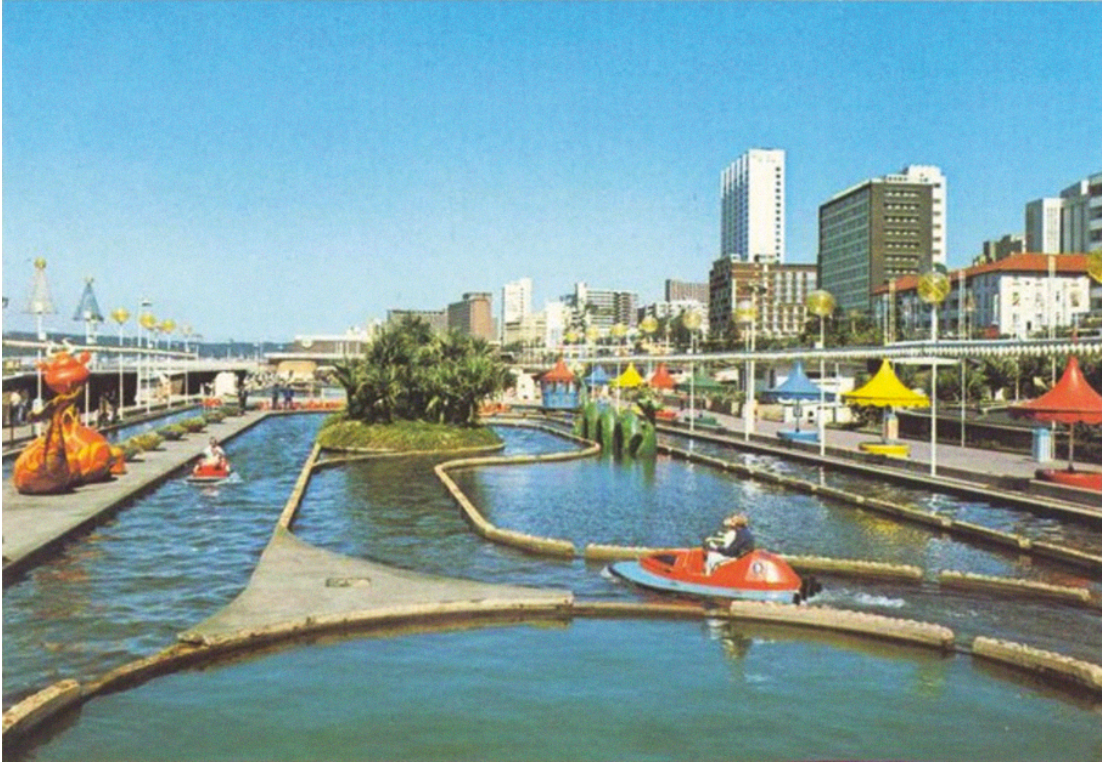


Figure 8: Durban Beachfront, 1950s postcard. © Protea Colour Prints

As indicated, postcards of the beachfront during the 1950s and early 1960s show very little evidence of informal trade, besides that of the rickshaws. Images of rickshaws during this period point to a distinct shift in rickshaw decoration, particularly towards the multicolour (figure 7). This trend appears to coincide with the Apartheid regime's development of overly colourful entertainment spaces (figure 8), to reinforce their take on "local colour", an emphasis which coincides with an increased availability of coloured beads at that time (Morris and Preston-Whyte 1994). A postcard (c.1950s) depicting a rickshaw participating in the Durban Parade, hosted by the DPA, demonstrates the multicolour emphasis (Figure 9). This image clearly depicts a change in horn, headdress and outfit decoration, evident in the shift from earthy tones and use of feathers (figures 3, 4, 5 and 6) to a palette of primary colours (figures 7 and 9). Figure 9 is also significant in that it offers evidence that various forms of regional beadwork, some bearing the distinctive triangular motif, from Northern KZN, were being worn simultaneously.



Figure: 9: LEFT: Winner of the 1950 Durban Parade. © Protea Colour Prints.

RIGHT: FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Recreated patterns, based on the image on the left, of regional (Northern KZN) beadwork from Maphumulo/ Umvoti, and Nongoma districts of Mandlakazi, Mahlabatini, Pongola, Ceza, and Usuthu. Illustrations: Rowan Gatfield

The function of beadwork (figure 9) had therefore changed. Instead of its traditional function denoting group or region, it now intended to amplify a sense of the “multicolour”. This bricolage is also evident in the altered painting of the *umapondo* (cow horns) from largely white (figure 3 and 4) to bearing a complex, multicolor triangular motif indicative of the *Nongoma Style* (figure 7 and 9).

As indicated, informants view beadwork as *imfesheni* (as in, and out of fashion) (Preston-Whyte 2014; Leeb du-Toit 2015). Rather than a static “tradition”, styles have remained fluid, capriciously affected by aesthetic influences, (Jolles 1993; Morris and Preston-Whyte 1994, Boram-Hayes 2005; Van Wyk 2003; Tyrell 1968; Stevenson and Graham-Stewart 2000), while responsive to political control (Boram Hayes 2015). As demonstrated by the rickshaw pullers, marginalized ethnic groups conformed to western dress standards, but drew on aspects of their material culture during the creative, sartorial “recycling” of their European dress (Hamilton 2016) or “kitchen boy” uniform (figures 3, 4 and 5).

Bead-workers are also known for their ‘intercultural borrowing, and reinterpretation’ of available influences (Leeb-du Toit 2015,76). During the late 19th century, bead-workers began to include ornate European metal clasps on beaded traditional waistbands (Stevenson and Graham-Stewart 2000). Fieldwork in KwaNyuswa in 2013 revealed that women wear handmade bustles as part of their traditional outfits, supposedly appropriated from Victorian dress. They also bead over umbrellas, and accessorise their traditional outfits with beaded, western-style handbags. Design content is also changing, derived from supermarket logos, carpet bags (Leeb-duToit 2015); cars, houses, aeroplanes, and alphabetic letterforms - a design flux which has filtered through to the production of tourist beadwork sold on the Golden Mile.

Isimodeni: The making of a ‘local colour’ trinket

Between 1936 and 1946, the number of African women in Durban doubled from 14,200 to about 28,500. This drift towards urban areas was due to rural pressures of overpopulation, overstocking, and drought (Maylam 1990). Thus urban areas were logical destinations.

IsiZulu speaking South African women have been the producers of bead arts since the introduction of glass beads in the late 1800s (Nettleton 2014). Many sold personal items of adornment (Preston-Whyte 2014) on ‘whites only’ beaches, providing informal income prior to their legal access to the Golden Mile in 1968. Although photographic and scholarly evidence of beadwork trade along the Mile, prior to 1968, is limited it would seem that in these formative years, city officials did not initially consider that bead-workers could contribute to the tourism effort.

The bead-workers, interviewed on Durban beachfront in 2014, were largely from areas inland of Durban. Some were members of the *amaNazaretha* or Shembe Church. Preston-Whyte suggests that (2014, 28) tourists were intrigued by the distinctive style of Nazarite headdresses worn by bead sellers, and expressed an interest in buying what they referred to as “real beadwork”. A number of the beadworkers responded by making simplified versions of their headdress to sell. This move proved successful, and their sales rose accordingly. Based on this account, it is plausible that *isimodeni* was derived from Shembe/Nazarite beadwork, however, it is as plausible that *isimodeni* was driven by the trinket-development processes of non-Shembe bead-workers.



Figure 10: Depiction of the Shembe *Sandanezwe Style* identified by Papini (2004, 48). Although similar to *isimodeni*, it is uncharacteristically jagged in its construction. The cross never seems to feature in examples of *isimodeni*. Illustration: Rowan Gatfield.

Although the Shembe movement was founded in 1910, the ‘Shembe Style’ only evolved in the Inanda region during the 1960s as part of a visual system of dance uniforms, modified from traditional Zulu attire under the leadership of Johannes Galilee Shembe (1935-76). This *Sandanezwe* or *Iziphambano Style*, or style of crosses, (figure 10) template, based on the Greek cross, occurs either in isolation’ or as a stepped geometric grid comprised of primary colors, with black surrounds, on a white field (Papini 2004; Leeb-du Toit 2015) influenced by the ‘stepped squares’ patterning of Nongoma beadwork (Leeb-du Toit 2015,87).

However, it is evident that the use of the cross is not restricted to Shembe beadwork: The author encountered the use of a square cross alongside the use of coloured beads “dotted” on a phatic black field known as *isinyolovane*, during research in KwaNyuswa (2011-2014). The regalia belonged to non-Shembe Christians, residing in the Qadi and Nyuswa regions (figure 11). It was indicated that the inclusion of crosses thus, aimed to denote associations with other non-Shembe churches (Gatfield 2014). These crosses are also believed to relate to indigenous ideas of fertility (Leeb-du Toit 2015). It is, therefore, plausible that the union of the square cross with *isinyolovane* may have been formed in the beadwork of young amaQadi or missionary students at Inanda in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, practicing letterforms and depicting either the Christian cross or perhaps, mathematical addition symbols using beads (Gatfield, 2014; Hughes 2012) on a white field – although an exception in this region, a white field is indicative of virginity (Gatfield, 2014). This is reinforced in that simple examples of addition, subtraction, division and multiplication symbols were encountered by Jolles on belts and headbands made for the tourist market in Durban (1991,76). This points to a potential misidentification of the “reproduced beadwork” as Shembe. In some instances the *isinyolovane* style’s, field colour is

interchangeable from black to white, when made for those deemed to be virgins (Gatfield, 2014).

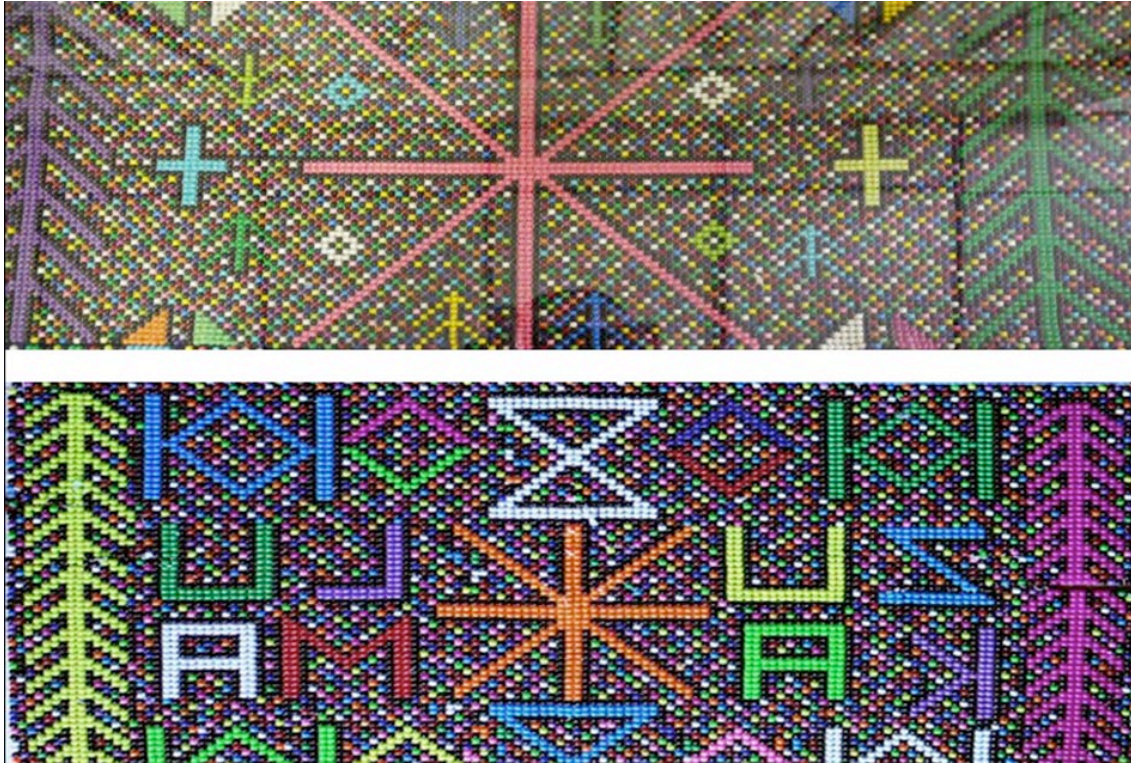


Figure 11: TOP: *Ibaya* or cape featuring the square cross. Reproduced with kind permission of Killie Campbell Museum. BOTTOM: Evidence of triangular forms and alphabet letterforms. Reproduced with kind permission of Zamuntu Majola. These two images evidence the multicoloured “pea soup” style known as *isinyolovani*, *nyakanyaga* or *isilumbana*, showing its black field. Photos: Rowan Gatfield.

Yvonne Winters, former Curator of the *Killie Campbell Museum of Ethnology*, describes a ‘style’ particular to the hinterland, (figure 12) known as *isinyolovane* (Jolles 1993). This was described to her by informants to resemble colourful “peas floating in a soup” of black. Winters explained that the term refers to the manner in which the beads are arranged to appear as “dots” of mixed colours dispersed, commonly, across a black field (Pers. comm 2013).

It is thus likely that it was the *isinyolovane* style, prolific in the inland areas around Durban (figure 12), which was offered to tourists in the middle to late 1960s in Durban. Notably trinkets “consumed” during the 1970s (figure 13) indicates that the “dotting” had taken on a triangular form, and that the cross had disappeared. Further, larger diamond shapes had begun to “form”. The reasons for these changes, is potentially as a result of the Golden Mile’s circuit of culture.



Figure 12: The multicoloured *isiyolovani*, style showing its coloured dotting on a black field. Reproduced (From left to right) with kind permission of: Zamuntu Majola; KwaZulu-Natal Museum Collections; Ugabasile Phewa; KwaZulu-Natal Museum Collections; Photos: Rowan Gatfield



Figure 13: Image taken at Durban Beachfront in the 1970s, shortly after the first issue of trader's licenses. Note the still unrefined triangular (*isinyolovane*) combination now referred to as *isimodeni*. Reproduced with kind permission by Eleanor Preston-Whyte and Thames Hudson. Photographer: Jean Morris. Source: Jean Morris and Eleanor Preston-Whyte, *Speaking with Beads: Zulu Arts from Southern Africa* (London: Thames and Hudson (2014,18).

Agents of Change on the Golden Mile

It is well known that white governments relied on ethnic identities to control black communities during the late 19th century. There is a strong likelihood that during the 20th and into the first decades of our present century, particular bead-working styles were in reality, “sophisticated reworkings” (Stevenson and Graham-Stewart 2000, 33).

Between 1959 and 1966, Durban saw a development boom with seaside frontage absorbing four-fifths of the growth in hotel space and two-thirds of apartments in central Durban. By 1980 this district was firmly subject to apartheid era laws, implemented by the Beach and City Steering Committee (Morris and Preston-Whyte, 2001) who oversaw the racial zoning of beaches and supervised the DPA, mandated to ensure that the beachfront experience served white tourists through the control of informal trade (Maharaj et al. 2008).

In the early days of the DPA’s “local colour” marketing, items on offer by bead-workers may have seemed aesthetically unappealing (being mostly black with a dotting of coloured beads). Contemporary observations of tourist transactions show that visitors vocalize their colour preferences, and place value on a trinket’s provenance and authenticity. However it is unlikely that the cultural value of the *isinyolovane* products were understood or valued, given the socially stratified relationship, reinforced by language barriers between seller and tourist. Instead, beadwork was most likely considered as holiday keepsakes: “traditional”, rare mementos of a visit to a region (Hamilton 1992).

Thus, consumption of beadwork is more than acquisition; instead it represents a process in which power, ideology, gender and social class circulate and shape one another (Denzin 2001), placing the Golden Mile as a site in which the consumption of cultural objects served to simultaneously ‘empower, demean, disenfranchise, liberate, essentialise, stereotype’ (Denzin 2001, 325) and “feed” perception.

In consumer contexts, colours play an important role in affecting perceptions of, and interactions with, others and inanimate objects (such as beadwork): Colours effect emotions; evidence shows that brighter colors (e.g., white, pink, red, blue) elicit more positive reactions (e.g., happy, excited) than do darker colors (Bagchi and Marcheema 2013, 947). The observations above reinforce an unspoken understanding that the control of colour and design lies in the hands of the purchaser, not the maker. An interview with second-generation bead-worker and beaded doll maker, Celani Nojiyeza, from Durban’s hinterland confirms that consumers do, through demand, control beadwork colours, in this instance, of those forming the *isinyolovane* style (Wells 2006,140). This control is significant in that it points to an external agent for the aesthetic shift in beadwork that began to take place around Durban.

Bead-workers used to make anything they wanted and people started to choose what they like and what they didn’t (like). They had to change and make only what the

customers, white people, wanted. ...they don't use a lot of black because whites don't like dark colours.

The excerpt from Celani Nojiyeza's interview, confirms that bead-workers originally had creative freedom, but that the needs of white customers altered the colour emphasis in the *isinyolovane* product.



Figure 14: The item is unique both in its use of a white field, with multi-coloured triangles, and as *ibande*, a traditional belt, made of four tubular sections. This is precedent – for a new cultural hybridity in which a tourist driven style has become traditional attire - a shift from trinket to tradition. Reproduced with kind permission of Ethekewini Local History Museum. Photo: Rowan Gatfield

Whilst tourists signal their personal needs and tastes through how they opt to spend their currency (Naidu 2011, 30), it makes sense that tourists visiting Durban made subconscious, perceptual links with the colourful 'holiday environment': the bathing costumes, umbrellas, and amusement areas (figures 5 & 8). Thus, the author suggests that, the racially framed sense of entitlement; the western fashion tastes of tourists; the DPA pressures around "local colour"; together with the rickshaw's aesthetic example, altered the design of the beaded trinket.

Given legal restrictions on movement and trade, placed on bead-workers, an opportunity for white traders and philanthropic development agencies emerged. These intercessors were able to purchase items from bead-workers for retail to curio shops, hotels and to tourists, thereby offering a mediated means by which rural women could access tourism economies. What emerges however, is that some agents were able to compel beaders to alter the nature, meaning, and production techniques of the trinkets. Preston-Whyte (2014, 43) argues that beadwork was transformed between the 1950s and early 1960s in response, firstly, to the development of a market for tourist beadwork, and secondly to the interventions of a number of development agencies. For example, in unstructured interviews with the author, bead-workers from KwaNyuswa revealed that they had “learnt” the meanings of bead colours from white agents, and now use these when selling their goods.

Further, as indicated previously, tourists purchase trinkets for their apparent authenticity (Hamilton 1992), seeking “real beadwork” (Preston-Whyte 2014). Halewood and Hannam (2001, 567) suggest that authenticity is often “consciously invoked” as a marketing strategy’. This is confirmed by Hamilton (1992, 9), who describes how a ‘vision of tribal Zululand’ is made concrete through the curios that tourists take home. The prolific public use of the “Zulu” label to describe and sell trinkets in KZN is therefore a salient area for scrutiny.

Playing to Zulu-ness

Thus far, it is clear that between the 1960s and 1990s, white holiday-makers to the KZN coast, who sought brightly coloured trinkets, found exactly what they were looking for: a “Zulu” trinket. This result is no coincidence: During this period, internationally screened films such as *Zulu* (1964) and *Zulu Dawn* (1979), as well as the nationally televised series *Shaka Zulu* (1986), widely reinforced Zulu identity, promoted the aesthetic, and stereotyped the “warrior”. What transpired was a process of turning Zulu legacy and the Shaka icon into a tourism commodity (Laband 2008). Primarily this materialised in the themed hotel ‘Shakaland’ in 1988 (Hamilton 1992), and was further cemented through the marketing tagline that framed the region for tourists as “The Kingdom of the Zulu” (Nkosi 2017:1) in the 1990s. This was followed by the naming of the beachfront aquarium ‘uShaka Marine World’ in 2004, and ‘King Shaka Airport’ in 2011. Durban’s Tourism’s approach is therefore, to continue to play to a tourist assumption that every black person in Durban is ‘culturally connected to a tribe’ (Boonzaier and Sharp 1988, 68) in this instance the “Zulu tribe” and trinkets for sale are, therefore, the “real thing” - authentic Zulu artifacts made by Zulu bead-workers (Hamilton 1992). Scholarship reveals that this assumption is underpinned by a long history of identity construction and advocacy.

Since the rise of the Zulu Kingdom under Shaka in the 1790s and early 1800s, cultural differences amongst smaller Nguni chiefdoms were either effaced or preserved within the kingdom. After the defeat of the Zulu Kingdom in 1879 by the British, the term *Zulu*

seized hold as “colonial shorthand” for the groupings amalgamated into the kingdom (Van Wyk 2003; Wright 2008). By 1906 many Natal Africans had adopted the Zulu identity, ‘whereas they had not been before’, selecting to fight against the British on the side of the Zulu King (Mahoney 2012:1). This identity assimilation repeated itself, during ethnically framed labour conflicts in Johannesburg, where “divide and rule” tactics by white employers fomented a Zulu ethno-genesis for workers from disparate Natal ethnic groupings (Mahoney 2012).

These examples evidence that ‘ethnicity is an abstraction’, it facilitates construction; it assisted indirect rule in the late 19th century, and assisted in the invention of tribes and traditions (Mahoney 2012; Hamilton and Liebhammer 2016). The Zulu label has, therefore, been entrenched in a manner that overarches all former cultural or socio-political differences (Van Wyk 2003; Wright 2008).

Thus, and inevitably, all beaded objects and attire sold on the Golden Mile came to be viewed as ‘authentic’ Zulu items. Problematically, this label persists as truth, for many who purchase trinkets, but also those who use them to self-identify and therefore, to construct political realities.

However, the view that beadwork of KZN, including *isimodeni*, is Zulu, is not necessarily the view of the bead-workers, despite their use of the popular term as a sales tool. For example, the KwaNyuswa region produces its particular *isinyolovane* style, made by the same women who produce *isimodeni*. Further, despite attempts at Zulu ethnic homogeneity not all hinterland women self-identify as Zulu, but as Qadi, Nyuswa, Shangase or Ngcobo (Gatfield, 2014).

Scholarship interrogating this homogenisation process appears to follow two trajectories. The first confronts the constructed stereotype of Zulu King, Shaka kaSezangakhona, and the nature and legitimacy of his legacy. It addresses his role in the conceptually contested *Mfecane*, his hegemonic appropriation of smaller polities and their territories. This appropriation has underpinned claims by current King Goodwill Zwelithini, and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi to various forms of geographic sovereignty within the KZN region (Klopper 1996; Wright 2008; Buthelezi 2008; Wylie 2011; Mahoney 2012). The second trajectory confronts what has come to be known as ‘Zulu-ness’ or ‘Zulu-ization’ (Hamilton 1992; Buthelezi 2008; Mahoney 2012) – the essentialising of and conflation behind, Zulu identity. The term has been described as the monolithic characterisation of black people in KZN, as bearing a single Zulu identity, and one which disregards the complexities of kinship identities, thereby controlling the political history of the region (Martens 2008, Carton et al. 2008; Wylie 2011; Dlamini 2008). This attempt culminated in an ideological and physical split between Zulu speakers, with many feeling that their idea of being Zulu did not align with Zulu Nationalism and IFP agendas (Klopper 1996, 53-54). Significantly, the IFP aimed to retain its powerbase by perpetuating the segregationist aims of the Nationalist Party, and by undermining the political solidarity among indigenes opposing the apartheid regime (Mahoney 2012). This political affiliation is

evident in traditional beadwork styles, representing regions or groupings, being implicated in nationalization politics, by being worn at rallies and events during the 1980s and 1990s (Klopper 1996; Boram Hayes 2015), and during bloody conflicts.

In contrast, *isimodeni* is a commodity, developed for white tourists seeking colourful Zulu authenticity. However, its unique aesthetic qualities have, since 1994, actuated its extensive purchase by black South Africans. Thus, and ironically, it is suggested that the reason for this consumption shift is its value as the only beadwork style in KZN that bears no historic, denotative or connotative link to polity affiliation, or indeed, to the notorious apartheid-era conflicts. This places *isimodeni*, unlike its predecessors, as politically independent of processes of Zulu nationalization.

***Isimodeni* as an apolitical norm**

Isimodeni (figure 15) can be purchased along the Golden Mile, throughout KZN and indeed, the country. It is worn at both traditional events and gala evenings, by people from differing ethnic or political “camps”. Compared with traditional styles, its spread has been unprecedented.

As indicated “Zulu” symbols, such as beadwork, were fought over by the IFP and ANC. These would have been worn at political rallies (Hamilton 1992), and at displays of allegiance to the Zulu King during the Reed Dance. These various styles therefore represented regions controlled by Inkatha and then KwaZulu Bantustan or “Homeland” up until 1994. An informant, Zamuntu Majola described how during the conflicts of the late apartheid era, one dared not make, wear or sell these styles for fear of being identified as an IFP supporter (Gatfield 2014, 153), instead hinterland bead-workers made the apolitical *isimodeni*. The large scale selection, societal endorsement, and regulation of *isimodeni*, across the province and then nationally, points to an overarching disdain for the old styles and a need for an alternative signifier and replacement for a normative material cultural tradition.

What emerges in this study, is that *isimodeni* is an anomaly. Born out of traditional bead-making practices, a product of assimilation and responsive production by bead-workers who did not necessarily see themselves or their beadwork as being “Zulu”. Instead, they fulfilled a demand for authenticity through the “Zulu” labeled trinket, and later, fulfilled the demand for a modern, fashionable, representation of traditional ethnic identity. This circuit of production therefore appeased tourism officials, sustained livelihoods and facilitated economic mobility, for the beadworkers, within racially stratified Durban, and an often politically volatile hinterland.

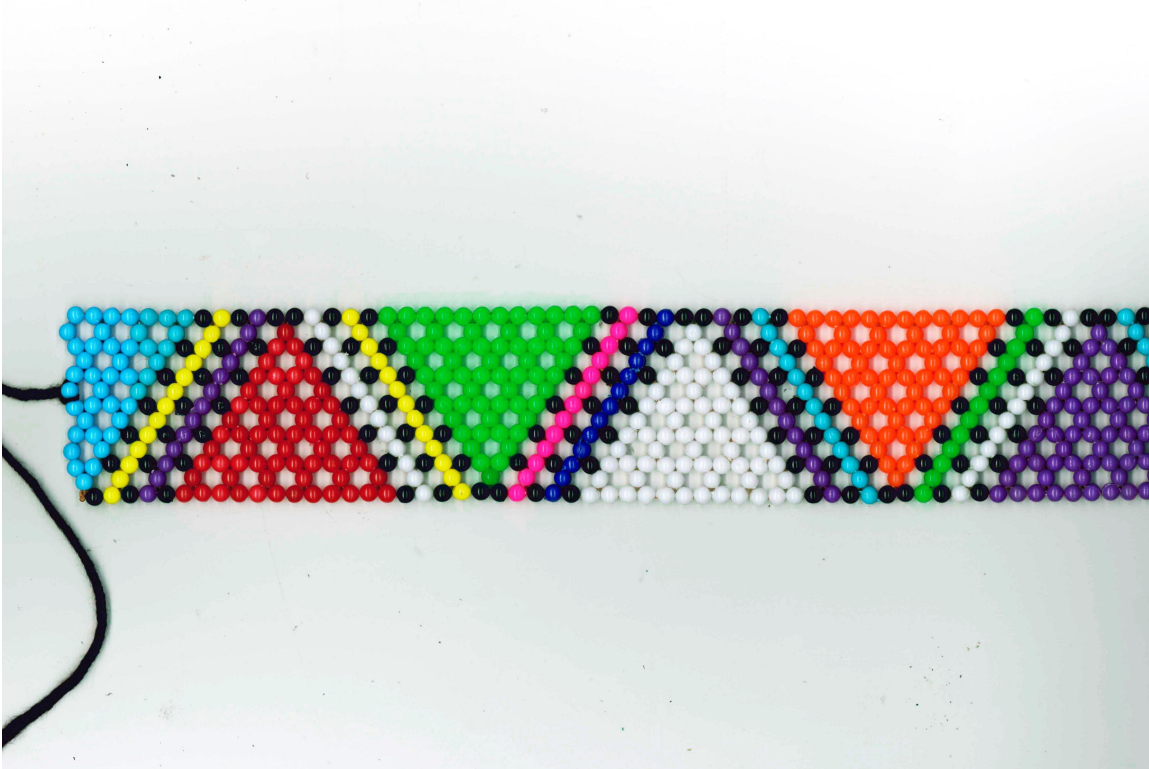


Figure 15: *Isimodeni* beadwork being sold throughout the country. Photo Rowan Gatfield

Conclusion

From 1968 onward, bead-workers officially entered Durban's ethnic tourism industry. Pressed to survive in this racially stratified environment, they took influence from the economically beneficial approaches of rickshaw pullers who had modified their traditional aesthetic to better serve constructed "mental representations" (Du Gay 1997, 17) of Zuluness to a white tourist audience. Further, by responding to the demands of white tourists and development agents, these women, hampered by their ability to describe and defend the true meaning of their offerings, renegotiated the traditional *isinyolovane* by taking influence from the triangular *Nongoma* Style to form the *Isimodeni* Style. The visual result of this circuit of culture is evident in the photographic evidence, which shows a gradual transition (figures 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 as depicted in figure 17).



Figure 16: 1980s: *Isinyolovane* beadwork. Geometric shapes had become more prominent. With kind permission of Wilson Ngcobo (Left) and Zibephi Phewa (Right). Photo: Rowan Gatfield.

The racial desegregation of beaches in December 1989, followed by the 1994 democratic election and the consequential Government of National Unity, brought about a new era of access for black South African tourists to the Golden Mile (Preston-Whyte 2001). Simultaneously, a visual language of the ‘New South Africa’ emerged, bringing with it a need for a reconfigured social identity. With new freedoms and a new flag, black South Africans found themselves faced with a need to outwardly represent the “rainbow nation” (Tutu, Allen, Mandela 1994) to the world, as a seemingly reconciled social identity, while retaining a sense of their African identity.



Figure 17: An example of the gradual design hybridisation that took place over time. Reproduced with kind permission of (top to bottom, left to right) Zamuntu Majola; KwaZulu-Natal Museum Collection; KwaZulu-Natal Museum Collection; Ugabasile Phewa; Wilson Ngcobo and Ugabasile Phewa. Photos: Rowan Gatfield.

What transpired was a return by beachfront bead-workers, to producing traditional wear (figure 14 and 15), but in the *isimodeni* style. Consequently, *isimodeni* has been adopted as a replacement for regional styles, which for many represent a memory of conflict. In this way, *isimodeni* has become a sign by which new interpretations of South African indigeneity can transform into shared cultural meaning. In its new “traditional wear” format it is desirable because it is embraced by all sides of the social and political spectrum. Whilst it could be considered as being surreptitiously “regulated” into use as a symbol of political change, of a new era, of a “new country”, for some it is simply a new fashion or a “Zulu” tourist trinket.

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