

*Pulled to diversify:
Confronting poverty through the
beadwork identity of the Durban
rickshaw pullers*

by Rowan Gatfield

Introduction

‘Someone awoken from a 20-year coma would surely find twenty-first century South Africa unrecognisable’ with the impression of an economy that had sufficiently recovered since the fall of apartheid. Although important social improvements are being made such as access to schooling and health care, and provision of water and sanitation, this is not the case. Efforts to change the lives of South Africans for the better are instead being thwarted by various hindrances, some of which are based on ‘legacies of history, some stem from specific policy choices’, while others are more directly a consequence of failed systems and mismanagement.¹

Hein Marais’ observations published in 2011 still bear gravitas in this article situated around the partial failure of well-intentioned or uncreative tourism approaches in KwaZulu-Natal to alleviate the poverty of informal traders along Durban’s Golden Mile.

It is common knowledge that significant differences in poverty levels exist between population groups in South Africa. In terms of poverty share, 64.2% of this is attributed to the black population.² When travelling through the rural hinterland or informal settlements surrounding South African cities, abject poverty is still very apparent. By contrast, the tourist mecca of Durban

is known for its warm waters, pristine beaches and rows of five-star beachfront hotels.

Between 2011 and 2015, visits to KwaNyuswa, a peri-urban region, 30 kilometres outside Durban, were conducted to identify and document craft economies among poor black inhabitants. The study revealed a community ‘on its knees’, struggling to return from its economic segregation from the city during apartheid.³ This struggle includes its ‘return’ to the Durban tourism economy, which now appears to be experiencing an increase in international visitors.

Between 2012 and 2019 King Shaka Airport reflected a 46% increase in international visitors compared with Cape Town International Airport with 57.3% growth,⁴ a difference of 11.3%. Of South Africa’s provinces KwaZulu-Natal has been identified as one of the least likely destinations for domestic tourism next to the North West, Northern Cape and Free State.⁵ The reasons for KwaZulu-Natal’s poor national performance are not revealed in the cited reports, but an examination of its tourism approach is revealing.

In 1992 South African anthropologist and historian Carolyn Hamilton identified that Zulu ethnic tourism – the consumption of Zulu history and culture – had been ‘actively marketed for much of the twentieth century’ and had formed part of the growing international commodification of African culture. She pointed out that during the 1980s and 1990s such forms of commodification were particularly active at KwaZulu-Natal tourism ‘hot spots’, where history, ‘ethnic identity and notions of tradition and culture’ were actively manufactured.⁶ The use of the Zulu label was an intrinsic aspect of

this manufacture, now evident through its ongoing use by Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, whose slogan ‘Zulu Kingdom, exceptional’, established in the early 2000s, cemented the province’s ethnic-tourism approach.⁷

In this way indigenous ethnicity in KwaZulu-Natal has been delimited and conceptually packaged for tour operators and tourists. For example, the South African tour operator Safari 365 details that:

The Zulu-Kingdom is ... worthy of a visit because of its unique cultural significance. Once led by the legendary Shaka Zulu, the way of life and proud traditions of the Zulu nation have been largely preserved on this ancestral land. Greeted by spear-wielding warriors and traditional Zulu dancers, visitors will have the opportunity to get a glimpse of South Africa’s ancient cultures and traditions.⁸

In this way, identity and culture intersect as a ‘collective subjectivity and as an “ethnicity”’,⁹ a term that by its definition implies ‘an assumed state – an unchallenged belonging to a social group with common national or cultural tradition’.¹⁰ This state and belonging is therefore implied, and thus assumed. What is also implied is that the Zulu are frozen in time as ‘spear-wielding warriors’ and ‘traditional dancers’.

This Safari 365 excerpt is indicative of the broader KwaZulu-Natal tourism operator rhetoric, which often capitalises on the ethnicity assumption by tourists who, quite likely, understand the contradictions of modernity and globalisation and that what is being purchased is in reality, temporary, acted out, staged, largely inauthentic and most often the only recourse (to income) for the actors. This self-consciousness by tourists and tour operators is:

underscored, made undeniably poignant, by an all-too-concrete reality: that in many desperately poor parts of the world, the attenuation of other modes of ... income has left the sale of cultural products and of the simulacra of ethnicized selfhood as the only viable means of survival.¹¹

This study is thus situated around the unfortunate inevitability of poverty. During empirical research, conducted along Durban's beachfront in 2011, while observing tourist interactions it became apparent that authenticity in the form of Zulu cultural products was being actively sought out and then realised, or reinforced, during sales pitches by bead workers and rickshaw pullers. The 'value' created in this intersection is the result of 'a deep ambivalence in modern life: a sense of "exile" from "authentic" otherness – albeit in consumable form'.¹²

The pursuit and delivery of Zulu authenticity is, therefore, the desired result of the now well-worn 'Zulu Kingdom' approach which, in comparison to Cape Town, is failing to show meaningful comparative (inter-provincial) growth or to drive new forms of attraction to the province. By extension, expectations for informal traders within the Durban tourism industry to rise above their circumstances seem unlikely to be fulfilled. The World Tourism Organisation articulates this concern:

Tourism is very sensitive to economic ... and socio-political events affecting tourists' willingness to travel. In the absence of insurance cover and social security, the poor can be particularly vulnerable to sudden downswings in demand.¹³

That said, a clear value in the Zulu marketing approach still remains: in

2018, 'spending by ... visitors in and to KwaZulu-Natal was estimated to be R5bn'. In the same year hotel occupancy in Durban was at 64.2 %. Tourism in the province is estimated to have translated into 123 348 jobs in 2018 either directly or indirectly, pointing to the possibility of micro-economies such as bead working and rickshaw pulling benefiting from this large spend.¹⁴

Given that tourism is still a viable means to alleviate poverty, there is a pressing need to understand why the Zulu brand positioning is failing to compete nationally (that is, of course, if those driving this approach are willing to acknowledge that the Zulu branding or Zuluness approach is indeed failing). Quite recently it was proposed that 'the "Zuluness" factor ... can be used by the Zulu Kingdom to foster its clear value position or unique brand essence in the global tourism marketplace'. By 'Zuluness' it appears that the author is referring to:

The societal attitudes and values in the Zulu Kingdom, such as the concept of *Ubuntu* – the spirit of humanity, respect for strangers and the elderly; and the energetic and colourful dances of the Zulus are pivots of the Zulu nation's identity which distinguish the people of KwaZulu-Natal from the rest of South Africans.¹⁵

Here, the terms 'Zulus' and 'Zulu Nation' perpetuate the idea of the singular polity which distinguishes and thus seemingly represents all indigenes within KwaZulu-Natal. The origins and problematic nature of such ongoing identity reification are illuminated when considering Durban's tourism history.

Since the rise of the Zulu Kingdom under Shaka in the 1790s and early 1800s, cultural differences among 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 shortening for the groups amalgamated into the kingdom.¹⁶

In 1902, 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’.¹⁷ Local colour made reference to the Zulu-speaking ethnic majority in Natal Colony who, together with an emphasis on Durban’s British modernity, helped immigrant boosters construct a Durban identity.¹⁸

By 1906 many Natal Africans had adopted the Zulu identity, ‘whereas they had not before’ and elected to fight against the British on the side of the Zulu King.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

After winning the general election in 1948, the National Party went on to implement the Group Areas Act (1950) and Separate Amenities Act (1953) permitting exclusive use of the best beaches, hotels and tourist attractions by whites.²¹ 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.²²

By the 1960s internationally screened films such as *Zulu* (1964) and *Zulu Dawn* (1979), as well as nationally televised series such as *Shaka Zulu* (1986), meant that the Zulu identity, aesthetic and Shaka warrior stereotype were internationally circulated. What transpired was a process of turning the Zulu legacy and Shaka icon into a tourism commodity.²³ This materialised in Protea Hotel’s Shakaland in 1988 but, as indicated, was cemented through the marketing tagline that framed the region to tourists as the ‘Kingdom of the Zulu’ in the 1990s.²⁴ This was followed by the naming of the beachfront uShaka Marine World in 2004 and King Shaka Airport in 2011. To reiterate, these respective developments are based on an ongoing assumption, that every black person in Durban is ‘culturally connected to a tribe’.²⁵ In this instance it is the Zulu tribe and the trinkets for sale are therefore seen by tourists as the real thing – authentic Zulu artefacts made by Zulu bead workers.²⁶

However, the view that all beadwork or rickshaw pulling in KwaZulu-Natal is exclusively ‘Zulu’, is not necessarily the view of hinterland bead workers or the rickshaw pullers, despite their use of the popular



Figure 1: *The multi-coloured Isinyolovane style showing its coloured dotting on a black field* (Photos Rowan Gatfield; reproduced (from left to right) by kind permission of Zamuntu Majola; KwaZulu-Natal Museum Collections; Ugabasile Phewa; and KwaZulu-Natal Museum Collections)

term as a sales tool. For example, the KwaNyuswa region, where many of the Ngcobo and Nyuswa reside, still has its particular Isinyolovane style (Figure 1) made by the same women who produce a style for sale to tourists referred to as Isimodeni (Figure 2), or the modern style. During field research in KwaNyuswa it was revealed that many bead workers did not exclusively identify themselves as Zulu; but also as Qadi, Nyuswa, Shangase or Ngcobo despite historic attempts at Zulu ethnic homogeneity.²⁷

Scholarship interrogating this homogenisation process has confronted the stereotype of King Shaka ka-Senzangakhona Zulu and the nature and legitimacy of his legacy, and his role and effect through Mfecane (by confronting the extent of his hegemonic appropriation of smaller polities and their territories). Mfecane has been a significant aspect of the position underpinning past claims by current King Goodwill Zwelithini and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi to various forms of geographic sovereignty within the KwaZulu-Natal region.²⁸

Scholarship also extends to confronting Zuluness or Zulu-isation; the essentialising, ethnic conflation and identity assimilation behind Zulu identity.²⁹ The use of the term has been described as a monolithic characterisation of black people in KwaZulu-Natal, by intentionally disregarding the complexities of other residual identities.³⁰ In this way, whoever wields the Zulu label controls the political history of the region.³¹ Such attempts 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 the agendas of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).³²

Zuluness (the disregard for other identities) therefore represents much more than the goodwill or cultural distinctiveness of black people in KwaZulu-Natal.³³ Instead, its continued use raises a number of ethical and economic concerns. First, its publicly unqualified (uncontextualised) use perpetuates this history of control and manipulation. Second, it has the potential to misrepresent certain individuals (trading within various tourism micro-economies across the province) who are unwilling to be seen as, or their offerings being marketed as, Zulu. Third, there is sufficient evidence to suggest (in tourism visitor statistics) that the current marketing approach needs revisiting, if it is to alleviate poverty effectively.

This article is thus concerned with Zulu-speaking individuals who live outside Durban in peri-urban or rural areas and access tourism economies in the region and thus rely on the marketing approach of the region. It examines how informal traders along the Golden Mile, particularly rickshaw pullers but subsequently bead workers, might improve their access to ethnic-tourism economies. This enquiry is thus positioned as an exploration of the material culture (particularly beadwork) and related ethnographies in the KwaZulu-Natal region.

If, as in Nkosi's view, Zuluness is the brand essence for the province, then this study is an investigation into brand diversification by examining if other ethnic-tourism offerings might sit alongside the 'Zulu Kingdom, exceptional' brand. As established, Zulu brand equity represents fiscal, but also perceptive, value.³⁴ Equity is also derived from heritage value, linked in this instance through film to the histories of the Anglo-Zulu War battles and the

distinctive warrior motif.

'If tourists experience meaningful connection, through identifying with cultural values and by creating congruence between their cultural orientation (assumptions) and the destination brand, they will be more likely to revisit.' These aspects represent a competitive advantage and long-term profitability over other ethnic tourism offerings elsewhere in the country and the world.³⁵ This advantage extends to another form of equity surrounding the Zulu brand, namely cultural distinctiveness (derived from material cultural representations), perceived as 'colourful exotica' and 'authentic otherness' most often consumed by tourists photographically.³⁶

This visual equity is described as intrinsic to the 'Tourist Gaze',³⁷ given that for a tourist, a photographic image transcribes reality, evidences where one was, how far one has travelled, and the changing contexts that one's life was anchored to in that moment.³⁸ Besides the rickshaw ride, which involves being drawn, and then carefully thrown about in one's seat by a human puller, it is the keepsake photograph that follows that is of significance. This photograph is not only intrinsic to the puller's business as an additional income; it also becomes a means for the tourist to transport the moment and visual experience.

Human objects of fascination are thus implicated with tourism package products. Yet, in order for these products to be effective economically, it is necessary that the tourist's gaze is not impeded by the offerings of infrastructure. The tourist's gaze upon the object of fascination is therefore the 'sacred offering', sometimes purposely contrived to stimulate the capturing of memories.³⁹

Thus, the first section of this article examines the identity assumptions made about the multi-coloured Zuluness of the Durban rickshaw pullers who, over a 123-year period, have capitalised on identity assumptions made by tourists surrounding the Zulu authenticity of their flamboyant pseudo-traditional paraphernalia and cart decoration. Interviews with rickshaw pullers support this examination. The second section considers the history of the service but also the development of its aesthetic. In the third section the study turns to examination of the diversification in the details within the pervasive multi-colouredness of the pullers' outfits and within the beadwork of the province. The study illuminates how beadwork specimens, gathered in KwaZulu-Natal archives and through visits to rural and peri-urban regions in KwaZulu-Natal, represent regional stylistic typologies. Finally, in the fourth section a consultative process of design anthropology is described in which I and my graphic design students from Durban University of Technology restored two Durban rickshaws and pullers' outfits with the aim of testing an emergent brand diversification premise based on regional or group beadwork design systems.

Multi-coloured Zuluness

Like most privileged white children in Durban, I enjoyed access to pristine sites along the north and south coasts of KwaZulu-Natal and on Durban's beachfront, where I encountered the rickshaw pullers and an array of street vendors selling beadwork. These were immediately linked to the histories taught to me at school about the Zulu, in which an assumption was facilitated about the Zulu authenticity of the beadwork

and the rickshaws I encountered. Never once in my 50 years as a Durbanite or as a graphic designer did I question that the identity and beadwork of those in the province were anything other than Zulu. To this day, I believe that this is still a general public consensus.

In 2011, with a view of understanding the beadwork offered for sale to tourists, as part of a PhD study in anthropology, I revisited coastal sites such as Amanzimtoti, Scottburgh, Port Shepstone and Umhlanga Rocks, and inland tourist sites like Eshowe, in order to interview beadwork retailers.⁴⁰ I also made numerous visits to Durban's Golden Mile. During these visits I engaged in unstructured interviews with craftswomen, vendors and rickshaw pullers. The aim was to understand the identity and origins of the beadwork encountered to establish if it represented anything other than Zulu. All those I interviewed were unanimous: that the beadwork being sold and consumed was purely Zulu in origin.

Initially, I resigned myself to the fact that these informants either sincerely believed this or were playing to my potential as a tourist intent on buying an authentic Zulu artefact, or paying for the opportunity to capture a photograph of myself alongside what I (the tourist) might assume to be an authentic Zulu rickshaw puller.

Search the word Zulu online and it is fairly easy to see why tourists arrive primed to assume that most black people wearing or selling beadwork in KwaZulu-Natal are Zulu. As discussed, it is widely publicised that there is a Zulu monarch and Zulu traditions in which Zulu ceremonial beadwork is worn. Such perceptions have, therefore, stuck through years of public reinforcement. By extension, therefore, referenc-

es to the Zulu rickshaw service as 'run by the Zulu' and that rickshaws have been 'incorporated into their culture' perpetuate the identity assumption.⁴¹ This assumption is compounded by these vendors, speaking in Zulu and following similar cultural practices while operating alongside tourism vendors who construct Zulu-themed spaces such as the uShaka Marine World, owned by the city of Durban.⁴² Outside the water park you are mostly likely to find the Durban rickshaw pullers dressed in beadwork and multi-coloured head-dresses. Inside the uShaka Marine World curio shops, as well as nearby along the Golden Mile, bead worker-owned stalls stock a very similar multi-coloured product. In all instances in uShaka Marine World curio shops, in beaded trinkets, and in the rickshaw outfits and carts, a multi-coloured style was evident; and referred to by bead workers as Isimodeni or the modern style, identified by its large colourful triangles often with a black beaded line separating each triangle from the next.⁴³

This research established that:

From 1968 onward, hinterland beadworkers officially entered Durban's beachfront economy. Pressed to survive in Durban's racially stratified environment, they took influence from the successful approaches of rickshaw pullers who had modified their traditional aesthetic to better serve constructed mental representations of Zuluness to an affluent white audience. Further, by responding to the demands of white tourists and development agents (selling beadwork), these beadworkers, hampered by their ability to describe and defend the true meaning of their offerings, renegotiated the traditional *isinyolovane* (Figure 1), by taking influence from the triangular Nongoma Style to form the Isimodeni Style (Figure 2).⁴⁴



Figure 2 left to right: *The Isimodeni style reflected in uShaka's interior; in beadwork for sale, and in the rickshaw pullers' horns* (photographs and illustration Rowan Gatfield, 2011)

This triangular pattern is also reflected in uShaka's decorated interior (Figure 2). Thus, the various offerings in uShaka, among the pullers' outfits and carts, and along the Golden Mile, are largely visually indistinguishable from each other. What was thus established was that the Isimodeni style is perceived by bead workers and many black people in the country as a symbol of modernity or as a new fashion. Yet what was also evident was that an assumption remained, that Isimodeni was assumed by tourists to be authentic Zulu material culture, an assumption linked to the 'Kingdom of the Zulu' marketing approach. In 2014 a KwaZulu-Natal Tourism product development strategy offered that there is a lack of substance in the 'Kingdom of the Zulu' approach: 'The ultimate success of a brand depends upon the reputation that the brand has ... KwaZulu-Natal has a reputation that has suffered at the hands of a variety of largely uncontrollable internal and external factors, like crime, grime, violence, HIV/Aids, and tardy infrastructure'.⁴⁵ The report goes on to suggest that this reputation needs to be clarified and changed positively wherever possible.

The diminishing value of this brand could, therefore, be attributed to the state of the environment surrounding the tourism offerings and the com-

modified nature of what is on offer, but most significantly, the saturation of the market place with the Isimodeni style in tourist souvenirs, at uShaka, and also among the rickshaw pullers. The difficulty with this arrangement is in the limited choice for tourists of assumed traditional artefacts alongside other contemporary offerings such as amusement parks, beach towels, and buckets and spades.

In an ethnic tourism milieu the limited choice of what is made available as authentic tradition for sale results in market saturation. Scholarship on tourism souvenirs has highlighted this phenomenon, noting that it is the 'underlying perceptions of traditions as the foundation for decision making' that affects goods chosen for the tourist consumer.⁴⁶ Thus, whoever controls the conceptual representations of tradition controls the production of cultural objects for consumption in corporate settings where makers are encouraged to 'synthesise local heterogeneity with other cultural phenomena to produce distinctive, homogenised products'. This is referred to as glocalisation where global demand affects local production.⁴⁷ However, in such spaces transformation can also occur where fresh ideas from other cultures are favoured and where the local culture (in

this instance Zulu) may be abandoned (or modified) in favour of alternatives. This points to a likelihood that the tourists are discerning and may wish to seek out other forms of traditional authenticity.

A potential for alternatives emerged in 2015 while interviewing rickshaw pullers. I happened to have a copy of the version of the publication *Durban* produced in 1977 for tourists.⁴⁷ It featured a rickshaw puller on the cover.



Figure 3: *Damaged and worn carts and outfits of Durban rickshaws. The images reflect the beadwork of the Usuthu region (black, blue, red and white) and the Mandlakazi (black, red, green and white) (courtesy William Sibiya; photo Rowan Gatfield, 2011)*



Figure 4: *Nongoma style rickshaw dress bearing Mandlakazi (red, black, green and white) and Usuthu beadwork (red, black, white and blue, sometimes with green added) (courtesy Phansi Museum, Glenwood, Durban; photo Rowan Gatfield, 2012)*

A respondent puller, William Sibiya explained:

Ah yes, this man is my Uncle, and I still have his rickshaw. We are all from Nongoma here, and my family is from KwaNongoma region, in the Mandlakazi district. You can see my beadwork is from this region.

At first glance it was overwhelmingly evident that the management of equity derived from the Zulu brand was not reaching the pullers. Carts and puller outfits were in tatters. Interviews with the eThekweni municipal overseers of the rickshaws revealed that the hand-to-mouth existence of the pullers was outside their ambit of oversight. When describing them, a respondent replied ‘They are out of control. They are wild, cowboys. They just do their own thing! We have no control over them!’ Thus, the men maintained a level of independence. The interview revealed why, when questioned about their income, that eThekweni municipal staff were unable to estimate it or the nature of their traditional origins, besides their hailing from northern KwaZulu-Natal.

In 2010 I attended a forum for beachfront hotels and residents (mostly Indian and white people) at which I facilitated an open conversation about the rickshaws. This revealed that few understood the pullers’ origins or legacy. It was also indicated that while they support the rickshaw service in principle, it was felt that the carts and pullers’ outfits were in an unacceptable state to offer a service to clients. Arguably, if the standard of the service was addressed, then the rickshaw service could complement the ‘Kingdom of the Zulu’ tourist strategy, to which many of the hoteliers naturally subscribe.

This collective disjuncture is likely a consequence of South Africa’s past in

which a distance was maintained: between rich and poor; between black and white; and between the tourist’s gaze and the objects of the gaze.⁴⁹ Language is another significant barrier. Most of the men speak sufficient English only to string together their sales pitch. This divide is illustrated in an American newspaper article on Durban:

Like oversized pull toys, the colourful rickshaws now align the curb. I am drawn from my aerial perch down to the street, to chat with the drivers, learn of their lives, take in their convergent wisdoms. My Zulu is non-existent. But surely we have English in common – this is South Africa, after all ... None of the drivers will talk or pose for a photo without first determining a price. We begin negotiations, and more drivers gather like a flock of colorful birds; their colorfully patterned costumes only partially conceal their tattered street clothes. They will give me their stories and pose for 600 Rand... Trapped in my tourist persona, my dreams of an open dialogue – of one of these gents being a frustrated memoirist itching to tell his tale – are naive. We agree on a price: twice the usual fee charged for a brief ride along the beachfront. I am seduced by their visual spectacle and reduced to paying for snapshots, and as I dispense Rands to each driver, I know nothing of their lives.^{49a}

Although Durban’s beachfront is now attracting more African tourists, the space continues as a social microcosm in which unequal power relations persist. The contrast between five-star hotel guest passengers and near starving pullers is a sobering reminder that poverty alleviation strategies in the Durban tourism sector are failing, given that the rickshaws, passed from generation to generation, have operated

in this region for 127 years and yet still appear to be largely unsupported by hoteliers and city managers. In 2013 an interview with rickshaw owner and puller Baba Ndwandwe revealed that a paradox existed:

The hotels say they would support us if we had a more professional operation and if our carts looked good, with nice seats, wheels and better shock absorbers, but we are broke. The eThekweni charge us a monthly fee to store our vehicles, but do not help us in any other way. The metro police also do not like us here. They suggest we must have a certificate of roadworthiness (COR). I mean come on! We are like invisible.

This public invisibility of the rickshaw puller's legacy, but also the identities behind his visual uniqueness, thus emerges for consideration. A unique quality of the rickshaw puller, besides his flamboyant pulling style, based on the rocking or, rather, the jogging of seated passengers up and down, is his somewhat anomalous appearance and service offering.

History of the Durban rickshaw pullers

The first 'rickshas'⁵⁰ (also spelt rickshaws) were imported from Japan to Natal by a pioneer of the sugar industry, Sir Marshall Campbell, in 1892.⁵¹ The rickshaw pullers occupied an anomalous position within Durban's labour market, not employed by businesses or the Durban Corporation. Instead, they were freelance operators, renting their carts (Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8) from white entrepreneurs.⁵² This offered certain advantages over other forms of labour. For some, advantage translated into a measure of creative freedom around the manner in which to adorn oneself and one's cart. An early picture (Figure 5) of rickshaw pullers adorned with *uphondo* (cow horns), presents a potential irony regarding the reduction of these men to the status of beasts of burden. However, Lawrence Mduduzo, a Durban rickshaw puller, whom I interviewed in 2012, explained that:



Figure 5: *Rickshaw pullers in the 1930s in Durban adorned with uphondo or cow horns* (courtesy Campbell Collections, Durban)

The wearing of *uphondo*, still practised today, is a statement of equity and power. The puller is identifying with the bull and its power, ferocity and ability to pull something as difficult as a plough.

Some pullers also believed that the horns would bring them good fortune,⁵³ given that cattle are broadly viewed as sacred by Zulus.⁵⁴

Each rickshaw puller was required by the city authorities to wear a uniform (Figure 8). This consisted of a two-piece garment that would come to be known as the 'kitchen boy suit'⁵⁵ (Figures 8 and 9) and which was worn by many other black African workers. By 1902, over two thousand rickshaws thronged the streets of Durban (Figure 6) with over 24 000 men registered as pullers.⁵⁶ Despite the cultural impositions of colonial rule, these men, influenced by their culture and spurred by the need to attract customers, began to adorn themselves in what must have been seen at the time as a flamboyant manner. Pullers began to modify the 'suit', sewed in extra rows of braid around the knee of the trouser,⁵⁷ dressed their hair in a traditional manner, and painted their legs with whitewash (Figure 5), apparently in a manner that imitated the knitted patterns of white school socks worn by local girls.⁵⁸ They wore feathered tufts as headdresses (Figure 9) called *isiyaya*.⁵⁹ Later, pullers individualised their new attire by wearing bangles of plaited reeds with seeds, which rattled. Fierce competition developed among the pullers to design the most original and elaborate costumes, pointing to the success of this approach in the ability to lure customers.⁶⁰ When asked about the role of the headdress, another puller (name withheld), a third-generation rickshaw puller, explained that:

The tradition of wearing headdresses and decorating oneself and one's rickshaw, although inspired by our culture, is in no way a specific representation of Zulu culture but is rather a means to attract customers. They believe it is Zulu, so we just go with it.

Again, the connection made between the wearer's costume and its claimed authenticity as definitively (though generically) Zulu, emerges largely as an unconsidered assumption made by tourists. These outfits are 'in some ways a version of eclectic exoticism, with its references to a rural homestead economy [i.e., the hunt, intricate beadwork and regimental/militaristic feathers and skins]...constructed in an assemblage that would have been unthinkable outside the urban leisure milieu of Durban'.⁶¹ Therefore, these visual constructions played to a flourishing perception of Zuluness portrayed by travel writers, on television and in films.

By 1980, only ten rickshaws remained in Durban and all were in poor condition. The Durban Publicity Association decided to intervene by building four new rickshaws, and by taking the pullers 'under their wing'.⁶² By 1995, the rickshaw culture was already passing into the realm of heritage when representatives from the Gallery Ezakwantu, who describe themselves as purveyors of 'Central, Eastern and Southern African Tribal Art' visited Durban to purchase the pullers' outfits and headdresses.⁶³

It is common knowledge that during the 1980s and early 1990s, South Africa was subjected to economic embargos and serious civil unrest, and was by no means a popular tourist destination, placing the rickshaws in a vulnerable economic position. From the

photographs presented on the Gallery Ezakwantu website it is apparent that an estimated six of the remaining ten headdresses were purchased, leaving the pullers without a means to generate an income, except perhaps to begin to rebuild their outfits.⁶⁴

In 2012, interviews with the pullers revealed that 25 rickshaws remained and were managed by the Business Support, Tourism and Markets Unit of eThekweni Municipality in Marine Parade Street, Durban. Prior to Durban hosting the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup, the carts were taken to municipal workshops and modified.

This refurbishment facilitated some trade, but since then the men indicated that they have achieved an average annual income of only R21 000 or around US \$1 400.

Now, approximately ten rickshaws operate at any given time throughout the year, with the other fifteen rickshaw pullers visiting from rural areas during the vacation periods of March, July and December. As indicated, the pullers enjoy very little support from Durbanites or the Durban beachfront hotels and so are largely reliant on footfall brought about through the 'Kingdom of Zulu' marketing approach.



Figure 6: *The rickshaw became Durban's main mode of transport in both in the city centre and docks (courtesy Campbell Collections, Durban)*



Figure 7: *The lure was also in the rickshaw's precarious nature, with pullers rising and falling as they moved through Durban's streets (courtesy Campbell Collections, Durban)*



Figure 8 left: *A modified 'kitchen boy suit' originally designed for male domestic workers* (courtesy Campbell Collections, Durban)

Figure 9 below left: *Rickshaw puller showing traditional dress including yaya or tufted ostrich feather headdress;* below right: *Pullers dressed themselves in culturally inspired headdresses, often from ostrich feathers* (courtesy Campbell Collections, Durban)



Figure 10: *The men began to use porcupine quills. Horns and feathers became part of the rickshaw pullers' attire. A traditional Zulu beaded sash was added to the chest. Both men wear isiqaza (traditional Zulu earplugs)* (courtesy Campbell Collections, Durban)

Figure 11: *By 1900, domestic or privately owned rickshaws also frequented Durban's streets* (courtesy Campbell Collections, Durban)

Diversification in the details

An apparent answer to this micro-economic/visual dichotomy emerges in the very nature of particular individual rickshaw puller outfits (Figures 3 and 4). Education as a graphic designer has facilitated my identification and categorisation of patterns of visual continuity in beadwork – through the frequency and sequence of colours used or through the common use of design motifs. When looking past the multi-colouredness of the Durban beachfront, visual insights were revealed when analysing the pullers’ aprons.

The blue, white, green, red and black beadwork (Figure 3) specifically relates to that of the Usuthu polity at Nongoma in northern KwaZulu-Natal. Another colour sequence of red, green, white and black (Figure 4) denotes the Mandlakazi polity also situated at Nongoma. According to a rickshaw puller (name withheld) whom I interviewed in 2012, the remaining pullers on Durban’s beachfront are actually descended from the original rickshaw pullers who came to Durban from KwaNongoma. More specifically still, the men also hail from two *izigodi* (districts or social polities).

While they see themselves as Zulu, the pullers’ beadwork confirms their expressed socio-political allegiance to their individual regional groupings through the wearing of representative beadwork systems (Figures 3 and 4).

Inspired by this insight, and in an attempt to verify if beadwork continued to fulfil a role as a means of denoting regional allegiances, I decided to travel to a rural area significantly distanced from urban/tourist influences. I selected the town of Weenen, in the Msinga area of KwaZulu-Natal, well documented as a bead working research site, in an attempt to observe groups who may still be wearing and making beadwork.

After interviewing bead workers and those using and wearing traditional beadwork of the amaChunu and amaTembu regional groupings, unravelling loyalties to the Zulu were expressed.⁶⁵ Responses included ‘this beadwork is Zulu and Chunu’; ‘Zulus wear beadwork like those from the Nongoma region, different from the beadwork of Msinga’; ‘this beadwork means I am Thembu, but my husband is Zulu’.



Figure 12: *The Reed Dance (Umkosi woMhlanga) at Enyokeni*
(photo Rowan Gatfield, 2011)

The homologous link of beadwork with the Zulu label was affirmed in a visit to the 2011 Reed Dance (*Umkosi woMhlanga*) at Enyokeni, near Ulundi. At this event, some 30 000 virgin female reed-bearers (Figure 12) were each adorned in beadwork of a specific design and colour palette denoting the various groupings or regions in KwaZulu-Natal. Dance, song and beadwork systems appeared to denote distinct group commonalities. Discussions with reed-bearers after the procession revealed that they believed they were wearing Zulu beadwork, but simultaneously indicated that their beadwork denoted a region or grouping. Thus the value of beadwork, to simultaneously represent both commonalities and difference was evident.

Beadwork as representation

Thus for tourists beadwork remains perceptively Zulu, sustained through an ongoing marketing narrative. Conversely, for many bead workers, Zulu is the name used to describe beadwork to tourists. For others, the term represents a history of hegemony and obscured identities. The symbolic nature of beadwork reflects aspects of this identity dichotomy.

Much scholarship on traditional southern Nguni beadwork from south-east Africa argues that beadwork is more than mere adornment, considering that the combinations of pattern, design and colour facilitate a means by which to connote and denote meaning for the wearer and viewer.⁶⁶

Thus, authors acknowledge that beadwork ‘flags difference like tartans of Scottish clans’.⁶⁷ A belt or apron can, through its colour, design and pattern, denote information about the wearer’s political status and membership.⁶⁸ Al-

though beadwork can indicate ethnic or regional roots, these identities have not always been fixed; people were ‘uprooted, often within their histories’.⁶⁹ Scholars, therefore, appear to favour the terms ‘style’⁷⁰ or ‘design’⁷¹ to indicate that colour palettes, methods of making, manner of wearing, and pattern were continually being renegotiated.

Under the apartheid system from the late 1940s Zulu-speaking people were required to identify with a bantustan. Here people came under the control of traditional leaders subordinate to the government. This move ‘inflamed old divisions’ and created new splinter groups and new beadwork styles.⁷²

In these respective ways, beadwork has been implicated in the conflicted social geographies and history of the KZN region, and its beadwork systems conflated into a multi-colouredness or local colour during the 1950s under the influence of tourism officials. The image in Figure 14 is indicative of this. Analysis of this image revealed that the puller is in fact wearing beadwork styles from various regions, not only his area of origin.

Since the 1930s various discrete styles have emerged in the region 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 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 (composed of localised styles including the seven-

colour Isishunka style); the newer Umzansi style (navy, green, white and opaque red); the multi-coloured Msinga Isinyolovane 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).⁷³ 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 Estcourt style (characterised by distinct strips bearing pictorial subject matter, seen in *izibheklane* (capes) in red, green, orange and blue surrounded by complex white-beaded surrounds). To these a Drakensberg style is later added,⁷⁴ very similar to the Estcourt 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 last 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.⁷⁵ 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 – as a colourful anomaly called Isimodeni – seen as Zulu beadwork by tourists and a new form of Zulu fashion.⁷⁶

Conclusions and the way forward: the Rickshaw Renovation Project

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu envisioned in 1994, South Africa could be a 'rainbow nation'⁷⁷ a unity of multiculturalism from many different nations in a country historically defined by its division of white and black. It is its multi-colouredness that is its most distinctive quality, but maybe many more colours than was generally understood.



Figure 13 top and middle: *Various examples of regional styles distinctly different from the Isimodeni style at the bottom* (courtesy Phansi Museum; photos Rowan Gatfield)



Figure 14 left: *Winner of the 1950 Durban Parade* (Protea Colour Prints); right: *Stylistic rendering of patterns used in headdress and costume of the rickshaw puller. The patterns draw on northern KwaZulu-Natal beadwork from top to bottom from Maphumulo/Umvoti, the Nongoma districts of Mandlakazi, Mahlabatini, Pongola, Ceza and Usuthu* (illustrations Rowan Gatfield)

And like skin colour, beadwork systems need freedom to co-exist and the freedom to liberate people from poverty.

Thus, given the social and economic situation of the rickshaw pullers in Durban, the study turned to examine if the denotative quality of beadwork could be utilised as a means to diversify the Zulu brand offering, thereby attempting to confront poverty and Durban's saturated beachfront marketplace, for the pullers and bead workers. The need to diversify the offering has not been previously recognised as an obvious solution and this, in turn, has arguably perpetuated the generic nature of the Zulu brand approach.

Based on this premise, between 2011 and 2014, I completed an extensive PhD study into the lineage, legacy and beadwork of the Nyuswa (known as the *isinyolovane* (mixed colour) style), worn by many who bear the surname

Ngcobo and the names of its subsidiaries.⁷⁸ What was established here was that a verifiable oral record and beadwork system could be attributed to a lineage, which potentially represents the two ingredients necessary for building brand equity and the basis for a brand diversification strategy in the Durban tourism sector; namely an alternative legacy and distinctive visual system. In this way it emerged that the brand equity surrounding the 'Kingdom of the Zulu' strategy could be broadened to encompass other forms of ethnic tourism and therefore represent a propensity to alleviate poverty.

In lieu of such potential, a collaborative effort between the Durban Rickshaw Pullers Association; students and staff of Workspace (a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) unit at the Department of Visual Communication Design, of Durban University of Technology,

overseen by me); the Business Support, Tourism and Markets Unit of eThekweni Municipality; and various sponsors ensued. Two Durban rickshaws and pullers' outfits were renovated. Through numerous consultations with the Durban Rickshaw Pullers Association

(Figure 19) it was established that this renovation process would commence with one of their beadwork systems (representing the Mandlakazi grouping) and that this could later be extended to represent their other regional beadwork system (the uSuthu grouping). It was



Figure 15: *Examples of a colour convention found in beadwork from the Mahlabatini region near Nongoma* (photo Rowan Gatfield, 2012). Below: *Design for new rickshaw based on the beadwork of the polity at Mahlabatini* (designed by Nonzuzo Nzimande; courtesy Durban University of Technology)



Figure 16: *Examples of a colour convention found in beadwork from the Ceza region in central Zululand* (courtesy Phansi Museum, Glenwood, Durban; photo Rowan Gatfield, 2012). Below: *Design for new rickshaw based on the beadwork of the polity at Ceza* (designed by Wendy Yang; courtesy Durban University of Technology)

then decided that visual systems from other regions could also be included to better diversify the rickshaw offer (particularly variations for photographic products for sale). This in turn could be underpinned by various oral histo-

ries surrounding these visual systems, and thus diversify the Zulu brand and its tourism narrative offering for international and domestic tourism and its related industries.

Students at Workspace were thus



Figure 17 above: *Examples of a colour convention found in beadwork from the Pongola region in Northern Zululand, dated as 1972* (courtesy KwaZulu-Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg; photo Rowan Gatfield, 2012); below: *Design for new rickshaw based on the beadwork of the polity at Pongola by Yoshen Nair* (courtesy Durban University of Technology)



Figure 18: *Design for new rickshaw based on the beadwork of the Mandlakazi polity at Nongoma by Noluthando Mchunu* (courtesy Durban University of Technology)

required to identify and recreate regional beadwork systems/styles (some examples are shown in Figures 15, 16, 17 and 18) in a manner that accurately replicated these design systems (comprising distinct forms and limited colour palettes) into the new outfit and cart designs. The first rickshaw cart and outfit renovation (Figure 20) was completed

in 2012 based on the Mandlakazi *isigodi* (district) at Nongoma. Funding was sought over a two-year period.

In response NPC Cimpor, Plascon Paints, Royal Adhesive Industries, Component Wholesalers, Universal Bolt and Nut, Dunlop Industrial and Sportsman's Warehouse made various contributions in cash or in kind.



Figure 19: *The consultation and restoration process with the Durban rickshaw pullers* (photo Rowan Gatfield, 2011)



Figure 20: *William Sibiya with the newly renovated rickshaw, costume and headdress* (courtesy William Sibiya; photo Rowan Gatfield, 2012)



Figure 21 above: *Beadwork of the amaChunu at Weenen* (photos Rowan Gatfield). Below: *Design for the amaChunu rickshaw based on beadwork from that polity found living at Msinga* (designed by Rowan Gatfield, 2012)

A process of design development with the rickshaw puller William Sibiya, a third-generation rickshaw owner from the Mandlakazi *isigodi* ensued. A second rickshaw based on the beadwork conventions of the amaChunu at Msinga (Figure 22) was then completed. Speculative designs were also prepared based on the beadwork of the Ceza region in central Zululand (Figure 16), the amaNgwanya at Bergville and the KwaNyuswa region at Botha's Hill near Durban; styles from the Mahlabatini region in central Zululand (Figure 15), Pongola in northern Zululand (Figure 17), and those of the iPhalafini region at Msinga. Consequently, as a result of this intervention and the support from hoteliers, Sibiya noted a marked improvement in business between 2012 and 2013, noting that the Easter and Christmas breaks had been particularly successful. Overall it is estimated that his annual income improved.

The arguments surrounding the ethics of confronting poverty within a dy-

namic developing society are complex. In South African it is most apparent that a micro-economic venture that aims to develop people is sure to fail if those involved do not want developing. The power of what is proposed in this paper points to visual style as the capital upon which a bottom-up strategy might gain a footing in a collaborative and negotiated fight against poverty. The intention is in no way to further segregate people through these apparent identities, but merely to diversify the tourism offering under the 'Zulu Kingdom, exceptional' branding. The Rickshaw Renovation Project is a minute illustration of what could be if those linked to unknown ethnic visual systems are facilitated through brand diversification, without fear of recourse. This diversification principle was explored in 2014 through a variety of product prototyping and has shown real promise (Figure 23).

Recent interviews conducted with rickshaw pullers indicate that a renewed optimism now prevails among them.



Figure 22: Lawrence Khoza with the newly renovated Msinga rickshaw, costume and headdress based on the beadwork of the amaChunu (photos Mdu Khumalo, 2013)



Figure 23: Staff of Workspace examining product prototypes developed by bead workers from Msinga (photo Rowan Gatfield, 2014)

Lawrence Khoza (Figure 22), the second recipient to have his rickshaw renovated, exclaimed in 2012 ‘I see William Sibiya now walks with dignity.’

Since the inception of the project Sibiya has purchased a pair of *imbathatha* (traditional Zulu sandals), traditional sheepskin leggings and a traditional Zulu whistle to attract customers. These small acts of personal investment in the project, as well as his attentive participation in the restoration of his rickshaw, speak of an indication that this project may have facilitated forms of catharsis, the dynamics of which remain to be seen.

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