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Abstract

Dress is a powerful means of communication that makes statements about the gender role of an individual from birth. The concept of clothing as a principal vehicle of social and personal information presupposes a common level of understanding among the audience to whom the communication is intended. It makes dramatic statements about social categories and changes from one social category to another as regulated by place, occasion, age, status, as well as values that reflect the social hierarchy of a community. It is in light of this perceived capacity for dress to 'speak' — or what has been termed the 'pregnant' nature of dress — that Justine Cordwell and Ronald Schwartz urge readers to learn to read and grasp dress as 'signs in the same way we learn to read and understand language', that they might more fully comprehend the complexities of cultural representation (1).

THENJIWE MAGWAZA

The Conceptualisation of Zulu Traditional Female Dress in the Post-Apartheid Era

Dress is a powerful means of communication that makes statements about the gender role of an individual from birth. The concept of clothing as a principal vehicle of social and personal information presupposes a common level of understanding among the audience to whom the communication is intended. It makes dramatic statements about social categories and changes from one social category to another as regulated by place, occasion, age, status, as well as values that reflect the social hierarchy of a community. It is in light of this perceived capacity for dress to 'speak' — or what has been termed the 'pregnant' nature of dress — that Justine Cordwell and Ronald Schwartz urge readers to learn to read and grasp dress as 'signs in the same way we learn to read and understand language', that they might more fully comprehend the complexities of cultural representation (1).

This essay attempts to place the contemporary dress of the Zulu female into a socio-political framework, and critiques the fact that despite radical social and political transformations, which are documented in the changing mode of male dress, some of the present conventions of female dress remain unchanged since the eighteenth century and thus fix women within certain 'traditional' roles. The focus of the article is mainly limited to the rural Ndwedwe district — a Durban Municipality area of KwaZulu-Natal, where, unlike fifty years ago, traditional Zulu dress is largely worn during weekends and at ceremonies and festivals. Reference to Zulu dress in this article should be understood in this context.

1 CONCEPTUALISATION OF DRESS ACCORDING TO AGE

Dress in the Zulu society traditionally varies according to one's age. From infancy to old age, there is a variety of dress items that the individual wears successively. The Ndwedwe society, like most rural traditional societies, has a tendency to concretise abstract concepts, a thinking which gives dress a strong symbolic value as pertains to the great milestones in the life cycle of a people. This symbolisation produces different kinds of dress, which are seen as outer signs for the stages of life through which a Zulu female passes and of her connection at each stage with her community. While in contemporary urban societies, the 'modern' urban woman seems to defy time, refusing to submit to age through her dress, in areas like Ndwedwe that still uphold traditional folk

culture, people are not afraid to look old and dress the part of grandmother without benefit of beauty parlour and cosmetic camouflage (Magwaza 201).

In the Ndwedwe district, it is apparent that dress is not only a repository of meanings regarding gender roles but is also a vehicle for perpetuating or rendering changes in gender roles, and differentiation by age. In this region dress is very closely associated with the various stages of growth in the Zulu person's life cycle: that is, birth, childhood, youth, marriage, and old age. Dress items and bodily ornamentation can be graphed from a minimum during infancy, through a crescendo of weight and visual intensity in the prime of life, to a falling off in middle and later years when activities associated with dress items cease to be a preoccupation.

About fifty years ago one would not find a Ndwedwe Zulu unadorned, on a daily basis, with some kind of personal embellishment symbolic of cultural status. Within several weeks of birth, children of both sexes would obtain waist, sometimes neck, wrist, and ankle beads provided by the parents and/or other relatives. This has changed in contemporary times as it is almost exclusively females (little emphasis or obligation being placed on males) who are expected to exhibit the progress to full adulthood through the wearing of distinctive styles of dress with ascending values of complexity that mark physical and social maturity. A widely held belief is that dress plays a significant role in ensuring that the cultural ideals of family sanctity are upheld. This pertains specifically to sexual looseness: an austere and disciplined cultivation of character is the underlying expectation for young women who are expected to progress through the maturation hierarchy to an 'honourable marriage'. The Ndwedwe Zulu hopes to avoid unplanned childbirth and HIV contraction by instilling cultural traditional norms — a process that places enormous pressure on young women in particular, and one in which dress plays a vital role.

1.2 YOUNG GIRLS

The maturation process of pre-adolescent girls is distinguishable by the increasing number of bead ornaments. During ceremonial dancing the wearing of bead ornaments culminates in intricate and elaborate finery. Dancing is very important to the girls because it is during these times that they hope to meet their husbands to be, hence, they also go to great length in preparing for them. They make or buy colourful articles: girls who do not have the money to buy, or time to make, their own ornaments, borrow from their mothers or other girls to ensure that they are equally noticeable. Jean Morris and Ben Levitas claim that when dancing, girls' firm bosoms and tight thighs are meant to be a positive indication of virginity and moral rectitude (38). This expectation (an understood requirement) places the responsibility of upholding and sustaining the Zulu society's moral values on the girls' shoulders. It is expected that the breasts (budding as they may be) of the young unmarried girls will be uncovered. During traditional ceremonies clothing (in a Western sense) is considered less important since it obscures the

visibility of the female body and its development, hence girls wear no clothes — only waist beads. However, with the mingling of different cultures, some girls are covering their buttocks with cloths underneath their waist beads.

Artefacts worn by adolescents distinguish them into a system of ordered age groupings, each of which has its leader. An *ijongosi* is a girl between the ages of eight and thirteen, and she would normally wear: an *izingeje/ ojibilili* — tussle shaped necklace made of beads; an *isigege* — frontal-covering skirt, made of beads or wool; and an *amadavathi* — anklets, made of beads, stones and wire. An *itshitshi* is a girl between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. Her requisite dress includes: wearing layers of cloths, usually undecorated; hair plaited with black wool; *ungifase* — beaded necklace with its end in a bundle form; *amadavathi* — anklets.

1.3 A GIRL OF MARRIAGEABLE AGE

Zulu girls compared to girls of other tribal/cultural groups are considered ready for marriage at an early age. By her beadwork apron, hip draperies and other beadwork she announces herself to be single but ripe for marriage.¹ (See figure 6.) The early age at which girls fulfil this role may be a result of physical readiness, for once a girl begins to menstruate, she may be considered ready to start a family. It should, however, be pointed out that nowadays with a number of girls menstruating earlier than the expected marriageable age (15–18 years) this attitude is slowly changing. Ndwedwe villages still maintain the tradition of building menstruating huts. A girl goes into the hut at the first signs of menstruation and stays there for four to seven days. After remaining there for that number of days, a girl is expected to throw out her old clothing, put on a set of fresh clothes and cut her fingernails and hair. Whilst in the menstrual hut, older girls or older women of the household, admonish the girl throughout the week on how she is now to conduct herself, what is expected of her in terms of good behaviour, ethics and morals. She is also cautioned about possible misadventures in the handling of men, instructed in the behaviour patterns that are expected of women, the values and ideals that should be upheld, and appropriate responses to male behaviour.

To mark her entry into adulthood and the approach of marriageable age, a ceremony is performed at the end of her secluded days that includes feasting for the whole village. This occasion also provides a ritual context in which to promote and ask for auspiciousness and favour from the ancestors. A girl of marriageable age may have the *umemulo* (a coming of age feast and ceremony) performed for her by her father after she has been seen and proved to be a well behaved girl who upholds societal and family values. The ceremony, joyously celebrated in public, is a celebration of the potential fertility of a girl as well as the public announcement of her marriageable status (nowadays performed when the girl is over the age of eighteen). At the ceremony, the girl dons the cowhide skirt of a married woman, *isidwaba*, for the first time. (See figure 2.) Barbara Tyrrell notes that these indirect² performances alert young men to the girl's marriageable status (113) (which is in

reality, a confirmation of her commodity status by which the woman is rendered the object of a cultural/social transaction).

1.4 THE MARRIED WOMAN

Although a married woman's adornment with beads and bodily modifications — such as head gear sewn on to her hair, ear piercings or incisions on her skin — may provide some basis for differentiation there is a limit to how much can be used without becoming ostentatious considering that she is not on the market any more. Women are more constrained by Zulu cultural heritage than men as they are the ones who are expected to uphold, sustain and transmit the traditions to their off-spring. In contrast to male attire and adornment, a woman's expected dress and personal decoration appropriate to the stage she is in, is a graphic autobiography by which she can accurately recall or retell the events of her life. She carries this personal and social chronology and teaches it to her children. Each item worn carries significance beyond the simple appearance of the woman concerned. It tells about the relationship she has with her husband as well as other people. It may tell, for example, whether the husband is at home or away, if he is alive or dead, or if she is his only partner or one of many wives.

Girls who are about to wed, recently wedded brides, and older married women cover their breasts, shoulders and knees out of deference to, and reverence for, their husbands and the families into which they have married or will marry. This may however differ from one family to the next: some families maintain that a woman must cover breasts and shoulders when away from home but not necessarily at the homestead. The scarf or cloak, either worn over the shoulders or across the upper body, that is, from shoulder to waist is, according to Christian Msimang, of particular importance (184). This garment is adopted by married women out of respect for their husband's fathers and other senior men of the family whether alive or dead, and for the homestead. Of equal significance with this material sign of respect is the adherence to a set of social skills: when addressing these men or in their presence, women adopt a particular attitude and behave in a particular manner that might include avoiding eye contact, bending the face downward, and adopting a position (whether kneeling, sitting or standing) that is never higher than the men in their company. These are the most obvious signs of other (more subtle) restrictions imposed on women.

There may be dress restrictions placed upon a woman depending on the state that she is in at a particular time. Death, for instance, restricts a woman in her choice of dress as does the fact that she has recently given birth. On either occasion she is not permitted to wear bright clothes. After having had a child she remains 'polluted and impure' for weeks, whilst after having lost a husband she is considered polluted for the minimum of a year, during which time she can not attend ceremonies or any other gatherings where she may be seen by a large number of people, and neither is she allowed to prepare traditional foodstuff like beer or partake in festivities. She is considered a bad omen whilst in mourning

dress. It is only after a cleansing ceremony has been performed by her own people (not the dead husband's people), that taboos with all the stigmas attached are lifted from her and she can be accepted back into the community's activities. It should be noted that the black skin skirt of marriage, *isidwaba*, should be worn at all traditional ceremonies and festivities even after the death of her husband.

The way hair is dressed is also indicative of a woman's marital stage (Tyrrell and Jurgens 39). A Zulu married woman has a tall, red ochre hairstyle, a token of marriage, which she wears in reverence for her husband's family. Women's hair ornaments (of purely decorative function, unlike men's) are pinned onto the topknot and are edged with a bead band — also a sign of reverence for her husband's family. When physical beauty wanes at middle age, and after the birth of children, preoccupation with elegant dress wanes too. It is only on rare special social occasions that elegant dress is worn. Due to the weight of beads, most articles now worn are made of wool, which is lighter. An older woman's ensemble of decoration, if she still wears traditional dress, tends toward darker colours as well as larger beads than those worn by younger women. The latter may reflect which beads were available from traders at the time of purchase and which area of birth she comes from. Some old Ndwedwe women, even during traditional ceremonies and festivals, opt not to wear traditional dress having given away all articles to other people, mainly younger women.

Distinguishing age by dress encourages sexual overtures in socially approved ways, and in effect, guarantees male dominance and importance, as most of what the female folk do is for the interest and benefit of men. In addition to dress, specific body modifications concur with gender expectations and encourage younger girls to learn to direct their own acts of dress according to those expectations.

2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF DRESS ACCORDING TO REGION

The focus in the Zulu costume culture is not on the individual but upon the community. Groups wear and may carry special garments or accessories that identify them as members of a specific group. Richard Dorson is of the view that one of the unwritten laws of folk costume is that the individual is not completely free to express individuality in dress but rather the dress must indicate the individual's conforming participation not only in his or her age, sex, and status groups within the unified community but also in the area of abode (280).

The very real sense of purpose of dress within a folk community is, according to Msimang, to de-individualise the individual (18). By insisting on the submergence of individual identity to community values, dress affords each community unity. There is a division even among the Zulu communities themselves — each community manifesting its own peculiarities. It is interesting to note that such divisions are not only recognisable in the traditional settings but can also be seen in the contemporary African Christian churches. In the churches, the structure of folk community is seen in the degree to which individuals find it necessary to

dress with uniformity so as to set themselves apart from other denominations. Even within a denomination, members sit in their appropriate age and marital status categories; and each of these would have its own duties, meetings and peculiar dress codes. Here, then, is evidence of the Zulu modern society having transmitted and translated what happens in its traditional setting to new institutions.

Costume is one of the symbols of folk community and one of the variables of a culture. As a symbol, it expresses the basic needs as well as the basic structure of a community and as a variable it is like regional architecture, a means of identifying the local, and the vernacular. Folk costume is the visible outward badge of folk group identity, that is deliberately and consciously worn to express that identity. 'The identity that is geographically determined is important and necessary as an expression that a particular locality or region is distinct, and should be easily identified' (Dorson 295). The Ndwedwe style of dress, like other regions of KwaZulu-Natal is communicative of the community's communal identity. Today, that communal identity strives and is mainly maintained in female traditional clothing only. A few men still subscribe to communal clothing, but for most men, traditional dress has come to mean a dress style of any African country that an individual may choose to adopt.

All Zulu female dress may seem to a person who is foreign to the tradition quite similar if not exactly the same. In earlier times before colourful beads were adopted as part of traditional dress, differences between groups would warrant a discussion; and in later times dress and ornamentation difference between distinctive areas grew increasingly subtle and minute, being largely based on beadal colour combination and patterning, discernable only to the educated or familiar eye. Yet, for Zulu women, beads have come to be the determinants of regional differentiation, and nearly all beaded items worn by females have varying sizes, colour combinations, shapes, and styles. Having distinctive features of beadal style, enables a person conversant with individual dress 'grammars' to spot somebody of a particular tribe at some distance with ease.

In an appraisal of rural areas like Ndwedwe, Msimang maintains that the subtle differences in dress for each region are prescribed by that community and its form is dictated by the community's tradition, and the meaning thereof is influenced by the caste (group) of a person visually identified by her dress (7). This is equally true of the Ndwedwe area. Whatever meaning is expressed through dress is only understood through relationships with other people; that is, there needs to be people who will be able to interpret it appropriately. If there are people who are able to decipher intended meanings, a response acknowledging comprehension of what is intended will be stimulated. While general levels of symbolic information may be shared by the various people, it cannot be assumed that a member of one area would give the same interpretation to a common symbolic form, as would one of their neighbours. Colour symbolism (distinct for different areas) is a good example of this strong degree of variability.

Regional differences come to the fore more often when groups of girls from different geographical areas perform in peculiar uniforms in ceremonies. Dress and its finery in one group may represent one thing, in another it may represent something different, in still another something else, hence a variety of interpretations of one item of dress and beaded colours or colours of beads is possible.

2.1 CHANGE IN REGIONAL DRESS

As I began to study dress scientifically, taking into account the influence of evolution over time and culture, I realised that one of the main elements of costume is change. Change that eventually spreads through the whole community is initiated by the upper class or people with a status in a homestead, for example, a head wife in a polygamous family, or wives of chiefs. (See figure 1, p. 171.) Thereafter a kind of dress will become a custom. In the case of the Ndwedwe Zulu female dress, a remarkable change can be seen in styles of beadwork. The beadwork has been adapted to incorporate new features of the environment, depending on the contact and influence prevalent at the time. One such change can be observed in traditional women's headdress. During the early to mid twentieth century, women's headdresses were sewn onto their hair, thus becoming a permanent feature of dress, but now the headdress more often takes the form of a detachable top knot. These are used by women who work in towns and those who need such headgear for special cultural occasions. Some women however use these as gala dress and for hiring out to brides or any other women who may need headgear for temporary purposes. The traditional headdress survives in new form — adapted to fit the new environment in which Zulu women find themselves.

Once adopted, adaptations like this last longer in rural areas, as in Ndwedwe, because of a 'cultural lag' that is based on rural conservatism. It was observed (from my doctoral study) that some areas within the Ndwedwe region — eMaphetheni, KwaNgcolosi and oThwebe — have preserved quite archaic cultural items of dress and adhere to a traditional sense of dress that is quite rigid, whilst others nearby but less rural (KwaNyuswa, eMolweni, eNgonweni) display urban dress or traditional dress with urban touches or vice versa; and some of the Ndwedwe Zulu who wear factory-made Western clothing adapt that clothing to their own ideas, omitting or adding certain objects or materials (glass/plastic beads, decorative stones, and wire) that the factory makers had not initially intended for garment use. Figure 3 (p. 172) is evidence of this kind of adaptation. However, although the Ndwedwe Zulu female dress may not be entirely homemade and archaic across all related groups, it is folk-cultural in the sense of its use and function within the folk community. Despite change due to adaptation of items from Western culture, dress is still very much the badge of group identity and is still as related to 'tradition' and to community values as it was a hundred years ago.

3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF DRESS ACCORDING TO STATUS

In the traditional community, female status according to dress involves several levels, the most basic of which is marital status. In the Ndwedwe area, women's dress is especially differentiated to signal marriage or the process toward it. The dress of a recently married girl and a woman who has been married for some time, though almost uniform, would reflect subtle variations, for example, change of colour or colour combination, length of a skirt or different hair styles.

Dress also signifies the position one has in the community or in the family. A head woman of a polygamous family may be adorned differently from her co-wives. MaMduna of oThwebe, Camperdown village, adjacent to Ndwedwe said 'I am the one who decides on the colours and certain dress articles that other women [co-wives and women of her village who are under her leadership as a head woman] are to wear for a particular occasion'. MaMduna is also the head woman of all married women of oThwebe. Her dress influence would seem to conform to the general laws of costume cited by Dorson (280): his claim that the upper level (person of high rank) partially determines and/or influences dress development of people in lower levels clearly applies to the Zulu traditional setting of oThwebe (refer to figure 1).

Dress does not only symbolise, but can dictate, the behaviours and roles expected of people on the basis of their various and sometimes multiple connections with each other and can, therefore, distinguish the powerful from the weak, the rich from the poor, the hero from the outcast, the conformer from the non-conformer, the leader from the follower and the insider from the outsider. As much as status is spoken of through dress, so is the wearer's personality. It is, however the marital status demarcations which speak and feature much more than indicators of individual personality in Zulu female dress. Status distinction through dress has always been common and readily identifiable in male folk dress, however, items of dress worn by men not only indicate the status but also, significantly, the personal achievements of male individuals. (Refer to figure 4, p. 173.) The following brief discussion of male folk dress will articulate the essential difference between male and female status in the Zulu community.

3.1 FEMALE STATUS AS OPPOSED TO MALE STATUS

In Zulu society men and women achieve status differently. Women achieve recognition through a process associated with attaining physical and moral maturation, marriage and eventually reproducing (Msimang 46). On the other hand, men gain recognition through political or economic achievement — such achievements are expressed through dress. Women's clothing has never reflected the shifting political position of the wearer as did the clothing of men, rather, most female dress items are more indicative of the age or marital status of the wearer. Status distinctions among women have always been articulated and recognised through particularities of dress that correspond to the five stages of Zulu womanhood — pre-puberty, puberty, maturity, marriage and motherhood.

Confirming Msimang's contention, a Ndwedwe informant, MaMduna, stressed that the sequence of the developmental stages for women are dependent on external signs of physical maturation and public acknowledgement of these changes through rituals and ceremonies.

Men, on the other hand, have always ascended through economic achievement (acquiring as much livestock as possible), political achievement (being a part of a regiment and/or fulfilling the orders of the chief or commander with the hope of attaining the status of commander), and personal achievements — for which they are given prestigious recognition in the form of headdress ornamentation indicative of heroism and cattle handouts by the king for outstanding contributions to the community. Each progression for men, usually political, is associated with a change in attire that reflects their newly acquired position. In contemporary times ascension to a higher status is realised not only through a dress item but through affording positions of power to men (in community, political and cultural organisations) whilst most women's capabilities as leaders are not realised or well recognised.

This status quo continues even in the new post-apartheid political dispensation that prides itself on being a 'leader of democracy' in Africa. In the rural Ndwedwe community, even in the twenty-first century, there is not much evidence of the function of clothing as a means of communicating a new economic and political status for women. One of the few indicators of change in women's status, as represented by name and dress, can be seen in the figure of *iqhikiza*. In the colonial and apartheid eras, *iqhikiza*, the senior maiden, was one of the few females who were accorded status. Younger women would be entrusted to *iqhikiza*. Her duty was to advise younger maidens on how to behave, advice being given specifically on love matters (a subject that put men at the centre). She had distinct dress items that identified her status. She would be adorned in much more colourful dress items than other girls and carry a stick confirming her position. It is interesting to note that the contemporary Ndwedwe's *iqhikiza* has a newly acquired status code: she is referred to as *induna yamantombazane esigodi*, a chief or head maiden of a region or village. Such a name indicates women's desire to attain equal status with men — the word *iduna* (chief) having a male connotation. The chief maiden's status indicator is a swipe, *imvubu*, a short spear and (optionally) a shield, all of which are generally carried by men. One cannot avoid perceiving this change (name and items carried) as indicative of young women's desire for inclusion in a system that largely excludes women from positions of political and economic status, and as a protest against a system that glorifies men.

4 DRESS, APPEARANCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

Gender is a social construction. Accordingly, appearance is one medium through which we articulate and shape our impressions of what it means to be male or female. As is the case in other societies, the Zulu use forms of appearance to construct a masculine or feminine image. We are led to think about the cultural meanings linked to gender in a particular way. Gender ideology is not only about

gender categories, but also pertains to the relation between these categories and the tension resulting from an ideology that over-emphasises the importance of personal appearance, as indicated by formal adherence to dress codes, for females, and under emphasises it for males.

In order to understand present meanings of female dress, an analysis of gender ideology specific to the Zulu community is necessary. Such an analysis includes how the ideology is culturally communicated as well as how it applies to the lives of Zulu females and males. In the Zulu culture, maleness is associated with the challenging roles of 'action' and femaleness is associated with the passive notion of the decorative. Susan Kaiser refers to this kind of ideology as a 'dichotomy of doing versus being, a cultural mechanism for socially organising gender' (76). This ideology has been perpetuated even in the post-apartheid era, with little or no change evident.

However, it is interesting to note that gender distinctions within the communities that are still clad in traditional dress were not as strongly marked before and during the colonial period. From the latter years of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, both men and women wore beads and skirt-like clothing around their waists. The male skirt-like clothing, *ibheshu*, may have been dropped by men out of fear of ridicule. *Ibheshu* resembled nothing that was worn by the 'masters' but that which was worn by the wives of the 'masters'. Hence it can be surmised that Zulu men avoided wearing clothing styles they now viewed as connoting feminine qualities — the feminine as seen through colonial eyes — and thus the use of beads was also dropped. As societies were transformed from predominantly rural to urban industrial entities, the 'new' values that emerged were amplified by the Zulu traditional way of life which, tied to a desire to emulate the white employers' dress code, resulted in a dress code for Zulu men that signified their individuality and economic advancement. These values were not translated to women or women's dress, rather, in the new dispensation that followed the apartheid era, the call for 'African renaissance' and the perceived need to claim back African cultures and way of life, saw an entrenchment of the alignment of women's traditional status (marked by physical stages of maturation) with the apparel of women's traditional dress.

In the era of the new dispensation, Zulu male traditional clothing has changed remarkably in its move away from specific or regional traditional cultural forms. Men do not have to be clad in animal skins and beads to be considered 'traditionally dressed', but the 'traditional' styles of other parts of Africa (central, eastern and western) have been adopted. In its simplest form, a fabric shirt, with or without embroidery or animal print, is sufficient to serve as an African traditional mark. The shirt is worn with pants of any fabric, length or style. On the other hand, women have continued to be assigned a highly restrictive dress code, signifying their age, marital status and region from which they originate. A black skin skirt, *isidwaba*, still identifies a married woman, and situates her within a tradition that restricts her freedom of movement — culturally, socially and physically. *Isidwaba*

is not only heavy, as it is made from the raw skin of an animal, it must be covered in a black stuff (polish and/or oil that maintains its colour and shine) that stains the body and any surface that a woman may sit on. The cloth and beads that are used to cover *isidwaba* must be formed into layers that signify the number of years of marriage. Figure 1 (p. 173) is an example of one such kind of dress item (layered), signifying a woman's number of years in marriage. Having worn *isidwaba* (with its accessories) myself, I find it physically uncomfortable and extremely heavy.

Such restrictive codes are also applied to unmarried women. The unmarried woman's colour of clothes and beads are clearly indicative of her marital status. It is clear that whilst Zulu women continue to be trapped in a traditional identity and definition, men have been allowed the freedom to borrow from convenient styles of any other African country; and unlike most female dress items, which are made by the labour of their own hands, the male 'traditional' dress (constituting only a shirt) is readily available in most shops. Such convenience allows men a freedom of choice and an option to express their individualism as they wish, whilst women continue to endure a restricted routine and conservative code of femininity.

In summary, it can be seen that female dress is a vehicle that is being used to encourage the Zulu to 'return to their roots', however, it cannot be denied, as Sandra Klopper notes, that 'dress is probably one of the only means left to articulate relations that have been disrupted through economic and political transformation' (156). A specific female dress code has thus been used by Zulu men as a means of asserting their power and maintaining control over their wives and girlfriends under the pretext that dress is one tool that captures and retains the essence of the Zulu.

NOTES

- ¹ This need not necessarily be in relation to her personal wish. It is her family, with her father or other male relatives assuming much of the responsibility, who usually decree her as being 'ready'.
- ² The indirect nature of these actions is seen in the fact that, unlike in other traditional Zulu ceremonies there are no clear verbal utterances of the reasons behind such dress code. Sometimes songs, composed by age-mates of the girl may be sung — bearing figurative lyrics that make reference to the new status of the girl.

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