Jubilee Dandies
Collecting Beadwork in Tsolo, Eastern Cape 1897–1932

Anitra Nettleton

This paper deals largely with a single photograph in relation to an unusually coherent collection of beadwork from the Eastern Cape (South Africa) in relation to collecting practices. I explore these beaded forms as aesthetically loaded parts of a particular material culture which has been detached from its original setting, working with and drawing from Appadurai (1986), Edwards (2002), and Poole (1997, 2005) in understanding the ways in which objects are assigned different and contingent meanings. Although I also acknowledge the beadwork in question as a form of creative praxis in its making and wearing, I use the term “material culture” here as a catch-all, because my purpose in this paper is not to argue an art status for beadwork. Beadwork, as I examine it here, is understood primarily a means of “clothing” the body, and throughout most of human history clothing has been, like the other objects we now term “art” in Africa, undifferentiated from other forms of material culture.

The collection examined in this paper is in the stores of the British Museum, where it has resided for nearly eighty years without ever, to my knowledge, having been placed on display. Viewed simply as collection of beaded items in a museum store it has very little meaning. When a single piece was published, in full color, by John Mack (2002), its isolation from the rest of the collection, and thus its historical context, ensured its appreciation as an aesthetic object, possibly as a “masterpiece,” but any other elements of its potential signification were not fully explored. Yet beadwork in general has a relatively long history in South Africa and this object has a genealogy: not only are beads recorded as part of Southern African material culture from the earliest survivals of human self-decorating activity, but beadwork using glass beads can be traced through at least four centuries of imported materials and their indigenous uses (Huffman 2007, Wood 2008).

In the nineteenth century, the art of making pieces of body adornment or clothing and other accoutrements using imported glass beads expanded exponentially on the east coast of Southern Africa and, by 1862, constituted a major form of aesthetic expression among Nguni-speaking peoples south of the Tugela River, and possibly among Tsonga-speaking peoples in the vicinity of Delagoa Bay (Muller and Snelleman n.d. [1892], Nettleton 2007). This paper investigates some aspects of such beadwork as clothing for the body, as a site of not only aesthetic expression and identity politics, but also of resistance to colonial norms, and ultimately as a site of residual curiosity when viewed as a collection. The collection from Tsolo was put together at a mission station and I explore the irony of beadwork’s appeal to missionaries as collectors in the Eastern Cape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century via evidence offered by three photographs emanating from the mission.

In trawling European museums for evidence of Southern African objects over the past thirty years, the frequent presence of missionaries as collectors emerged from the information on many acquisitions. In 2007 I was asked to identify an ochered cloth skirt for the Glasgow Museums. The information on the donor provided by the curator of World Cultures at the Museum, Pat Allan, reads as follows:

The donor, Margaret Wagstrom Hope was a teacher with the Kaffrarian Mission at the Mgwali Training School for Girls near Dohne in Stutterheim District. Miss Hope seems to have arrived (at Mgwali) in 1892 and continued there until around 1897.

It is the only object which Wagstrom-Hope appears to have deposited with the museum; the skirt is an example of an iconic form of dress worn by Xhosa-speaking women in the nineteenth and twentieth century and it features strongly in the costume...
revivalism of the post-apartheid era. It is apposite here because it was collected by a woman missionary with some interest in education and in hand crafts. Margaret Wagstrom-Hope taught at a mission training school in the Eastern Cape, at which sewing was a major part of the curriculum, but she chose to preserve and donate an item of “indigenous” dress, made by Xhosa-speakers of entirely imported materials, rather than a dress item of the type promoted in the mission sewing schools of the time. The irony of this choice, one which I explore here, had clearly not surfaced when the skirt was collected.

THE TSOLO COLLECTION

As a single item, Wagstrom-Hope’s Xhosa skirt functions quite differently from the smaller, but numerous, items in the collection of beadwork from Tsolo in the Eastern Cape, accessioned in 1933 by the British Museum, and recorded as having been donated by Frank “Corner.” This collection (hereafter referred to as the Tsolo collection) comprises a large range of object types, many of which appear to be of nineteenth century manufacture, although most were probably collected in the twentieth century. There are, notably, no skirts, and only one beaded cloth in the Tsolo collection: the majority of its items are composed of
beads, worked into various forms without cloth backing; necklaces comprising panels of bead fabric (Fig. 1), girdles, aprons (Fig. 2), and lace-like collars (Fig. 3). There are some bags in which the cloth (Fig. 4) is beaded, but cloth, while it significantly informs the discussion which follows, did not form a primary focus of the collection. There are a number of possible explanations for the focus on beaded items in the Tsolo collection, one of which may have been the skill exhibited in the making of the beadwork.

Having (in 2009) been given access to, and the opportunity to photograph the beaded objects, I was struck by the extraordinary quality of their facture, and their design. The patterns that appear in the beadwork are quite easily recognized, with hindsight, as particular to the Eastern Cape, but, whoever made the collection selected only really well-designed and skillfully executed pieces. The items collected thus represented not only a large number of categories of beadwork from the region, but also a selection of aesthetically pleasing examples. It would thus appear that this relatively large collection had more a simple anthropological, illustrative purpose. Its anthropological framing as a sampler of indigenous African practice could explain why it ended up in the British Museum. However, the motive behind its assemblage might, in the first instance, have rested as heavily on an interest in aesthetics as it did on the missionaries’ need to document the local traditions as primitively other. Ambivalence, thus inscribed in the space of collection, is therefore a major element in the analysis. The collection itself speaks of a particular kind of investment in, or understanding of the local tradition around Tsolo (with some additions from further afield) of making and wearing beads. This locality is quite clearly a space of hybridity, of potential for the double-inscription that Bhabha (1985) outlines as one of the markers of difference in the colonial text.

THE DONOR/COLLECTOR

The identities of the donor and collector, important to an understanding of any collection’s significance, are in this case not entirely clear. The British Museum’s records are scant and they have only the following information: the collection was donated by Mr. Frank “Corner” in 1933, when Cornner’s address was recorded as St. Edwards House, 22 Great College Street, London. This was, and still is, the address of the home of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist (SSJE), an Anglican monastic order. In 1934, however, Cornner sent two further items to the British Museum (apparently they had not made it to London with him the previous year), and at that time his address was noted as “St. Cuthbert’s, Eastern Cape.”

The Anglican mission church at Tsolo was called St. Cuthbert’s: Tsolo is a town in the northern part of Eastern Cape, between Mtata to the south and McLear to the north, traditionally the territory of Mpondomise chiefs, but including Mfengu peoples as well. It included a hospital, St. Lucy’s, and was the place at which Frank Cornner was stationed. The Church of the Province, South Africa (CPSA) archives have little primary material from the mission, apart from a detailed matron’s log (AB815/Ca/1.25) from the hospital, with daily entries from 1902 through to 1934. In the matron’s log, amidst the comings and goings, hir-
ings and retirements or resignations of various doctors, priests, nurses, and others there is no reference to Frank Cornner. On the second to last page, however, is a log entry recording the departure of “Mn Corner” on March 15, 1933, “on furlough” to England. Cornner arrived in 1897, before the log started in 1902, and the lack of record of his arrival is thus easily explained, while the later entry probably records Cornner’s departure for England early in the year in which the beadwork collection was accessioned to the British Museum.

Further information on Frank Cornner is available in the writing of Father Godfrey Callaway, the head of the mission at St. Cuthbert’s from 1891 to 1904 (Callaway 1921) and a priest there till his death in 1942 (Pendelton 2009). In his account of a visit to the mission by then prime minister of the Union of South Africa General Jan Smuts in 1935, Callaway (1935) records that Smuts was impressed by Cornner’s having been working at the mission for thirty-seven years. From Callaway’s somewhat acerbic comparison of Cornner’s length of service as falling six years short of his own forty-three years’ service, starting in 1891, it can be deduced that Cornner arrived at the mission in 1897. This would mean that, if Cornner put the beadwork collection together himself, he could only have started acquiring items close to the turn of the century. Cornner was personally responsible for making the collection, one of at least three, as there is one in Cape Town’s Iziko Nationa Museum of South Africa and another recorded as being in the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford.

That Cornner was not an ordained member of the mission is clear from reference to him as Mr. in another context: Callaway’s Preface to the book Building for God in Africa:

Mr. Frank Cornner, although he has had to drop a few of his activities, is still a man of many and varied occupations, but has found time to give me most valuable help by looking through past records and by searching for references (Callaway 1936:vii).

Callaway notables refers to all the ordained members of the mission as “Father.” The fact that Cornner also typed the manuscript of this book for Callaway suggests strongly that Cornner was one of the lay workers, a person with some education and considerable standing at the mission. He may have been in charge of the Mission House, as Callaway (1936:93) mentions that it was run by a staff member with “more than thirty years’ service” to the mission. I have not been able to establish definitively whether Frank Cornner was married, or why a reference to his trip to London should have turned up in the logbook of St. Lucy’s Hospital in particular. Nevertheless, the idea persists that Frank Cornner was an extraordinary man insofar as he was sufficiently interested in “native” arts to make not only this collection, but two others. He appears, from the evidence offered by his correspondence with Miss Shaw of the South African Museum, to have been the person at the mission who had sufficient interest in the beadwork made by indigenous “Heathens” to collect these objects and then take them to England with him in the spring of 1933.

**THE SPACE OF COLLECTING**

St. Cuthbert’s Mission was large, having thirty outstations by 1935 (Callaway 1935), fifty before 1950, all visited by the clergy on horseback, on a monthly rotation (Pendelton 2009). The central mission station encompassed not only the stone church, St. Cuthbert’s, and St. Lucy’s Hospital, but also various dwellings for mission staff, two boarding schools—St. Joseph’s for boys and St. Mary’s for girls—and St. Margaret’s hostel for women enrolled in the weaving school. There was a separate school, St. Augustine’s, for colored children, and a carpentry department. Callaway notes that in 1936 there were

in addition to the fathers of the SSJE some thirty Europeans, including Sisters (CSMV), laymen, laywomen, and these with one exception are all stationed at St. Cuthbert’s itself (Callaway 1936:93).

With such a large staff, it is possible that there were many others involved in assembling the beadwork collection, although Cornner’s correspondence with Miss Shaw (Iziko Social History Research Centre) and the collection’s specific coherence of typological order militate against this idea. Either way, it points to a colonial presence in the mission space that was not so entirely caught up in the processes of conversion that the original culture was simply denied. The thus ambivalent circumstances in which

---

4 Unknown Artist
Bag
Beads, cloth, leather, and thread; bag 23 cm x 9 cm, straps 146 cm
Collected between 1897 and 1933 at Tsolo, Eastern Cape
British Museum no AF1933.6.9.67
this collection of beadwork was formed are expanded in important ways below through an examination of details in a few, but significant photographs recording the mission presence at St. Cuthbert’s in comparison with photographs from other, secular and anthropological, sources.

THE JUBILEE DANDIES: PHOTOGRAPH

In the CPSA archive, besides the logbook, a scrapbook, and a few other documents from St. Cuthbert’s mission, is a small number of photographs. Two of these are of particular interest for this paper. One (Fig. 5) contains a row of six young men and two young women in “native” garb, with others, who wear western clothes, standing apart and behind the main group. The central subjects have quite clearly dressed themselves and have posed for the photographer: all appear quite magnificently self-confident in their finery. At the back of the photograph, in handwritten script, is the mot “Jubilee Dandies,” but this was subsequently scored out with a single line and replaced with “Heathen Dandies who came to the Jubilee.” I have chosen to stick with the first title because it has a lighter touch. The re-inscribed title suggests too heavily the ulterior purpose of the mission presence, and, following Poole (2005), I wish to free the photograph from this aspect of mission archive. It has both a magisterial sense of presence among the men, and the beadwork around the bodies, visible on close looking, and more so with enhanced digital technology reveals a corresponds to beadwork items in the Tsolo collection collected by the missionaries at St. Cuthbert’s.

PROBLEMS OF COLLECTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF BEADWORK

We can assume that the “Jubilee Dandies” photograph reflects beadwork and clothing styles current in the district around 1897, the date of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee, and the year of Frank Cornner’s arrival in Tsolo. The collection dates to the years between 1897 and 1934, and, because the denizens of St. Lucy’s Hospital had limited mobility—most, like Callaway, travelled largely on horseback—the collector/s probably did not move far afield from Tsolo. We can assume that they did their collect-
In looking at the problem posed by the collecting of beadwork, its status as art, and its relation to the body through photographic records, I turn from the idea of photography as a form of imperialist control that Mclintock (1995) and others have pointed to. I work rather with what Poole (1997:166) has called “the troubling spectre of intimacy” that ethnographic photography, and perhaps even more, missionary photography evokes. The problem sits to some extent in the ways in which photographs of bodies with beadwork are used as documents in the identification of persons by ethnic group, or of their garments as indices of actual dress-practice. Both the ethnographer and the missionary encountered the beaded body and recorded it, but with different degrees of intimacy, the anthropologist’s apparently archival, the other, the missionary’s, with intent—recording what they believed had to change. Thus Monica Hunter’s image of a Mpondo woman in a secular colonial context, possibly the local general dealer’s store, could be argued to stand as a, relatively objective, ethnographic record of a contact zone, one in which a “pure indigeneity” had been posited as problematic by the photographer-anthropologist. The other photograph, of

village dwelling, going in at a very strange angle, forwards, not on her hands and knees as a local would have done (Bester 1993). It was taken, probably, to indicate the awkward access to these apparently “primitive” homes, introducing an idea of missionaries as intrepid bringers of civilization and salvation into the context of collecting beadwork in the villages or in other spaces of colonial encounter. A photograph of a woman outside a trading store, taken in the early 1930s by Monica Hunter (later Wilson), ethnographer of (among others) the Mpondo and related Eastern Cape peoples, is just such a record of a particular space and kind of colonial encounter, but can also be used as evidence of a “setting” of a particular ethnic identity through the many beaded items and the white skirt that she wears (Fig. 6).
particular men identified as “Jubilee Dandies” in another contact zone, the mission context, and in the presence of men who have “changed/converted” (their clothing at least), stands as a record not only of hybridity, but of that which could not be allowed to last and which it was the aim of the mission to change.

The mission archives and their publications give various accounts of the history of this particular Anglican mission among the Mpondomisi and the histories of the Mpondomisi (and Mpondo). Peires (1981) points out the historical relations between different Xhosa-speakers is complicated by their rules of exogamy and the ways in which individuals identify themselves as subjects of particular ruling houses. Peires (2010) has recently argued that the Mpondomisi and Mpondo have the longest genealogy lists for their ruling houses among all the Xhosa-speakers and that this speaks to the length of their settlement in the area. Given this, one might expect that the dress and beadwork worn by the Dandies in the photograph and that collected by the missionaries would reflect particular identities, or act as identity markers of Mpondomisi, and possibly Mfengu, as opposed to Mpondo, Thembu, or Gcaleka. However, the correlations between beadwork and geographic locality in identifying an individual subject’s “ethnic” association are somewhat more problematic than appears from this evidence.

In recent research on nineteenth century Zulu beadwork—if beadwork can be “Zulu”—I have examined objects from Natal and Zululand in relation to nineteenth century photographs of persons, identified as “Zulu,” wearing beadwork. As has been demonstrated by numerous others, these photographs are often constructions made by the photographers, sometimes in collaboration with their subjects. A number of photographs of men recorded as having been taken by Captain J.E. Parish in the nineteenth century, now in the British Museum, are labeled “Kafir” (British Museum nos. Af,A5.35, Af,A5.45, Af,A5.9, Af,A5.8, Af,A5.7), but some others of the same individuals are labeled “Xhosa” or “Zulu,” and of two images of a single individual, one...
is labeled "Zulu" and the other "Ndebele"—the latter in a different album and attributed to a different photographer (British Museum nos. OC,A3.68, OC,A3.66). These photos are interesting in that the group images (e.g. Fig. 7) include, in different combinations, the same persons as appear in the individual photographs, almost as though they were models, whose costume does not change even though they are attributed different "ethnic" identities. In some senses they are photographic fables of a particular ethnographic curiosity. But are they unreliable as archives of what beadwork might be able to tell the observer about cultural identities?

Most of the evidence suggests that the things individuals wore for their appearance in front of the traveller's camera were probably largely their own, although some seem anomalous, especially a belt made of beads strung over grass coils, worn by a man with a snuff-spoon in his hair, and the key-pattern neck band of another man with feathers in his hair, whose belt has a clasp that is European. The beaded coil belts are largely recorded as women's wear in literature on Zulu beadwork (van Wyk 2003, Klopper 2000, Preston-Whyte 1994, Mertens and Schoemann 1975) and this could suggest that the photographer, ignorant of gender specificity, introduced this beadwork on a male body. However, rules of gender-specific dress among Zulu-speakers themselves were not so hard and fast that men might not have donned women's items. This is even more likely in studio images, in that the photographer's ignorance, as outsider, allowed the photographed subjects individual agency in bending indigenous rules and co-opting European elements. A similar ambiguity emerges from images of people wearing beadwork in spaces of colonial encounter outside the studio. The task, Poole (2005:172) suggests, "is to reclaim this sense of encounter without abandoning the possibilities for interpretation and explanation."

**EMBODIED AGENCY**

The beadwork with which we interact in exhibitions and museum stores is completely disembodied; it no longer has the kind of agency which it had when it was, or had the potential to be, attached to bodies. Its art status is contingent on this detachment, through which the designs of the beadwork are admired and the body is largely suppressed in, but not entirely absent from, conscious admiration of the object. The play between formalist appreciation of the objects' designs and the suppressed body is seen in museum descriptions of such objects such as the explanations of objects recorded in the British Museum (and other) registers.

In contrast to this, the photograph of the body wearing the beadwork foregrounds a relationship mediated by the fact that the camera is in the hands, and the resultant image dependent on the eye, of an outsider with an agenda embedded within an alien discourse of the primitive and the traditional. The line of men and women in "traditional" garb in the photo of "Jubilee Dandies" (Fig. 5) presents exactly such a mediated image. Their dress includes swathes of cloth of a type introduced via European trade and in increased supply from the early nineteenth century onwards. It functioned both as a sign of status within Xhosa-speaking societies and as an index of relatively acceptable and civilized dress giving access to the mission station. But the way it is worn by the "Dandies" was exotic to the mission station, where converts were required to wear clothing like the smock on the young boy in the next photo from St. Lucy's (Fig. 7) or the trousers worn by the men on the left of the Jubilee Dandies. The dandies' style of cloth use constitutes what Hansen (2005:118) refers to as the "experimen-
tal dimension to the wearing of dress,” or in this case, of wearing cloth that may not have been made for use as dress.

Dominating the second picture (Fig. 7) by her height is a woman with a cloth “turban” and long-stemmed tobacco pipe, wearing “traditional” clothing, and carrying a bag. But she is outshone by the (her?) child next to her—he is in the white smock of mission youth being prepared for catechism. If there was one thing that the “natives” and the missionaries could have agreed on, it was the connection of the color white to the spirit world—many of the diviners and spiritual healers (amagqira, sg. igqira) wore masses of white beads to index this connection (Hunter 1936). In the context of the mission, and among other colonists however, white cloth was contrasted with the red-ochered blankets worn by some Xhosa speakers. Godfrey Callaway (1905:7) offers an account of the contrast between his somewhat naïve anticipation, before his arrival at St. Cuthbert’s, of bartering with the “natives” for goods and the reality of the Eastern Cape trading store in which there was a railing separating customers according to whether they wore ochered clothing or not. One is left in little doubt that white cloth, such as that worn by the Mpondo woman in Wilson’s photo (Fig. 6), would have been far preferable, in his view, to the red-ochered skirt of the kind donated to the Museum in Dundee. The relative whiteness of the clothing thus indexed acceptance or relative exclusion of particular people in specifically delineated colonial spaces. The fact that the males in the Jubilee Dandies photograph (Fig. 5) turned up at the mission in white cloth, but worn “African” style, can thus be read as an almost postmodern irony, but certainly as a challenge to missionary rules of engagement.

This, then, returns us to the world of objects whose agency is investigated by Alfred Gell (1998). Woodward (2005), working with Gell’s notion of the status of objects as distributed personhood, suggests that clothing can be seen as a manifestation of an externalized self which is distributed through space. Each item, then, is part of an identity which can change, an identity which is externalized which is distributed through space. Each item, then, is part of an identity which can change, an identity which is opened up to the gaze of others and through which the agency of the material object is exposed. But what happens when the object’s connection with the body is stretched to an imaginary or to a merely recalled relationship, as is the case with all the objects in the collections that occupy the stores of the British Museum and others, and with the Tsolo collection in particular?

COLLECTING BEADWORK, COLLECTING BODIES

It seems that the objects in the Tsolo collection were assembled in order to maintain some kind of connection to or at least a record of the bodies of which they constituted distributed parts. This can be demonstrated through the fact that they were often collected as examples of things associated with different parts of the body—so many bags, collars, ankle bands, arm bands, belts, etc.—following a similar trend to that seen in the possibly earlier collection made by Alfred John Gregory, published by Stevenson and Graham-Stewart (2000). Some of this fixity in the notations of body functions for collected beadwork items, which I questioned earlier in relation to nineteenth century photographs, and which is replicated here, may be the result of the establishment of specific collection categories rather than frameworks outlined within the cultures from which the objects originally came.

According to Stevenson and Graham-Stewart (2000), Alfred John Gregory lived at the Cape between 1891 and 1914. During this time he made a collection that contains beadwork similar to the Tsolo collection: among these are four lace-like collars in blue, red, black, and white, identified as specifically Mfengu by Stevenson and Graham-Stewart (2000:54–55). This coloration is present in three of the ten collars in the Tsolo collection (Fig. 9), possibly all collected in Mpondomisit territory, along with one in blue, white, and pink, one in white and pink, and others in varying combinations of blue, black, white, and red (Fig 10). There is an example of such a collar in the British Museum (British Museum no. Af1416; see Nettleton 2012), donated by Henry Christy and predating 1872, which is identical in technique and very close in color range to the Tsolo and the Gregory collections, although most of the later ones have more rows and thus greater width across the chest of the wearer. The Christy example is almost identical to one illustrated in a watercolor illustration by Leila Hawkins (1862) of material on display at the 1862 International Exhibition in London, recorded as coming from Natal but subsequently labeled “Zulu.”

The Christy material establishes a date before which this technique for beading was employed in the area of Natal and the Eastern Cape, but the notation also introduces the problem of ethnic identity. Collars of this type are not usually associated with Zulu-speakers. Nevertheless, they cannot, on present evidence, be exclusively associated with any one Eastern Cape “ethnic” groups, even in terms of color combinations. Probably originally modeled on Western lace collars, they enhanced and enclosed the chest of the wearer (male or female) and they became icons of an indigenous “traditional” Eastern Cape dress. A collar of this kind was chosen by Winnie Madikizela Mandela for Nelson Mandela to wear, along with a candlewick bedspread as a wrapper, for his sentencing at the Rivonia trial, and recorded in the now-famous photographic portrait by Eli Weinberg (1962; Fig. 11). The collar and style of dress were intended by the Mandelas as a statement of resistance to an illegitimate regime, via an appeal to an indigenous ancestral legacy. However, while the collar’s “traditional” pedigree appears more certain than that of the candlewick bedspread, the latter was certainly not a completely unprecedented use of an imported form.
CONNECTING CLOTHING AT THE MISSION AND BEADS IN THE TSOLO COLLECTION

In the Jubilee Dandies photograph (Fig. 5), it is clear that the wrappers worn by the men are constituted of various stuffs, including shawls with fringes on the three men on the right of the images and what looks curiously like a quilted or candlewick cloth, edged with a band of darker color, around the upper torso of the man fourth from the right. The two men on the far right have wraps of lighter-colored embroidered or printed fabric, and the man second to the right has a dark fabric wrapper with larger embroidered motifs on it. These cloths, along with that around the shoulders of the man second from the right, were deliberately chosen for wear and are differentiated from the plain, heavy cotton sheeting commonly associated with “traditional” Xhosa costumes. The two women on the left and the man second from the right in this line wear, respectively, short and long wrap skirts made of such cotton sheeting, decorated with lines of bias binding or tape trim; the man’s lower wrap is decorated further with beads and crotals, all now considered canonical in “Xhosa” costume. Cloth worn without any tailoring was common in the Eastern Cape, but did not reflect an attitude to cloth as a whole unit such as that posited by Cohn (1989) in colonial India. It may nevertheless have reflected a similar resistance to colonial control of custom and modernity by combining the tailoring of paneled skirts with huge shawls and thus insisting on the stature given by voluminous cloth, albeit cloth which carries trace of colonial encounter. The revival of this form of dress in a less vol-

minous, more “modern” incarnation with the beaded collar by politicians in the 1990s could be seen as nativist revivalism, but within a postcolonial context it has lost much of its original sting of resistance, being, as Makdisi (1992) suggests, a postcolonial intellectual reaffirmation of a dubious “tradition.”

Interestingly, while none of the Jubilee Dandies wears one of these collars, of which there are ten in the Tsolo collection, much of the beadwork seen in the Jubilee Dandies photograph is replicated directly in that collection. Most visible are long front pendant panels in bead fabric with geometric designs on a white background worn by the three men at the center of the image, but their cotton shawls conceal all the ends of the necklaces. A number of these necklaces in the Tsolo collection have at the ends of their panels one or more snuff tins with the head of a British monarch, possibly Edward VII, son of Victoria, embossed on their lids (Fig. 12). The particular kind of snuff tin was sold separately, and
represented at least two English monarchs, was clearly prized by
the makers of these necklaces.28 Such tins are not merely indices of
commercial transactions, nor signs of a particular economic sta-
tus, which enabled the purchase of snuff. They were also an index,
as was the beadwork itself, of connectedness, with both a modern
world and an ancestral tradition, and possibly of recognition
of inherited status and social differentiation. The only published
object from this collection included a Vaseline tin of American
origin29 (Fig. 13) but this one is on a twisted rope construction, a
feature found in other items in the collection, and visible in one
of the necklaces worn by the four men at the center of the Jubilee
Dandies photograph. The use of these tins and their reference
to a world beyond—yet already encroaching on Mpondomi and
Mfengu people through both the mission at Tsolo—and trading
stores is also reflected in the use of regimental buttons from Brit-
ish uniforms on a beaded fringe belt/apron (Fig. 14) in the collec-
tion.

The man on the far right of the Jubilee Dandies photograph
has a Western style pipe in his mouth, reflecting a “swank” in his
attitude similar to that inherent in the inclusion of the snuff and
Vaseline tins on the necklaces. His pipe, of a European type, is,
however, left plain, in contrast to the locally made pipes in the
Tsolo collection which are covered in beads. The men to his right
have elaborate headgear of beads in various configurations, of
which some examples are to be found in the collection (Fig. 15),
and in another mission photograph, titled “Heathen Women”
(Fig. 16).30 Arm and leg bands, bags, and fringed aprons in vari-
ous forms and sizes that are present in numbers in the Tsolo col-
collection are, however, visible in the Jubilee Dandies photograph
only through close scrutiny.

The reasons for their lack of overt visibility may have to do
with what was considered appropriate dress for a celebration of
a British Jubilee on an Anglican mission station in Africa, and
on the gender of those photographed. The glimpses of the bare
upper torsos of the young men allow beadwork to be seen under
their upper shawls and around their waists. While the women in
the photograph appear, at first glance, to be wearing traditional
garb, a closer scrutiny reveals Western-style smocks under their
wrappers, with beadwork visible only around their necks and
waists. The woman second from the left has a bag hanging in
front of her lower abdomen: it is of a type very similar to one in
the Tsolo collection, except that it has not been beaded.

SECONDARY SCARIFICATION

The surface of one bag in the Tsolo collection (Fig. 17) has
beads strung and sewn at alternating angles in order to create
a rough texture, both visible and tactile, clearly differentiating
it from the smoothness of the fabric of the bag and clothing,
and, implicitly, of the skin.31 I have argued (Nettleton 2012) that
one of the functions of beadwork is to create a kind of second-
ary scarification on the body, introducing forms of punctuation
and thus of meanings in the field of unmarked and unclothed
skin. In the Jubilee Dandies photograph, large lengths of cloth
cover most of the skin of the bodies depicted, and so it is dif-
ficult to read beadwork in this way, but the effect of beads on
skin is visible to some extent in the torsos of the men whose
clothing does not entirely envelop their bodies. The contrast
between beaded items as extensions of skin, or as boundary
markers on the skin, and the function of cloth as a cover, a
mask for skin is clear in this image. Most of this beadwork is
worn at points of transition on the body—joints, waists, and
necks—at erogenous or sexually significant points—hips, pubic
areas, and breasts—and frames the head. Rarely does bead-
work ever really function to conceal bodily parts. Furthermore
a single item was used in many ways—so fringed aprons (Figs.
2, 14), most commonly recorded as being used to “cover” the
pubic regions of young girls, are, possibly arbitrarily, placed
at the waists of the men in the Jubilee Dandies photo. Simi-
lar fringes appear around the ankles of some of the men and
one woman. All of these indicate that beaded items were not
restricted in use, as is suggested in the categories employed by
Broster (1976) in classifying Thembu beadwork.32
For beads to become a second skin, they had to cling close to the body, move with the body, but also stand out from the body: the technical and formal means for ensuring this were developed to include the smallest details of the objects. Ends of fringes with larger or multiple beads in a knot are raised against the skin, and incidental elements such as buttons from British regi-
mental uniforms (Fig. 14) catch the eye because they stand out from the surface. In the Tsolo collection, a long rectangular beadwork pendant (British Museum no. Af 1933.6.9.36) has built-in trans-
verse fringes along its length and imitation mother-of-pearl but-
tons, allowing it to shine against the dark skin of its wearer.38

Interestingly, it is not just the human skin, the outer bound-
ary of the body, construed by Douglas (1966) as a bounded sys-
tem, that is marked by this form of dressing. It is also extended
to objects which may form part of either everyday or ceremonial wear, things distributed around the body which, when removed,
could, following Gell (1998), be taken as parts of a "distributed" body. What is interesting is that these extended parts of the self include other containers, some modified natural forms, like gourds decorated with animal hair, that index embodiment
and physical identities more than the beads do. But the yet-to-be dis-
tributed containers visible on the bodies of the persons in the
Jubilee Dandies photograph all appear to be manmade objects,
mostly acquired by barter with the Europeans.

One of the women has what looks like a round snuff tin, the
same shape if not the same make as the Edward VII-headed
specimens discussed above, while some of the men have what
appear to be cylindrical metal containers suspended on bead
strings from their waists. The bodies of these items are not beaded, unlike the gourds in the Tsolo collection which would

have served the same purpose as the miniature cans in the pho-
tograph, but accorded more closely with missionary expecta-
tions of “authenticity” through a use of a natural local material
as a base for the beads. The missionaries probably collected the
latter as a means of drawing a distance between their identity as
members of an industrialized society and the presumed primi-
tiveness of their potential converts.

**PROVIDING A MOTIVE**

**THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMPETUS AND THE COLLECTING URGE**

The Jubilee Dandies photograph (Fig. 5) and the photo-
graph of the Woman with the Child in a mission smock (Fig.
7) encapsulate both European missionary responses to indige-
nous culture and the uses they made of such photographs. In the
matron’s log from Tsolo, the arrival of natives for the jubilee cel-
brations at the mission are recorded, but without any detail. The
photograph provides this detail, but also reveals aspects of mis-
sion attitudes to the arrival of these Dandies. To the left are three
persons; one, cut in half by the vertical edge of the photograph,
who appears to be a “European,” is wearing jodhpurs and boots,
a wide-brimmed hat, and may have a pipe in his mouth. To his
right is a black man wearing Western-style clothing from his hat
to his leather shoes. Both look at the group of Dandies. A third
figure, rendered enigmatic by his partial masking behind the two
women, between whose heads he is visible, looks out at a dis-
tant point, not participating the othering gaze bestowed on the
“Dandies.” It is significant that this gaze is bestowed not only by
the settler missionaries, one of whom is possibly present in the
image and another behind the camera, but also by the converted
inhabitants of this contact zone.

It must, nevertheless, have been the othering gaze that motivated
the missionaries to collect the beadwork items and subsequently
to decide to bestow them on the British Museum and elsewhere.
The beadwork itself, in spite of its extraordinary quality of facture
and beautiful design, was deployed in types of objects with which
the missionaries could not engage on an ongoing basis. It was not
seen as equivalent to the sewing (clothes) and weaving (of items
not specified in the archival record) taught by the missionaries to
their converts (Callaway 1936). In a sense, the beadwork had to be
removed to a space in which its value as a curiosity of otherness
and its aesthetic quality could be appreciated without bringing the
missionary endeavour into jeopardy.

**THE TSOLO COLLECTION: THE AESTHETIC AND THE ARCHIVAL**

The examples in the Tsolo collection were clearly selected to
illustrate different techniques of beading and different design
principles, but whether the collector considered them “representa-
tive” or not is, of course, open to question. Some show definite
signs of use and wear. Others could have been made specifically
for sale to, or to fulfill an order from the missionaries. The gourds
themselves have bilobed bodies (Fig. 17) and are enveloped in
beaded fabric of the same range of colors as the beadwork that
“clothes” actual human bodies. They are all given long strings,
sometimes of the rope construction found on long necklaces, so
that they could be carried around the necks of their owners. The
pristine condition of the snuff containers in the Tsolo collection
at the British Museum may be testament to their being curios-
ity items rather than items of use among Mpondomisi or related groups. The collection even includes a snuff box (Fig. 18), of a type which had fascinated British collectors and observers from the 1860s, if not earlier, made from dried intestines and blood and in the shape of a bovine.

The question that this particular item then raises is the degree to which collections such as the beadwork items assembled at Tsolo can be considered archival or used as indexical of aspects of Mpondomisi culture in particular (if one can define a culture of a political entity) or of a putative more widely defined Xhosa-speakers’ culture. The collection certainly provides a date for locating the items and thus their style, facture, and materials on a timeline, although this can only be approximate because the items could have been made a long time before they were collected. The beaded items on their own also offer a clear sense of the design parameters of Mpondomisi and related beadwork in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and, if the collection could be seen exhibited or reproduced as a whole, it might engender a greater degree of respect for beadwork as a record of female aesthetic facture and for the role of the missionary in collating it. But, most importantly, in conjunction with the Jubilee Dandies photograph, the Tsolo collection enables us to acquire a sense of how beaded items might have been deployed on the bodies of Mpondomisi, Mfengu, or Tembu peoples and what their affects might have been. These affects can be considered aesthetic, political, and personal, talking back to European power, in spaces of European cultural domination, through a use of materials provide by the very presence of that power.

Anitra Nettleton is Chair and Director of the Centre for Creative Arts of Africa at the Wits Art Museum (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg). She has researched and published articles, chapters and books on historical and contemporary arts of Africa over three decades. Her present concerns include the relationships between histories and modernity as manifested in South African beadwork and “traditional” sculptural forms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She is also researching a project comparing modernism as it was manifested in artists of the Amadiozi group of the 1960s and its afterlife in the 1980s, with the modernity realized by rural artists of Limpopo and Mpumalanga. Anitra.Nettleton@wits.ac.za

Notes

The research for this paper was made possible by a research grant from The National Research Foundation (NRF South Africa). My thanks to Jim Hammill, Chris Spring, Heidi Cutts, and Catherine Elliott of the British Museum, and to Lindsay Hooper and Gerald Klinghardt of Iziko Museums for their time and access to the collections.

1. This is the only piece from this collection that has been published as far as I can tell. When I went to the British Museum in 2009 to look at the collection very few pieces had been photographed or placed on the website.

2. As far as I have been able to ascertain, this development in Southern Africa predates that on the more northerly parts of the East Coast of the continent by at least half a century. Seed beads were the preferred medium. See Kasfir (2007), Klopfer (2000), Bedford (1993).

3. Email correspondence, Pat Allen May 4–12, 2006, and March 14, 2007. This skirt uses bias binding trim and a number of beads sewn in diagonal patterns onto the red-ochrered cloth, along with white, pearl-essent buttons, and so is very like many later skirts and some worn by men in the photograph discussed later in this article.

4. His name is more correctly spelt Conner, but has been incorrectly transcribed into the RM records. Two further items from the same source were accessioned in 1934, having apparently been left out somewhere in the chain of transposition from Tsolo.

5. I did not see this object, as the enquiry “beadwork” did not pull it up. It is not photographed, but is listed on the British Museum web database (no Afs1933.0069.60).

6. The collection numbers 143 pieces, including some arrows, a club, a quiver, flywhisks, horn spoons, but these are far outnumbered by the bead items.

7. My thanks to Heidi Cutts, James Hamill and Christopher Spring for access to the materials and the archive.

8. The British Museum web catalogue had confused this Frank Corner with another, Dr. Frank Corner, and this led to something of a wild goose-chase in the search for the real donor. Thus I have given some detail about the real donor and the process of finding his identity here.

9. Thanks to James Hamill (British Museum) (personal communication 2010) for finding this information for me.


11. These archives are held in the William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My thanks to the staff there for their help with finding and copying material.

12. This led me to speculate that perhaps this was Frank Cornner’s wife, who may, if Mn is an abbreviation for Matron, therefore, at one stage, have written the log.

13. There are a number of references in the matron’s log to the times that Callaway and others of mission staff spent in the hospital as patients, to the baptism or confirmation of patients or converts, to “white” patients from Tsolo and elsewhere admitted to the hospital, but no reference to Frank Cornner, who must, by comparison with Callaway, have had a very healthy constitution.

14. The Iziko South African Museum in Cape Town has a large collection of material acquired by Frank Cornner in Tsolo and donated to the Museum from 1935 to 1948. It was accompanied by a long and continuing correspondence with the Curator in the Department of Ethnography, Mrs Margaret Shaw. In a letter to Shaw, dated 20th February 1936, Cornner says he has “made collections for the British Museum, The Pitt Rivers Museum, The East London Museum and 2 mission-ary societies in the homeland” (Iziko South African Museum Correspondence files C.135).

15. Correspondence between Shaw and Cornner 1935–1938 (Iziko South African Museum Correspondence files C.135).

16. In South-Africa the term “colored” was used to designate people of Indonesian “slave” descent and people of mixed-race ancestry.

17. Edwards’s (2002) arguments for recognizing the materiality of the photograph is clearly relevant here—the fact that one can/could handle the image, inscribe and reinscribe information on its obverse, is testament to its status as an object and to the impact of that handling on its reading.

18. The question of the ethnicity of the makers of the beadwork is not the main thrust of this paper. The Mission literature talks of the local population as Mpondo and Pondo MISISI, but Jeff Peires (email, February 18, 2012) postulates the latter to have been the main inhabitants of the area around Tsolo and their neighbors as Mfengu, particularly Amathlale.

19. Given that the log starts in 1902, it is difficult to establish which jubilee that might have been—I consider this again below in relation to the Jubilee Dandies photograph.

20. Monica Hunter (Wilson’s) book on the Pondoro (1956) is recognized as one of the first anthropological studies which took the colonial encounter into account when “describing” the people with whom she worked.

21. The only catalogue/publication to have dealt with the beadwork of the Eastern Cape, Ezakwantu (Bedford 1993) did not attempt to separate out different groups’ beadwork from each other in a sustained fashion. The only studies which have established catalogues of beadworks associated with particular Eastern Cape groups are Broster (1976), Nettleton, Hammond Tooke, and Ndambibi (1989), and Mertens and Gray (1973). This article is a small contribution.

22. This was first argued by Proctor and Klopfer (1993), but without a clear idea of how the contingency of urban conditions impacted on the construction of the traditional costume.

23. Callaway (1905) records how, at the trading stores at Tsolo, buyers would hold lengths of fabric up to the light to scan them for flaws in the weaving before they paid.

24. This is evident from many of the photographs reproduced in Ezakwantu (Bedford 1993) and analyzed by van Wyk (1993) in the same volume.

25. This was seen in a photograph of Yengeni and his wife taken at the opening of parliament in 1996—during Mbeki’s presidency when the search for essential African identities was particularly strong.

26. The possibility that traditional clothing is used as a speaking back to power is argued by Proctor and Klopfer (1993) for the Mandela photograph cited above but is not extended back in time. Once the historical dimension is addressed, the gesture of 1936 looks more hybrid than traditional.

27. The image is reminiscent of those on his coronation medal or coins. I have not been able to trace the origins of these particular tins. Blakemore (1976) claims that cheap metal snuff tins were manufactured in England from the 1700s by Thomas Bolsover and that the tradition of inserting images of “illustrious moderns” started in the Wedgewood factory (Blakemore 1976:69), while thousands of japanned snuffboxes were produced in the nineteenth century in a variety of western English industrial centres.
is listed on the British Museum web database (no where in the chain of transposition from Tsolo. some worn by men in the photograph discussed later in 2006, and March 14, 2007. This skirt uses bias binding Bedford (1993).

This image featured on a publicity brochure for the mission (Callaway 1935).

What one gains from an engagement with the beadwork objects in their material presence in the museum is an understanding of physical presence, of three dimensionality, something that is not really understood about beadwork from photographs, even where it is photographed worn on the skin.

Broster (1976) lists all the different kinds of Thembu beadwork with indigenous names and their functions.

A similar example, but with two long bands and fewer transverse fringes, is published by Stevenson and Graham-Stewart (2000:57, no. 23) as part of Alfred John's collection and identified as Mengu.

Robert Mann (1862) describes the manufacture of these snuffboxes, of which there are a number of examples in the British Museum, probably all acquired from the London International Exhibition of 1862.

In fact a single necklace from the Wellcome material acquired by the British Museum, and accessioned in 1863 (no. AF 583:11.83) has an old label that reads: "St. Cuthbert's Heather Beadwork, Necklace," indicating the degree to which the mission station became associated with a collection and a style of beadwork. My thanks to Catherine Elliott for bringing this piece to my attention.

References cited


Peires, Jeff. 2010. "He Wears Short Clothes!: Rethink- ing Rharhabe (c. 1715–c. 1782)." Paper presented at the 500 years Conference, Origins Centre University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, October.


