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Title: You Need Only One Bull to Cover Fifty Cows : Zulu Women and 'Traditional' Dress.

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You need only one bull to cover fifty cows: Zulu women and 'traditional' dress.

This paper tries to place the contemporary dress of married Zulu women into a broad historical framework. It therefore addresses the the problem of why, despite radical economic and political transformations, some of the present conventions of female dress have remained virtually unchanged since Shakan times.(1) By looking particularly at the history of the institution of marriage, it attempts to demonstrate how the meanings ascribed to, but also the roles of these conventions have been affected by the codification of so-called customary law and the growth of migrant labour. Given the paucity of information on past perceptions and interpretations of female dress it must be pointed out, though, that many of the observations which follow are necessarily speculative.

Unfortunately, the literature on African art is rather less than useful in its attempts to deal with the survival of artistic conventions. More often than not, historians of African art focus on the fact rather than the history of religious and cultural institutions. In effect, therefore, they alienate works of art from their own social and political histories. Taking little if any cognizance of the dynamic relationship between cultural institutions and the societies that produce these institutions, they usually argue that works of art embody essential or unchanging meanings. To some extent their reasons for doing so are understandable. Especially in Africa, where it is not uncommon for conventions of representations and dress to survive despite radical social and political transformations, it is tempting to assume that art remains unaffected by history.

Some attempt is now being made to question these essentially synchronic exegeses of the relationship of art works to cultural institutions by historians like Vansina.(2) A more dynamic perception of the relationship between art objects and their own social histories has also been developed through the study of so-called tourist art. (see, especially, Graburn,1976 and Ben-Amos,1977.) But as yet, no concerted attempt has been made to demonstrate how works of art might reflect these histories, except where there is some concrete evidence for a transformation in the style of the art object, or in the visual symbols associated with it.

In these terms, then, it would be possible to consider the history of the Zulu woman's top- knot (inhloko/isicholo) as a reflection of the dynamic interaction between a society and the arts it produces. Par-

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(1) For early descriptions of female dress in the Zulu kingdom see e.g. Fynn(1969:293-294); Gardiner(1836:100); and the illustrations in G.F.Angas' The Kafirs Illustrated (1849).

(2) Vansina goes so far as to suggest that "the potential of art objects to provide a better understanding of social history is so great that we could align example after example of different conclusions that can be drawn from such evidence and has not been, whether it is about the growth and spread of such institutions as associations, or about changing social strata, or about the evolution of statuses or roles, or about expressions of ethnicity. (Vansina,1985:205-6)

adoxically, though, one would also be forced to accept that her isidwaba (leather skirt) and isifociya (grass belt) embody immutable meanings. For the leather skirt(3) and grass belt have remained virtually unchanged since the early nineteenth century, whereas the top-knot has undergone several transformations both in form and in the materials from which it is made. Some consideration will be given to the history of this form, as also to the development of more recent conventions, like the tradition of wearing beaded aprons over the isidwaba, as well as shirts. But for reasons that will hopefully become clear, these later conventions will be dealt with briefly and in passing, while the development of the top-knot will be discussed separately from the more conventional forms of the isidwaba and the isifociya. In dealing with the isidwaba it will also be necessary to consider its relationship to the long, sometimes colourful shawls (izilembu) that women now wear. For although these cotton shawls can hardly be termed 'traditional', it was already quite common for women to wear leather shawls or 'karosses' by the 1850's.(See,e.g. Shooter,1857:88)

In discussing the more conventional forms of the isidwaba, isifociya and ulemba an attempt will be made to demonstrate that works of art can never be identical with the concepts that are ascribed to them. In other words, conventional symbols can be, and often are renegotiated. As Paul De Man suggests of allegorical resresentations, these conventions are repetitions of previous 'signs' with which they can never fully coincide.(De Man,1980:295) Yet more often than not, their survival also attests to a concern to preserve values and concepts threatened by transformation or extinction through rapid social change.(4)

A further problem is raised by conventions of dress. For in contrast to painting and sculpture, as well as other durable utilitarian artifacts, visual symbols are seldom appropriated for these (usually ephemeral) art forms, presumably because the labour involved does not justify it. Certainly there are some exceptions to this: among the Hausa, for example, gowns are often embroidered with elaborate abstract motifs that are given specific names.(See,e.g. Picton and Mack,1979:189-99) To some extent the different colour combinations and geometric designs now found in Zulu beadwork may be compared with these gowns, for they too are sometimes named or explained annecdotally.(5)

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(3) While the status of some women was formerly reflected in, for example, the tradition of wearing long leather skirts (see Gardiner,1836: 126), no attempt will be made to discuss these now obsolete forms of dress.

(4) Obviously, the potential value to African art studies of Godelier's essay "The Non-Correspondence between Form and Content in Social Relations: New Thoughs about the Incas" (Godelier,1977), is considerable.

(5) Like the designs on Hausa gowns, the patterns on Zulu beadwork are sometimes referred to as 'trees', and even 'stairs' or 'buildings'. See, also, Mayr's classic interpretation of colour symbolism in Zulu beadwork, "Language of Colours amongst the Zulu expressed by their Bead-work Ornaments; and some general Notes on their Personal Adornments and Clothing", Annals of the Natal Museum, 2:159-16 5, 1907.

Ultimately, though, this comparison merely serves to suggest that several complex and interrelated systems of communication may be invoked through visual forms. For despite the fact that certain types of beaded artifacts are reserved for married women, strictly-speaking this beadwork does not form part of the same taxonomy or symbolic system as their leather skirts, grass belts and, until the destruction of the Zulu kingdom, their top-knots as well: beadwork colours and motifs identify the institution or group to which a woman belongs, or the geographical area from which she comes, whereas her leather skirt, grass belt and, in the first instance also her top-knot, point to her marital status. In effect, therefore, while beadwork underlines the social differences between women, their leather skirts, grass belts and headdresses identify them as a group distinct from unmarried women and, in principle if not always in fact, now also from post-menopausal women. However, it will also be suggested that, given transformations in the form of the isicholo/inhloko, its position in these symbolic systems is less clear now than it was in the past.

It is also worth noting, firstly, that the beads that are now sewn onto the married woman's isifociya (grass belt) actually consist of detachable panels i.e. they are not sewn into the grass substructure; and secondly, that these belt are still made from locally obtainable materials despite the fact that beads have been freely available since at least the second half of the nineteenth century. In this respect the isifociya is actually unique, for no other beaded artifacts are sewn onto grass substructures.(6) Therefore, it may be argued that since the materials as well as the forms of the isidwaba and isifociya have survived, it is through these materials that symbols are constructed.

But before one can begin to consider how and why the meanings ascribed to these conventions are invented and ultimately renegotiated, it will be necessary to address several issues raised by the anthropological literature on the Zulu. In the first instance, because the social structures described in this literature obviously continues to inform both the individual experiences of Zulu traditionalists, and group relations in rural Zululand. But also because a description of these structures highlights social transformations that are crutial to a consideration of present attitudes to married women, and thus to their dress.

Zulu trace their desent groups patrilinially and residence on marriage is always virilocal. It is also generally but erroneously assumed that they are strictly exogamous.(7) Nevertheless anthropologists usually

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(6) There is one interesting exception to this: in some areas, women for whom all lobola cattle have been paid and who have therefore started growing their hair in preparation for putting on their top-knots, wear beaded belts sewn onto thin grass sub-structures.

(7) Despite assertions to the contrary (see, e.g. Marks and Atmore,1980:4 0), there is evidence to suggest that royal marriages were sometimes endogamous.(Stuart,1979:212) Today, moreover, Zulu who observe tradition do not appear to take these restrictions as seriously as might be expected. Young men and women sometimes say that it is better not to know the praises of your future spouse's isibongo .

imply, and sometimes assert that female experience is informed in several significant ways by what Ngubane calls the 'conflicting interests in the rules of patriliny and exogamy'.(Ngubane,1977:76) According to her

> A woman in a patrilinial society such as the Zulu provides a bridge which links through kinship ties some members of one corporate unit to another corporate lineage unit. In other words, in a polyganous family the man's children are united as siblings, but divided by their maternal relationship. This means that while a woman on the one hand represents her own lineage and forms a bridge between it and the lineage of her of her affines, on the other hand within the latter she forms boundaries and not bridges.... Thus she is a threat to the continued unity of the corporate group.(Ngubane,1977:91)

While Ngubane's exclusive focus on these 'conflicting interests in the rules of patriliny and exogamy' is problematic(8), this insistence on the Zulu woman's ambivalent position in her affinal home is certainly justified. Indeed, her potential outsiderness is first alluded to, through song but also dress, in her agnatic home at her 'coming of age' ceremony, at which she wears a borrowed isidwaba and isifociya. (9) It is highlighted, again, in the carefully orchestrated and ritualised antagonism between her agnatic and affinal relations on the second day of her three day wedding ceremony. The literature on the Zulu provides many examples of the fact if not the history of these experiences, which are usually said to continue at least until a woman reaches menopause. Thus, as Preston-Whyte points out

> Among the Nguni, while each new marriage union is welcomed and celebrated, the exclusiveness of the agnatic groups of the bride and groom is nevertheless suggested at every turn. The haggling over the bridewealth, the reluctance of the bride to enter the groom's home, the insulting songs and competative dancing so characteristic of Zulu wedding ceremonies all draw attention to the separate identity of the groups involved.... (Preston-Whyte,1974:203-4)

The object of these confrontations, the bride, is subsequently "hemmed in on all sides by various rules of...respect and avoidance

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(8) For instance, she ignores both the economic implications of marginalizing women,and tensions caused by prolonged separation of spouses. These problems will be addressed below. For an interesting critique of Ngubane see Murray,1981:152-3.

(9) Apparently, young women wear the clothes of married women at these (ukwemula) ceremonies to disclose their desire to become wives and mothers. But it is also said to protect them from the ancestral wrath of potential or future affines. This will be dealt with more fully below. The words to the songs sung at these ceremomies vary considerably, but usually include phrases like:"Induku enhle igawulwa ezizweni" i.e. a good person is found in another country, not your own.

(ukuhlonipha) "(Ngubane,1977:76), which express but also reinforce her outsiderness.(10)

The most important of these restrictions involve the initial avoidance of meat and milk, and sometimes for many years thereafter, the cattle byre and the great hut (indlunkulu). Hlonihpa of speech and wearing 'traditional' dress - although the latter is seldom dealt with in the literature - are also important. With the exception of Raum, though, most writers tend to abstract the concept of hlonipha from the lives of individual people. As he notes, these observances are

> never found implemented in any one family, in any particular individual. Each Zulu, and each lineage makes a selection that is determined by historical, cultural and economic circumstances and individual predilection. (Raum,1973:1)

It is extremely difficult (and for my purposes) probably unnecessary to try and quantify the relationship between these particularities. Suffice to say that women who wear traditional dress are usually wives of polygamists, most of whom work as migrant labourers. Those who live in close settlements (e.g. around Qudeni) were relocated from white farms in the early 1970's, others have lived in Zululand since birth, or left farms 'voluntarily' soon after the Second World War "because we heard that there was grazing for our cattle in KwaZulu." Few have any cattle left today.

However, the inescapable realities of migrant labour and rural poverty raise other, equally important particularities which may go some way in explaining why many married men still insist on their wives observing the hlonipha of dress, and even why there is evidence to suggest that the practice may be increasing. In most close settlements (resettlement villages) and now also in many older settlements there is often no grazing land, no cattle byres and no cattle.(11) Moreover, there is no need for language avoidances in a person's absence. (See Raum,1973:80) For both of these reasons, which are self-evidently beyond the control of migrant labourers, most women are thus freed from many 'traditional' hlonipha restrictions. And in the absence of these restrictions, it seems, female dress is used to express symbolically social (and economic) relations formerly articulated through other hlonipha observances. In this sense, then, the contemporary dress worn by married Zulu women is not only a conspicuous relic of past social relations, but one of the means through which men try to maintain control over their wives during their long absences from home.(12)

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(10)In the early stages of marriage a man must also avoid some of his affines and may not eat meat in his affinal home (Kuper,1982:185) but, as Kuper also points out, he is certainly not placed in the position of subordination that for a woman may last for the rest of her life.

(11) See, e.g., the memorandum prepared by the community at Mzimphophe, Qudeni, quoted by Platzky and Walker in The Surplus People, 1985:148-50. In many of these 'villages there is virtually no land for cultivation either.

(12) Between 1936 and 1970 the number of migrants from Zululand increased three-fold. By 1971 more than one out of two, and sometimes

It is important to point out, though, that men ultimately succeed in their attempts to subordinate women through these hlonihpa restrictions - insofar as it is still possible for them to do so - by appealing to the primacy of a non-material 'reality', controlled, not by them, but by their patrilineal ancestors. For this reason, the ideological implications of hlonipha practices cannot be separated from their role in defining a woman's relationship to her affinal ancestors and hence, also, as I hope to demonstrate, from the powers ascribed to her reproductive capacities.(13)

In recent years, women's reproductive functions have certainly become a major explanatory principle for their subordination. Generally-speaking, though, two quite distinct explanations are given for the role reproduction plays in their oppression. On the one hand, there is a tendency to argue that symbolic powers are ascribed to menstruating and, more particularly, married women who can still bear children, and that these powers are used to marginalise them(see, e.g. Douglas, 1966); while on the other hand, female subordination is linked to the need to control the means of production (subsistance and reproduction).(e.g Meillassoux, 1972) Both approaches have been criticised, the former because it fails to recognise that since gender identities are constructed, i.e.since they are not innate, they require historical analysis (Fox-Genovese 1982:14); the latter for inadvertently perpetuating androcentric and structuralist assumptions, but also for denying the autonomy of women's oppression.(see Mackintosh,1977; and Etienne and Leacock,1980;and Bozolli,1983) These objections are important and must obviously be taken into consideration. But like discussions on the implications of hlonipha restrictions, the present debate on the role women's reproductive functions play in their subordination tends to separate the symbolic from the political and economic aspects of female oppression. At least in the Zulu context, this is extremely limiting; for material and and cosmological concerns actually converge in the importance 'traditionalists' attach to cattle. It is consequently virtually impossible to address the question of why women wear leather skirts unless one accepts the fact that cattle are important both symbolically and economically. Moreover, it may be argued that, far from

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eight out of ten men were migrants. Most of these men now leave before they are twenty and only return permanently when they are in their fifties or sixties. (Natrass,1977:3) With growing unemployment in the 1980's, this situation appears to be changing. However, it would seem that it is mostly young, unmarried men who are affected directly by the present economic situation. The effects this has had on social relations in rural Zululand will be addressed briefly towards the end of this paper.

(13) It is unfortunate that Wright attempts to effect a separation between the fact of hlonipha observances and the implementation of these restrictions through the appeals men make to the power and potential wrath of their ancestors in his analysis of the control over women's labour in the Zulu kingdom. (see Wright,1983); for, as Godelier (and others) have pointed out, the subordination of women is "a social reality with three dimensions: economic, political and symbolic". (Godelier 1981:5)

reducing the importance Zulu now attach to cattle, the proletarianization of men and increasing pressure on available grazing have probably heightened their cultural or symbolic significance. Certainly cattle are constantly invoked, through metaphor, to describe admirable qualities in men, as well as relations between men and women. The corollory to this, it seems, is to speak disparagingly of outsiders (i.e. non-Zulu) by pointedly refusing them this compliment. In northern Zululand, for instance, people from the Msinga area, who are not considered 'Zulu', are often described as trouble- making izibhejane, i.e. black rhinoseroses.

Zulu ascribe cattle an important role in their cosmology, and in regulating relations between men and their patrilinial ancestors. (amadlozi) Indeed, it is usually through cattle that they maintian communication with their ancestors.(See, e.g. Berglund,1976:199) However, it is not clear exactly how they perceive this relationship. In some traditions which go back at least to the nineteenth century,and which are still upheld today, it is said that people came before cattle, while in other traditions it is implied that cattle existed before the creation of people. Both Krige(1936:410) and Berglund record traditions in which the sky is described as a solid blue rock. This rock is believed to rest on the earth, while the earth itself, "being a flat surface, is held up by four bulls, 'carrying the earth on their horns. When one of them shakes its head, then the earth also shakes'."(Berglund,1976:32) On the other hand, Callaway records that

> men say they possessed Amatongo [ancestors] as soon as they came into being.... It is not something which came into being immediately after men, which when they saw they said, 'Those are Amatongo'. They saw cattle indeed which came into being, and said 'Those are cattle', they having come into being immediately after themselves.(Callaway,1870:129)

The fact remains, though, that Zulu have constructed, and still uphold a worldview in which the ancestors, men and cattle are inextricably linked together. That they also believe that "cattle are inherited from the ancestors, and people often talk as though the ancestors themselves pay and receive bridewealth"(Kuper,1982:16-17), is hardly surprising. This, and the fact that today people still maintain that many ancestral spirits gather in the cattle fold of a man with a large herd, point to the very common tendency among Zulu traditionalists of conflating material and non-material concepts of wealth: a man with many cattle is rich in part because cattle afford him ancestral protection. Moreover, since cattle are inherited from the amadlozi,

> The cattle of a homestead are not the property on the father of the homestead only. They are equally the animals of the lineage shades.'When they (the shades) are complaining of hunger, they are calling for food from their own flock'.... Interference with a household's cattle is not merely an interference with the animal or the father of the homestead. It is an interference with the whole male population of the lineage, including the shades.(Berglund,1976:110)

This raises an important question, for, as Berglund implies, the relationship Zulu perceive between themselves and their ancestors does not appear to include women. Now, as in the nineteenth century, women

are usually said to assume the status of men once they become menopausal, i.e. they are freed from most hlonipha restrictions after they stop bearing children. (See, e.g. Krige,1936:93; Berglund,1976:121; and Brindley,1982:138). But while it was evidently possible, formerly, for them to achieve ancestral status in their affinal homes, today most Zulu insist that only men can become ancestors. Writing in 1870, Callaway argued that

> if there is a chief wife in a village, who has given birth to children, and if her husband is not dead, her Itongo ['spirit'] is much revered by her husband and all the children. And that chief wife becomes an Itongo which takes great care of the village.(Callaway,1870:140)

What is particularly interesting about this observation is the implication that some, if not all, women could achieve ancestral status through their contribution to the expansion of a husband's patrilineage. Any suggestion that women may be revered in their affinal homes after their deaths is now generally met with derision by men, although some women insist that female ancestors are still referred to generically on rare occassions.(14) Significantly, Raum's research pointed to an equally unequivocal position on the question of a woman's symbolic status in the 1950's. As one of his informants stated:"The spirit of a woman does not exist."(Raum,1973:73)

Given that there is very little corroborative evidence for Callaway's findings, one obviousy cannot ascribe them undue importance. Yet it is surely plausible to suggest that if a woman's symbolic status was formerly linked to her reproductive capacities, then that status is now often denied because her husband's wealth and power no longer depends on the number of his children. Resorting to such stark juxtapositions of past and present is of course to suggest a radical discontinuity between female experience in pre-colonial and colonial society. But while the crudeness of this contrast must be acknowledged, it nevertheless highlights transformations that are fundamental to the changed reality of women's lives in present-day Zululand.(15)

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(14) In the Nkandla district in the late 1970's Brindley (1982:38) found that male ancestors were invoked by name, while female ancestors were referred to generically. It is worth noting that all her informants appear to have been female. To some extent the present ideological struggles between men and women seem to find expression in their different responses to this question.

(15) It is worth quoting Murray in this regard, for, as he writes in Families Divided : "In default of adequate evidence to reconstruct the process of change in the rural periphery of southern Africa we are often reduced to a comparison of 'past' and 'present'. The past in this sense is a more or less hypothetical base-line, a reconstruction of traditional society that is contingent on our relative ignorance of pre-colonial conditions and which is largely derived from ethnographies conceived within a synchronic and functionalist paradigm. Such reconstruction is therefore undertaken with reluctance and with uneasy awareness that any simple periodisation of pre- colonial and colonial society or pre-capitalist and capitalist social formations can seldom accomodate the complexities with which we have to deal."

Despite the fact that women are now generally excluded from the ancestral realm, Zulu traditionalists attach considerable importance to the role their lineage ancestors play in marriage transactions, and hence to the relationship between women and their own (i.e. agnatic) ancestors. But if one is to understand the symbolic roles ascribed to cattle in these exchanges, it is important to realise, firstly, that while a numerically greater transfer of cattle is supposed to be made from the bridegroom to the bride's father, cattle also accompany the bride to her new home. The latter are known as the ukwendisa or imbeka cattle. Today, most ilobola cattle are what Zulu call cash-cattle, but where people still have access to grazing, there is usually no cash equivalent for the animals that go with a woman to her affinal home when she gets married.(See e.g. Reader,1966:194 and Berglund,1976:177) Secondly, the names of, and symbolic importance attached to particular ukwendisa cattle varies considerably from one area to another (See, e.g. Krige 1936:391-92), but always includes an animal known in most areas as the isikhumba/eyesikhumba beast (lit. the beast of the skin). And thirdly, it is now considered customary for two or even three cattle to accompany the bride when she leaves her agnatic home. It is essential to point out, though, that this tradition has changed considerably since the nineteenth century when it was customary in Zululand, if not always in Natal, for a single beast to go with the bride to her affinal home. (See, e.g. Shooter,1857:72)

Two important points emerge from the exchange of ilobola and ukwendisa cattle, both of which concern the woman's fertility. In the first instance, a woman's fertility is said to belong to her agnatic ancestors. For, "while the male shades are identified with the male fluid, those of the female are said to be associated with menstrual blood, both parties playing an important role in procreation." (Berglund,1976:253) From her fieldwork among the Nyuswa-Zulu, Ngubane suggests further that a woman "remains out of reach of the complete and entire control" (Ngubane 1977:90) of her affinal group until she can no longer bear children. She maintains that women are consequently regarded as potentially dangerous "as long as conditions of reproductivity prevail."(Ngubane,1977:66) This raises interesting questions about the exchange of cattle in marriage transactions. For it would seem that by linking a woman's fertility to her agnatic ancestors it becomes possible to accept as necessary the payement of ilobola. In fact, given that it is now customary for ilobola to be paid before marriage, Zulu generally claim that a woman's fertility may be withheld unless bridewealth has been paid in full. (See, also Kuper,1982:17)

The ukwendisa cattle are equally important to the married woman's fertility. For women always insist that unless these cattle go with them to their affinal homes they will never have children. (See, also Reader,1966:205; Berglund,1976:206ff; and Ngubane, 1977:61ff) It is therefore hardly surprising that it is to the cattle exchanged in marriage transactions that one must turn to understand why it is above all to their izidwaba, but also to their izifuociya that women attach the greatest importance in defining their marital status.

(Murray,1981:100).

Like the hides of ritually slaughtered animals, izidwaba are said to be imbued with ancertral power. Indeed, married women always point out that their leather skirts do not belong to them but to the ancestors. Uncertainty arises if one asks them whether they are referring to their agnatic or affinal ancestors, no doubt because the isidwaba is important in relation to both. Historically, though, this relationship was probably rather different from what it is now. For although women still maintain that their izidwaba are protective ancestral garments, and despite the fact that they also accept that these skirts may be perceived as concrete symbols of the control their agnatic ancestors have over their fertility, both they and their husbands tend to highlight the role of the isidwaba in hlonihpa restrictions. In other words, it is only possible to suggest that the isidwaba is a symbol of the married woman's fertility if one (re)constructs the history of its role in Zulu marriages; whereas its importance in protecting a woman's affines from the dangers of death and contamination ascribed to her reproductive capacities is generally understood. It will therefore be necesarry to consider the history of these relations separately.

Today, all married women say that their first leather skirts must be made from hides obtained from their fathers' cattle. It is for this reason only that the isidwaba, like the animals that go with her to her affinal home, may still be described as a concrete symbol of the control her agnatic ancestors have over her fertility. It is important to note, though, that no similar link is made between a man's fertility and his umutsha (isinene and ibeshu). For unlike the isidwaba, the umutsha has never been associated specifically with the institution of marriage; nor is it made from hides obtained from the man's own homestead. Men thus maintain that it is the umncwedo (prepuce cover) rather than the umutsha that protects the man's fertility (seminal fluid). Indeed, unless they wear the umncwedo when they put on their 'traditional' dress, their ancestors will think them naked and take offence. A woman, by comparison, is naked unless she wears her isidwaba and, now, also her ulembu or shawl and a shirt to cover her breasts.

Now, as formerly, the unmcwedo is a simple spherical 'box' woven from the fibre of various plants (see also Bryant,1949:135); but one of Stuart's informants maintained that a piece of oxhide was sewn into the the cover until Dingane's reign.(Stuart,1983:161) This might suggest that, in the past, the umncwedo, like the isidwaba, had to be prepared from leather obtained from a man's agnatic ancestors. Certainly, both it and the isidwaba are described as ancestral 'blankets' that enfold and protect the wearer. The same is also said of the umhlwehlwe or caul of fat which young women now wear in amakwemula (coming of age) ceremonies. These events, which are only held in December and on the Easter weekend when prospective husbands are home from the cities, are characterised by a conspicuous display of wealth - potential or actual dowry money pinned onto the young woman's head - a display which is symbolically reinforced through the caul of fat she wears. For fat is clearly an important symbol of wealth. Stuart makes a very interesting observation in this regard:

> A man in affluent or easy circumstances is said to be ncwaba (said of one who needs nothing), a word which is connected with the fat which is used for making a skin skirt or skin soft and pliable, or ncwaba. Stuart,1976:251

This statement seems all the more significant if one considers that the cooked fat of the umhlwehlwe may subsequently be used to soften the woman's first leather skirts.(16) It would thus appear that complex but subtle associations are made between notions of wealth (both material and symbolic), and the idea of ancestral protection. Clearly, though, these ideas are developed gradually and, insofar as they are symbolised in the isidwaba, they depend in part on its treatment with the fat of the umhlwelwe.

Rubbing fat onto the isidwaba is important for another, related reason. As one woman pointed out: "The leather skirt must never be washed; it must never touch water.The fat protects it against water." To wash the isidwaba, it seems, would be to wash away the woman's ancestors, and thus, also, the protection they afford her in her affinal home. The fat, like the isidwaba itself, thus guards the woman against the potential wrath of her husband's ancestors.

In The Powers of Presence, Armstrong (1983) makes an interesting comparison between what he calls "the aesthetic of virtuosity", arising out of the commodification of art in capitalist societies, and the "aesthetic of invocation." In most African societies, he argues, it is not the skill employed in the execution of art objects that is valued, but the spiritual powers that are invoked through it. As with the isidwaba, it is by pouring or rubbing substances onto the artifact that these powers are invoked. The object itself is otherwise meaningless i.e. it has no intrinsic value.

Given the paucity of information on ukwemula ceremonies in the nineteenth century(17), it is impossible to know whether notionsof ancestral protection was as important to the meaning of the isidwaba then as now. It would certainly seem, though, that in the past, a process of association not unlike that presently used to invoke the idea of ancestral protection, may also have been used to effect a link between the leather skirt (and perhaps even the woman's shawl) and the control her agnatic ancestors have over her fertility. It is worth pausing to consider both how this idea of fertility was ascribed to her dress and why it is no longer considered particularly relevant either to the symbolism isidwaba or to that of the ulemba.

The first isidwaba a woman owns is now put on after lobola has been paid in full, but before she goes permanently to her affinal home.(See,e.g. Krige,1936:136 and Reader,1966:194) However, at least until the late nineteenth century, it would appear that a direct association was made between this skirt (and probably also the leather shawl) and the beast that accompanied her to her affinal home. As Fynn observed, once slaughtered, the hide of this animal was generally

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(16) According to Ngubane (1977:61) the gall bladders from the beast slaughtered for the ukwemula ceremony are also kept and worn by the woman for her wedding ceremony.

(17) These ceremonies are now associated with the desire or intention to get married. But there is evidence to suggest that they formerly took place at puberty.(See Callaway,1866-8:182)

preserved for a petticoat for the bride, the dress which she then wears having been given new from her parents with a dress of beads.(Fynn,1969:297)(18)

Likewise, in his testimony to the Government Commission on Native Laws and Customs (1883:38) Shepstone pointed out that this beast was used to make a garment for the married woman: "It is usual ... after marriage for the girl to get an ox from her father or guardian to furnish her with a kaross...."

Notwithstanding the vagueness of, and apparent discrepancies between these two descriptions - and the fact, moreover, that it is impossible to make a leather skirt from a single ox hide - the ukwendisa beast that accompanied the woman to her affinal home was evidently used to make part of her dress thereafter. In other words, the beast supplied by her father to ensure that her fertility would go with her, and unite "the ancestors of the two desent groups" (Reader,1966:194), was subsequently sewn into a skirt (or possibly a shawl) for her to wear.

Of the sometimes three, but usually two beasts that accompany the woman to her affinal home today, one is generally kept to supply her with milk until the birth of her first child, while the other is still known as the isikhumba/eyesikhumba beast (lit. 'the beast of the skin'). (See,e.g. Berglund,1976:206 and Reader,1966:205) But as Reader points out, it is (now) only "nominally to make the bride a skirt."(Reader,1966: 194). In effect, therefore, the fact that the isidwaba (and ulemba) may be regarded as a symbol of the woman's fertility is less apparent now than it was in the past.

That neither is still made from the 'beast of the skin'is probably an indirect consequence of what amounted to a radical transformation of the institution of marriage through the codification in Natal of so-called customary law (1887/1891). For in an apparent attempt to obviate litigation over ilobola payments that a court would otherwise be unable to deal with, Clause 177 of the Natal Native Code of Law of 1891 stated that "All lobola cattle must be delivered on or before the marriage."(Natal Government Gazette,1891:1185) One of Stuart's informants reacted to this regulation by suggesting that it had transformed a pledge or token into "a final transaction between the bridegroom and father-in-law." He noted, further, that the law conveyed a totally false impression of the lobola custom by crystallising what was "indefinite and in a state of flux."(Stuart,1979:42) Until then it was customary for lobola payments to be made over a long period of time. It would in fact appear that these cattle were usually exchanged after the birth of children, not before a woman went to her affinal home.(19) Thus, as Stuart's informant also pointed out, lobola claims

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(18) Unfortunately, it is not clear either from Fynn's description or from other nineteenth sources what the woman wore on her arrival at her affinal home.

(19) In Natal as opposed to Zululand it was already common by the 1850's for high ilobola demands to be made and for these to be paid before marriage. See,e.g. Shooter,1857:49-50 and Welsh,1971)

in respect of a single woman could go on for generations.(Stuart,1979:42)

It could of course be argued that by engineering a shift away from the idea of "marriage as a process of becoming" (Comoroff,1980:38), Clause 177 of the Native Code of Law highlighted the exchange of cattle for a woman's productive rather than reproductive capacities at a time when men were being forced into the capitalist sector as wage labourers. But it also meant, in effect, that her affines assumed unequivocal rights to, if not control over, her reproductive capacities before rather than after she entered her new residence.(20) One might therefore suggest that since the Natal Code effectively destroyed the idea of marriage as "something indefinite and in a state of flux", it no longer made sense, thereafter, to use the "beast of the skin" and the isidwaba or leather shawl as symbols of the graduated process through which a woman's affines assumed rights to her fertility. It is interesting to note, though, that notwithstanding the separation of the leather shawl and the isidwaba from the 'beast of the skin', it is still customary for a woman to be given her ulemba at her wedding. This shawl, which is now made from cotton, is bought by her father, but passed on to her affines, who then give it to her on the second day of her wedding ceremony, the day on which the 'beast of the skin' is traditionally slaughtered. But even so, the dislocation between the married woman's dress and her fertility is now virtually complete. For the shawl, like the leather skirt, is constantly invoked in hlonipha observances.

Paucity of information on the isifociya makes it extremely difficult to reconstruct its role as symbol in the history of Zulu marriages. Nevertheless, it is probably relevant that while Zulu call these belts 'maternity' belts, and although most women claim that they only put on their izifociya three months after the birth of their first child, these grass belts are now also worn at weddings. Presumably because ilobola is now paid before marriage, the isifociya has assumed a new role: it 'announces' the woman's intention to produce children as soon as she enters her affinal home.

The period immediately after the birth of her first child is also the moment at which the woman begins to drink milk from cows belonging to her affines rather than one of the beasts she brings with her from her agnatic home - assuming, of course, that her husband still has any cattle. In this sense, then, the isifociya is a public declaration and affirmation of partial acceptance of her by the ancestors of her husband's patriliniage. On the other hand, the grass belt seems to affirm, through the materials from which it is made, the separateness of her identity as a woman and an agriculturalist. While this suggetion is necessarily speculative, it is certainly not inconsistent with the classification - in part, of course, through their contexts of display - of other materials like fat and leather.

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(20) There is considerable evidence to suggest that when the law was first passed, few ilobola debts were paid in full before marriage.(See,e.g. Natal Blue Books on Native Affairs,1901:B27). Today, however, prospective fathers-in-law are reluctant to allow women to leave their homes unless ilobola has been paid in full. This will be discussed more fully below.

Zulu now regard the exchange of ten head of ilobola cattle, also laid down in the law of 1891 but first introduced in Zululand in 1897, as customary and therefore binding.(21) The effect this law had on social relations throughout Zululand-Natal in the early years of this century, are well documented.(See,e.g. Welsh,1 971) Suffice to say, then, that when an attempt was first made to extend the law to Zululand in 1891, the rate was considered much too high. As the acting magistrate of the Ndwandwe Division argued, if one cosidered the

> rise in value and the difficulty of obtaining cattle now [presumably a reference to cattle losses in the civil war of the 1880's], a reduction in the lobola from 10 to 5 head in the case of commoner people, and the chieftain in proportion, would be advisable and I do not think it would be any hardship as the lobola in this district did not except in the cases of Chief headmen average more, but seems to have been from 3 to 7 head for common people.(Natal Archives 1/NGA 3|1|5:128)

If anything, this estimate was exaggerated. At least until the destruction of the Zulu kingdom, homestead heads had received perhaps two head of cattle for their daughters, and unmarried men with little or no cattle often borrowed livestock to meet their bridewealth payements. (See,e.g. Stuart,1976:317 and Bonner, 1983)

The events of 1896-7 when the rinderpest wiped out up to 90% of the cattle owned by peasant farmers in Zululand-Natal obviously exacerbated the problem of meeting the payments laid down in the 1891 law. But if the ilobola rate was too high at the turn of the century, it is even more unrealistic now. Recent studies on the distribution of livestock in rural Zululand indicate that there has been a steady decline in the availibility of cattle for ilobola and, of course, other purposes in the twentieth century. Indeed, despite substantial increases in population, the absolute number of cattle in Zululand has remained virtually unchanged since the early 1960's.(Clovis,1983:4) In 1980 the average herd size among owners was 8.5 head. But because there is also a large increase in homes without any cattle (especially in resettlement 'villages'), on average there was less than 3 head of cattle to every rural homestead in Zululand.(See also Lenta,1978:19) (22)

Unfortunately, these studies tend to equate the distribution of livestock with that of cattle, and thus ignore the importance of goats to the local economy. In this they are certainly not alone. As Kuper points out, anthropologists also forget

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(21) See Edgecombe (1978) for a discussion of attempts to introduce the Natal Native Code into Zululand before 1897.

(22) Although Gluckman was aware that the present ilobola rate had introduced through the Natal Code, he tried to explain the apparent stability of Zulu marriages in the 1940's, by arguing that "it is rare divorce that allows high marriage payement, rather than high marriage payement that which prevents divorce".(Gluckman, 1950:192)

> that goats are very important in many Eastern and Southern African societies, providing a major source of meat and milk. While they are not prestigious, they are in many contexts directly substitutable for cattle.(Kuper,1982:12)

According to him, Monica Wilson's recognition, in 1936, that among the Mpondo goats were used for bridewealth and in establishing good relations with the ancestors, is exceptional.

While he probably overstates the problem, it is nevertheless worth noting that in Zululand, during and immediately after the rinderpest, goats often replaced cattle in ilobola transactions.(Natal Blue Books on Native Affairs 1901:B33) And in some regions, like the lower Tugela valley where goats thrive on the thornbush vegetation, they were probably far more numerous than cattle even in the early nineteenth century. It is thus hardly surprising that in areas like these the leather skirts worn by married women are usually made from the hides of goats rather than cattle.(23) Furthermore, although anthropologists generally speak of the byre in the centre of a Zulu homestead as a cattle byre, these enclosures are usually divided into two sections, one for cattle, the other for goats. It would seem, also, that goats are sometimes used in preference to cattle for communication with the ancestors.(See, e.g. Ngubane,1977:4)

Clearly, though, even if goats are important to the local economy, one is still confronted with the inescapable fact that now, even more than as at the turn of the century, there is simply not enough livestock in circulation to meet ilobola payements. As was noted previouly, one way of coping with this is of course to convert cattle into what Zulu call cash-cattle. But this does not significantly alter the fact that, ever since the ilobola rate was first 'limited', the pressures placed on young men who want to marry have been enormous. As early as 1901 some magistrates urged that the rate be reduced to a reasonable number

> i.e. reduce the number of cattle from 10 head, valued at present at £3 each, to three head of cattle, valued at £2.10s each, and an industrious man would soon earn 37.10s".(Natal Blue Books on Native Affairs 1901:B1)

Seen against this background, it is hardly surprising that anthropologists often note, in passing, that they have come across cases of 'engagements' that have lasted from seven to eleven years because of the difficulty men experience in accumulating the cattle and cash needed to pay ilobola . (See,e.g. Vilakazi,1962:68 and Ngubane,1977:60) Today, the assistance fathers are able to render their sons is usually minimal. Certainly it is never sufficient to alter the

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(23) Two large cow hides or thirteen goat skins are needed to make a leather skirt. These skirts are now made by female specialists. In 1985, if one supplied the hides (as for the first leather skirt) the cost of having it cut and sewn was usually R19. If one did not supply the hides, the skirt could cost between R40 and R60, depending on the number of pleats sewn into it. It is worth noting that on average, since 1957, only 44% of available hides in Zululand, were sold to traders. (Lenta,1978:17)

anxiety and anger young men now express at the unrealistic demands prospective fathers-in-law make of them. With growing unemployment in the 1980's, they are not only unwilling, but increasingly unable to comply with these demands.

At the same time, it is also becoming more difficult for married men to exploit the labour of their wives. Non-cultivation of land as a result of lack of capital(Lenta, 1981), and consequently, an increasing reliance by women on the remittances of migrant labourers (Natrass,1977), is an inescapable reality in present-day Zululand. The tensions and conflicts thus produced between men and women are exacerbated by male obssesion with the very real and practical issue of possible female adultery.(24) It is not uncommon for migrants to insist, for instance, that their wives always return to the homestead before dark, especially in their absence. Despite the obvious financial burden, they also argue that it is better to have two wives than one: the first wife will guard the second wife if there is no mother-in-law to do so. Among some groups, male insecurity has even led to the reinterpretation of the custom called ndiki - cutting off the final joint of the little finger. In the literature on the Zulu, this tradition is said to point to contact between San gatherer- hunters and the Natal Nguni (Marks,1969:32); alternatively, it is characterised as a distinguishing practice of some chiefdoms formerly north of the Zulu kingdom.(Harries,1983:21) Today, Ngubane and some Dhlamini regard it as a test of paternity. According to them, the final joint of a child's little finger is buried in the cattle byre soon after birth. If their ancestors do not recognise it as belonging to them, the child will bleed to death.(25)

Since pregnangy may signify a loss of authority rather than a gain of off-spring, married men constantly invoke the spectre of female infidelity as a reason for insisting that women observe hlonipha restrictions; but more especially, that they wear 'traditional' dress as concrete, visible evidence of the control their husbands have over them. Generally-speaking, men affirm this right by arguing that since a woman belongs to her husband, i.e. since he has paid ilobola for her, she belongs to his ancestors. She must therefore obey and respect them i.e. observe hlonipha restrictions at all times.

If ambiguity has been the price of survival in a contradictory world (Marks, 1986:14), then it is certainly possible to argue that this affects actions and attitudes in the domestic as well as the political sphere. For despite (or possibly because of) the threat of female infidelity, migrants are often explicitly preoccupied with their own

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(24) The fact that men are regarded as the sociolgical fathers of any children their wives may bear, does not alter their obvious sense of insecurity in this regard.

(25) As Vignes points out in her admittedly uncompromising attack on the oppression of women by their migrant husbands: "Nothing is more dangerous than rites robbed of their significance and surviving in a changing world. Men clutch these forms with even a greater determination as they feel the earth is shifting under their feet."(Quoted by Cutrufelli,1983:72)

sexuality. Thus although most of them still uphold polygamy as an ideal "because a man with many wives is respected", and often speak of children as a gift from their ancestors, it would seem that many wives and many children is increasingly considered positive testimony of male virility. As one migrant explained: "You need only one bull to cover fifty cows." It is interesting to note that Clegg talks about the ideology of ubunkunzi or bull-ness in umqonqo dances. As he points out

> The Zulu use the bull as a symbol of manhood, virility, achievement, courage. It is [by] looking at the bull that certain kinds of attitudes, both in the dance and the fight, are developed."(Clegg,1981:13)

In addition to the emphasis migrants place on hlonipha restrictions and 'ownership' of their wives in their insistance on women wearing 'traditional' dress, men now seem to regard this convention as concrete evidence of the survival of values and customs that are quintessentially Zulu. Accordingly they argue that women who wear 'traditional' dress are the custodians of Zulu culture. Yet migrants also differentiate themselves unequivocally from their wives in the observance of these customs. Even at weddings, they often wear suits rather than amabushu , thereby asserting a cosmopolitan or urban identity for themselves. That they do not regard this as contradictory seems, in part, to depend on women affirming the existance of an ethnic identity for them. Furthermore, although most men still own 'traditional' clothes, which they wear on occassion to communicate with their ancestors, they generally buy their leather front- and back aprons at urban markets like Kwa Mai-Mai in Durban road, Johannesburg.(26) Alternatively, but far less often, these aprons are puchased from izinduna, some of whom make and sell them in rural Zululand.(27)

A concern with preserving Zulu "tradition" is certainly not a phenomenon of the 1970's and 1980's, nor is Zulu ethnic consciousness a grass-roots movement. On the contrary, as Marks has demonstrated, the first Inkatha movement was forged in the 1920's through an alliance between the Zulu royal family and the amakholwa (Christian) intelligensia to gain state recognition for the Zulu monarchy.(Marks,1978) And it has since been reaffirmed through movements like the Zulu Culture Society in the 1930's and, ultimately, the reemergence of Inkatha in 1975. But as a response to social dislocation and the transformation of social relations in rural Zululand, this consciousness - which has clearly been redefined though the present Inkatha movement's emphasis on traditionalism - can no longer be distinguished from the attitudes and actions of most migrants. For many of them, it seems, it is now virtually impossible

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(26) There is an interesting article on Kwa Mai-Mai in Drum ^March, 1951. At that stage 'traditional' carvings were also sold at this market.

(27) Izinduna still tend to have far greater access to cattle and goats than other Zulu because serious disputes are often settled through fines in livestock. It would seem, also, that they have the right to appropriate the skins of the few wild cats and and small buck that are sometimes trapped in mountainous and forested areas. These are generally used for decorative trimmings on leather aprons.

to separate the idea of being Zulu from that of being a member of Inkatha. As one migrant explained: "Inkatha is for the people. Zulu like Inkatha because it prevents them from fighting." It would appear that for most of these migrants membership is not necessarily a matter of choice; nor, for that matter, is attendance at Inkatha meetings. In outlying rural areas, moreover, local chiefs keep (female) residents informed of all decisions made in Ulundi. Here, Inkatha is a household word, and its repeated appeals to women to observe Zulu custom, although met with fear and suspicion by Chistians, is generally acknowledged with pride by traditionalists. Thus whatever the origins of Zulu ethnic consciousness, it has filtered down to every traditional rural homestead. But while Inkatha provides authoritative affirmation for those who observe tradition, it is not without some irony that it now also alienates Christian Zulu.

The fact that female rather than male dress is regarded as one of the means through which this ethnic identity may be preserved is further illustrated by Inkatha's insistence on women wearing 'traditional' clothing to many of its public functions.(28) Most recently, its appeal to the idea of women as the custodians of an ethnic identity threatened by the onslaught of corrupting forces, especially promiscuity, has led to the revival of the umlangha (reed) ceremony, last perfomed during King Mpande's reign. Thus, in 1985, more than 2000 young women gathered at the royal residence of King Zwelethini carrying bundles of reeds from which they constructed a large hut. Drum reports that

> In his speech in front of a crowd of about 12000 people, King Goodwill said he reintroduced the Umlhanga ceremony in an attempt to bring a sense of morality and self-dicipline which seems to be on the decline in some women of today. King Goodwill added that the ceremony will help to produce young women who take pride in their bodies in a competative display every year and to fight pre-marriage pregnancies which are a social and religious problem that is even creeping into the schools.(Drum , January 1986:32)

Generally-speaking, women who observe tradition respond positively to the recognition events like these afford them. On the whole they also accept, in principle, that it is necessary to pay respect to their affinal ancestors by wearing 'traditional' dress. Indeed, they usually insist that they have no choice in the matter. If they refrain from wearing their isidwaba and, less importantly, their inhloko, except when washing or sleeping, they will incur the wrath of their affinal ancestors: illness or, worse, death can often be traced back to the fact that they took off their traditional clothes when there was no-one to witness them doing so. According to them, the potentially serious consequences of such transgressions can only be obviated by slaughtering an animal from their agnatic homesteads to appease their husband's ancestors.

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(28) With the exception of the king and the chief minister, few men wear traditional dress at these functions. But rural women who otherwise do not wear traditional dress(i.e.Christians) are often forced to borrow clothes from 'traditionalists' should they want to attend these meetings.

Yet there is often a significant gap between what women say and what they actually do. While they always talk at great length about potential ancestral wrath, they often add, when asked, that they are not wearing their 'traditional' dress on a particular day because it is too hot, or because they simply did not feel like doing so. This tendeny to flaunt 'tradition', even though women clearly accept the intimate relationship men perceive between themselves and their patrilinial ancestors, and despite the fact that they welcome the acknowledgement they receive from Inkatha, may be ascribed to several factors. Firsty, men are now seldom home to enforce hlonipha restrictions. Thus unless women live in homesteads under the control of a mother-in-law it is unlikely that anyone will take their transgressions seriously. Secondly, in the absence of men, women are often forced to ignore the restrictions traditionally placed on them. For those who still have access to cattle, entering the cattle byre, milking cows, and plowing fields with the aid of draught animals may be a matter of survival rather than choice. But perhaps most importantly, the unreliability of migrant men, who tend to send remittances home on an irregular basis despite the fact that women are now forced to rely increasingly on the financial support of their husbands, mitigates against their acceptance of restrictions for which they are unlikely to receive any actual or material compensations.(29)

The desparate economic situation in which women (married and unmarried) now find themselves and from which, generally, there is no escape(30), probably also accounts for the survival - and since the 1930's even revival - of celebrations for Nomkhubulwana (The Heavenly Princess).(See Krige,1968:173) While this figure was formerly credited with being the mythical originator of beer and the useful arts as well as agriculture (see,e.g. Samualson,1929:303), Berglund points out that in recent years, young women who uphold the tradition do so out of fear of remaining unmarried and because of "the daily struggle for sufficient food in heavily populated areas".(Berglund,1976:72-3) It would therefore seem that while married women are increasingly ignoring the symbolic controls men try to impose on them, unmarried women, usually with little or no prospects either of employment or marriage - especially if their fathers insist on high ilobola payments - are upholding and even reconstructing symbols through which their own experiences can be articulated.

In is also worth noting that while married women maintain that they can only be freed from wearing 'traditional' dress when they become menopausal (because of the danger of their fertility to their affinal group), individual case histories seem to suggest otherwise:illness,

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(29) In 1971-3 rural households produced a third of their needs, while migrants sent home perhaps a fifth of their earnings.(Natrass,1977) The annual per capita income in KwaZulu was less than R200 in 1980.(South African Institute of Race Relations,1983:412)

(30) Although, by 1971 more than one out of two and sometimes eight out of ten men from rural Zululand were migrants, the ratio of male to female migration was 6:1.(Natrass,1977:3) Not surprisingly, women believe that opportunities for employment are virtually non-existent.

leaving a homestead under the control of a mother-in-law, and even personal choice are sometimes cited. Significantly, though, the latter reason is usually given only by women whose hubands do not work as migrants. But in all instances a woman's affinal ancestors must be informed of the decision. Her clothes are then usually buried, for, as one woman put it:"The isidwaba can never be thrown away. It would be like throwing the ancestors away." In rural Zululand, then, complex but often contradictory reasons may be cited for the fact that married women still wear 'traditional' dress. For although old reasons and old meanings have been transformed, many of them have simply been overlaid with new reasons and new meanings.

The inhloko/isicholo has certainly not escaped this process of mutation and renegotiation. On the contrary, its transformation as symbol has been so great that women now ascribe it very little importance in the observance of hlonipha restrictions. Under the Zulu kings and among several other Nguni groups who paid tribute them (Welsh,1971:63), the top-knot, like the male headring (isicoco), was a symbol of the right to marry, which was usually granted to entire male and female regiments at the annual First Fruits Ceremony. At least until the 1930's, it seems, this tradition was still upheld, since women from a single district often put on their top-knots at the same time.(De Jager,1937:44)

Today, women start growing their hair as soon as all the ilobola cattle have been paid. But as a symbol of their marital status, the top-knot differs in several important respects from the isidwaba and isifociya. Firstly, like beadwork, it now attests to regional (and institutional) variations; secondly, although women still grow their hair, the inhloko of today is usually detachable; and thirdly, the tradition is not unique to married women. The hair of new born babies and isangoma is also cut and then allowed to grow. In many respects, growing one's hair is simply one of many ways - like pouring gall over one's body - of invoking ancestral power. (See Berglund,1977:127) But for married women it is also a symbol of the control their husbands have over them. To cut their own hair would be tantamount to wishing their husbands dead. Consequently, if a woman cuts her hair it is a sign of her intention to leave her husband.

Moreover, unlike the leather skirt and the grass belt, the top-knot attests to historical processes that are not directly related to the history of Zulu marriages. For the development of new, more elaborate top-knot styles among the Chunu and Tembu in the second half of the nineteenth century is one of many indications of their attempts both to differentiate themselves, and to assert their independence from the Zulu kingdom.(See Stuart,1976:315 and Bryant,1949:153- 155) Today, however, the 'pillar-box' style once associated with the Chunu has been adopted by most women in northern Zululand and, more generally, by members of the Shembe church. On the other hand, the wide, flaring inhloko once associated with the Tembu, is now worn by all women south of the Tugela as well as those women in northern Zululand who come from, or trace their ancestory back to the Msinga area. 'Horn-like' top-knots (amabhuje) are a more recent development. Women now wear these at home because they are more comfortable that the other types, especially the decidedly top-heavy flaring isicholo of recent years.

Like the other two styles, the latter type also originated south of the Tugela, probably in the mid- to late 1950's. But given the constant migration of people from the more over-populated south into northern Zululand, it had made its appearance in the Mhlabathini area, and elsewhere, by the mid-1960's. Initially, though, like all other things (and people) from Msinga, it was frowned upon. Raum records that in the Buthelezi ward, the chief decided to prosecute women who adopted the new style

> since in his opinion, the fashion struck at the root of hlponihpa custom. Gatsha's half-brother assaulted his wife and refused her food

when she untied her old top-knot. But fashion and comfort ultimately won out against men and the ancestors. For whereas, formerly, it was also an important hlonipha practice to put red ochre or blood on the top-knot (see,e.g. Stuart,1983:170), women no longer regard this as important, nor do they attach any significance to the fact that they still paint some inhloko red - now usually with shoe polish. Finally, it is worth noting that these styles all originated among groups who are not considered to be - and who still choose not to regard themselves as - Zulu.

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