Intloya Iphuma emasini: Investigating the functional significance of *AbaThembu* beaded necklaces to signify the transition from boyhood to manhood.

BY

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Abstract

This research delves into the significance of beaded necklaces in shaping male gender identity within *AbaThembu* cultural group, particularly during the transition from boyhood to manhood. Grounded in Heritage Studies, the study investigates how these traditional artistic expressions represent male gender identity. Beadwork, an Indigenous art form often overlooked by colonisers and traditional art history, takes centre stage. The focus is specifically on beaded necklaces, crucial in differentiating boyhood from manhood and shaping male gender identity within *AbaThembu* cultural group. Employing qualitative methodology, the research examines beaded necklaces from collections at Walter Sisulu University and insights from interviews with *AbaThembu* cultural experts and beadwork artists. Semi-structured interviews, relevant literature, and a theoretical framework were utilised to better understand these necklaces' cultural meanings and significance. This study aims to provide a nuanced perspective on how beadwork functions as both an aesthetic and artistic expression and as a fundamental aspect in shaping and upholding male gender identity within *AbaThembu* community. The outcomes of this research will contribute to broader conversations in Heritage Studies on the role of indigenous art forms in identity formation and shed light on the cultural practices of *AbaThembu*, underscoring their significance in contemporary society. By addressing a crucial gap in the existing literature, this research extensively analyses the cultural importance of beaded necklaces as instruments of identity and tradition within this cultural context.

Keywords: *AbaThembu cultural group, Beadwork, Male gender identity, Boyhood to manhood transition, Heritage Studies, Indigenous art forms, Identity formation, Cultural practices, Cultural preservation and African heritage.*

Key Words

1. **African Indigenous Art:** Creative expressions, including visual arts, expertise, music, and dance, originating from Africa's diverse Indigenous cultures. These art forms are deeply connected to traditional beliefs, rituals, and community life, often passed down through generations and embodying African societies' spiritual, social, and cultural values.

2. **Beadwork:** The skill of creating decorative items, such as artwork, jewellery, garments, and accessories, using beads made from various materials like glass, stone, or seeds. In Africa, beadwork often carries significant cultural symbolism, representing social status, gender, age, and rites of passage, particularly within Indigenous communities.

3. ***AbaThembu* Culture:** The customs, traditions, and practices of *AbaThembu* people, a subgroup of the Xhosa nation in South Africa. *AbaThembu* culture emphasises communal life, ancestral reverence, rituals, and the importance of beadwork and traditional ceremonies in defining social roles and identities.

4. **Male Identity:** The characteristics, roles, and behaviours associated with being male within a specific cultural, social, or personal context. Male identity is often shaped by societal expectations, rituals, and traditions that define manhood and masculinity.

5. **Cultural Symbolism:** Using symbols or practices to convey meanings, beliefs, or values within a specific culture. Cultural symbolism can be seen in art, rituals, clothing, and language, where certain items or actions represent broader cultural concepts.

6. **Rituals and Ceremonies:** Formalised actions, often religious or cultural, performed in a prescribed manner to mark significant events, transitions, or celebrations in a community's life. Rituals and ceremonies may include rites of passage, initiations, weddings, and spiritual offerings.

7. **Colonialism and Decolonisation:** Colonialism refers to the practice of domination and control by one country over another, often involving the exploitation of resources and suppression of Indigenous cultures. Decolonisation reverses colonial impacts, reclaims autonomy, and revitalises Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and identities.

8. **Art History:** The academic study of the development and significance of art over time, focusing on various movements, styles, and cultural contexts. Art history often involves the analysis of visual works, their creators, and the cultural influences that shaped them.

9. **Rites of Passage:** Ceremonial events marking significant transitions in a person's life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, or death. These rituals often initiate individuals into new roles within their community, reinforcing cultural values and social structures.

10. **Spiritual Protection:** Practices or objects believed to safeguard individuals from harm, negative energies, or evil spirits. In many African cultures, spiritual protection may be sought through rituals, charms, beadwork, or ancestral intervention.

11. **Female Diviners**: Women who are believed to have the ability to communicate with spiritual entities, ancestors, or deities to provide guidance, healing, or insights. In many African cultures, female diviners play a crucial role in spiritual and social life, often serving as healers and counsellors.

12. **Traditional Dances:** Culturally significant dances performed by Indigenous communities that embody spiritual, social, or ceremonial meanings. Traditional dances often accompany ceremonies, storytelling, or communal celebrations, preserving cultural heritage and reinforcing group identity.

13. **Social Status and Identity:** A person's position or rank within a society, often determined by factors like wealth, occupation, family, or cultural heritage. Social status is closely linked to one's identity, influencing how individuals are perceived and treated within their community.

14. **Patriarchal Societal Structure**: A social system in which men hold primary power and authority, particularly in roles of leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control over property. Patriarchal structures often define gender roles and expectations within a society.

15. **Masculine Identity:** The traits, behaviours, and roles traditionally associated with being male, as defined by cultural and societal norms. Masculine identity encompasses attributes like strength, leadership, and responsibility, often influenced by cultural rituals and expectations.

16. **Symbolic Representation:** Using symbols and images to represent abstract ideas, concepts, or beliefs. Symbolic representation is prevalent in art, culture, and rituals, where items or actions carry deeper meanings related to spiritual or social values.

17. **Regalia of Royalty:** The ceremonial garments and jewellery worn or carried by royalty during official functions or rituals. These Indigenous art forms symbolise the authority, status, and sacred role of the monarch or leader within a cultural context.

18. **Leadership and Heritage:** The transmission of leadership roles, values, and cultural knowledge from one generation to another within a community or society. Leadership and heritage are closely intertwined, with leaders often serving as custodians of their community's traditions and history.

19. **Power and Status:** Individuals hold influence, authority, and prestige within a social hierarchy. Power and status can be derived from various sources, such as wealth, lineage, occupation, or cultural significance, and are often expressed through symbolic means like clothing, titles, or rituals.

20. **Cultural Continuity:** The ongoing preservation and transmission of cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions from generation to generation. Cultural continuity ensures the survival and resilience of a community's identity despite changes and challenges over time.

Plagiarism Declaration

I, Augustine Zukisa Madyibi, affirm that the content presented in this thesis is entirely my own. Any use of external work has been duly credited with the prescribed referencing style. I have neither replicated nor rephrased any portion of another individual's work without appropriate citation.

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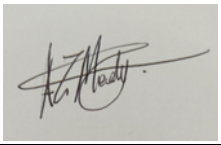
Signature: 

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Glossary

Term	Language	Definition
Ulwaluko	*Xhosa*	*A male initiation ritual is a traditional ceremony designed to signify the transition of boys into manhood. The ritual often encompasses various cultural practices and teachings that instil values, responsibilities, and the significance of manhood within their respective societies.*
Umkhwetha	*Xhosa*	*A male individual undergoing the initiation ritual resides in a lodge constructed from grass, which is intentionally secluded from the community for the duration of the ritual. Once the period is concluded, the lodge is burnt with every item that was used during the period.*
Ibhoma	*Xhosa*	*A structure specifically designed to accommodate individuals undergoing initiation processes.*
Ikhankatha	*Xhosa*	*In the context of initiation rituals, the traditional role of the caretaker is to guide and support the initiate throughout the duration of the ceremony. This individual is responsible for overseeing the initiate's experience, ensuring that they are prepared for and can navigate the various aspects of the ritual.*
Ikrwala	*Xhosa*	*Recently graduated initiate.*
Imbola	*Xhosa*	*Homemade red ochre that is traditionally used to moisturise a newly graduated initiate following the removal of white ochre, which the initiate applies during the initiation ritual process. This practice highlights the significance of these natural substances in ceremonial rites, where red ochre symbolises vitality and new beginnings.*
Umgidi	*Xhosa*	*The homecoming ceremony is a celebratory event held to honour the newly graduated initiate. This occasion features a variety of festivities, including a feast with meat and drinks, as well as the presentation of gifts to the graduated initiate. Members of the community, along with friends and family, gather to partake in these celebrations, fostering a sense of unity and support for the graduate.*
Ubudoda	*Xhosa*	*The responsibilities that accompany the transition to manhood involve various duties*

		and expectations that individuals are expected to uphold once they reach this significant stage in their lives.
Umnqayi	*Xhosa*	*A traditional club that is often carried by individuals who have reached manhood status within certain cultures. It serves not only as a symbol of maturity and strength but also as a practical tool in various contexts.*
Intlabi	*Xhosa*	*A specific individual within the family who holds the important role of conducting ritualistic animal sacrifices during ceremonial events. This person is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that these rituals are performed according to tradition and significance, highlighting the cultural and spiritual importance of such ceremonies.*
Intonjane	*Xhosa*	*The initiation ritual for females among the AbaThembu and other isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups is a significant cultural practice that marks the transition from girlhood to womanhood. This ritual traditionally involves various rites, teachings, and ceremonies that are designed to prepare young women for their roles in society. It reflects the values, beliefs, and practices of the community and plays an essential role in preserving cultural identity and continuity.*
Ilobola	*Xhosa*	*Traditional negotiations between the families of the bride and groom-to-be. It is an essential part of establishing a relationship for marriage. These negotiations are typically hosted by the family of the bride-to-be. A significant item in this ceremonial process is the Uswazi ceremonial knobkerrie, which plays a crucial role in the discussions and proceedings of the negotiations.*
Uswazi	*Xhosa*	*A ceremonial knobkerrie, which plays a crucial role in the discussions and proceedings of the negotiations.*
Uduli / Umendo,	*Xhosa*	*A traditional ceremony of uniting two families through a celebration known as Umdudo. Therefore, Uduli is initiated by the bride's family through gifting the groom's family and bringing homeware for the newlyweds. Therefore, Uduli is a synonym of Uduli.*

Ubufazi	*Xhosa*	*Understanding the responsibilities linked to womanhood involves recognising various societal, cultural, and personal expectations. These responsibilities can encompass a range of roles, including those related to family, career, and community engagement. Women often navigate duties such as caregiving, professional development, and active participation in social and civic life. Additionally, there may be expectations around self-care, advocacy for gender equality, and mentorship.*
Ubuntwana	*Xhosa*	*Childhood is often associated with a variety of expectations that can significantly shape a child's development and experiences. These expectations may include reaching certain developmental milestones, such as walking and talking, as well as attending school and forming social relationships. Understanding these expectations is crucial for parents, educators, and caregivers to support children's overall well-being and development effectively.*
Imbeleko	*Xhosa*	*A ceremonial tradition is often conducted to introduce a new family member to their ancestors. In certain families, this ritual includes a beaded necklace made exclusively of white beads, which is given to the new member during the ceremony. This practice serves to symbolise the connection between the new member and their lineage, honouring the traditions and ancestors of the family.*
Ingqithi	*Xhosa*	*A ceremonial tradition practised to welcome a new family member and honour ancestral connections. This ritual involves the symbolic amputation of the first segment of the ring finger or pinky finger on the left hand. The severed portion is then buried in the household kraal, which serves as a significant site for preserving family heritage and lineage.*
Ukuhlonipha	*Xhosa/ Zulu*	*Refers to the act of showing respect, admiration, or recognition towards someone or something. It involves acknowledging the contributions, achievements, or qualities of an individual, a group, or even a concept.*
Ubuntu	*Xhosa/Zulu*	*An African concept, primarily from Southern Africa, that emphasises the interconnectedness of all people and is often*

		summarised as "I am because we are". It is a social philosophy based on principles of compassion, dignity, and m
Iingxoxo	*Xhosa*	*To facilitate the process of reaching a consensus or agreement among the participants.*
Ubukhosi	*Xhosa/ Zulu*	*The term refers to the condition or role of holding a leadership position within a cultural group. This involves guiding, influencing, and representing the values, practices, and interests of that community. Leadership in this context can encompass various responsibilities, including fostering cohesion, promoting cultural identity, and facilitating communication within the group.*
Umphafa	*Xhosa*	*An indigenous tree. The branch of this tree plays a significant role in cultural ritual, particularly during the ukulandwa kwabantu abadala, which is a traditional event among AbaThembu and other isiXhosa-speaking groups. This tree is often utilised in various rituals, highlighting its importance in their cultural practices.*
Ukuhlalisana	*Xhosa*	*Harmonious coexistence refers to the ability of different groups, cultures, species, or individuals to live together peacefully while respecting and valuing their differences. This concept is significant across various contexts, including ecology, sociology, and international relations. Overall, the principle of harmonious coexistence is about finding the balance between diversity and unity, allowing for a more enriching and sustainable existence for all parties involved.*
Umtshotsho	*Xhosa*	*A traditional dance of boys and girls from the AbaThembu community and other isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups serves as a pivotal rite of passage closely tied to the preparation for ulwaluko.*
Intlombe	*Xhosa*	*Traditional dance that is performed exclusively by men who have completed the ulwaluko initiation process. This dance holds significant cultural importance and is a demonstration of their cultural heritage and identity.*
Ibhasi	*Xhosa*	*The married men's dance in AbaThembu community takes place after the Intlombe and Umtshotsho dances, which are part of the age grouping system. Participation in this dance is limited to men over thirty years*

		old, with the exception of those who have recently gotten married.

Chapter One

1.1. Introduction and Background to the Study

This research critically examines the significance of beadwork[1] in shaping *AbaThembu*[2] male identity within isiXhosa-speaking[3] communities, focusing on the transition from boyhood to manhood, known as *ulwaluko.*[4] Based on lived experience, *ulwaluko*[5] is a traditional rite of passage for boys aged 18 and older, involving circumcision and a separation period of three to six weeks. During this time, *umkhwetha*[6], resides in a temporary *ibhoma*[7] with *ikhankatha*[8], who guides manhood and other initiates (Sakhumzi Mfecane 2016: 204). The focus is to examine how traditional artistic expressions convey male identity within their cultural context, such as the beaded *Isidanga* necklace ***(figure 1)***, *Ithumbu*[9] wide-collar neckband ***(figure 2)***, and *Ipasi* headband ***(figure 3)***. The forthcoming chapters will engage in a comprehensive examination of the cultural significance attributed to the selected beaded artefacts within *AbaThembu*[10] community. The beadwork analysed comes from the Broster Beadwork Collection (BBC) at Walter Sisulu University (WSU).[11] However, the reliance on institutional collections, notably the BBC at WSU, raises concerns about colonial collecting practices and epistemic erasure. Acquired from Joan Broster ***(figure 4)*** in 1992, this collection, amassed between 1952 and 1965, exemplifies the historical trend of Euro-American extraction of Indigenous cultural materials. She gathered the collection while living at Qebe village in Engcobo District in the former Transkei Homeland of the Eastern Cape.[12] During the gathering of this collection, apartheid was fully enforced in South Africa, leading to widespread

[1] Beadwork as an indigenous art form encapsulates the spiritual and communal values of the people, serving both practical and symbolic purposes (Lara Heese, 2007: 46).
[2] The research project will not use "The" before *AbaThembu,* isiXhosa-speaking, amaXhosa, or isiXhosa terms in the text.
[3] IsiXhosa-speaking and amaXhosa terms are used interchangeably in this project.
[4] The male initiation stage is one of such graduation stages, marked by a specific ritual to introduce the individual to his new counterparts and ancestors (Madoda Cekiso & Thenjiwe Meyiwa, 2014: 76).
[5] This research project will use italics for All isiXhosa terms and language.
[6] The initiate.
[7] A lodge made out of dry grass and tree branches.
[8] Refer to the initiation ritual guardian.
[9] Plaatjies wears his original *nobaxa* necklaces during performances, a cultural artefact gifted to him after his initiation in 1979. This highlights his strong connection to his personal identity and cultural heritage (Sandra Klopper, 1993: 64).
[10] AbaThembu endured severe repression under the apartheid state and its collaborator, Chief Kaiser Matanzima, becoming primary victims of the Bantu Authorities Act (Jongikhaya Mvenene, 2013: 27).
[11] Established on July 1, 2005, WSU resulted from the merger of Border Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon, and the University of Transkei.
[12] Broster was born at Qebe in the Ngcobo district, where her family owned a trading post since 1875 (Daily Dispatch 1992, 8).

discrimination and significant human rights violations. It institutionalised racial segregation, suppressed resistance movements, and reinforced white minority rule (Erik Stolten, 2005: 122).

During the colonial era, European traders controlled the supply and distribution of glass beads[13], significantly impacting how Indigenous South African communities accessed and used them. This manipulation created disparities in bead availability, as some groups had better access to specific colours[14] and designs than others. Over time, these variations reinforced and altered existing cultural distinctions among ethnic groups such as isiXhosa, isiZulu and isiNdebele. Van Wyk (2003: 27) asserts that " …translucent red beads implied a heart inflamed with love and pink implied poverty in reading isiZulu-speaking people's beadwork. However, the meaning of each bead depended on its syntactical placement between neighbouring beads." The interpretation of bead colours is deeply influenced by cultural context, with meanings varying significantly across Indigenous communities. While Van Wyk's statement emphasises the importance of colour symbolism in isiZulu's beadwork, it oversimplifies beaded communication by reducing meanings to fixed definitions. For instance, in isiXhosa culture, red beads symbolise vitality, strength, and ancestral reverence, not romantic love, showing that colour interpretations are culturally specific. Additionally, the claim that pink represents poverty in isiZulu contrasts with its symbolism in other groups, where dusty pink is linked to adulthood and royalty, as seen among *AbaThembu.*[15] The arrangement of beads is vital, but meanings are also shaped by historical, social, and ceremonial contexts, carrying layered messages beyond mere colour associations. This analysis highlights the need for nuanced, localised interpretations of beadwork rather than generalised external frameworks (Costello, 1990: 17).

[13] Pascale Nourisson (1992: 19) noted, "Explorers and missionaries used beads and cowries as currency and gifts. The slave trade developed in the region, which became known as the Slave Coast."

[14] For someone with a basic understanding, the beadwork of the southern Nguni, noted for its prominent use of white, blue, red, and pink beads, distinctive delicately outlined geometric designs, and specific types of body adornments, can be set apart from that of the northern Nguni in Natal (Lindsay Hooper, 1993: 81).

[15] *AbaThembu* has been associated with *Ama-Lala*, as they were initially recognised to coexist in what eventually became known as Zululand, the original settlers of that region in South Africa before the arrival of *Aba-Mbo* in Natal in 1620 (John Soga, 1930:466).

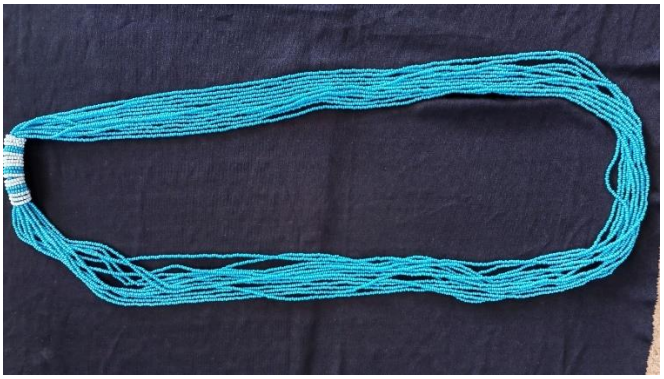

Figure 1 – *Isidanga* necklace *(AbaThembu)*. Nokhanyo Gana's collection. Photographed by Zukisa Madyibi

Figure 2 – *Ithumbu/ Ingqosha/ Unobaxa* wide-collar neckband *(amaMfengu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archive

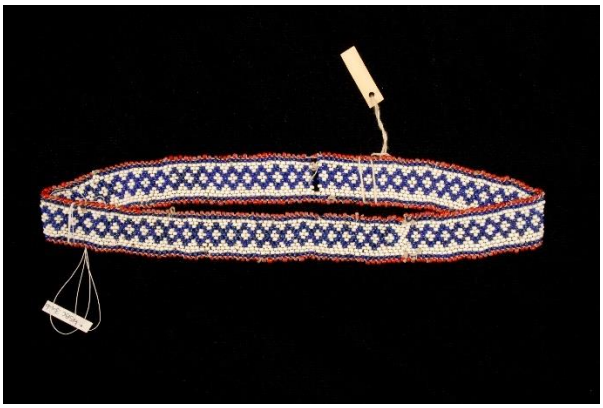

Figure 3 – *Ipasi lentloko* headband *(amaGcaleka)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archive.

The Walter Sisulu University Beadwork Collection (WSUBC) highlights the significant role of beadwork colour in shaping the identity of isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups. The introduction of colourful[16] glass beads transformed traditional artistry and created new opportunities for artisans and merchants in African societies. Initially brought to Southern Africa by Arab slave traders, the Portuguese later increased their supply, followed by the Dutch and English. The Portuguese established extensive trade along the east coast, introducing beads crafted by skilled Venetian artisans. An estimated 80 million beads arrived on the East African coast between 1508 and 1509, with some eventually reaching the Xhosa through established trade routes (Costello 1990: 2). Like other African societies that adopted colourful glass beads among isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups, the colour of beads has played a vital role in identity formation. For instance, *AbaThembu* primarily uses turquoise blue with red, white[17], and navy accents. In contrast, older individuals prefer navy and white, complemented by dusty pink. *AmaMfengu* favours dusty pink, blue, and white, often combining deeper blue and pink for wide collars. They also incorporate more dusty pink beads than other Xhosa-speaking societies. Additionally, *amaMfengu* uses red, black, and dark blue beads on a white background for their large, beaded tabs featuring animal and human shapes (Barbara Tyrrell, 1968:177). *AmaMpondomise* traditionally did not use green and yellow in their beadwork, favouring blue, dusty pink, red, and white, often enhanced with black and white amaso. *AmaXesibe* incorporates green and orange from their wool pom-poms into their designs. The standard colours of isiXhosa-speaking cultural group's beadwork include white, dusty pink, blue, and red, outlined with black and navy. Variations exist, with *amaGcaleka* preferring bright turquoise blue contrasted with red, navy, and white, while older generations often substitute dusty pink for red. Overall, *amaMpondo* beadwork is characterised by blue with accents of white, orange, and black (Costello, 1990: 17).

The following presents the vernacular colour nomenclature assigned to beads by *AbaThembu* cultural group.

- Turquoise blue – *Intsimbi ehobe* (a dove): the hue represents fidelity, peace, and protection

[16] The range of available bead colours is unclear, as are the effects of colour changes on design. Fluctuating colour trends have caused some traders to struggle with sales and incur financial losses (Costello 1990: 17).
[17] White beads represent positive qualities such as love, purity, goodness, happiness, virginity, and good luck. In contrast, black, green, pink, yellow, blue, and red beads can convey mixed interpretations that typically fall into positive or negative categories (Buyisiwe Xulu 2002: 20).

- Red – *Intsimbi ebomvu*: is associated with vitality, power, and sometimes danger or mourning.
- White – *Intsimbi emhlophe*: signifies purity, spirituality, and transition in life stages.
- Navy – *Intsimbi emsobo*: associated with adulthood and royalty.
- Dusty pink – *Intsimbi emurugwane*: associated with adulthood and royalty.
- Yellow – *Intsimbi emthubi*: conveys wealth, prosperity, and fertility.
- Green – *Intsimbi eluhlaza*: is linked to growth, renewal, and well-being.

In unpacking the use of beadwork in courtship among *AbaThembu*, a research participant, Nokhaya Maphetshane asserts that:

> *Emandulo phaya, xa intombi isihlukana nenkwenkwe ngezizathu ezithile. Intombi yayigayela loomlingane wayo ingasavisisani naye intsimbi yomqala. Sasisebenzisa ke instimbi emthubi ingaxutywa neminye imibala. Kutheni nje sisebenzisa lombala umnye? Isizathu yinto yokuba imbi intsimbi engaxutywanga okokuqala. Ubonakalisa ukuba imbi into ondenzele yona. Lombala umthubi awunxitywa ngamakhwenkwe. Yayilihlazo ukunxiba intsimbi etyheli yayikubeka elubala ukuba uyarhaqaza okanye uyahula ngokwalemihla siphila kuyo. Xa umnika wayesazi ukuba iphelile into ibisidibanisa ngaphandle kocacisa okanye iingxoxo.*
>
> In ancient times, when a girl and boy separated, the girl would craft a yellow necklace for her former partner, symbolising the end of their connection. Yellow beads were used exclusively, as this colour signified something negative, indicating that the relationship had soured. Wearing a yellow necklace was considered shameful, suggesting infidelity or playfulness. She conveyed without words that their bond was over by giving it to him.

The significance of beadwork colour in *AbaThembu* and various isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups' traditions transcends mere decoration, serving as a visual language that communicates profound emotional, social, and cultural meanings. In this context, yellow beads symbolise the separation between a boy and a girl, emphasising beadwork's communicative power in expressing sentiments that words may struggle to convey. Here, yellow embodies negativity, representing the end of a relationship and carrying implications of shame, infidelity, or untrustworthiness. Crafting and presenting a yellow necklace is not just symbolic; it is a public declaration of the emotional and social ramifications involved, highlighting beadwork's role in shaping social interactions. This practice illustrates how colour in beadwork functions as a vital storytelling medium, reflecting shared cultural values and reinforcing societal expectations around relationships and personal conduct.

The study highlights the valuable contributions of researchers on the beadwork heritage of isiXhosa-speaking communities while noting a significant gap in understanding the cultural significance of colour in these groups. This issue is prevalent in Global North museums, which

often lack metadata and reflect a colonial perspective that prioritises aesthetics over sociocultural meaning, thereby silencing many African voices. Researching historical objects from Africa in European ethnographic museums reveals that their records are often unreliable and subject to numerous alterations (Anitra Nettleton 2016: 503). This prompts crucial questions about the motivations behind the collection: was it genuine cultural preservation or merely a way to satisfy Western cravings for decontextualised African materials? The absence of contextual information limits meaningful analysis of beadwork's significance in cultural identity formation and reflects the collector's disinterest in engaging with originating communities. This study addresses this imbalance by moving beyond the archival silence surrounding the collection. It seeks to present beadwork not merely as a static object of Western interest but as a dynamic expression of *AbaThembu*[18] knowledge, identity, and cultural continuity. As an insider and curator of this often-overlooked collection, I am committed to honouring *AbaThembu* community by critically examining its positionality. My goal is to amplify the voices of *AbaThembu* people and challenge colonial narratives. This research examines beads as materials and reflections of culture, practices, and beliefs. I aim to reinterpret the selected beadwork pieces through active dialogue with local communities. Grounded in Heritage Studies, this research employs a self-reflexive approach to explore how we can better acknowledge the historically marginalised knowledge practices surrounding *AbaThembu* beadwork (Njabulo Chipangura, 2023: 111).

In the European encounter with *AbaThembu*, Fank Brownlee (1923: 20) states that:

> AbaThembu, as they term themselves, the Tembu or Tambookies, as we term them, were found by shipwrecked seamen in 1688, occupying the country between the Bashee and the Mtata rivers, and there they were still living at the commencement of the present government.

This colonial perspective reveals a profound Eurocentric bias, undermining *AbaThembu* agency and historical continuity. Dismissing Indigenous self-identification as they term themselves in favour of colonial names, "Tembu or Tambookies" asserts colonial authority. The claim that *AbaThembu* were "found" by shipwrecked seamen in 1688 perpetuates the myth of European discovery, erasing their pre-existing presence, governance, and history. The implication of a static existence, "still living", denies their dynamic historical trajectory.

[18] *AbaThembu* has been associated with *Ama-Lala*, as they were initially recognised to coexist in what eventually became known as Zululand, the original settlers of that region in South Africa before the arrival of *Aba-Mbo* in Natal in 1620 (Soga John,1930:466).

Framing their existence within the context of colonial rule further subjugates their history to the coloniser's timeline. This narrative misrepresents *AbaThembu's* continuous inhabitation and justifies colonial intervention by portraying them as passive recipients of European "discovery" and governance.

Figure 4 – Joan Broster chats to *Tembu* friends. Broster (1976): The Tembu[19]: Their Beadwork, Songs and Dances.

The term "Xhosa"[20] used by Global North researchers to refer to IsiXhosa-speaking cultural groups is problematic. This oversimplification has resulted in significant cultural misinterpretations in their research. It is essential to recognise that isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups consist of distinct communities, including *amaGcaleka, AbaThembu*[21]*, amaMpondo,*

[19] This pronunciation, "Tembu", as opposed to *AbaThembu*, is based on Broster's publication titled The Tembu: Their Beadwork, Songs and Dances.
[20] It's incorrect to refer to all these individuals as the Xhosa (Hammond-Tooke & Nettleton, 1989:39).
[21] Above and beyond the problematic nature of this framing of Mandela, there are several elementary mistakes in almost all the biographies. A common mistake is that Mandela was both Thembu and Xhosa. This is based on the flawed notion that the Thembu and the Xhosa are the same people because they speak the same language (Xolela Mangcu, 2019: 1035).

amaMpondomise, amaBomvana, and *amaXesibe*[22], which are all represented in the WSU BBC. Despite their common isiXhosa language[23], these subcultural groups diverge in their cultural backgrounds due to their allegiance to different kings, each holding genetic sovereignty over their respective groups, for instance, King *Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo* of *AbaThembu* ***(figure 5),*** a rightful heir to *Sabatha Dalindyebo.*[24] Upon closer examination of the beadwork collection, it becomes apparent that the underlying concepts behind bead weaving techniques vary among these groups. The use of beaded objects varies among different groups, with specific techniques and significance known only to the artisans of this Indigenous art form, as there are few written records on *AbaThembu* beadwork artistry. Traditionally, *AbaThembu* women[25] have been the primary creators of traditional beadwork, passing their skills on to the youth. This practice can enhance educational outcomes, as beadwork incorporates scientific, technological, and mathematical knowledge, potentially encouraging learners to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. The collection has the potential to play a crucial role in both preserving and deepening our understanding of the cultural heritage of isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups[26] (Carina Rozani & Nomalungelo Goduka, 2017:135).

[22] *AbaThembu*, *amaXhosa*, *amaMpondo* and *amaMpondomise* are the indigenous kingdoms in the former Transkei. *amaBomvana*, *amaBhaca, amaXesibe* and *amaQwathi* arrived later (Mvenene, 2020:3).

[23] Language is not invariably a determinant of individual identity. The incorporation of the Mpondo dialect by individuals of Zulu heritage exemplifies the influence exerted by the local environment on diverse social groups residing within that context. This phenomenon highlights the complex interplay between linguistic and social identities, illustrating how external factors can shape and transform cultural expressions within a community (Nokuthula Cele, 2016: 279).

[24] The chieftainship of *AbaThembu* has experienced cyclical changes over nearly two hundred years. This evolutionary pattern observed in the process has rendered the topic of chieftainship a characteristic of the pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial, and democratic periods (Drusilla Yekela, 2011: 4).

[25] Women were the ones who discovered methods to create these contemporary forms using beads, altering both skin and fabric garments, as well as the bodies involved in the process. Their skill in beadwork and sewing was handed down from generation to generation well into the mid-twentieth century, and it continues to thrive in the beaded products available for purchase in South African cities today (Nettleton, 2012:233).

[26] African art's most ancient surviving instances are beads crafted from mollusc and snail shells (Evelyn Simak & Carl Dreibelbis, 2010:26).

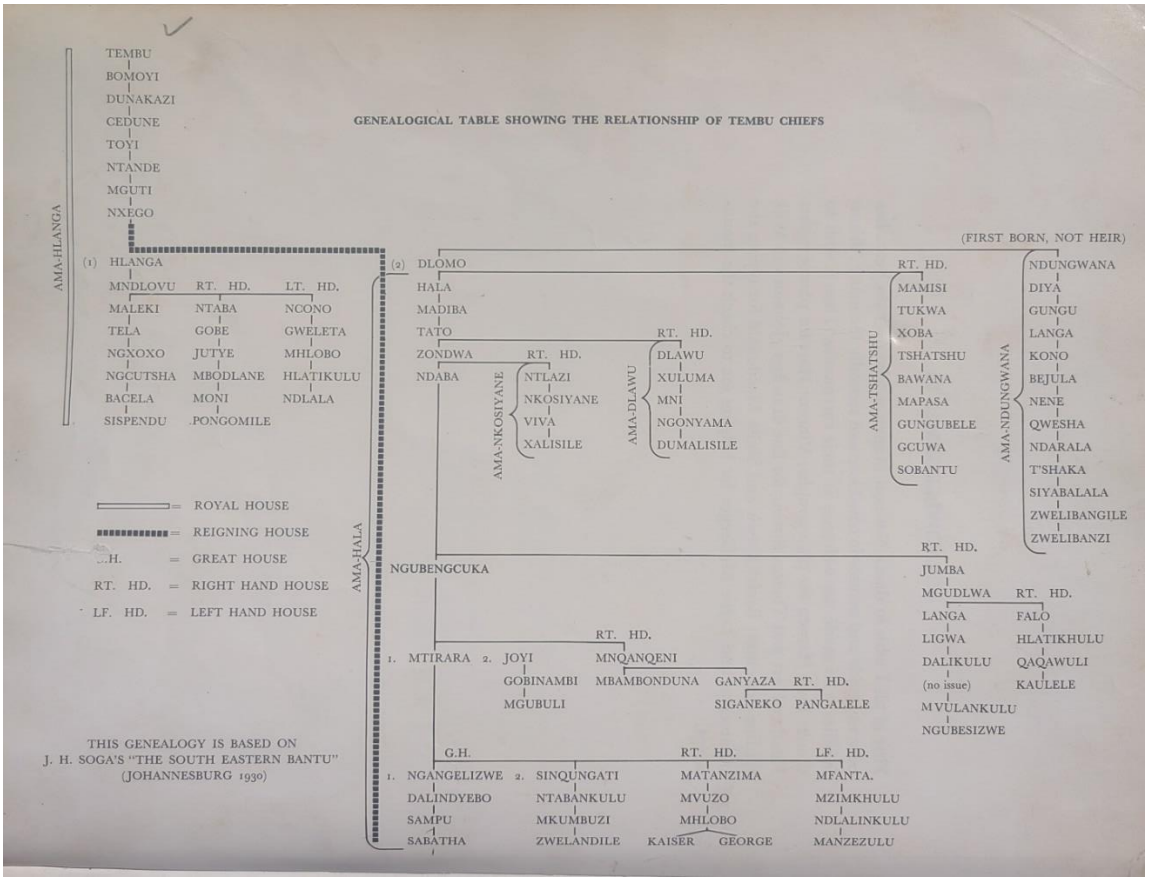

Figure 5 – Genealogy of *AbaThembu* Royal Family. Soga (1930) The South-Eastern Bantu: Abe-Nguni, Aba-Mbo, Ama-Lala

As an insider and researcher of this beadwork collection, I recognise that my cultural insights are not neutral lenses but integral components shaping my analysis of the interplay between tradition and contemporary art. The chosen methodology, therefore, necessitates a constant self-awareness of how my background, beliefs, and perspectives as a member of this community influence my interpretations (George Mahashe, 2019: 10). This reflexive approach aligns with the concept of the "half anthropologist," recognising the overlap between researcher and subject while promoting accountability to academic rigour and the diverse experiences within the community I represent. I understand that these insider perspectives are essential for uncovering nuanced contexts often missed by Global North scholars, who may inadvertently reinforce existing power dynamics. My positionality, shaped by my race, nationality, age, gender, socioeconomic status, and other intersecting identities, should not be dismissed but considered a vital lens for engaging with these issues. By embracing this insider/researcher role, I can continuously reflect on and reassess the knowledge I produce, especially regarding the enduring legacies of colonialism that have influenced our understanding of cultural artefacts in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Mahashe, 2019: 12).

For instance, *Isidanga* beaded ceremonial necklace among *AbaThembu* is a significant marker of *ukuhlonipha*[27] and the transition to manhood. While beadwork regalia is generally worn by men and women[28] across social strata for ancestral reverence and ceremonial events, *Isidanga* holds a specific symbolic weight. Critically, *Isidanga* is exclusively worn by men during significant ritual occasions, including, but not limited to, *Unqulo*[29], *Ukulandwa kwabantu abadala*[30], *Ukubuyiswa*[31], and *Ukuhlanjwa komzi.*[32] *Isidanga*, therefore, serves as a potent visual articulation of male status and participation in key socio-religious practices within *AbaThembu* and other isiXhosa-speaking communities. A research participant and cultural expert, Loyiso Nqevu, advised that:

> *Indoda enesidanga ayithi vu esikweni iyazimasa.*
>
> A man with *Isidanga* doesn't just partake in a ritual ceremony; he honours it.[33]

In *AbaThembu* culture, a man wearing *Isidanga* necklace embodies the sacred significance of ritual ceremonies, representing ancestral wisdom, community recognition, and cultural continuity. This adornment is a visual dialect that conveys identity, status, and spiritual obligations. *Isidanga* is not just an accessory; it connects the wearer to their ancestors and symbolises their initiation and responsibilities within manhood. Wearing it actively engages one with traditions, invokes ancestral guidance, and reinforces adult responsibilities. In the isiXhosa-speaking context, *Isidanga* allows the wearer to participate in a dynamic cultural exchange through ritual.[34]

---

[27] To honour or respect

[28] The attachment to beadwork production is notably more pronounced among older women than their younger counterparts. This observation does not diminish the significance of beadwork in expressing and articulating cultural identity and belonging within the community (Sibusiso Ndlovu, 2017: 224).

[29] This broad term encompasses various forms of reverence and respect towards ancestors, elders, and the spiritual world.

[30] Bringing ancestors into the current household and seeking guidance and wisdom from them, emphasising respect for their experience and traditional practices, essential for maintaining cultural continuity.

[31] This often refers to returning or reconciling with those who have passed away, mainly through rituals and communication with the ancestors. It can also involve the reconciliation of individuals within the community after a conflict or separation.

[32] This ritual cleanses a home of negative influences, bad luck, or spiritual impurities. It typically involves traditional medicines and practices to restore harmony and well-being, particularly after events like a death that may disturb the spiritual balance.

[33] Due to the dynamic nature of language, translating isiXhosa to English may not always be precise. But in this project, quotes will be translated for the accessibility of non-isiXhosa speakers.

[34] The AbaThembu ceremony of *Izithebe* allocates shares according to leaders' symbolic bulls, serving to authenticate royal lineage and reinforce national unity, thereby functioning as both a historical record and a mechanism for social cohesion (Mvenene, 2013: 33).

According to Herbert Cole (1989: 2), "African art is not simply a form of aesthetic expression but a vital part of daily life, ritual, and social organisation." While Herbert correctly emphasises art's functional and integrated nature within African Societies, it can inadvertently create a monolithic view of "African art," obscuring the immense diversity of artistic traditions across the continent. From an isiXhosa-speaking perspective, art is integral to daily life and intertwined with social, spiritual, and political existence. While often framed as serving external functions like social cohesion or ritual, many African artistic expressions are vital forms of communication, spiritual embodiment, historical record, and personal expression. A nuanced understanding of African cultural traditions acknowledges their aesthetic value in addition to their social, ritual, and spiritual significance, emphasising the importance of specific cultural contexts. This perspective encourages a thoughtful examination of how cultural backgrounds influence the appreciation of African art, which is deeply rooted in community life and rituals. The text emphasises the shortcomings of Western art traditions in appreciating African art, calling for a more respectful and culturally sensitive approach that acknowledges its unique contributions to global art. In Southern Africa, glass beads play a vital role in the culture of many local Black communities, serving as elements of clothing, decoration, communication, religion, and symbolism (Sharma Saitowitz, 1993:41).

The innovation of incorporating materials, such as glass beads and animal teeth, is not merely a relic of the distant past but is emblematic of thousands of years of human creativity and expression. To bolster this perspective and serve as a foundation for further discussion, his research on beads[35] *In the Krobo Culture of Ghana,* Malek Affum (2009: 20) cogently argues that:

> When humans started making string, they began to hang things on strings. One of the earliest forms of strung ornament was animal teeth with distinct grooves or notches worn into them. The notches allowed the teeth to be held firmly on a knotted string. One example of this comes from Arcy-sur-Cure, in France, which is a string of marmot, fox, wolf, and hyena teeth dating from 31,000 B.C.

While the statement about early humans using string and animal teeth for adornment might hold a universal truth, applying it across cultures without nuance is problematic. *Indlela yethu ayifani neyabanye.*[36] While we, like many cultures, use strung objects, including animal products, for adornment and symbolic purposes, the meaning behind those objects

[36] Our ways are not the same as others.

is deeply rooted in our specific cultural context. *Siyayazi inkcubeko yethu.*[37] To state that humans hung things on strings ignores the rich tapestry of symbolism, ritual practices, and social meanings embedded within our traditions. For example, using animal teeth or bones in *AbaThembu* regalia isn't merely decorative; it signifies a connection to ancestors, the animal's power, and specific social roles. Therefore, while the general idea of string and adornment might be a starting point, a reflexive approach requires us to contextualise practices within the cultural frameworks of their creators and users, avoiding generalisations based on isolated archaeological findings. These ancient traditions date back to before the voyages around the Cape of Good Hope (Sipho Ndabambi, 1993: 19).

By seeking a nuanced understanding of early ornaments' original context and significance, we can better appreciate how early humans engaged with their surroundings, using Indigenous art mediums to survive and express identity, status and community.[38] In the cultural practices of *AbaThembu*, *Amazinyo Enja* necklace ***(figure 6)***, made out of dog teeth and glass beads, holds substantial symbolic significance among married women. Adopting this specific necklace by a married woman manifests her social standing and affiliation within *AbaThembu* society. Nowongile Bilitane, a research participant, offered insights into the significance of the above necklace regarding women's status:

> *Ngamazinyo enja la. Anxitywa ngumntu ongumama omdala (ixhegwazana) xa kukho umcimbi okanye yinkosikazi xa izokwendiswa. Xa iphuma isiya enkundleni iye iyinxibe kulomtshato kuthiwa luduli ke ngesiXhosa.*
>
> These are dog teeth, typically worn by older women (grandmothers) during sacrificial rituals or by the bride just before her marriage ceremony. The bride wears them when presented to the bridegroom on their wedding day. This traditional wedding ritual is known as *uduli* in isiXhosa language.

In Xhosa culture[39], beadwork and adornments like dog teeth carry deep symbolic meanings, particularly in spiritual and ancestral contexts. Often misconceived as mere ornaments, this beaded piece holds significant value during the bride's wedding ritual, known as *uduli*, symbolising the bride's transition through life. It's essential to recognise that these adornments are not exclusive to older women or brides; they are meaningful throughout various life stages. Dog teeth, in particular, are part of a broader symbolic system connected to life cycles and spiritual beliefs, with dogs often appearing as ancestral figures in dreams. Examining initial

[37] We know our cultural heritage.

[38] Beads are connected with every aspect of African existence. They are integral to a multilayered communication system among all groups, symbolising identity, status, and cultural values (Lois Dubin, 2010:15).

[39] Before the introduction of glass beads, the Xhosa made beads from natural materials, such as ostrich eggshells and bones, which were chipped and ground to the approximate size, bored and polished before being strung (Costello, 1990: 2).

reactions and biases is essential to understanding these cultural narratives while engaging respectfully with *uduli* ritual. This perspective encourages a deeper appreciation of these practices' artistic, spiritual, and social contexts, challenging stereotypes and honouring their significance. The beadwork can foster mutual interdependence and highlight the interconnectedness of *AbaThembu* (Carina Rozani, 2013: 2).

Figure 6 – *Amazinyo enja* necklace *(AbaThembu)*. Courtesy of Nowongile Bilitane. Photographed by Zukisa Madyibi

Throughout history and across various cultures, beads have served as adornments, currency, and symbols of status, spirituality, and identity. Their universal appeal as a functional and decorative art form transcends cultural boundaries, conveying meaning and beauty. Affum (2009: 20) also points out that:

> The use of beads is universal. Every civilisation, nation, or people, at one point, has used beads and continues to use them in one way or another. They have been with men for a long time and were almost invisible.

From isiXhosa-speaking perspective, while the claim of beads being "universal" has some truth, it requires careful consideration. *Siyavuma*[40] that beads are widely used, but the statement's simplicity obscures crucial cultural nuances. *Indlela yethu ayifani neyabanye:* while many cultures use beads, their meanings and significance vary drastically. For *AbaThembu*, beadwork is far more than mere adornment; it's a language, a carrier of history, and a reflection of social status, spiritual beliefs, and personal identity. *Siyazazi izinto zethu* and our beadwork traditions are deeply intertwined with our cultural practices and worldview. To lump all bead usage into a single "universal" category ignores the rich tapestry of cultural meanings that make each tradition unique. While beads are widespread, a reflexive approach necessitates recognising their diverse cultural meanings and moving beyond simplistic generalisations. This highlights the rich significance of often-overlooked artistic aspects of human experience. In Africa, Indigenous knowledge, including beadwork skills passed down informally from elders to younger generations (often girls), is traditionally transmitted orally and through practice, unlike the Eurocentric reliance on written records. This informal transmission forms a robust hidden curriculum (Rozani 2013: 99-100).

Mark Roberts (2019: 134) noted, "Each piece of beadwork is a testament to the artisan's heritage and a reflection of their cultural milieu." While the statement acknowledges the connection between beadwork and cultural identity, it risks portraying artistic creation as a static act of simply reproducing tradition. From an African perspective, particularly within dynamic and evolving isiXhosa-speaking communities, beadwork is not merely a passive reflection of the past but also an active engagement with the present. Artisans are not simply conduits of heritage; they are active agents, creatively interpreting and innovating within established traditions. While heritage undoubtedly informs their work, beadwork becomes a medium for personal expression, social commentary, and negotiation of contemporary realities. Robert's emphasis on the individual artisan can overlook the collaborative nature of artistic creation central to African practices. A nuanced understanding recognises beadwork as a dynamic interplay of heritage, innovation, personal creativity, and collective expression. It highlights the artisan's role in shaping cultural traditions. Each South African community should study and document its unique beadwork practices (Jacob Mashiyane, 2006: 5).

[40] We agree.

1.2. Research Problem Statement

As an insider and part researcher deeply invested in the preservation and understanding of *AbaThembu* Beadwork, I bring a personal connection to this vital art form. The underrepresentation of *AbaThembu* beadwork within social and art historical discourse is not just an academic oversight but a reflection of broader power dynamics that have historically marginalised Indigenous voices and perspectives. This marginalisation, particularly concerning *AbaThembu* beadwork and its crucial role in signifying *ukuhlonipha* and marking the transition to manhood, feels personal, a silencing of a key aspect of my cultural heritage. This personal connection fuels my research, prompting me to critically examine how colonial narratives and traditional scholarship have contributed to this neglect, shaping how beadwork is perceived and how its significance in constructing male gender identity has been diminished. Therefore, my research is not simply an objective analysis but a reflexive engagement with my positionality within Heritage Studies. I am acutely aware of how my insider status and connection to *AbaThembu* community influence my interpretations, research questions, and understanding of what constitutes "knowledge" in this context. This awareness of my biases and perspectives is not something to be overcome but rather a crucial tool for critical self-reflection, allowing me to interrogate the assumptions and narratives that have shaped our understanding of beadwork. By using qualitative methodologies and drawing on my insider perspective, I aim to address gaps in scholarship and challenge the structures that have marginalised *AbaThembu* beadwork, reclaiming its significance in academic discourse and the broader cultural landscape. Colonial education and religious systems alienated Africans from their culture, customs, and beadwork (Rozani & Goduka, 2017: 136).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2015: 90) powerfully supports the need for reflexive insider research in challenging dominant narratives. She states that "Research is not neutral. It is always implicated in relations of power... How research is conceptualised, carried out, and disseminated can be deeply problematic for indigenous peoples." As an insider/part researcher, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's assertion that "research is not neutral" resonates deeply with my own experiences and underscores why I approach my work with a reflexive lens. I've witnessed firsthand how research, even with the best intentions, can be deeply implicated in power relations, often perpetuating colonial narratives and further marginalising Indigenous communities. Smith's words serve as a constant reminder that the very act of "conceptualising, carrying out, and disseminating" research on my community is fraught with potential pitfalls. How I frame my research questions, chosen methodologies, and even the language I use can

reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics. Therefore, reflexivity is not just a methodological tool for me; it's a crucial ethical commitment. It demands that I constantly interrogate my positionality, acknowledging how my insider status, while offering unique insights, also comes with inherent biases and potential blind spots. It requires me to be vigilant about whose voices are being amplified and silenced and to actively work towards decolonising the research process, ensuring that it serves the interests of the community I am part of rather than simply extracting knowledge for external consumption. Smith's quote, therefore, is not just a theoretical statement; it's a call to action, urging insider researchers like myself to engage in research practices that are not only rigorous but also ethical, culturally sensitive, and ultimately empowering for Indigenous peoples (Mahashe, 2019: 11).

1.3. Significance of the Study

Broster (1967) observed that:

> Illiterate women, almost strangers to personal hygiene, are bead connoisseurs who haggle over the purchase of five cents'(6d) worth of beads: they will say, "Don't buy that colour; it fades," or "That shade is not a good match.

From the perspective of a researcher and curator, this statement highlights women's acute awareness of bead quality and aesthetics, indicating a profound understanding of colourfastness, colour coordination, and the subtle distinctions among various bead types. Even over a modest sum, the haggling emphasises their resourcefulness and discerning nature, underscoring that value and quality are paramount. This behaviour suggests a cultural context in which beads hold significance beyond mere decoration, possibly symbolising status, tradition, or personal expression, thereby justifying the meticulous selection process. The shared knowledge among *AbaThembu* women, as demonstrated by the advice exchanged, such as "Don't buy that colour; it fades" or "That shade is not a good match", highlights communal expertise and a collective standard of excellence in beadwork. Her interactions with *AbaThembu* community at *Qebe* village led to the study of this collection, culminating in her publications: "The Thembu: Their Beadwork, Songs and Dances" (1976), "The Red Blanket Valley" (1967), and "African Elegance" (1973) co-authored with Alica Martens. Her efforts have been instrumental in preserving isiXhosa-speaking beadwork heritage; without her dedication to collecting, one might not be engaged in this vital research on *AbaThembu* beadwork heritage today.

Gary Van Wyk (2003:22) states that:

> Little is known about the colour symbolism of Xhosa beads apart from white. In early times, red beads were associated with Xhosa royalty and were offered when the elephant was killed. However, Broster states that every colour was symbolic among the Thembu in Qebe.

This perspective offers a limited and inaccurate understanding of Xhosa beadwork symbolism, particularly from an outsider's viewpoint within the cultural group. While it emphasises the significance of white and red beads, it neglects the rich meanings associated with other colours. In isiXhosa-speaking communities, beadwork serves as a profound cultural expression, with each colour conveying messages related to social status, clan affiliation, marital status, and spiritual beliefs. For instance, white symbolises a connection to ancestors, while yellow signifies fertility and hope. The assertion that "little is known" about Xhosa beadwork is misleading; instead, it reflects the limited knowledge of Western researchers. In contrast, isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups hold intricate understandings of their beadwork's symbolism. While red is vital in royalty and hunting, it embodies vitality, strength, and ancestral reverence during rituals. Additionally, white signifies purity and spirituality, transcending its basic associations mentioned in the Van Wyk statement. Furthermore, Broster's observation that "every colour was symbolic" among *AbaThembu* in *Qebe* underscores the diversity of interpretations across isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups, which the original statement fails to acknowledge. It also overlooks the evolving meanings of bead colours in contemporary society, where traditional symbolism interacts with modern aesthetics. Ultimately, the Van Wyk perspective oversimplifies a complex tradition, disregarding the layers of cultural, spiritual, and historical significance inherent in Xhosa beadwork.

Broster overlooked the opportunity to immerse herself in the language of beadwork, choosing instead to exploit the young members of the *Qebe* village community, likely to procure beadwork for European markets. Today, Van Wyk reflects that "little is known about Xhosa beadwork," which might be aimed more at European markets rather than appreciated by isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups. In her records, she asserts that:

> In our second winter at Qebe, I began working in the tiny beadwork industry. The young shepherds worked so happily in my garden that I was encouraged to think their elder sisters might learn to come each day and spend a few hours beading. So, I let it be known that whoever wished might come, food and beadwork would be provided, and payment would be made on piecework (Broster, 1967: 29).

This statement invites a reflexive exploration of the perspectives surrounding Xhosa beadwork. It challenges us to consider how we might inadvertently adopt a paternalistic view that positions Xhosa women as passive recipients of employment instead of recognising their

inherent agency and existing skills. The suggestion of 'teaching' them beadwork[41], an essential part of their cultural identity, begs us to reflect on the implications of disregarding their rich knowledge. Such an approach risks reducing this intricate craft to mere 'piecework' for income, overshadowing its cultural and artistic significance. It prompts us to think about how isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups' beadwork extends beyond a simple source of income; it embodies self-expression, social communication, and the transmission of culture. By proposing the creation of a 'small beadwork industry' in *Qebe*, we may overlook the profound traditions that underpin this art form. This framing positions young shepherds and elder sisters as passive participants, minimising the profound cultural importance embedded in beadwork. Furthermore, offering 'food and beadwork' as incentives compels us to reflect on how this perspective undermines the pride and value that isiXhosa-speaking women associate with their cultural heritage.

Such narratives can inadvertently frame them as dependent on external intervention, neglecting to acknowledge their role as custodians of a rich artistic tradition. This raises the crucial question of how we can decolonise our views of Indigenous art, learning to appreciate it not as a mere commodity but as an essential expression of cultural identity. In isiXhosa culture, a proverb says: *"Intloya Iphuma emasini",* the title of this research project. The word *intloya* refers to the milk that has undergone a chemical breakdown to become *amasi*, which is sour milk. This liquid has an off-green colour and was traditionally used in the fermentation process. This method was widely practised in isiXhosa-speaking households as a common way to ferment sour milk. Unpacking the proverb, Mesatywa (1954: 200) explains, stating:

> *Kuthethwa ukuba yonke into inesizathu sayo. Nangona intloya le ikhangeleka ngokungathi ngamanzi, kodwa iyavakala emlonyeni ukuba iphuma emasini.*
>
> It is said that everything has a reason. Although it looks like water, it feels like it's coming from *amasi*/ sour milk.

This proverb speaks to a truth we live by, woven into the fabric of our beadwork and traditions. It reminds us that *ubuhle buse nzulu*[42]. What the eye sees is often just the surface, a glimpse of something much more profound. Like the intricate patterns of our *imbola* (red ochre), there's a story whispered in every stitch, a meaning layered upon meaning, understood by those who

[41] The composition of these beadworks is notably distinct from the methods employed in Europe for using seed beads. This difference may stem from the fact that these beading techniques were developed indigenously; there is no evidence to suggest that the missionaries who taught African women in South Africa to sew cloth also imparted knowledge of beading techniques (Nettleton, 2015:25).
[42] The beauty lies deep within.

know its language. As *AbaThembu,* we understand that *indoda yindoda*[43] and *umfazi ngumfazi*[44]. This understanding is reflected in the beadwork itself. The colours and the patterns speak of who we are, our place in the world, and our journey through life. A woman's beadwork tells a different story than a man's, a tale of *umendo*[45], *ubuntwana*[46], and *ulwaluko*. To truly understand the beadwork, we must understand the stories held within each bead. This idea of looking deeper, of knowledge that *konke kunesizathu*[47] is central to our way of knowing. It's like *amasi*[48]. Beneath its simple, watery appearance lies a rich essence essential to our heritage. To truly appreciate this, we must look beyond the surface and recognise that "everything has a reason." This perspective encourages a deeper understanding of seemingly simple subjects, revealing the complexities and significance that might be overlooked, much like the hidden richness of *amasi.* This approach fosters empathy and insight, helping us notice nuances that may have escaped earlier historians and collectors like Broster.

So, too, with our research, especially when we venture into the world of other cultures. One must be careful not to judge by appearances, lest we miss the true meaning, the hidden wisdom. What may appear ostensibly simple to some individuals can carry nuanced significance for others, necessitating an approach to cultural differences rooted in humility and respect. We must strive for a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons behind our observations. Such comprehension enriches our appreciation of the world's complexities and highlights the inherent beauty of creation, thereby fostering authentic connections among diverse cultures. The profound impact of colonialism on traditional African worldviews and artistic expressions, including beadwork, cannot be overstated. Colonial encounters have led to the devaluation and disruption of longstanding cultural practices. Additionally, economic systems that prioritise Western goods have significantly undermined the local production of Indigenous art. This shift has compelled artisans to conform their work to colonial preferences, diluting traditional styles and meanings. A self-reflective approach is imperative to recognise the colonial biases that have shaped Indigenous art's perception and creation, thereby prompting a critical examination of these historical dynamics (Sidney Kasfir, 1999: 35).

[43] Man is a man.
[44] Woman is a woman.
[45] IsiXhosa-speaking people traditional wedding.
[46] Childhood.
[47] Everything has a reason.
[48] Sour milk.

In reflecting on the impact of colonial administrations, it's evident that they often suppressed cultural practices that conflicted with Christian or European norms. This suppression has led to the marginalisation of these art forms within global art history narratives. When I analyse a colonial photograph featuring a European-descended police officer, confidently seated with a swagger stick, alongside a Zulu police officer who stands resolutely with a knobkerrie, I am reminded of Hlonipha Mokoena's insights. She highlights the contrasting representations in such imagery, prompting me to consider the broader implications of how power dynamics have historically shaped our understanding of cultural identity and expression.

> One might object to this reading of 'swagger stick' as one reviewer did, by commenting that 'sometimes a stick is just a stick – isn't it a reasonable expectation that a walking stick would have a knob that allows it to be gripped' this kind of comment illustrates why definitions are essential (Mokoena 2016: 532).

From my perspective, I realise that dismissing the symbolic significance of a walking stick, or 'intonga', as merely 'just a stick' reveals a limited understanding of its cultural importance. Among the Xhosa people, I've come to appreciate that 'intonga' is not just a functional object; it embodies masculinity, authority, and social status, woven deeply into identity and ceremonial practices. The 'knob' on a walking stick, for instance, holds specific cultural meanings for *AbaThembu*, representing strength, leadership, or the readiness to defend one's community. By recognising this, I see how reductionist views overlook the rich cultural symbolism embedded in everyday objects within Indigenous traditions. This reflection highlights how crucial it is to appreciate material culture and its role in conveying identity and social values. I've learned that precise definitions are essential for bridging cultural misunderstandings and ensuring Indigenous perspectives are valued in academic and social discussions.

The design of knobkerries, much like beadwork, invites us to reflect on their deep cultural significance within *AbaThembu* and isiXhosa-speaking communities. These objects are potent symbols of identity, history, and artistic expression while delineating male hierarchy. For instance, *Ingqanda* knobkerrie ***(figure 7)***, crafted from a bicycle crank, is intrinsically linked to boys and finds its place in factional battles. It embodies the essence of boyhood, yet it becomes inappropriate for those men who have undergone initiation. This transition is a pivotal moment in social status, as newly initiated men, *ikrwala,* must relinquish their knobkerries. It highlights the importance of understanding the evolving meanings of cultural symbols, which convey deeper significances beyond their physical forms. At this stage, an initiate is introduced to society with a new status, name, attire, and new rights and duties (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2014:75).

Figure 7 – *Ingqanda (AbaThembu).* Courtesy of Mthatha Museum Permanent Collection, photographed by Augustine Zukisa Madyibi.

Uswazi ceremonial knobkerrie ***(figure 8)*** is a profoundly reflective symbol of my journey through marriage and the assertion of male authority during *lobola* negotiations. However, in contemporary times, a bottle of methylated spirits, such as brandy, has replaced *Uswazi*. When displayed at the groom's ancestral home, it marks a marriage and the bride's formal entry into this new chapter of life. As a tool reserved for the discussions of married men, the stick embodies the significance of rites of passage. It illustrates how our societal roles intricately connect with our marital status. *Uswazi* stick symbolises how cultural elements shape individual identities and social structures. Like beadwork, which expresses self-identity and group affiliation across gender, class, age, and ethnicity, *Uswazi* stick reflects the complex relationship between cultural practices and social identity formation (Caroline White, 2008: 17).

Figure 8 – *Uswazi (AbaThembu).* Courtesy of Mthatha Museum, photographed by Augustine Zukisa Madyibi

Uswazi invites us to reflect on the cultural significance of marriage and traditional practices within *AbaThembu* community. It encourages us to consider how these customs define roles and shape our understanding of cultural identity. We gain insights into how heritage is formed and expressed by exploring the relationship between objects, rituals, and societal roles. The passage highlights our universal search for meaningful symbols across different cultures, urging us to find a balance between heritage, identity, and values. It challenges us to appreciate cultural heritage and collective histories more deeply. For instance, the knobkierie is a powerful symbol among *AbaThembu*, representing status and reflecting social and marital standing. Similarly, the specific beadwork worn by men who have undergone *ulwaluko* and by diviners, chiefs, or kings illustrates the profound connections between personal adornment, cultural ceremonies, and societal roles. This invites us to think about our customs and their significance in our lives, reinforcing the importance of understanding and valuing our cultural narratives. Susan Vogel (1986: 14) suggests that "African art frequently functions as a vehicle for spiritual and social communication, with a strong emphasis on symbolic meanings and communal participation." Vogel accurately reflects the central role of art in many African cultures. Art is a powerful tool for expressing and transmitting spiritual beliefs, social values, and historical narratives. From intricate beadwork and sculptures to vibrant masks and textiles, African art forms are often imbued with deep symbolic meaning, reflecting the interconnectedness of the spiritual, social, and artistic realms. These artworks connect the physical and spiritual realms, linking individuals to their ancestors, deities, and the collective consciousness of their community.

The meanings are not static but constantly negotiated and reinterpreted within our communities. Therefore, any discussion of "African art" must acknowledge this internal perspective and avoid perpetuating the idea of a homogenous "African" identity. Olu Oguibe (2004: 24) points out, "The historic derogation of African art by the West can be traced back to a colonial order that saw Africa as devoid of history and culture." The statement that the West's historic derogation of African art stems from a colonial view of Africa as lacking history and culture rings true, yet it requires more profound reflection. While *impucuko yethu*[49] was often disregarded by colonial powers; it's not simply a matter of absence but a deliberate act of erasure. *Basifihlela izinto zethu*[50]and our history. Colonialism didn't just ignore African history; it actively rewrote it, portraying us as primitive and without complex societies to justify exploitation—the denigration of our artistic expressions, including our beadwork, aimed to dehumanise us and facilitate subjugation. However, we must recognise our agency. Despite colonial pressures, our art remained a vital vessel for cultural memory, preserving our identity and resisting assimilation. While Western derogation is an integral part of our narrative, it's crucial to highlight the resilience and creativity of *AbaThembu* artists in the face of prejudice. Our history and culture were actively suppressed but never extinguished. Apartheid was not merely a system of racial discrimination; it was a form of colonialism designed to control and exploit the Indigenous population through both legal and extra-legal means (Mahmood Mamdani, 1996: 33).

Kwame Appiah (1991: 72) states, "The exclusion of African art from the canon of art history is a form of intellectual colonialism that must be rectified." The exclusion of African artistic traditions perpetuates a Eurocentric worldview that marginalises their significance. By ignoring the rich history and diversity of African art, art history reinforces harmful stereotypes and a biased view of human creativity. To address this, it's essential to critically re-evaluate art historical narratives to include African voices and perspectives, committing to the decolonisation of art history. While acknowledging that excluding African art constitutes a form of intellectual colonialism, we must recognise that merely inserting it into a Western-centric canon risks perpetuating existing power dynamics. Understanding art through our lenses, which connect deeply to our spiritual and social worlds, differs significantly from Western perspectives. A decolonial approach should not simply add African art to this canon but challenge its foundations and criteria for establishing what constitutes "art." We must be

[49] Our civilisation.
[50] They hid our knowledge.

central to the narrative, actively shaping the understanding and appreciation of our art rather than merely being subjects of study.

To address this exclusion, we need a fundamental shift in perspective that recognises the diversity of artistic traditions and values them on their own merits rather than through a Western lens. The neglect of indigenous art forms, like beadwork and knobkieries, often arises from these colonial influences. Broster (1976) highlighted this by examining the beadwork artisans in the Qebe locality:

> All the maidens of the clan are artists in beadwork. Being illiterate, they have learned to record messages in beads and developed a form of symbolism in colour combinations and motifs. In these artistic compositions, the colours are exquisitely proportioned to inflect meaning.

While the statement that *AbaThembu* maidens are artists in beadwork and use it to record messages through colour and motif symbolism holds some truth, it risks romanticising and simplifying a complex practice. *Siyavuma,* that beadwork is a significant art form for our women and carries meaning. However, to say all women are artists and that it's a direct substitute for literacy is an overstatement. While beadwork knowledge is widespread, skill levels vary, and its primary function isn't necessarily textual recording. *Intsingiselo ikhona*[51] in the colours and patterns, but it's not a simple one-to-one translation. The meaning is often nuanced, context-dependent, and understood within the community. Furthermore, implying that beadwork arises because illiteracy is reductive and perpetuates a colonial trope of associating orality with a lack of sophistication, we know our things. Beadwork is a rich artistic tradition in its own right, not a substitute for something else. A reflexive approach recognises the agency and creativity of *AbaThembu* women, acknowledging the depth of their artistic expression without resorting to simplistic explanations or external frameworks.

1.4. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research methodology that combines self-reflexivity, semi-structured interviews, visual analysis, and archival research to explore the cultural and artistic significance of beadwork within *AbaThembu* cultural group. This approach provides insights into how beadwork shapes male gender identity while considering the researcher's positionality and ethical concerns. The research focuses on the representation of male identity in *AbaThembu* culture, highlighting traditional artistic expressions, especially beadwork. Walter Mignolo

[51] There is meaning.

(2011: 230) emphasises that "self-reflexivity is a critical tool for decolonising knowledge production." The assertion that self-reflexivity is a critical tool for decolonising knowledge production resonates deeply yet requires careful consideration. *Siyavuma,* I agree that examining my biases and assumptions is crucial when engaging with knowledge, particularly in a context marked by colonial history. However, self-reflexivity cannot be solely an individual exercise. Decolonising knowledge production requires more than individual reflection; it demands a collective process of *ukuzazi*[52] as a community. We know our things, and our understanding of the world is shaped by our shared history and lived experiences. Therefore, a decolonial approach necessitates centring Indigenous voices and perspectives, creating space for *iingxoxo*[53] that challenge dominant narratives and reclaim our agency in shaping our stories. Self-reflexivity is crucial, but it should go hand in hand with a commitment to dismantling power structures that sustain colonial knowledge and amplifying marginalised voices. In the humanities, reflexivity involves critically examining how we acquire knowledge (Mahashe, 2019: 11)

1.4.1. Reflecting on Positionality

As an IsiXhosa-speaking researcher with professional and personal connections to Indigenous art, my positionality significantly influences this study. My background allows me to engage deeply with the cultural practices and meanings inherent in beadwork; however, it also demands a continuous process of reflection to address potential biases. My ties to *AbaThembu* cultural group grant me valuable insider knowledge. Still, they also require me to maintain a critical balance to ensure that my interpretations do not eclipse the perspectives of community members. *AmaXhos*a generally understands *AbaThembu*, even if it is not profoundly familiar. Thus, the best way to address the research question is to engage with *AbaThembu* (Mahashe 2019: 2).

1.4.2. Influence of Background and Biases

In the framework of this research methodology, it is essential to recognise that the deliberate retention of untranslated isiXhosa text in certain chapters serves as a form of resistance against linguistic colonialism. This approach aims to preserve the semantic and cultural integrity of the isiXhosa language by eschewing reductive translation. By doing so, it asserts a stance of linguistic sovereignty and calls into question dominant reading practices, thereby enriching the

[52] Self-knowing.
[53] Dialogues.

discourse surrounding language and power dynamics. My experiences and academic training in curatorship and Heritage Studies shape how I design, collect, and interpret data. For instance:

a) **Research Design:** My familiarity with Indigenous beadwork practices guided the focus on beadwork as a key tangible heritage, centring on their aesthetic and cultural dimensions.
b) **Data Collection:** I prioritised semi-structured interviews with *AbaThembu* cultural experts and beadwork artists to foreground their voices and lived experiences. My cultural proximity facilitated rapport-building during interviews, while my awareness of potential bias ensured that questions were open-ended and non-leading.
c) **Data Interpretation:** Visual analyses and archival research were conducted through a lens that respects and amplifies the symbolic meanings encoded in beadwork, avoiding Eurocentric or reductionist interpretations.

By recognising my positionality, I aim to integrate my insider perspective with a robust academic framework, ensuring that the research accurately and authentically reflects the cultural context surrounding beadwork.

1.4.3. Role of Self-Reflexivity

Reflecting on my research methodology, I have realised the critical importance of self-reflexivity in enhancing my work's validity and ethical foundation. Examining my assumptions and influences, I strive for greater transparency and accountability. This reflexive practice allows me to acknowledge how my identity as a researcher inevitably shapes my questions, analysis, and representations of the rich cultural narratives at play. I am increasingly aware that ethical research requires sensitivity to cultural nuances and a profound respect for the knowledge systems of my participants. By actively engaging in reflexivity, I have adjusted my research design based on the feedback from the community, ensuring that their agency and cultural values remain at the forefront of my study. This ongoing process helps me confront my biases and align my interpretations with the actual perspectives of *AbaThembu* community, fostering a sense of collaboration and mutual respect in our relationship. Ultimately, I have been committed to balancing cultural authenticity and scholarly rigour, aiming to make an ethically grounded contribution that deepens our understanding of Indigenous art forms and their significance in identity formation within *AbaThembu* cultural group.

1.5. Ethical Considerations

In reflecting upon the conduct of this study, I recognise how crucial ethical rigour and cultural sensitivity were, particularly given my focus on *AbaThembu* cultural group and the profoundly symbolic practices tied to their beadwork. I approached the research with a commitment to ethical standards, including training and obtaining official ethical clearance. Throughout this process, I was acutely aware of the need to protect participants' privacy, implementing structured protocols that I hoped would ensure their trust and safety. Transparency was a guiding principle for me; I made it a priority to communicate the study's objectives, methods, and potential impacts to foster voluntary participation. I prepared informed consent forms in English and isiXhosa to enhance understanding and respect autonomy. Conducting interviews that prioritised participants' cultural knowledge and comfort was essential, and I translated questions into isiXhosa, recognising the importance of linguistic preferences in maintaining clarity and respect. Navigating the power dynamics inherent in this research required a self-reflexive lens. I continually reflected on my dual role as an academic and cultural insider, ensuring my position did not overshadow the participants' voices. By viewing them as custodians of their cultural knowledge, I sought to allow their insights and perspectives to meaningfully inform the study's direction. I emphasised respect beyond confidentiality and honoured participants' experiences and practical knowledge. This involved creating a safe, inclusive environment for sharing, being sensitive to culturally charged topics, and consistently analysing how power imbalances influenced our interactions and my interpretations. Throughout the research journey, I strived to cultivate equitable and collaborative partnerships, aspiring to uphold the dignity, agency, and cultural significance of *AbaThembu* community at every step.

1.6. Organisation of Thesis

The thesis consists of Five Chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

The introduction presents a comprehensive background for the study, outlining the research problem and addressing the concepts of positionality and reflexivity. It articulates the significance of the research, delineates the methodology employed, and examines ethical considerations pertinent to the study. Additionally, the introduction offers an overview of the organisational structure of the thesis, guiding the reader through the forthcoming sections.

CHAPTER TWO:

Chapter Two establishes the historical context of beadwork within colonial frameworks, revealing it as a site of cultural resistance and resilience. It emphasises beadwork's importance as a repository of ancestral knowledge, acting as a visual language that conveys communal narratives.

CHAPTER THREE:

Chapter Three examined how beadwork shapes male identity in *AbaThembu* culture, highlighting its role in gendered practices and ceremonies like *ulwaluko*. It situates beadwork within Heritage Studies, emphasising its importance in understanding identity and societal roles.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Chapter Four built on these insights, exploring beadwork's symbolic role in identity formation through case studies of traditional pieces like Isidanga, Ithumbu, and Ipasi. It underscored beadwork as a vital symbol of individual and collective identity while stressing the need to preserve its cultural integrity against commodification and appropriation. Additionally, it showcased beadwork's ability to reinforce and challenge traditional gender roles within evolving cultural narratives.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Chapter Five explores beadwork's vital role in promoting social cohesion and cultural continuity. It highlights beadwork's presence in communal rituals, traditional dances, and rites of passage, emphasising its ability to foster belonging and transmit cultural values across generations. The chapter also illustrates beadwork's resilience, showing its adaptability to modern challenges while preserving its core meanings as a cultural artefact.

CONCLUSION:

This chapter encapsulates the culmination of the research endeavour, delineating the conclusive outcomes, potential avenues for future exploration, contributions made to the academic discipline, reflective insights garnered throughout the process, implications for subsequent research endeavours, and summarising reflections.

Chapter Two

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Historical Context of Beadwork and Colonisation

The Colonial[54] period in South Africa, which commenced in the 17th century, brought considerable disruption to Indigenous cultural practices, including beadwork. Colonial administrators, missionaries, and settlers often dismissed African art forms as mere "crafts," undermining their sophistication and significance as authentic artistic expressions. This devaluation reinforced Eurocentric hierarchies that positioned Western art as superior to Indigenous creations, further marginalising beadwork and other cultural practices. Neelam Tandon (2018: 133) argues that "Colonialism imposed European cultural values and norms on African societies, disrupting traditional cultural practices. African writers often grappled with questions of identity and a sense of cultural loss." Tandon rightly acknowledges the disruptive effects of colonialism on African societies. Still, it oversimplifies the depth of cultural resistance and adaptation African communities, including the Xhosa, exhibited in response to European impositions. While colonialism undeniably forced European values and norms onto indigenous cultures, leading to a profound sense of cultural loss, it is crucial to recognise the resilience within African communities that allowed traditional cultural practices, including those within the Xhosa society, to survive and adapt. The imposition of European cultural values did not lead to the complete erasure of Indigenous identity; instead, African writers and intellectuals often grappled with a dual consciousness, where they navigated the complexities of preserving their cultural heritage while engaging with colonial structures. The arrival of Europeans in Natal significantly influenced Africans' dressing and self-representation, prompting adaptations in their cultural practices. The resilience of Xhosa beadwork, language, and rituals highlights an ongoing negotiation of identity rooted in ancestral knowledge. While colonialism had a profound impact, it's essential to recognise how African communities, especially the Xhosa, transformed their customs to respond to these challenges, keeping their heritage dynamic and relevant today (Nettleton, 2016: 519-20).

This journey highlights past injustices while celebrating the richness of African cultures. Beadwork, a crucial Indigenous art form, is intricately linked to heritage, social structures, and cultural identity. Traditionally made from materials like seeds, bones, and shells, beaded items

[54] Colonialism in South Africa imposed a racial hierarchy and economic system that disenfranchised the indigenous population (Robert Ross, 1999: 82).

carry symbolic meanings about status, age, gender, and spirituality. The introduction of glass beads during colonial trade broadened the aesthetic possibilities of beadwork, reflecting the complexities of those exchanges. Michael Stevenson and Michael Graham-Stewart (2000: 67) asserted that:

> The introduction of glass beads through colonial trade significantly influenced the art of African beadwork, allowing for more intricate designs and reflecting the complexities of colonial exchanges. Historically, materials such as shells, seeds, bones, and clay were used, reflecting the early human inclination to use art as a form of communication and expression.

While introducing glass beads through colonial trade undeniably introduced new materials that influenced the evolution of beadwork, this statement overlooks the agency and adaptability of African communities, including the Xhosa-speaking, in incorporating these foreign materials into their existing cultural and artistic practices. The adoption of glass beads should not be viewed solely as a product of colonial influence but rather as a complex interaction between indigenous knowledge systems and new material possibilities. Glass beads allowed for more intricate designs. However, these designs were still deeply rooted in traditional beadwork's symbolic and communicative functions. Moreover, using shells, seeds, bones, and clay in early beadwork reflects an inclination to use art as a form of communication and a sophisticated understanding of materials, symbolism, and identity. The Xhosa, like other African communities, were not passive recipients of colonial trade goods but active agents who integrated and transformed these materials to serve their cultural needs. This critique highlights that while colonialism changed the material landscape, it did not diminish the cultural importance of beadwork, which remained a vibrant form of self-expression, communication, and identity.[55]

The evolution of African beadwork illustrates its adaptability and resilience in the face of colonial challenges. Artisans began integrating glass beads with traditional techniques, maintaining beadwork's role as a visual language while responding to shifting historical and socio-political contexts. Over the centuries, beadwork has been a powerful medium for expressing identity and community, reflecting the balance between tradition and change. Understanding colonialism's impact is essential, as it often involved the exploitation of resources and suppression of indigenous cultures, marginalising traditional African art forms like beadwork. Exploring this history helps us appreciate the dynamics that contribute to the

[55] Carol Kaufmann (1993:47) states that "beads became a medium of circulation in southern Africa and were also used for internal trade."

undervaluation of these rich artistic traditions. As Priti Jaware & Tanya Mangwani (2012: 145) assert that:

> Colonialism is the expansion of a nation's sovereignty over foreign territories through forcible occupation. European colonialism began in the fifteenth century and reached its climax in the late 19th century. At the height of European colonialism, more than three-quarters of the earth belonged to European nations.

This definition of colonialism fails to fully capture the profound and lasting impact that European colonialism had on African societies, including the Xhosa people, and the resistance they mounted against it. While it correctly identifies colonialism as the expansion of sovereignty through forcible occupation, it lacks an acknowledgement of the violence, cultural erasure, and systemic subjugation that accompanied this process, particularly regarding the Xhosa's experiences during the Frontier Wars[56] and the subsequent imposition of European norms. Colonialism was not just the physical occupation of land but also the insidious dismantling of indigenous knowledge systems, governance structures, and cultural practices. The notion of "three-quarters of the earth" being controlled by European nations emphasises the scale of the empire. Still, it does not address how this territorial conquest was accompanied by the forcible imposition of foreign ideologies, economic systems, and cultural practices that sought to diminish or invalidate African ways of life. Moreover, the Xhosa and other African communities did not passively accept colonial rule. Still, they resisted it in multiple ways, both through armed struggle and by preserving their cultural heritage in defiance of colonial domination. This critique highlights that European colonialism in Africa had significant political and cultural impacts, with enduring effects on post-colonial societies (William Beinart, 2001: 152).

Colonial powers suppressed Indigenous cultural practices and languages, favouring English and Afrikaans, which marginalised African languages. This linguistic suppression eroded indigenous cultures and reinforced colonial dominance, diminishing the cultural heritage of South Africa's colonised population. Furthermore, Western scholars often overlooked the rich tradition of beadwork, preferring objects that aligned with Western artistic standards, reflecting a broader trend of cultural colonisation. As Jaware & Mangwani (2012: 145) pointed out, "This strategy, also known as cultural colonisation, was supposed to manipulate the colonised peoples' minds. The colonial powers believed that a colonised nation which adopted and admired Western culture would no longer resist the colonisers' occupation." This view

[56] 1779 – 1878.

highlights a critical aspect of the colonial experience: the deliberate and systematic attempt to erode indigenous cultures and replace them with Western ideals, values, and norms. The strategy of cultural colonisation was particularly devastating for isiXhosa-speaking people, as it sought to undermine not only their political and social systems but also their spiritual beliefs, language, and artistic expressions. The belief that a colonised nation would stop resisting if it admired Western culture reveals the profound disregard for the value and richness of African traditions, assuming that foreign models could supplant Xhosa identity and heritage. However, this mindset misinterprets the resilience of African cultures, including the Xhosa, who maintained and adapted their cultural practices despite attempts at erasure (Neville Alexander, 2004: 120-122).

For isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups, colonial forces failed to eradicate their identity, as they actively resisted cultural domination by preserving their language and cultural symbols, like beadwork, which served as tools of resistance. This highlights the agency of the Xhosa in reclaiming their heritage through cultural practices. Cultural colonisation aimed to replace traditional values with Western ideals, weakening national identities and reducing resistance. However, this often backfired, as Indigenous peoples recognised the erosion of their identities and reinforced their cultural practices in response. This reaction stemmed from a crisis of identity and a desire to reclaim their heritage, fuelled by the hypocrisy of colonial powers that claimed to promote civilisation while engaging in violence and exploitation. Consequently, colonialism did not create a compliant population; instead, it disrupted pre-existing African gender roles by imposing Eurocentric ideologies that marginalised African practices of gender fluidity and egalitarianism. In pre-colonial societies, women held significant roles as spiritual leaders, traders, and political advisors. Obiora Okafor (2016: 23) observed that:

> Colonialism profoundly disrupted pre-existing African gender roles, introducing Eurocentric ideologies that marginalised African systems of gender fluidity and egalitarian practices. Pre-colonial African societies often recognised nuanced gender roles tied to social, spiritual, and economic functions. For instance, women in many African communities held influential positions as spiritual leaders, traders, and political advisors.

This observation accurately highlights the disruptive nature of colonialism on indigenous African gender roles. In pre-colonial Xhosa society, gender roles were closely linked to social, spiritual, and economic life. Women played key roles as spiritual leaders, caregivers, and advisors in governance, holding significant influence in their communities. However, colonialism imposed Eurocentric gender norms that disrupted these complex systems,

undermining the autonomy and authority of women and gender-diverse individuals. This marginalisation affected women's leadership and eroded the gender fluidity and egalitarian practices central to Xhosa traditions. Research indicates a strong connection between the stereotyping of Black women and their oppression throughout history, showing that these stereotypes are integral to understanding their experiences. In Xhosa culture, the balance between the masculine and feminine and recognition of roles beyond a binary system were central to the social fabric. The statement, while recognising colonialism's impact on gender roles, overlooks the specific ways in which Xhosa society resisted these impositions, finding ways to maintain and adapt traditional gender practices, even as they were systematically undermined by colonial governance. Thus, the historical context of gender roles in Xhosa society offers a nuanced resistance to the simplistic Eurocentric gender norms imposed during colonial rule (Phumla Gqola, 2004: 50).

2.2. Beadwork as an African Indigenous Art Form

African Indigenous art forms, like beadwork[57], possess unique characteristics and profound cultural significance, reflecting rich cultural heritage and artistic expression. This tangible heritage goes beyond aesthetics, interweaving cultural identities, societal roles, and historical narratives. Despite facing challenges such as marginalisation from Western and colonial powers, African Indigenous art has shown remarkable resilience in preserving cultural importance. This marginalisation has made these art forms more prevalent in ethnographic museums than in traditional art galleries. Emmanuel Tetteh (2013: 34-35) states:

> During the late 19th century, many European merchants collected African art forms from sub-Saharan Africa. These art forms were kept in ethnographic museums as objects of curiosity. These art forms were not considered art since they did not conform to their definition; they were not by Western standards of perspective realism and other accepted models.

This statement reflects a narrow and Eurocentric view of what constitutes art, disregarding African art's rich, complex, and culturally embedded traditions. The notion that African art was 'not considered art' because it did not align with Western standards of perspective and realism reveals the deep cultural imperialism inherent in colonial attitudes. Xhosa art, particularly beadwork, ceramics, and other expressive forms, holds profound symbolic meaning and serves multiple functions, including identity construction, communication, and spiritual expression.

[57] Throughout history, beads have been crafted from shells found on seashores and riverbanks. The Ndebele people believe certain beads possess magical, mystical, and medicinal properties. Their phosphorescence, or ability to glow in the dark, is evidence of their extraordinary powers (Mashiyane 2006: 8).

To dismiss these as mere curiosities or artefacts without recognising their cultural significance was part of a broader colonial effort to undermine and devalue Indigenous knowledge systems. African art forms were viewed through a Western lens that sought to marginalise and define them as inferior. Like many other African communities, the Xhosa people have always understood their artistic practices as sophisticated, deeply embedded in their worldview, and essential to their cultural continuity. The dismissal of African art by Western merchants and ethnographic museums reflects their inability to appreciate non-Western conceptions of art. It exemplifies the colonial mindset that sought to erase African societies' cultural and intellectual richness (Mashiyane, 2006: 73).

As Rumi Umino (2008: 33) assert that:

> African art's aesthetic principles often differ significantly from those of Western art. Emphasis on abstraction, symbolism, and incorporating spiritual and social meaning challenges the Western focus on naturalistic representation and individual artistic expression. This divergence in values led to a historical undervaluation of African art within Western art historical discourse.

This statement aptly highlights the fundamental differences between African and Western art. Yet, it fails to fully appreciate the cultural richness and complexity of African art forms, such as Xhosa beadwork, which are inherently steeped in social, spiritual, and cultural significance. While Western art has often been defined by naturalism, individual expression, and the pursuit of realism, Xhosa art operates within a different set of aesthetic values, where abstraction and symbolism serve as essential vehicles for communicating identity, lineage, and spiritual connection. In Xhosa beadwork, for instance, every colour, pattern, and design carries a deeply embedded meaning tied to personal and collective histories. The emphasis on abstraction and symbolism in African art is not a departure from artistic integrity but a reflection of the interconnectedness of art, culture, and the community. This view acknowledges the historical undervaluation of African art within Western discourse, which often dismissed these non-naturalistic forms as 'primitive' or 'incomplete' simply because they did not align with Western notions of what art should be. From a Xhosa perspective, this marginalisation overlooks art's vital, holistic role in the community, highlighting the need to acknowledge African art's intricate aesthetic principles as a sophisticated system (Rozani, 2014: 23).

Beadwork among isiXhosa-speaking people in South Africa is a key means of communicating social information such as age, gender, marital status, and social standing. The vibrant colours and intricate patterns of isiXhosa beadwork visually embody this cultural tradition. Laura Johnson (2017: 87) states, "Bead colours and patterns are symbolic, with each combination

telling a specific story or conveying a particular message." Johnson's statement accurately recognises the significance of beadwork but oversimplifies the rich and layered meanings embedded within Xhosa beadwork traditions. Beadwork in the Xhosa culture is not just symbolic; it is a dynamic, living language through which individuals communicate identity, social status, life transitions, and ancestral connections. Each colour, pattern, and arrangement in Xhosa beadwork carries nuanced meanings that vary depending on context, time, and individual life experiences. For example, green and yellow beads can represent fertility and wealth among isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups. Additionally, beadwork among the Xhosa is not a fixed form of communication; it evolves and adapts, reflecting the fluidity of cultural expression in response to changing social and political contexts. The statement also oversimplifies the dynamic nature of beadwork, treating it as a static system. Its strength lies in encoding personal and communal narratives, reflecting context-specific meanings, and asserting a cultural identity (Johnson, 2017: 88).

African beadwork fascinates global and local scholars, with notable cultural groups including the Akan of Ghana, Maasai of Kenya, Yoruba of Nigeria, and isiZulu-speaking communities in South Africa. Its importance goes beyond adornment, serving as a powerful means of individual and communal expression. Within African culture, beadwork plays a unique role, fulfilling various essential functions. As Akinwumi Ogundiran (2002:432) noted:

> The use of bone, shell, metal, and other beads has a long history in West Africa, reaching about 6,000 years ago. Direct archaeological evidence for using specific exotic stone and glass beads as status objects in Yorubaland dates only to ca. 800-1000 A.D., with the emergence of a new form of the political system in Ile-Ife centred on a ceremonial kingship institution.

While the statement highlights beads' long history and cultural significance in West Africa, particularly in the Yorubaland Ile-Ife region, it inadvertently underscores the diversity of beadwork traditions across the African continent, which cannot be confined to a singular narrative. Among the Xhosa, beadwork is a critical cultural marker, deeply intertwined with identity, spirituality, and social hierarchies, much like its use in Ile-Ife. However, the focus on archaeological evidence and exotic materials such as glass and stone beads reflects a Western framework prioritising physical artefacts over oral histories. For the Xhosa, beadwork is more than just a status symbol; it is a vibrant art form that conveys communal and individual stories. This perspective highlights how beadwork has evolved through colonial and post-colonial influences, blending traditional materials with contemporary practices to stay culturally relevant (Nettleton, 2016: 510).

In Nigeria during 800-1000 A.D., introducing exotic stone and glass beads in Ile-Ife signified a cultural shift, becoming symbols of status linked to royalty within the emerging political system. This change showcased the adaptability of Nigerian societies as they incorporated new materials into their cultural practices. Beads played a crucial role in reinforcing societal power structures and expressing complex ideas about leadership, spirituality, and identity, which are fundamental to West African communities' social and political fabric. Additionally, shells have historically been significant in beadwork across ancient Egypt, West Africa, and Southern Africa. Mandu Vukuru (1997:49) noted, "In East Africa, ostrich eggshell beads have been made for at least 30,000 years. They are the most common decorative ornaments found in sites of hunter-gatherers and pastoralists." Vukuru's view emphasises the long history of bead making in East Africa, particularly the significance of ostrich eggshell beads, which have been integral to African cultures for millennia. These beads often serve as decorative ornaments and indicators of social status or group identity. The perspective highlights their wide use among various communities, from hunter-gatherers to pastoralists, reflecting a shared cultural practice. In *AbaThembu* culture, beadwork using natural materials like bone and shell functions not just as adornment but also as a means of storytelling, social identity, and spiritual communication. While East Africa's archaeological findings are essential, they should not overshadow the rich beadwork traditions in Southern Africa, where ostrich eggshells hold similar symbolic and practical value. Furthermore, the continuity and evolution of bead-making practices reveal how Xhosa and other cultures have adapted this craft to meet changing social, spiritual, and artistic needs. This emphasises the necessity of a broader understanding of beadwork across Africa to appreciate its full significance (Rozani, 2014: 93).

2.3. Identity Formation through Tangible Heritage, such as beadwork

2.3.1. Theoretical Perspectives on Identity and Cultural Expression

Tangible heritage[58] shapes individual and collective identities, particularly art forms like beadwork. This cultural expression goes beyond aesthetics; it serves as a vital marker of heritage, intertwining history, culture, personal narratives and identities.[59] Theoretical frameworks from heritage studies show that cultural expressions such as beadwork act as

[58] *Iintsimbi sele ziyinxalenye yenkcubeko yamaXhosa kwaye okushicilelwayo ngazo nokuyinkcubeko yookhokho bethu kumele kuphume ngenzala kaNguni* (Tolakele Silo, 2020: 4).

[59] Beadwork is a key aspect of identity, helping to identify clan membership. Each clan has its unique style, making its beadwork distinctive (Zungu Bonisile 2000: 13).

vessels of identity, reflecting a community's values, beliefs, and traditions. Yvonne Winters (2015: 67) states:

> Beadwork is not merely an ornamental craft but a profound cultural expression encapsulating a community's heritage, values, and aspirations. Through intricate patterns and vibrant colours, beadwork narrates the stories of ancestors, embodies communal values, and symbolises the collective dreams and identity of the people.

Winters emphasises that beadwork goes beyond simple decoration; it embodies deep cultural significance. As a form of visual communication, it conveys complex social hierarchies, spiritual beliefs, and historical narratives. Each colour and pattern carries symbolic meaning, reflecting the people's intricate social fabric and cultural richness. Artisans create art through beadwork, preserve their heritage, share knowledge with future generations, and express their identity and aspirations. While acknowledging beadwork as a vital cultural expression, it is essential to avoid romanticising its significance. Its meanings are context-specific and dynamic, tied to rituals, life stages, and social roles. For example, *Isidanga* necklace holds unique meanings during *ulwaluko* initiation, signifying transitions in identity rather than general collective dreams. Vibrant colours and patterns in *AbaThembu* beadwork carry nuanced meanings that outsiders can easily misinterpret. A culturally informed interpretation is vital to appreciate the complexity of this form of personal and communal narrative, shaped by evolving traditions and lived experiences.

Postcolonialism[60] It is a theoretical framework that critiques the enduring legacies of colonialism, aiming to reclaim marginalised narratives and identities suppressed under colonial rule. Influenced by scholars like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, it explores colonial domination's cultural, political, and economic effects, emphasising how these systems perpetuate inequalities and shape global power dynamics. As Elleke Boehmer (2005: 6) asserts:

> Postcolonial theory seeks to understand the enduring impacts of colonialism, focusing on how colonial power dynamics continue to shape cultural, political, and economic structures. Scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak have been instrumental in developing this framework to reclaim suppressed narratives and challenge ongoing inequalities.

[60] Ania Loomba (1998: 12) states, "Postcolonialism is a theoretical framework that interrogates the legacy of colonialism, focusing on the lasting impact of colonial rule on the political, cultural, and social landscapes of formerly colonised societies."

Postcolonial theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the lasting effects of colonialism. It examines how colonial power structures continue to influence society and highlights the struggles of formerly colonised peoples. Influential thinkers like Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak have critically analysed colonial discourse, focusing on its impact on cultural identity, political representation, and economic inequality. Their work challenges dominant narratives, seeks to reclaim suppressed voices, and aims for a more equitable world. However, the application of postcolonial theory needs critical examination to avoid perpetuating Western epistemologies. While Fanon, Said, and Spivak provide insights into various postcolonial contexts, their frameworks may not fully address the unique experiences of isiXhosa-speaking people. Xhosa cultural narratives, such as beadwork, oral histories, and gender roles, exemplify distinct resistance and identity formation modes. The focus on reclaiming narratives is crucial for preserving Indigenous knowledge, particularly in Xhosa culture, which emphasises philosophies like ubuntu that prioritise collective well-being and interconnectedness (Soga 1937: 41).

Postcolonial theory provides essential insights into colonial legacies, but focusing on Xhosa-specific perspectives is vital. Edward Said critiques Western misrepresentations of the 'Other,' highlighting the need to reevaluate non-Western narratives to recognise their complexity. This reclamation fosters self-determination and challenges colonial legacies. Similarly, African beadwork powerfully expresses cultural resistance, affirming the complexity and autonomy of Indigenous identities. Nthabiseng Motsemme (2004: 915) writes:

> When we reject dominant Western oppositional hierarchies of silence and speech and instead adopt frameworks where words, silence, dreams, gestures, and tears exist interdependently and within the same interpretive field, we find that the muted are always speaking.

While rejecting Western oppositional hierarchies between silence and speech resonates, the statement requires careful consideration. *Siyavuma* that communication is multifaceted, encompassing more than just spoken words. *Indlela yethu ayifani neyabanye* and within our traditions, silence, dreams, gestures, and tears all hold meaning and contribute to communication. *Siyazazi izinto zethu,* and these forms of expression are often deeply intertwined, not necessarily existing within the same interpretive field but informing and enriching one another. However, the claim that “the muted are always speaking” risks oversimplifying complex power dynamics. A reflexive approach demands we consider the context, the speaker, and the specific form of communication. While recognising marginalisation, recognising the communicative potential of non-verbal expressions, we must

also be aware of the very real silences imposed by power imbalances and historical marginalisation, ensuring that our interpretation of "speaking" doesn't inadvertently mask or minimise these realities.

In *AbaThembu* cultural context, beadwork serves as a vital expression of resistance and cultural identity, preserving history and asserting agency. Often overlooked, this traditional art form plays a key role in rites of passage, allowing communities to reclaim their voice and convey marginalised meanings. Tangible heritage, encompassing monuments, artefacts, and traditions, empowers marginalised communities to articulate and redefine their identities. This process enables them to challenge dominant colonial narratives and confront historical injustices. Ultimately, tangible heritage is an essential empowerment tool that enriches our understanding of identity complexities within postcolonial frameworks. Jelina Haines *et al.* (2024: 295) argue that:

> The reinterpretation and reclamation of heritage empower marginalised voices to confront historical injustices and assert their agency, fostering cultural resilience and redefining their place within the broader social narrative. Tangible heritage emerges as a crucial tool for empowerment, enhancing our understanding of the complexities of identity within postcolonial frameworks.

This perspective effectively articulates the significance of heritage reinterpretation and reclamation for marginalised communities. By re-examining and re-appropriating their cultural heritage, marginalised groups can challenge dominant narratives that have historically misrepresented or erased their histories. This process empowers them to confront historical injustices, reclaim their agency, and redefine their societal place. Tangible heritage, such as archaeological sites, traditional crafts, and oral histories, is vital in helping marginalised communities understand their identity and foster cultural resilience in a postcolonial context. Engaging with these elements deepens their self-worth and belonging (Haines *et al.* 2024: 298).

Artistic practices, particularly beadwork, further explore identity formation and reflect societal gender roles. Beadwork, primarily created by women and worn by men during significant life stages, is a form of resistance against patriarchy. Cultural artefacts act as negotiation spaces where tradition intersects with modernity, allowing communities to redefine heritage in ways that resonate with contemporary identities and challenge historical constraints. The connection between tangible heritage and identity is evident in beaded objects symbolising belonging, communicating social roles, and facilitating self-expression. Scholars note that such heritage reflects cultural values and shapes identity, especially during significant transitions like rites of passage. Lizette Reitsma et al (2013: 12) argue that:

> The interplay of tangible heritage and identity is evident in how beaded objects symbolise belonging, communicate social roles, and serve as a medium for self-expression. Scholars argue that tangible heritage, such as beadwork, reflects cultural values and shapes identity, especially in transitional contexts like rites of passage.

This view highlights the profound connection between tangible heritage and identity formation. In *AbaThembu* culture context, beadwork is a powerful example of this interplay. Through intricate patterns and vibrant colours, beaded objects symbolise belonging to specific cultural groups or lineages, communicate social roles (such as marital status or age), and provide a powerful medium for individual self-expression. Scholars rightly point out that tangible heritage like beadwork reflects existing cultural values and actively shapes individual and collective identities, particularly during significant life transitions such as rites of passage. Often wearing specific beadwork, these rituals mark essential milestones and reinforce community cultural values and social roles (Nessa Leibhammer, 2016: 59).

2.4. Decolonising Use of Indigenous Material in Creative Work

The decolonisation of creative practices involving Indigenous materials is rooted in broader movements to challenge and dismantle the lingering impacts of colonialism on cultural expression. During colonial periods, Indigenous art forms and materials were often appropriated, decontextualised, and commodified by colonial powers, stripping them of their cultural significance and agency. In echoing this perspective, Ruth Phillips (2011: 40) asserts that:

> Decolonisation of Indigenous art involves reclaiming and recontextualising traditional practices and materials that were appropriated and commodified during colonial periods. This process is essential for restoring Indigenous art's cultural significance and agency, historically marginalised and misrepresented.

The statement captures the essence of decolonisation within the context of Indigenous art, particularly relevant to the Xhosa experience. Colonialism, through its exploitative practices, significantly impacted Xhosa art forms. Traditional artistry like beadwork, pottery, and woodcarving were often appropriated, stripped of their cultural context, and mass-produced for the global market, reducing them to mere commodities. This commodification not only undermined the cultural value of these art forms but also marginalised the Xhosa artists who created them, diminishing their agency and control over their artistic expressions. Therefore, the decolonisation of Xhosa art necessitates a conscious effort to reclaim these traditional practices, recontextualise them within their original cultural frameworks, and empower Xhosa artists to reclaim their rightful place as custodians and innovators of their artistic heritage. This

process aims to deepen the understanding and appreciation of the cultural significance of art forms, guided by Xhosa values, while empowering Xhosa artists to revitalise and reinterpret their traditions actively (Nomusa Makhubu & Ruth Simbao 2013: 301).

Decolonising Indigenous materials in contemporary contexts seeks to restore cultural sovereignty and emphasise their intrinsic value beyond Western standards. It prioritises Indigenous voices in creative endeavours and acknowledges the rich meanings in materials like beadwork, textiles, wood, and clay. For instance, in *AbaThembu* contexts, beadwork reflects complex meanings related to identity, gender, and ritual that must be respected in modern creations. David Temin (2023: 29) states, "Decolonisation involves the reclamation of Indigenous cultural practices and materials, emphasising their intrinsic value and cultural sovereignty. This process challenges the Western aesthetic and commercial standards historically marginalised Indigenous art forms." This statement resonates deeply within the Xhosa context. Colonialism stripped the Xhosa people of their land, resources, and cultural identity. Traditional art forms such as beadwork, carvings, and textiles were appropriated and commodified, losing their cultural significance in Western markets. This devaluation marginalised isiXhosa-speaking people's perspectives. A pivotal event was the Xhosa cattle-killing movement of 1856-1857, driven by prophetic visions that led to the slaughter of around 400,000 cattle, resulting in famine and an estimated 80,000 deaths among the Xhosa. This tragedy further weakened them and increased their vulnerability to colonial domination. Therefore, decolonisation calls for the reclamation of these cultural practices as vital expressions of knowledge, spirituality, and social structures. By challenging dominant Western aesthetics, Xhosa artists can reclaim cultural sovereignty and ensure their art is valued for its intrinsic worth and rich narratives (Aaron McArthur, 2005: 1).

The statement emphasises collaboration with Indigenous creators, promoting innovation that respects tradition while addressing cultural appropriation. Decolonisation encourages inclusivity, cultural preservation, and equity by reimagining Indigenous materials in the global art scene. It is crucial for challenging Eurocentric narratives and integrating Indigenous art forms, such as beadwork, rock art, pottery, and traditional crafts, into broader artistic discourse, celebrating Indigenous communities' heritage and creative expressions. Oguibe (2004: 31) emphatically asserts that "reclaim Indigenous knowledge systems and artistic practices that have been marginalised or erased by colonial histories." This perspective directly addresses the core of decolonisation for the Xhosa people. Colonialism actively suppressed Xhosa knowledge systems and artistic practices, viewing them as inferior to Western ones. The

marginalisation and near-erasure of valuable traditions like traditional medicine, astronomy, and intricate beadwork have diminished cultural heritage. Reclaiming these practices is essential for revitalising cultural identity, challenging colonial narratives, and ensuring their survival for future generations. Artists like Nicholas Hlobo and Nandipha Mntambo play a key role in this effort by using Indigenous art mediums to decolonise South African art history.[61] Their work critiques colonial narratives and reconnects with Indigenous cultural expressions, fostering a more nuanced understanding of South African art. Nontobeko Ntombela, writing about the work of Zama Dunywa titled *Ngiyini Kuwe?* (What am I to you)*, Uthini Ngami?* (What are you saying about me) *And Ufunani Kimi?* (What do you want from me?) (2016: 104) provides a subtle interpretation of this artistic endeavour, positing that:

> Although the 'outfits' details seemingly represent Zulu culture, they also reference many other African cultures, pointing to their hybridity and interconnectedness. Props, such as the mat on the floor in the first photograph and the *isagila* (knobkerrie) held by the woman whose body is red, are objects sold commercially across continents. The colours of the beads worn by the women (red, black and white) constitute a palette standard for many African communities. The pigment (red and white *umcako,* ochre) smeared on their bodies references practices of *ukuthwasa* (sangoma initiation), a cultural custom practised across sub-Saharan Africa.

Here, Ntombela highlights the interconnectedness of African cultures, particularly within the Southern African context. While the attire might evoke specific Zulu cultural elements, the broader picture reveals a tapestry of shared practices across the region. The presence of the mat and the knobkerrie, objects with widespread commercial availability, underscores the fluidity of cultural exchange and the impact of globalisation. Similarly, the daily use of red, black, and white beads and body adornment with ochre across many African communities emphasises the shared cultural heritage that transcends specific ethnic boundaries. Reinterpreting and reclaiming heritage empowers marginalised voices to confront historical injustices and assert their agency.

This process fosters cultural resilience and helps redefine their place in the broader social narrative. Tangible heritage is a vital tool for empowerment, deepening our understanding of identity complexities within postcolonial contexts. As elucidated by the South African scholar Zakes Mda (2002: 15), "Art, as an embodiment of culture, cannot be understood without considering the socio-political context from which it emerges." This view holds significant truth within the Xhosa context. Xhosa art forms, whether intricate beadwork, powerful

[61] Okwui Enwezor (2004: 59) states, "The work of contemporary African artists is not merely reactive; it is actively reconstructive, seeking to create a dialogue between the past and the present."

storytelling, or traditional music, are deeply intertwined with the socio-political landscape of the Xhosa people. Xhosa art is a powerful medium for celebrating ancestral heritage, commemorating historical events, expressing resistance to colonial oppression, and navigating post-apartheid complexities. Understanding Xhosa society's historical, social, and political contexts enhances appreciation of its artistic expressions. Mntambo employs a unique sculpting technique using cowhides to create figures that reflect her exploration of identity, culture, and transformation. Each sculpture invites viewers to engage with its rich textures and forms, conveying a deep understanding of the human experience. Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi (2013: 45) asserts:

> Contemporary African artists engage in a dynamic process of reconstructing historical narratives, creating a dialogue between the past and the present. Their work challenges Eurocentric perspectives and reclaims indigenous histories, offering new interpretations that resonate with current socio-political contexts.

This statement reflects the dynamic nature of contemporary African art, particularly relevant to the Xhosa context. Xhosa artists actively reconstruct historical narratives marginalised or misrepresented by colonial perspectives. Xhosa artists draw inspiration from traditional art forms like beadwork, storytelling, and music, blending them with contemporary sensibilities. Their influential works challenge Eurocentric perspectives and offer new interpretations of history, reclaiming indigenous narratives while addressing current socio-political issues (Ruth Nyambura, Tom Nyamache & Emily Nyabisi, 2012:35).

This approach deepens our understanding of identity and history, highlighting the continuity of African experiences and the relationship between past and present. It is essential for decolonisation, empowering artists to reinterpret their histories meaningfully. Their contributions honour cultural legacies and enrich the discourse on cultural identity in a changing world while also demanding a critical examination of the power dynamics within South African art history. As Makhubu (2017: 67) argues, “Decolonisation is not just about adding Indigenous art forms to the existing canon but about dismantling the structures of knowledge production that have privileged certain voices over others.” Makhubu highlights a crucial aspect of decolonisation in art, particularly relevant to the Xhosa experience. Incorporating Xhosa art forms into established art canons is a positive step, but it doesn't fully address the underlying power imbalances in these systems. Genuine decolonisation requires a profound transformation that dismantles structures favouring certain voices while marginalising others, like the Xhosa. This involves challenging Eurocentric aesthetic standards, re-evaluating curatorial practices, and empowering Xhosa artists to shape the narratives around

their art actively. To achieve true decolonisation, we must critically examine the authoritative structures defining art, question established histories and highlight overlooked narratives. This process involves reassessing the criteria and methodologies for studying art, acknowledging that Western institutions often impose their interpretations on non-Western art, stripping it of its meanings. Decolonisation seeks to elevate Indigenous epistemologies based on their value, fostering an equitable knowledge landscape (Makhubu, 2017: 67-8).

2.5. Gaps and Contribution in Existing Literature

2.5.1. Lack of Focus on Beaded Necklaces in *AbaThembu* Heritage

Several prominent South African scholars and curators have significantly contributed to studying Xhosa beadwork. Although the following list is not exhaustive, notable figures include Carina Rozani, Nomalungelo Goduka, Nokuzola Mndende, Nomboniso Gasa, Joan Broster, Abrey Eliot, Gary Van Wyk, Carol Kaufmann, and Nessa Leibhammer. Their work has been instrumental in documenting and interpreting beadwork as a complex art form. Additionally, Elizabeth Preston-Whyte has focused on the social and symbolic meanings inherent in Zulu beadwork, which often intersects with Xhosa traditions. Klopper's research delves into the intersections of art, identity, and politics in South Africa, illuminating beadwork's role in cultural expression. Anitra Nettleton, an art historian, has examined beadwork within the broader context of South African art and material culture. For a deeper understanding of Xhosa beadwork, one must consult their specific publications, as each scholar addresses different facets of this art form.

Nettleton (2016: 521) argues that "despite their admiration for the ingenuity of form, the Europeans who acquired the snuff spoons viewed that aesthetic elaboration of such objects as lesser interest than the curiosity of their usage." From an African perspective, the statement about Europeans prioritising the "curiosity of usage" over the "ingenuity of form" in snuff spoons is a familiar, though frustrating, observation. *Siyavuma* colonial gazes often reduced African artistry to ethnographic curiosities, focusing on the *exotic* practice rather than the artistic skill and cultural meaning embedded within the object. *Indlela yethu ayifani neyabanye* and this tendency reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of African aesthetics. *Siyazazi inkcubeko yethu* and form and function are often inextricably linked for us. The beauty of a snuff spoon lies in how it enhances its purpose. Prioritising "usage" over "form" reflects a colonial mindset that seeks to understand African cultures from an external viewpoint, neglecting the internal logic and artistic expression inherent in these objects. Even in admiring

their "ingenuity," the colonial gaze often misses the true artistry, focusing instead on the perceived strangeness of the practice. *AbaThembu* cultural group boasts a rich heritage, particularly in intricate beadwork traditions. However, this vital aspect has gained limited scholarly attention, leaving a gap in our understanding of its significance within the community. *Inkciyo* (traditional girdles) and *Isidanga* (necklaces) serve as critical social and cultural markers, representing key life transitions from childhood to adulthood. *AbaThembu* beadwork conveys cultural values and gender identities, celebrating rites of passage that signify maturity (Mpumelelo Makuliwe, 1995: 10).

Yet, these items' nuanced meanings and contextual aspects remain unexplored in academic discourse, undermining the recognition of African Indigenous art forms and risking eroding traditional knowledge systems amid modern influences and globalisation. Addressing this gap is crucial for preserving *AbaThembu's* cultural heritage and recognising beadwork traditions as vital to African Indigenous art history. While research on beadwork in Southern Africa is growing, significant gaps persist in understanding its role within specific cultural contexts, particularly among *AbaThembu.* Many studies tend to oversimplify Indigenous art, neglecting the deep meanings behind items like beaded necklaces that symbolise social status and identity. To fully appreciate the richness of beadwork, exploring the unique cultural narratives and values shaping its creation and use within *AbaThembu* community is essential. Reitsma et al (2013: 16) further argues that:

> To truly appreciate the richness of beadwork, it is essential to delve into the specific cultural narratives and values that inform the creation and use of these items within AbaThembu context. Beadwork is deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of AbaThembu people, symbolising identity, status, and community values through intricate designs and colour patterns.

This argument reflects the profound cultural significance of beadwork within *AbaThembu* community, a sub-group of the Xhosa people. Beadwork is not merely decorative but a visual language with deep cultural meaning. Each bead, colour, and pattern tells a story, reflecting ancestral traditions, social hierarchies, and personal narratives. To truly appreciate *AbaThembu's* beadwork, one must go beyond admiring its aesthetic beauty. It requires understanding the intricate symbolism of each piece, recognising its role in social interactions, and acknowledging the profound cultural knowledge and artistic skill that goes into its creation. By delving into the cultural narratives and values that inform *AbaThembu* beadwork, we can gain a deeper appreciation for its artistic merit and enduring significance as a powerful expression of *AbaThembu's* identity and cultural heritage (Mndende, 2021: 194).

Figure 9 – *Inqkokhwe (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

In December, the Eastern Cape comes alive with the vibrant *Umgidi*[62] festivities, celebrating the homecoming of newly graduated male initiates from *ulwaluko*. This joyous occasion is often showcased on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. I've observed how *Inqkokhwe* neckband ***(figure 9)*** beautifully complements women's outfits, which feature intricately designed beaded textiles like *Umbhaco* (skirt), *Incebetha* (apron), and *Isiqhova* (turban). These garments enhance our cultural identity and reflect our rich heritage during this special time. It is essential to highlight that *Inqkokhwe*[63] neckband carries significant cultural meaning, traditionally worn by female initiates during *Intonjane* celebration, the female counterpart to Umgidi. This rite, primarily practised among *AbaThembu,* is reserved for girls over eighteen, indicating their readiness for marriage. The neckband itself symbolises femininity, respect, and the transition into adulthood. This distinction invites us to reflect on its cultural significance, especially since such vibrant

[62] In contemporary African ceremonies, beadwork is not only a form of adornment but also a medium through which the values and traditions of the community are communicated and reinforced(Kofi Agorsah, 2021: 203).
[63] The application of particular beadwork patterns in initiation ceremonies symbolises the shift from adolescence to adulthood, each denoting various stages of this transformative process (Buyisiwe Xulu, 2016: 34).

beadwork is not typically worn during celebratory occasions like *Umgidi*. These variations in attire underscore the complexities of artistic expression and the respect integral to these essential rituals. The experience emphasises the importance of refraining from blaming the individuals involved and highlights the necessity of accurately documenting tangible heritage. This documentation plays a crucial role in safeguarding against cultural misinterpretation and misrepresentation. By capturing the intricate details of our cultural heritage objects, one can ensure their significance is preserved and understood correctly, promoting respect and appreciation for diverse cultures and histories. This proactive approach is vital in fostering accurate representations and narratives that genuinely reflect the essence of various cultures (Mndende, 2021: 198).

Beadwork, as seen above, is not just decorative items but rather profound symbols that resonate with the values, traditions, and social roles assigned to men and women throughout various stages of life. Reflecting on the art of beadwork, we recognise the need for more thorough documentation of this dynamic and evolving tradition. This artistry connects historical narratives with contemporary practices, embodying the social and cultural changes woven into the fabric of *AbaThembu* community. Each bead we encounter carries significance, and the techniques used in their creation reveal a rich tapestry of knowledge passed down through generations. As I consider these often-overlooked elements, I realise how they can significantly enrich the broader discourse surrounding Indigenous art, the complexities of identity formation, and the vital practices of heritage preservation within *AbaThembu* community. This investigation deepens my understanding of how cultural objects contribute to individual and communal identities and highlights the intricate dance between tradition and modernity that these communities navigate.

2.5.2. Colonialism and the Division of Cultural Groups Through Bead Colours

During the colonial[64] period, European traders and missionaries manipulated the availability and distribution of glass beads, significantly impacting South African Indigenous societies. Colonisers[65] controlled trade routes, determining which groups accessed specific bead colours.

[64] Colonial interactions presented obstacles and advancements to beadwork in Africa, as indigenous artisans modified their techniques to include new materials while navigating the effects of colonial cultural influences (Smith, 2018: 76).

[65] In the late 19th century, travellers, missionaries, and colonial agents collected beadwork from these communities as curios and souvenirs (Stevenson & Graham-Stewart, 2000:9).

This control influenced social hierarchies and intergroup relations, creating lasting effects on Indigenous populations. The glass beads' trade dynamics and cultural significance highlight how colonial[66] powers shaped Indigenous social structures. Beads were typically purchased at local trading stores owned by colonial settlers, where buyers sought bright colours and well-shaped beads with appropriately sized holes. Unsatisfactory beads remained unsold, even at reduced prices. Historically, beads were sold in strings, and damaged strings were sold by the spoonful, depending on their price. In the trading store where I grew up, hanks of beads hung from nails, with enamel basins below to catch beads from broken strings sold by the spoonful (Costello, 1990: 17).

2.5. Conclusion of Chapter Two and Transition to Chapter Three

This chapter invites reflection on the historical context of beadwork within the framework of colonialism, revealing how Indigenous art forms, particularly beadwork, have evolved in the face of cultural disruption. Despite the intent of colonialism to marginalise Indigenous knowledge and artistic practices, beadwork has emerged as a crucial medium of cultural expression and resilience. It is a repository of ancestral knowledge, asserting cultural autonomy and illuminating the intricate relationship between tangible heritage and personal identity. Building on this understanding, Chapter Three turns inward to explore beadwork's role in shaping male identity within *AbaThembu* culture. It encourages contemplation on how beadwork encodes and communicates gendered identities, influencing societal roles and rites of passage. This analysis locates beadwork within Heritage Studies, urging us to consider the gendered dimensions of cultural expression and their profound implications for comprehending identity in both postcolonial and contemporary contexts. Ultimately, beadwork is not only viewed as a historical artefact but also as a dynamic cultural practice that actively influences the lived experiences of *AbaThembu* people.

[66] After the significant European exploratory voyages of the 15th century, trade routes evolved, leading to an increase in ocean-going trade (Nourisson, 1992: 19).

Chapter Three

3. Gender and Identity in *AbaThembu* Cultural Context

3.1 Introduction: Understanding Identity and Gender Formation

Colonialism has profoundly influenced African identities, imposing Western norms, languages, and governance, resulting in a complex cultural landscape.[67] As Fanon (1967) observed, colonised individuals often adopt the coloniser's culture, leading to a fragmented sense of self. This creates a dual consciousness, where people balance their indigenous identities with those forced upon them by colonial powers. This duality fosters creative resistance and allows for the evolution of African identities in response to various influences. Today, globalisation and modernity further complicate identity concepts, especially amid ongoing conflicts in Sudan, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These wars contribute to displacement and reshape communal identities, prompting a re-evaluation of self-perception. The continent's youth play a vital role in blending traditional cultural expressions with global visual arts, music, and fashion trends, reflecting an evolving cultural landscape. As Sarah Thornton (1995: 10) points out, "Youth culture is a significant driver of societal change, blending innovation with tradition to create new cultural norms. This process is evident in their creative expressions across various mediums, influencing broader cultural trends and societal values." Thornton highlights how Xhosa youth actively reshape their culture by blending traditional values with modern influences in music, fashion, language, and social practices. This process helps them form their identities and influences broader societal trends, showing that identity is a constantly evolving "production" shaped by representation (Stuart Hall, 1996: 2).

Furthermore, representation of Africa affects both collective and individual identities, but global media often relies on reductive stereotypes that ignore the continent's diversity. These oversimplified narratives can distort external perceptions and how Africans view themselves. Scholars like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o advocate revitalising African languages in literature and the arts, allowing for authentic cultural narratives. Contemporary artists, such as Yinka Shonibare, contribute to this narrative transformation by using vibrant Dutch wax fabrics to critique post-colonial identity and challenge stereotypes. This creative resistance is crucial for evolving African identity and celebrating diversity. Theories from scholars and artists emphasise that

[67] The role of beadwork as a significant index of ethnic identity emerges prominently during the era of white settlement and the subsequent evolution of urban lifestyles among black communities. This phenomenon underscores the construction of beadwork as a distinctive black 'tradition,' reflecting broader socio-cultural dynamics and the negotiation of identity within changing historical contexts (Nettleton 2014:349).

African identity is multifaceted, shaped by indigenous traditions, colonial legacies, and global influences. Hall highlights identity's dynamic nature, urging an understanding within various cultural contexts. Consequently, the discourse surrounding African identity involves continuous negotiation of history and art, emphasising the importance of self-representation and challenging stereotypes for a nuanced portrayal of African experiences (Fanon, 1967: 18).

Hall (1996: 2) argues that "identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Rather, we should think of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation." This argument resonates deeply with the Xhosa understanding of identity. Xhosa identity is not a fixed, static concept but a dynamic process of self-discovery and negotiation shaped by various influences. Historical experiences, particularly the impact of colonialism, have significantly shaped Xhosa's identity, leading to internalised oppression and a struggle to maintain cultural integrity. The Xhosa people are actively reshaping their identities through artistic expression, cultural revitalisation, and ongoing engagement with their heritage. This continuous process involves negotiating and redefining cultural values in response to modern challenges. In the broader African context, diverse cultures, histories, and postcolonial legacies contribute to evolving identities. Unlike the Western focus on individualism, many African societies emphasise communal and relational aspects of identity, as captured in the concept of ubuntu: "I am because we are." This view sees identity as fluid, influenced by social interactions and the cultural environment. For instance, initiation ceremonies among *AbaThembu* play a crucial role in defining gendered identities and highlight the ongoing evolution of identity. Judith Butler, in her work 'Gender Trouble' (1990), argues that gender is a performative social construct rather than a fixed identity. She posits that gender arises from repeated actions and societal norms, emphasising "gender performativity," the notion that individuals enact gender through culturally dictated practices (Butler 1990: 43).

Butler challenges the binary view of gender, asserting that it is fluid and shaped by historical and cultural contexts. She critiques the perception that gender aligns strictly with biological sex, suggesting such beliefs stem from regulatory discourses that sustain heteronormativity. Her scholarship has significantly contributed to deconstructing rigid gender norms and fostering a more inclusive understanding of diverse gender identities (Butler, 1990: 56). One

of the influential scholars on masculinity[68], Kopano Ratele (2013: 145) points out that "Men learn about masculinity by being addressed by others, by comparing themselves with others, and by comparing themselves with an image of themselves at an earlier point in their lives." The perspective accurately reflects how Xhosa's masculinity is shaped by social interaction and cultural expectations. The concept of *'indoda'* is central to Xhosa culture, and achieving it involves navigating complex social dynamics. Xhosa men learn about masculinity through interactions with peers and elders, constantly measuring themselves against societal expectations. Influenced by the concept of *'ubuntu'*[69], which emphasises collective responsibility, they are expected to be providers, protectors, and leaders in their families and communities. Masculinity emerges from tradition and individual choice, allowing men to adapt to social and personal challenges. This reflective process helps them navigate their gender identity, recognise their growth, and adjust their behaviours based on self-perception and external feedback. Rather than a fixed trait, masculinity is an evolving construct shaped by social contexts and experiences.

Ratele's perspective fosters a nuanced understanding of gender issues, promoting transformation and growth in both individual and collective expressions of masculinity, and encourages critical reflection on reshaping gender norms for more equitable and inclusive understandings. Continuing with this thought, Ratele (2014: 118) argues:

> Such struggles to attain adequate personal and social status are entangled with the socioeconomic development-related failures of Africa's ruling men and their failures as political leaders, as measured by the lack of essential services, poverty, unemployment, inequality, and levels of violence in their countries.

Ratele discusses a significant issue affecting many African nations, especially those with large Xhosa populations. He points out that leadership failures contribute to individual struggles for social status. The interconnected challenges of poverty, unemployment, inequality, and violence create instability that impacts all citizens, including Xhosa communities. Political leaders often prioritise personal gain over the well-being of their people, resulting in corruption, mismanagement of resources, and poor governance. This, in turn, leads to a lack of essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, which hinders both individual progress and national development. To substantiate this view, Kwabena Gyimah-Brempong (2002: 20)

[68] Beadwork in African societies is not merely a decorative art form; it is a powerful medium through which concepts of masculinity are articulated and affirmed. The choice of colours, patterns, and motifs in men's beadwork reflects societal expectations of being a man (Olayinka Ogunleye 2008: 78).

[69] Humanity.

asserts that “Corruption in Africa undermines socio-economic development by diverting resources away from essential public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, hindering progress and exacerbating poverty.” The statement reflects a major challenge facing many African nations, including those with significant Xhosa populations. Corruption siphons off resources for essential public services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure. This diversion of funds not only hinders development but also exacerbates poverty and inequality, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities. Limited access to quality healthcare, poor education, and deteriorating infrastructure perpetuate poverty and obstruct community progress.

In isiXhosa-speaking communities such as *AbaThembu*, male identity is significantly shaped by initiation rituals, which are essential for a young man's transition to adulthood and deeply rooted in cultural practices, impacting personal and social identities. Limited access to quality healthcare, poor education, and deteriorating infrastructure perpetuate poverty and obstruct community progress. Mfecane, an Associate Professor at the University of the Western Cape in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, specialises in gender studies with a focus on the complexities of gender dynamics, the construction of masculinities, and the links between medical anthropology and men’s health. His work offers an insightful perspective on the interconnections between gender roles and health within societal frameworks. He argues that:

> *Ulwaluko* entails, among other things, circumcision followed by separation from society for a period of three to six weeks. During the separation period, the initiate —*umkhwetha* — lives in the secluded temporary *ibhoma* lodge with a designated guardian called *ikhankatha*… After completing the *ulwaluko* ritual, a Xhosa initiate is reintegrated into the community and officially regarded as a man, an *indoda*. This allows him to marry, build a homestead, and actively participate in community discussions and rituals (Mfecane, 2016: 204).

Mfecane accurately describes the significance of *ulwaluko*[70], a crucial rite of passage for Xhosa boys. It highlights the physical and social transformation involved, with circumcision marking the physical transition and the seclusion period fostering mental and emotional growth. The role of *ikhankatha* is emphasised, underscoring the importance of guidance and mentorship during this transformative phase. Upon completion, the initiative is recognised as *indoda,* gaining full participation in community life and its responsibilities. *Ulwaluko* is a cornerstone

[70] While much has been written about ulwaluko, it primarily focuses on issues like deaths, injuries, crime, and gender oppression (Mfecane, 2016: 204).

of Xhosa identity, shaping masculinity, social roles, and cultural continuity. Examining identity and gender in close-knit communities reveals complex dynamics of disagreement and reinterpretation. While rooted in tradition, these communities are dynamic and subject to change from internal beliefs and external pressures (Mfecane 2016: 215).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 87) points out that "even in the most traditional settings, identity and gender roles are subject to negotiation and redefinition, especially in the face of modernity and globalisation." This statement highlights the dynamic nature of gender roles and identities, even within seemingly traditional contexts like Xhosa culture. While *ulwaluko* and other cultural practices may reinforce specific gender roles, the influence of modernity and globalisation introduces new ideas and challenges these established norms. Xhosa society constantly evolves, and individuals actively negotiate and redefine their identities based on their experiences, interactions, and changing social realities. This ongoing negotiation process reflects the fluidity of gender roles and the adaptability of Xhosa culture in the face of contemporary challenges.

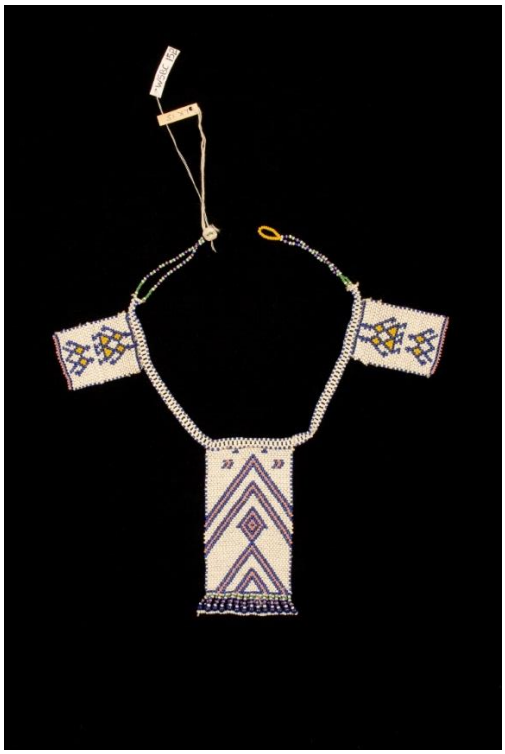

Figure 10 – *Iphoco elinesigcina ntliziyo (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

Globalisation has introduced new materials and styles that have impacted African beadwork. Artisans creatively blend these influences, producing designs that merge traditional aesthetics

with contemporary trends. Urbanisation has further transformed beadwork practices, as those moving to cities give rise to new meanings reflective of urban social and economic changes. Younger generations reinterpret traditional beadwork, incorporating their perspectives and experiences, leading to new expressions that respect the past while challenging established norms. This adaptability shows how African cultures can evolve while safeguarding their core identities, ensuring beadwork remains a vibrant art form that captures the richness and diversity of African cultures.

3.2. Gender within *AbaThembu* Cultural Context

In this section, I reflect on how *AbaThembu* community defines and negotiates gender roles, emphasising the cultural significance of beadwork in shaping male and female identities through rituals and rites of passage. I recognise that many Indigenous African societies embrace a more fluid and inclusive understanding of gender, allowing for a diverse spectrum of identities that often transcend the rigid binary framework found in many Western contexts.

As I observe, individuals within these cultures may identify with genders that fall outside traditional categories, and their unique roles and expressions are met with acceptance and respect. This acknowledgement is deeply embedded in cultural traditions, spiritual practices, and social norms, revealing the strong connection between gender and cultural identity. Ultimately, I appreciate how this understanding nurtures varied identities, honouring personal narratives and communal experiences. Azille Coetzee (2018: 11) states, "In cross-cultural gender studies, theorists impose Western categories on non-Western cultures and then project such categories as natural." Here, Coetzee highlights a crucial concern within cross-cultural gender studies, particularly relevant when examining Xhosa culture. Western theoretical frameworks often impose pre-existing categories like 'masculinity' and 'femininity' onto non-Western societies, assuming these categories are universal and natural. This approach can lead to misinterpretations of complex cultural realities. In the Xhosa context, concepts like *'indoda'*[71] and *'umfazi'*[72] are deeply intertwined with cultural values, social roles, and spiritual beliefs. These concepts cannot be easily translated or understood through the lens of Western gender binaries. Researchers should approach Xhosa gender with sensitivity and humility, acknowledging its unique cultural nuances while avoiding Western frameworks that might obscure the complexities of Xhosa gender identities. In men's and women's beadwork, colours,

[71] Manhood.
[72] Womanhood.

patterns, and motifs convey symbolic meanings, creating regionally understandable narratives akin to a dialect (Van Wyk 2003: 14).

Nkiru Nzegwu (2006: 50) argues, "Gender roles in African communities are not merely social constructs but are deeply embedded in the spiritual and cosmological frameworks that guide everyday life." This statement reflects the deeply rooted nature of gender roles within Xhosa culture. Gender roles are not merely social constructs but are intricately woven into the fabric of Xhosa spirituality and cosmology. Ancestral beliefs, spiritual practices, and traditional narratives all shape the understanding of *ubudoda*[73] and *Ubufazi.*[74] Gender roles in Xhosa society are dynamic, adapting to changing social and economic conditions while remaining influenced by deep spiritual and cosmological foundations. These traditions strengthen community bonds, preserve heritage, promote social cohesion, and uphold cultural identity and values. *AbaThembu* subgroup exhibits unique cultural practices that align with broader Xhosa traditions. Kristin Boswell (2018: 45) states that "Zulu beadwork serves as a visual language, conveying intricate messages about the wearer's social status, age, and marital status." Here, Boswell captures the multifaceted role of beadwork within Zulu culture. Beyond mere adornment, Zulu beadwork functions as a visual language, intricately communicating information about the wearer's social standing, age, and marital status. The specific colours, patterns, and motifs employed in the beadwork carry significant symbolic meaning, allowing individuals to convey their identity and social standing within the community. This intricate visual communication system underscores the profound cultural significance of beadwork in Zulu society, serving as a powerful means of self-expression and social interaction (Nzegwu 2006: 74).

However, colonialism often devalued or reinterpreted these customs through a Western lens, leaving a lasting legacy on gender dynamics in Africa today. Nzegwu (2006: 105) also noted that "Colonialism introduced new criteria for manhood, where Western education and the ability to engage with the colonial economy became more valued than the traditional rites of passage." The statement reflects the significant impact of colonialism on Xhosa's notions of manhood. Traditionally, in isiXhosa-speaking communities, ubudoda was achieved by completing ulwaluko (initiation) and demonstrating resilience, courage, and adherence to cultural norms. Colonialism introduced new standards for manhood, emphasising Western education, colonial employment, and navigating the colonial system. The migrant experience

[73] Masculinity.
[74] Femininity.

symbolises modernity, challenging traditional manhood markers and resulting in internalised colonial values. This created a complex negotiation between conventional and colonial ideals within Xhosa communities. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 113) states, "Colonialism sought to erase indigenous practices and replace them with Western norms, leading to a loss of cultural identity and heritage." Ndlovu-Gatsheni's view reflects the devastating impact of colonialism on African societies. Colonial powers actively sought to suppress and replace indigenous practices, including language, religion, and social structures, with Western norms. This deliberate effort to erase Xhosa's cultural identity had profound and lasting consequences. The Xhosa people have faced significant cultural suppression, leading to a loss of confidence and disorientation within their communities. This legacy continues to affect them today as they strive to maintain their cultural heritage in a globalised world (Boehmer, 2005: 18).

The erasure of Indigenous knowledge has disrupted the transmission of artistic practices and beliefs across generations, resulting in lasting scars from cultural alienation. Recent scholarship, including the work of Anna Coetzee, focuses on documenting and revitalising Xhosa and *AbaThembu* traditions, highlighting their resilience and adaptability in contemporary contexts. Coetzee (2012: 55) notes, "Despite the pressures of modernisation and globalisation, many Xhosa and *AbaThembu* communities continue to uphold their traditional practices, adapting them to the modern context while retaining their core values." This statement reflects the resilience and adaptability of isiXhosa and *AbaThembu* culture. Despite facing significant pressures from modernisation and globalisation, these communities demonstrate a remarkable ability to maintain their cultural heritage. Traditional practices, such as *ulwaluko* (initiation), conventional medicine, and the use of the isiXhosa language, continue to be valued and practised, albeit in evolving forms. These communities balance modern complexities with their core cultural values, ensuring the continuity of Xhosa and *AbaThembu* traditions. The integration of contemporary influences with traditional practices has fostered a deeper understanding of gender roles in *AbaThembu* community, where the relevance of customs is increasingly negotiated alongside modern values and societal changes.

Smith (2015: 57) highlights, "The dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in *AbaThembu* community illustrates how gender roles are continuously negotiated and redefined, reflecting a complex interplay between cultural heritage and contemporary realities." This perspective captures the dynamic nature of gender roles within *AbaThembu* community. While traditional norms and values continue to shape gender expectations, the forces of modernity and globalisation introduce new ideas and challenges. *AbaThembu* individuals, particularly

women, are increasingly engaging in education, pursuing careers, and participating in public life, leading to a re-negotiation of traditional gender roles. This process involves a complex interplay between cultural heritage and contemporary realities, with individuals adapting and redefining their roles while valuing and preserving core cultural values. This dynamic process is described by Smith (2015: 60), who notes, "The negotiation between traditional practices and modern influences reflects a complex balance where cultural heritage and contemporary realities continuously inform and reshape gender roles." This statement reflects the dynamic nature of gender roles within Xhosa society. Traditional practices, deeply rooted in cultural values and ancestral beliefs, continue to shape gender expectations. However, the forces of modernity and globalisation introduce new ideas and challenges, leading to a constant negotiation and redefinition of gender roles. This process involves a complex interplay between cultural heritage and contemporary realities.

Xhosa individuals, particularly women, are increasingly engaging in education, pursuing careers, and participating in public life, leading to a re-negotiation of traditional gender roles. This process involves a complex interplay between cultural heritage and contemporary realities, with individuals adapting and redefining their roles while valuing and preserving core cultural values. Butler (1990: 25) posits that "gender is not something that one is; it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun." Butler's view resonates with the Xhosa understanding of gender. While terms like *'indoda'*[75] and *'umfazi'*[76] are not static categories but reflect individuals' roles and behaviours. Gender is not a fixed state, but a dynamic process shaped by social interactions, cultural expectations, and personal choices. In the Xhosa context, gender roles are constantly being negotiated and redefined, particularly in the face of modernity and globalisation. This perspective aligns with the quote's emphasis on gender as a verb, highlighting the active and ongoing nature of gender performance and identity construction.

3.3. Gender and Heritage Studies: A Reflective Analysis

This section examines gender interpretation in Heritage Studies, focusing on how tangible heritage, such as beadwork, expresses and transmits gendered identities. It highlights the intricate relationship between gender and cultural practices, revealing how ancestral and contemporary influences shape identities. The research underscores the intersection of societal

[75] Man.
[76] Women.

customs and gender expectations, emphasising their significance in the ongoing discourse on identity construction. As Anne McClintock (1995:232) notes, “Heritage is not a static concept but a dynamic process through which historical and cultural identities are continuously constructed and reconstructed.” This statement accurately reflects the Xhosa understanding of heritage. It emphasises that heritage is not a static relic of the past but a dynamic and evolving concept. Xhosa people continuously construct and reconstruct their cultural identities, drawing from historical traditions while adapting to the changing realities of the present. This dynamic process involves a constant negotiation between the past and the present, allowing for the preservation of core cultural values while embracing new ideas and experiences. Heritage, therefore, is seen as a living entity that evolves with each generation, ensuring the continuity of Xhosa culture while allowing for its ongoing growth and transformation.

As Ann Kaplan (2002: 87) asserts, “Gendered heritage is a site of both resistance and assimilation, where traditional roles are challenged and transformed in response to contemporary cultural and social forces.” From a Xhosa perspective, the notion of ‘gendered heritage’ as both a site of resistance and assimilation reflects the dynamic ways in which Xhosa traditions adapt to contemporary social realities while retaining their cultural essence. In Xhosa culture, gender roles have long been tied to specific practices, such as the creation and use of beadwork, which women often dominate as custodians of cultural knowledge. However, these roles are not static; they are continually negotiated and transformed in response to changing social contexts, such as urbanisation, modern education, and global influences. For instance, while beadwork remains a powerful medium for expressing gendered identities, the rise of male artists and the incorporation of beadwork into contemporary fashion signal shifts that challenge traditional gender binaries. At the same time, these transformations can serve as acts of resistance, reclaiming cultural practices within a globalised context and asserting the value of Xhosa heritage. This duality highlights how gendered heritage in Xhosa society is not only a space of continuity but also one of agency, adaptation, and resilience.

3.3.1. Gender in the Context of Heritage Studies

This subsection situates gender discourse within Heritage Studies, exploring how tangible heritage, such as beadwork, influences the construction of gender identities. It considers the postcolonial implications of reclaiming Indigenous heritage to reinforce traditional gender roles. As an interdisciplinary field, Heritage Studies draws upon insights from cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, history, the arts, and gender studies to enhance our understanding of

gender dynamics in heritage contexts. The following tools and methods are crucial for analysing the representation and discourse of masculinity within this framework.

a) Visual Analysis

Visual analysis in the African context deepens the understanding of cultural art forms like beadwork, masks, and sculptures embody crucial gendered meanings and reflect gender identities in material culture. This method enables researchers to interpret the meanings in visual materials by examining elements such as composition, colour, texture, and symbolism, uncovering both explicit and implicit messages within their cultural and historical contexts (Sayre Henry 2006: 58). This research highlights the vital role of visual culture in expressing and shaping gender. Specifically, in examining beadwork within *AbaThembu* cultural group, my analysis reveals how specific designs and colours symbolise the stages of male initiation, marking the journey into adulthood. Thando Mgqolozana (2009: 55) noted, "The complex patterns and bright colours of *Isidanga* necklace are not merely decorative; they encode information about the wearer's experience and status following ulwaluko, the male initiation rite." This statement appropriately underscores the cultural depth of *Isidanga* necklace. Yet, it risks oversimplifying its significance by viewing it merely as an 'encoded' status marker. *Isidanga* and *Ithumbu/Ingqosha* neckband ***(figure 11)*** is more than a symbolic code; it is a living artefact of cultural identity and spiritual affirmation. It is deeply intertwined with the communal and spiritual aspects of *ulwaluko*, the male initiation rite. Its vibrant colours and intricate patterns represent a young man's transition to adulthood, reflecting his journey and his community's collective identity and values. The necklace embodies layers of meaning, ancestral reverence, social belonging, and a commitment to uphold the moral expectations of manhood within Xhosa society. By describing it only in terms of 'information,' the quote inadvertently diminishes its role as a profound spiritual and cultural artefact, reducing a rich tradition into an analytical framework. A Xhosa critique would assert the need to frame *Isidanga* as an integral part of communal life that binds the individual to his heritage and the social fabric of his people (Mgqolozana 2009: 60).

Figure 11 – *Ithumbu (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

The designation *"Ithumbu"* is derived from its distinctive intestine-like design, although the underlying rationale for this nomenclature remains unclear within the academic discourse. *Ithumbu* is a culturally significant neckband traditionally worn by young men of *AbaThembu* community. This striking accessory features a wide collar, about six inches in width, making it a prominent part of the wearer's attire. Crafted with horizontal bands adorned with vibrant navy blue, white, red, and turquoise blue beads, each band is bordered with black *amaso* beads, enhancing its visual appeal. *Ithumbu* represents the artistic values and cultural heritage of isiXhosa-speaking groups, with its colours and bead arrangements often carrying specific meanings. It symbolises the wearer's social identity and status, marking essential life milestones and celebrating cultural identity.

b) Oral History Narratives

Oral history narratives are vital for knowledge transmission in many African cultures, helping preserve and share collective histories, customs, and ancestral wisdom. These traditions are crucial in shaping identity, spirituality, and social organisation. Elders, griots, and community leaders are responsible for recounting stories that include myths, genealogies, rituals, and life experiences. Beyond serving as historical accounts, these narratives educate and instil values, social norms, and cultural continuity. They are dynamic, evolving as retold, ensuring relevance in contemporary contexts. In African culture, oral history is a living practice that connects the

past to the present, highlighting storytelling's role in maintaining cultural integrity and fostering community cohesion. Louise Vincent (2008: 79) highlights the importance of this narrative, stating, "Through the narratives of elders and initiates, ulwaluko is revealed not only as a rite of passage but as a crucial moment in the social construction of masculinity within Xhosa society." From a Xhosa perspective, this statement aptly acknowledges the transformative significance of *ulwaluko* as both a rite of passage and a foundational process in shaping masculinity. However, while it rightly emphasises its role in the social construction of masculinity, it simplifies the ritual's broader cultural and spiritual dimensions. *Ulwaluko* is not merely about defining masculinity but instilling communal values, strengthening kinship bonds, and ensuring the continuity of cultural identity. Elders and initiates alike view this ritual as a sacred act of integrating young men into the moral and spiritual framework of the community, emphasising respect, responsibility, and humility. By focusing predominantly on the social construction of masculinity, the quote risks reducing *ulwaluko* to a sociological process, overlooking its spiritual essence and the profound ways it aligns the initiate with ancestral wisdom and cultural continuity. A Xhosa critique would argue for a more holistic representation that highlights the multifaceted significance of *ulwaluko*, encompassing its social, spiritual, and cultural dimensions as interconnected and inseparable.

c) Archival Research

Archival research is valuable for studying the portrayal and understanding of male gender identity throughout history. It helps trace the evolution of gender roles and analyse the influence of colonialism and post-colonialism on gender dynamics in African societies. In exploring how colonial archives often perpetuated stereotypes about African men, depicting them either as exaggeratedly masculine warriors or as submissive labourers. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:102) states:

> The colonial archive is replete with images and narratives that constructed African men through the lens of colonial biases and agendas. These depictions have profoundly influenced Western perceptions of African masculinity, perpetuating stereotypes that continue to shape contemporary understandings and representations.

From a Xhosa perspective, this quote highlights a critical truth about how colonial narratives distorted African masculinities, presenting them through the lens of Western biases to perpetuate control and justify oppression. Ashley Gilliland et al. (2007: 25) assert, "One significant limitation of text-focused archival models is their inherent exclusion of cultures and societies where oral traditions, tangible heritage, and embodied practices play a central role in knowledge transmission." The statement critiques the Eurocentric bias in text-focused archival

models that often overlook the diverse ways knowledge is transmitted in African societies. Oral traditions, tangible heritage, and embodied practices like storytelling, music, dance, and beadwork are essential forms of knowledge that shape identity, history, and social cohesion. Excluding these non-textual forms reflects a broader marginalisation of African ways of knowing, historically undervalued compared to Western textual frameworks. This gap distorts our understanding of African societies and erases knowledge systems that defy Western documentation standards. The critique emphasises the need for inclusive archival methodologies that recognise and honour the full spectrum of African intellectual and cultural traditions.

For isiXhosa-speaking people, this erasure clashed directly with Indigenous understandings of masculinity, which were deeply rooted in communal responsibility, respect, and spiritual maturity, as exemplified in practices like *ulwaluko*. However, the quote falls short of addressing how African communities, including the Xhosa, actively resisted these misrepresentations and preserved their definitions of masculinity through oral traditions, rituals, and art. While colonial stereotypes remain influential, they are not definitive. A Xhosa critique would argue for reclaiming these narratives, emphasising the agency of African men in resisting and redefining their identities in ways that honour their heritage and values.

d) Interdisciplinary Approach

The interdisciplinary approach in heritage studies provides valuable insights into male gender identity in the African context. By merging cultural studies, sociology, history, and gender studies, we better understand how these fields intersect and shape gender representation in heritage practices. This perspective encourages a deeper examination of gender depiction and interpretation, highlighting the collaborative nature of different academic disciplines. Scholars have effectively integrated anthropological fieldwork with historical analysis, focusing on the evolution of male roles in Zulu society. This approach has significantly enhanced our understanding of cultural transformations and the social constructions of masculinity within this rich historical context. For instance, Lindani Hadebe (2010: 23) states, “An analysis of both oral traditions and historical documents reveals that a combination of indigenous practices and external factors, such as missionary education and colonial governance, has profoundly influenced Zulu masculinity.” The assertion that Zulu masculinity has been shaped by both Indigenous practices and external factors such as missionary education and colonial governance resonates with broader experiences of African societies under colonialism. Similarly, Xhosa masculinity has been deeply influenced by the coexistence of traditional

customs, like *ulwaluko* (male initiation rites), and the impositions of colonial structures; however, the quote risks overemphasising external factors without adequately acknowledging the resilience and adaptability of Indigenous frameworks. Xhosa oral traditions emphasise that while colonial and missionary influences attempted to undermine cultural practices, these traditions adapted and persisted, maintaining their central role in shaping identity and masculinity. A Xhosa critique would argue for a more nuanced exploration that centres on Indigenous agency, showing how traditional practices were not merely influenced but actively defended and redefined in the face of external pressures. This perspective underscores African masculinities' dynamic and evolving nature, deeply rooted in cultural heritage despite external disruptions.

3.5. Gender, Politics, and Poetics of Beadwork: A Dialogue with *AbaThembu*

This section explores the importance of beadwork within *AbaThembu* cultural group, emphasising its political, poetic, and aesthetic aspects. Through insights from cultural experts and artisans, it demonstrates how beadwork expresses gendered identities, reflecting the gender dynamics within the broader isiXhosa cultural framework. Beadwork is not just decorative; it plays a crucial role in shaping and communicating gender identities, prompting a deeper understanding of the link between cultural narratives and gender. Roberts (2019: 58) states, "The beaded necklaces worn by men in many African cultures are not merely ornamental; they serve as symbols of age, social status, and adherence to cultural traditions." From a Xhosa perspective, this statement aligns with the cultural significance of beaded necklaces, such as I*sidanga* or *Ithumbu*, which are integral to Xhosa male identity and social structures. These necklaces transcend ornamentation, embodying cultural narratives tied to age, social rank, and rites of passage, mainly through practices like *ulwaluko* (initiation). However, the quote simplifies the nuanced meanings of these necklaces, as it does not capture the layers of symbolism specific to each beadwork pattern, colour, or context of use within Xhosa society. For example, *Ipasi* headband signifies a young man's transition to adulthood and communicates familial pride, community acknowledgement, and individual achievement. A critique from a Xhosa perspective highlights beadwork as a visual language rooted in Indigenous knowledge and storytelling rather than a generalised African art form. This emphasises the cultural uniqueness of Xhosa beadwork within the broader African context (Phazamile Dumiso, 2004: 7).

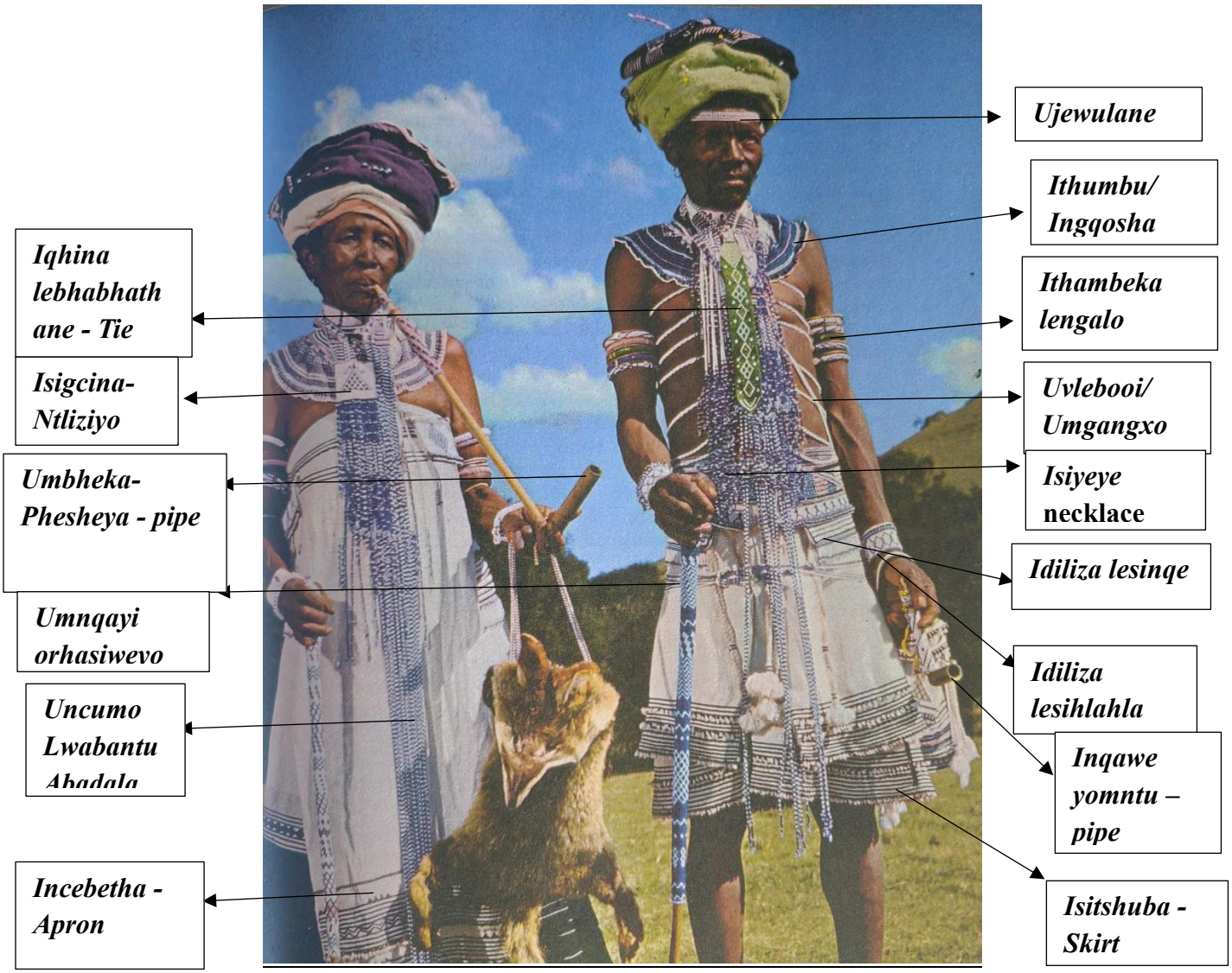

Figure 12 – *AbaThembu* couple. Broster (1967): The Red Blanket Valley.

In isiXhosa-speaking communities, women are crucial in creating beadwork, though men often wear and own these intricate pieces, reflecting a gender-based division of roles in this art form. Regarding this occurrence, Nosinala Mali points out that:

> *Ubunintsi bentsimbi zootata babegayelwa ngamankazana wabo. Uyibona ezintsimbi zam ndiyazithengisa kwakungekho nto inje kudala, umntu wayesenzelwa intsimbi yintombi yakhe. Amankazana akudala ayesaziwa ngoomama. Kwakuphuma iinkabi ziyobalimela. Inkazana yayihlonipha umfazi wendoda ethandana nayo. Inkazana yayilinyelwa ize ityise abantwana bayo.*
>
> Their clandestine partners gifted much of the beadwork worn by our fathers. As I sell my beadwork creations, a practice unheard of in the past, it's evident that times have changed. Previously, individuals acquired their beadwork from their clandestine partners, a fact known to our mothers. It was customary for household bulls to be loaned out for

ploughing for the secret partners. Conversely, these secret partners greatly respected the wives of the men they loved. Their gardens were cultivated, ensuring they flourished so she could provide for her offspring.

This lived experience reveals an intimate and nuanced dynamic within past social and economic relationships, where beadwork symbolised hidden expressions of love and commitment within the bounds of complex familial and communal structures. It highlights how beadwork transcended its decorative function, becoming a material representation of emotional and social bonds. However, the modern commercialisation of beadwork, as the speaker notes, signifies a departure from these traditional practices, reflecting shifting societal values and economic pressures. Critically, the statement romanticises the clandestine partnerships of the past, overlooking potential tensions or power imbalances these relationships may have caused within households. Furthermore, it assumes universal respect and reciprocity among all parties involved, which may not fully align with historical realities. From a Xhosa lens, while the transition to selling beadwork reflects adaptability and resilience, it also signals the erosion of traditional practices that once deeply connected personal relationships, cultural identity, and communal obligations.

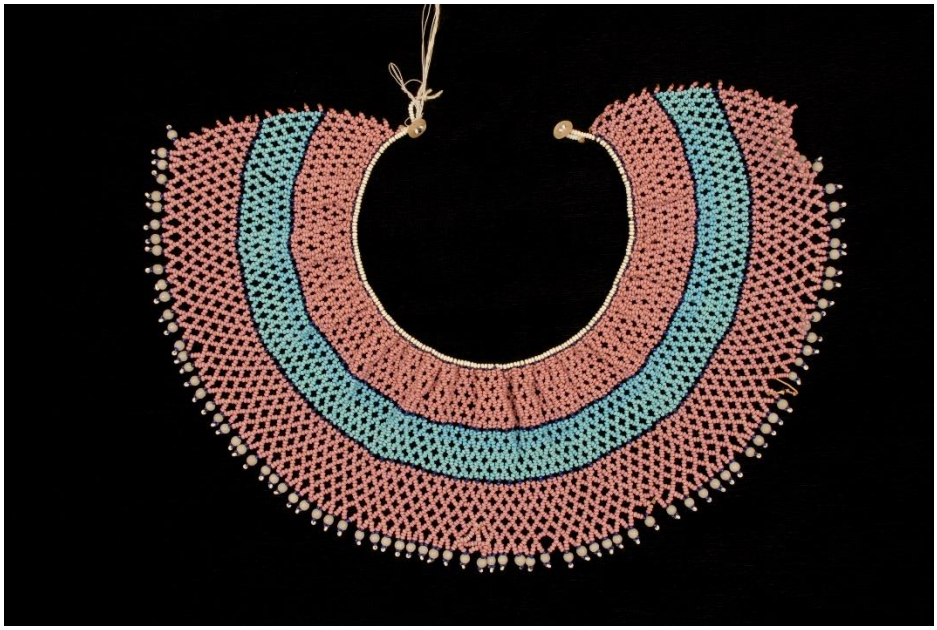

Figure 13 – *Ithumbu/ Ingqosha (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. and archives. WSU Beadwork Archives

Ithumbu ***(figure 13)***, a wide collar neckband, is a beautifully crafted piece known for its loose weaving and intricate details. It features two dusty pink beads symbolising wisdom and maturity, alongside a band of turquoise blue beads edged with deep navy. Surrounding the neckband is a border of pristine white *'amaso'* beads, contrasting with the design. This neckband is a significant cultural artefact from *AbaThembu* subcultural group, mainly from *Tyhalarha* village near Bumbane, the home of *AbaThembu* Great House. Designed for older men, the prevalence of pink beads highlights the importance of age and respect within the community. This study explores their significance and adaptive use, illustrating how these beads enrich cultural narratives and identity.

Colour plays a crucial role in beadwork, influencing aesthetic and emotional significance. Artists often select colours that reflect their experiences or cultural heritage; vibrant reds symbolise passion, while calming blues evoke tranquillity. The contrast between colours creates visual impact, while harmonious combinations promote unity. Material availability also affects colour choices, as beads come in shades that interact with light differently. By layering colours and textures, artists add depth and complexity, making colour a powerful tool for conveying unique stories and emotions in their designs. In her analysis of contemporary beadwork creations, Nosinala Mali articulates the significance of colour usage, asserting that the selection and application of hues play a pivotal role in conveying cultural narratives and personal expression within the artistry. She asserts that:

> *Nangona sesibona ooVula-Kabini abamhlophe namnyama, bahle bona, kodwa apha esiXhoseni asinayo instimbi emnyama. Intsimbi emnyama iyanyaniswa neshwangusha. Le imhlophe iyanyaniswa nabantu abadala kuledlu kaXhosa. Ewe ezinye izizwe zinganayo lentsimbi imnyama, kodwa kule Yethu asinayo thina.*
>
> While we often see *uVula-Kabini*[77] beadwork in black and white looks appealing; it is essential to note that in Xhosa culture, we do not use black beads in our beadwork. Black beads are associated with bad omens, whereas white beads are linked to ancestors within isiXhosa-speaking communities. Although other cultures may have beadwork predominantly featuring black beads, this practice is not part of our tradition.

This lived experience touches on the deep symbolism embedded in beadwork, where specific colours hold profound cultural and spiritual meanings. The claim that black beads are associated with bad omens aligns with certain Xhosa spiritual beliefs, contrasting them with

[77] Weichold et al (2023: 2) state that "Initiation ceremonies or rites of passage in general are a culturally structured transition; for adolescents, they are based on the developmental stage or chronological age (8–18 yrs.) and can be understood as the social counterpart to biological maturation. In traditional and indigenous societies, rites of passage are deeply anchored in the culture, focused on the preservation of society and interpersonal relationships… and mostly are related to a clear, wholistic status change."

the use of white beads to symbolise ancestors and purity. However, the statement could be critiqued for its rigid generalisation of beadwork practices, as Xhosa beadwork traditions are diverse and adaptive, shaped by regional, familial, and personal preferences. Additionally, while it is true that black beads are not traditionally predominant in Xhosa beadwork, the assertion dismisses the possibility of creative evolution within the culture, especially in contemporary contexts where art forms are constantly reimagined. This perspective must also acknowledge how intercultural exchanges and personal expressions might have introduced variations, challenging the notion of a static, monolithic tradition. Xhosa's beadwork is dynamic, embodying continuity and transformation, which are essential to its cultural significance.

This investigation deepens our understanding of Indigenous art, emphasising its relationship with societal values and encouraging reflection on the meanings associated with these forms. Nokhaya Maphetshane states:

> *Yilentsimbi ifakwa ebantwini abangasalitsibiyo iziko ngokomthetho… Ixutyelwa abantu ababini abangalitsibiyo iziko namakhosi.*
>
> This colour is incorporated into beadwork associated with elders no longer interested in intimate relationships and those born into royal lineage in our cultural context.

From a Xhosa perspective, the statement acknowledges the nuanced symbolism of colour in beadwork, which reflects the wearer's social status, life stage, or lineage. In Xhosa culture, beadwork is a form of non-verbal communication, encoding specific meanings tied to identity and societal roles. However, the claim oversimplifies the complexities of how beadwork colours are interpreted and utilised, as it assumes uniformity in practices across all isiXhosa-speaking communities. Variations in beadwork traditions exist, influenced by regional differences, family customs, and individual creativity. Additionally, associating specific colours exclusively with elders or royal lineage risks erasing the broader contexts in which those colours may be used for spiritual, ceremonial, or aesthetic purposes. Xhosa beadwork is dynamic, adaptable, and evolving in meaning alongside cultural and individual expressions. While the statement acknowledges an essential aspect of beadwork, it also must recognise the fluidity and diversity inherent in Xhosa traditions. Additionally, it highlights how cultural practices use material objects to convey values, status, and community expectations, ensuring the transmission of these symbols across generations.

Xhosa beadwork is dynamic, adaptable, and evolving in meaning alongside cultural and individual expressions. While the statement acknowledges an essential aspect of beadwork, it

also must recognise the fluidity and diversity inherent in Xhosa traditions. Additionally, it highlights how cultural practices use material objects to convey values, status, and community expectations, ensuring the transmission of these symbols across generations. Loyiso Nqevu states that:

> *Indoda enesidanga ayithi vu esikweni iyazimasa. Indoda enesidanga ayilibukeli isiko ihleli emotweni netshomi zayo ingena ngaphakathi enkundleni imamele umthetho. Indoda enesidanga ayizi nxa kuphakwayo esikweni ingena ngaphakathi iyenze yonke lento yenziwayo apho uzalana ungazalani*.
>
> A man with Isidanga doesn't just partake in a ritual ceremony; he honours it. A man with Isidanga does not observe the custom of sitting in a car with his friends; he goes inside the kraal and honours the ritual. A man with Isidanga doesn't come when the food is served at a ceremony; he goes inside and does everything, whether you are related.

This lived experience emphasises the significance of *Isidanga* necklace as a symbol of status and a representation of one's commitment to cultural and ancestral values. The statement highlights that a man wearing Isidanga must respect and adhere to traditional practices, particularly in rituals and ceremonies. However, the assertion could be critiqued for its rigid view of what it means to 'honour' the ritual, as it suggests a singular, prescriptive interpretation of cultural behaviour. In reality, how individuals engage with cultural practices can be diverse, with younger generations often navigating the tension between tradition and modernity. Furthermore, it may overlook the complexities of personal circumstances, such as geographic location or access to ceremonies, which can influence how one participates in cultural practices. While *Isidanga* undoubtedly carries deep cultural meaning, the expectation that men should adhere strictly to these customs could be seen as limiting, failing to account for evolving interpretations and expressions of identity within contemporary Xhosa society. Therefore, while the essence of the quote underscores the importance of ritual, it needs to acknowledge the flexibility and adaptability of cultural engagement.

3.6. Implications of Gender Discourse in *AbaThembu* Cultural Group

Gender discourse within *AbaThembu* cultural group is closely linked to traditional roles and social expectations, impacting identity and power dynamics. Traditionally, men have held leadership and decision-making roles, while women are seen as guardians of domestic and cultural knowledge, including beadwork and storytelling. However, these roles are evolving due to globalisation, urbanisation, and movements for gender equality. For example, *ulwaluko* initiation ritual focuses on masculinity tied to responsibility and respect, while women's beadwork conveys messages of lineage and morality. This interplay illustrates how gender

discourse navigates the tension between tradition and modernity, prompting important questions about inclusion and the evolution of cultural practices. This section explores how beadwork shapes contemporary understandings of gender within *AbaThembu* community, highlighting the challenges and opportunities of preserving gendered practices amidst globalisation. It emphasises the connection between gender roles, artistic expression, and societal expectations, demonstrating the nuanced relationship between tradition and personal identity. For instance, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986: 124) explains that "gender roles in many African societies are not merely social constructs but are deeply embedded in the social and spiritual frameworks that shape daily life." Wa Thiong'o accurately reflects the deeply embedded nature of gender roles within Xhosa society. Gender is not merely a social construct but is intricately woven into the fabric of Xhosa social and spiritual frameworks. Ancestral beliefs, spiritual practices, and traditional narratives all contribute to shaping the understanding of masculinity and femininity. Gender roles in Xhosa society are dynamic, continuously evolving with changing social and economic conditions, yet still shaped by deep spiritual and cosmological foundations (wa Thiong'o 1986: 130).

In *AbaThembu* community, the conversation around gender illustrates a complex interplay of traditional values and modern perspectives, highlighting a negotiation process that redefines roles and identities in light of societal changes and progressive ideas. Mike Parent et al (2013: 642) point out that "The intersection of traditional gender roles with contemporary influences highlights the fluid and evolving nature of gender identities, demonstrating how cultural, social, and historical contexts shape and reshape these roles over time." This statement reflects the dynamic nature of gender roles within Xhosa society. Traditional gender roles, deeply rooted in cultural values and ancestral beliefs, provide a framework for understanding and navigating social interactions. However, these roles are not static; they are constantly being negotiated and redefined in response to the interplay of various factors, including cultural, social, and historical influences. The increasing influence of modernity, globalisation, and changing social dynamics challenges traditional gender norms, leading to a complex process of adaptation and reinterpretation. This ongoing negotiation highlights the fluidity of gender identities and the continuous evolution of gender roles within Xhosa society (Nonhlanhla Dlamini, 2015: 132).

3.7. Conclusion of Chapter Three and Transition to Chapter Four

This chapter has led me to reflect on the complex role of gender in shaping identity within *AbaThembu* cultural group. Through my exploration, I appreciate how gender dynamics intricately influence social interactions and collective identities, mainly through cultural

practices. A central theme from this analysis is beadwork, which I now recognise as more than just a decorative art form; it serves as a vital medium for transmitting heritage and fostering understanding within Heritage Studies. As I delved into the significance of beadwork, I found that it functions as a conduit for dialogue, encouraging meaningful conversations about cultural expression. In examining the gendered practices within *AbaThembu* community, I am reminded of their deep historical roots and their essential presence in ritualistic ceremonies and the daily lives of community members. This realisation has enriched my perspective on the profound role of beadwork in self-expression, allowing individuals to articulate their identities while remaining closely tied to their collective cultural heritage. This exploration invites me to discuss the intersections of gender, culture, and identity within Heritage Studies. It challenges me to examine these connections closely and enhances my understanding of how tangible cultural heritage, such as beadwork, reflects and shapes gendered experiences. Ultimately, this reflection deepens my appreciation for the complexities of identity within diverse cultural landscapes and encourages a more thoughtful approach to these intricate dynamics.

Building on the insights from earlier chapters, Chapter Four presents an opportunity to delve into the vital role that symbolic art forms, particularly beadwork, play in shaping identity. I am fascinated by how beadwork is a powerful symbol of individual and collective identity, effectively conveying intricate personal narratives and communal meanings that resonate within cultural contexts. As I explore the historical evolution of beadwork, I reflect on its cultural significance and the transformations it has undergone over time. The craftsmanship, materials, and techniques employed historically highlight the aesthetic values and traditions of the communities that create them. Through selected case studies of *AbaThembu* beadwork pieces, including *Isidanga, Ithumbu,* and *Ipasi*, I have come to appreciate the unique symbolic roles these items fulfil in various rituals and life transitions, such as coming-of-age ceremonies, weddings, and mourning practices. It becomes evident that these tangible heritage objects are not merely decorative; they are imbued with profound cultural significance, serving as vehicles for expressing identity and heritage. Furthermore, my exploration of the intricate relationship between beadwork and gender discourse within *AbaThembu* society has shed light on how this art form not only reflects prevailing gender identities but also actively shapes and challenges them. By examining beadwork through this lens, I recognise how traditional gender roles are reinforced, negotiated, or contested, illustrating the dynamic interplay between art, identity, and gender in contemporary Indigenous contexts. This comprehensive investigation has

enriched my understanding of the complexities of identity formation and the rich cultural narratives conveyed through beadwork within *AbaThembu* community.

Chapter Four:

4. Beadwork

4.1. Beadwork as Symbols of Identity

This chapter examines the vital role of *Uvula-Kabini, Isidanga,* and *Ipasi*, juxtaposition with other isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups, such as *Isitsikili samaMpndo* beadwork, in shaping identity within *AbaThembu* community.[78] Beadwork is more than just decorative art; it conveys personal and communal narratives that reflect and shape broader sociocultural identities. By analysing pieces like *Isidanga* and *Ipasi*, I emphasise their significance in rituals and life transitions, such as coming-of-age ceremonies and weddings. This art form also illustrates social hierarchy, spirituality, and community belonging, encapsulating deep meanings related to cultural identity. Overall, this investigation enhances our understanding of identity formation and the cultural narratives expressed through *AbaThembu* beadwork. Vanessa Wijngaarden (2018: 237) asserts that:

> Beadwork is a powerful medium through which Indigenous peoples can reclaim and articulate their identities, resist marginalisation, and assert their cultural presence. This craft not only preserves historical narratives but also fosters healing and activism, embodying the resilience and creativity of Indigenous communities.

This statement highlights beadwork as a vital tool for reclaiming identity and resisting marginalisation within Indigenous African communities. Beyond its aesthetic value, beadwork is a cultural expression that conveys social status, gender roles, age, and ancestral ties. It asserts cultural presence against historical and ongoing colonialism aimed at erasing African identities. Beadwork also demonstrates resilience, adapting to modern contexts while preserving its traditional significance. Crafting and wearing beadwork foster community and belonging, connecting individuals to their heritage. Importantly, beadwork is not merely a passive or nostalgic practice; it actively engages in identity negotiation within contemporary African societies, particularly in a globalised world where culture faces commodification. Thus, beadwork is a powerful means of cultural resistance and renewal, embodying living expressions of sovereignty and self-determination (Mashiyane 2006: 130).

Each design's unique patterns and colours carry deep meanings rooted in tradition, highlighting the importance of understanding beadwork to appreciate its cultural value. Misunderstanding

[78] Understanding the cultural significance of artefacts requires exploring their symbolic meanings and usage contexts (Wijngaarden 2018: 142).

this art form can diminish its significance. As Ryan Theroux and Derek Furukawa (2022: 17) argue, “To understand the cultural significance of artefacts, it is essential to explore the symbolic meanings they embody and the contexts within which they are situated.” Theroux and Furukawa’s argument that understanding cultural artefacts requires exploring their symbolic meanings and contexts resonates deeply, as artefacts like beadwork are profoundly tied to the community’s lived experiences, rituals, and heritage. For instance, *AbaThembu* beaded necklace or headband signifies more than its aesthetic appeal; it encodes spiritual beliefs and social structures. However, the statement could be critiqued for implying that artefacts’ significance is static or confined solely to their original contexts. In *AbaThembu* culture, artefacts are dynamic and continue to evolve, gaining new meanings as they interact with modernity and globalisation. The interplay between tradition and transformation is vital, as beadwork is both a historical symbol and a marker of cultural identity. Its significance requires a holistic view that considers both historical and contemporary contexts. Rich in cultural meaning, beadwork remains a recognisable symbol of identity within the community (Carolyn Hamilton & Nessa Leibhammer, 2016: 423).

In ancient Egypt, beadwork represented status and protection, with elite designs symbolising power and divine connection. The patterns found in tombs reflected the deceased's social and spiritual status, highlighting beadwork's role in identity and spirituality. Renée Friedman (200: 15) asserts that:

> Beads were not merely adornments but imbued with symbolic meaning, reflecting the wearer's social status, religious beliefs, and aspirations for the afterlife. Pharaohs, nobles, and commoners adorned themselves with beads, each strand telling a story of identity and belonging.

The statement that beads transcend mere adornment to embody symbolic meaning aligns with the cultural understanding of beadwork as a medium for storytelling, identity, and community connection. In isiXhosa-speaking people’s tradition, beadwork is deeply embedded with messages reflecting social status, gender roles, and significant life transitions, such as initiation and marriage. However, while insightful, comparing ancient Egyptian practices risks conflating distinct cultural frameworks. Their beadwork often conveys dynamic, lived experiences and communal ties rather than an individual’s aspirations for the afterlife, which may hold more prominence in Egyptian contexts. Furthermore, Xhosa beadwork emphasises ongoing social and cultural continuity, with designs evolving to reflect contemporary realities while preserving ancestral knowledge. The assertion underscores beadwork’s profound cultural resonance but should be nuanced to respect the unique symbolism within each cultural tradition.

Many African communities use beadwork to represent life stages and social roles. Maasai warriors wear distinct necklaces, and women design pieces honouring their mothers and wives. The Akan people in Ghana use beadwork to signify wealth and social connections, particularly in royal regalia, while the Yoruba of Nigeria incorporate elaborate bead designs in royal attire. Overall, beadwork serves as a visual language representing identity, authority, and social structure across these cultures. John Drewal (2008: 20) states that:

> Beadwork in Africa is not merely decoration; it is a visual language, a system of signs communicating identity, social status, and historical memory. From the Maasai of Kenya to the Yoruba of Nigeria, beadwork is a powerful medium for expressing cultural values and personal narratives.

While Drewal aptly highlights the multifaceted significance of beadwork in Africa as a visual language and a communication medium, it simplifies and generalises the cultural diversity and complexity of African beadwork traditions. By referencing only two groups, the Maasai of Kenya and the Yoruba of Nigeria, the statement overlooks the vast array of African communities, such as the Zulu, Ndebele, and *AbaThembu*, each with their unique beadwork practices and symbolic meanings. Additionally, the phrase 'not merely decoration' implies that decorative aspects are secondary. Yet, for many African cultures, aesthetics are integral to the beadwork's purpose, deeply intertwined with its communicative and cultural functions. Beadwork conveys identity, status, and memory, but its spiritual and ritualistic aspects, such as initiation ceremonies and ancestral veneration, are often overlooked. While the statement acknowledges the cultural value of beadwork, it simplifies the complex, localised meanings contributing to the richness of African beadwork traditions. For *AbaThembu*, beadwork is a visual language expressing identity and transformation. For example, the Isiyambane necklace, worn by ordinary men and Diviners, features distinct colours that reflect social status. Therefore, beadwork is vital in signifying the transition from ordinary individuals to the divine within isiXhosa-speaking communities (Mndende 2002: 106).

According to Mfecane (2016: 287), "The isidanga, a beaded necklace, is not just a decorative item but a symbol of the transition from boyhood to manhood, representing the completion of the ulwaluko rite of passage among the Xhosa." This beaded necklace is a vital cultural symbol for *AbaThembu*, signifying the transition from boyhood to manhood. It represents maturity and social recognition and is not worn solely after completing *ulwaluko* initiation rite; instead, the rite of passage qualifies an individual to don the necklace. Its significance extends beyond mere adornment, as it is closely tied to family rituals that honour ancestors. The necklace signifies readiness for adult responsibilities and privileges, deeply aligning with ancestral values and

traditions. Similarly, Zulu beadwork functions as a form of visual communication, conveying important messages about social status and marital standing through its intricate patterns and colours, each of which carries profound cultural meaning and reflects personal identity. Hadebe (2010: 45) notes, "The Umqhele headband, traditionally worn by Zulu men, signifies not just masculinity but also the leadership qualities expected of a man within his family and community." In *AbaThembu* culture, *Ipasi* beaded headband, similar to the Zulu's *Umqhele*[79], signifies masculinity and social status through its distinctive beadwork. This headband represents a man's transition into adulthood, embodying the qualities expected within the family and the community. Upon completing the rite of passage, young men don this beaded headband, which features designs and colours that honour their ancestors and illustrate the wearer's readiness to assume leadership roles and uphold traditions. Historically, beadwork has been a marker for age-related transitions, highlighting a man's evolving responsibilities and societal roles while celebrating masculinity and visually narrating his life journey (Cele 2016: 275).

John Mack (2020: 78) highlights, "Beadwork among the Xhosa communities, particularly the Uvula-Kabini neckbands worn by men, is a powerful symbol of identity and heritage. These adornments affirm individual identity and establish a tangible connection to ancestral lineage and the broader cultural heritage." The quote effectively highlights the significance of beadwork, specifically *Uvula-Kabini* neckband ***(figure 14),*** among Xhosa communities as a powerful emblem of identity and heritage. However, it could delve deeper into the multilayered meanings of such adornments. While it emphasises individual identity and ancestral connections, it simplifies the broader cultural and social roles of beadwork in Xhosa traditions. For instance, *Uvula-Kabini* neckbands are not merely markers of heritage but also play a role in rites of passage, symbolising the wearer's transition through life stages and societal acceptance. These neckbands are crafted with intricate designs that communicate messages about community values, spiritual beliefs, and social hierarchies. By framing beadwork solely as a connection to heritage, the quote underrepresents its dynamic role as a living practice that adapts to contemporary expressions of identity while preserving traditional significance. Thus, while the statement is accurate, a more nuanced exploration would better capture Xhosa beadwork traditions' depth and evolving nature (Rozani, 2013: 444).

[79] A headband made of animal skin (Grant McNulty 2016: 117).

Figure 14 – *Uvula-Kabini (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Permanent Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

The garment features 33 long streamers made from a striking blend of navy and white fabric, attached to a flat tab embellished with six elegant pearl buttons. The neck strap consists of three complementary flat tabs, each with six additional pearl buttons, beautifully crafted from 19 alternating strings of navy and white beads to add depth. A single back tab provides support, while two front tabs frame the neck and are secured with three tasteful pearl buttons for both style and functionality. Traditionally worn by middle-aged and adult men and women from *AbaThembu* community in Qebe, this attire reflects their cultural heritage and artistry. In a rapidly modernising world, the beadwork symbolises the community's resilience and identity,

connecting individuals to their roots and representing their collective memory and shared history. Through the embrace of *Uvula-Kabini,* men actively preserve and pass down their cultural heritage, ensuring its significance for future generations. Thus, beadwork plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural identities and strengthening social bonds within the community (Broster 1976: 79).

4.2. Cultural Significance of Beadwork

In contemporary African societies, beadwork plays a vital role in cultural practices and identity formation. This art form serves as a dynamic connection between tradition and modern expressions of cultural identity, highlighting its significance in today's globalised world by skilfully representing both personal and collective identities.[80] For instance, Christopher Richards, in his reading of a Laduma Ngxokolo's designer label known as *MaXhosa,* points out that:

> One of the most significant visual signifiers of isiXhosa-speakers' identities, as with other South African indigenous groups, is their profusion of beaded adornments. To fully understand the significance of Ngxokolo's designs, it is necessary to explore both historical development of isiXhosa-speakers' beadwork and how this art form, during the early and mid-twentieth century, became a dazzling and iconic representation of a constructed, homogenised 'Xhosa' identity, one that Ngxokolo is simultaneously referencing and revolutionising through his designer fashions (Richards 2015: 110-111).

This statement aptly acknowledges the importance of beadwork as a visual signifier of isiXhosa identity. It situates Laduma Ngxokolo's designs within Xhosa beadwork traditions' broader historical and cultural context. However, it simplifies the complexity of isiXhosa beadwork by framing it as a homogenised identity construct. While it is true that colonial and apartheid-era[81] processes contributed to the construction of a unified 'Xhosa' identity, isiXhosa-speaking communities have always exhibited diverse cultural expressions within beadwork traditions, reflecting regional, familial, and individual identities. Ngxokolo's work does not merely 'reference and revolutionise' this identity but also reclaims and elevates these traditions by integrating them into global fashion discourses, challenging historical marginalisation.

[80] Beadwork is a crucial tool in constructing identity, particularly in rural areas where traditional practices remain strong. It allows individuals to communicate their identity visually and in ways that are instantly recognisable to others within the community (Thabisani Ndlovu 2016: 98).

[81]Beadwork can be interpreted as a phenomenon that plays a complicit role in reconfiguring social geographies, especially in post-apartheid South Africa. In this setting, the emergence of newfound freedoms and the pervasive influence of modernity have significantly transformed this traditional craft's cultural and economic significance (Rowan Gatfield 2019:131).

Additionally, the statement could explore how Ngxokolo's designs confront the legacy of cultural commodification by ensuring the authenticity and resilience of isiXhosa heritage in contemporary mediums. While it captures the interplay of history and innovation, the statement would benefit from emphasising the depth and diversity of isiXhosa beadwork and its enduring role as a dynamic cultural force (Peter Magubane, 1998: 28).

In many African communities, beadwork is vital for conveying cultural values, social status, and personal identity. This importance is especially evident in regions where the art has been carefully preserved and adapted to reflect contemporary life. As Roger Neich (1993: 215) explains, "Beadwork remains a vital and dynamic cultural resource, where the arrangement of colours and patterns continues to communicate messages that are both rooted in tradition and relevant to contemporary social contexts." Neich's view effectively highlights beadwork's enduring role as a cultural resource, emphasising its capacity to bridge tradition and contemporary social contexts. However, it underrepresents the depth of beadwork as more than a communicative tool; it is also a medium of resistance, identity assertion, and cultural innovation. For example, beadwork often reflects societal shifts, from colonial disruptions to postcolonial reclamations of heritage, making it not just a transmitter of tradition but a dynamic response to changing political and cultural landscapes. While the statement acknowledges the relevance of colours and patterns in communication, it overlooks how these designs can serve as subtle critiques or affirmations of power structures, particularly in gendered and generational contexts. Additionally, the phrase 'rooted in tradition' could suggest static cultural practices, whereas African beadwork continuously evolves, incorporating modern aesthetics while retaining its symbolic core. Thus, the statement is accurate but would benefit from a more nuanced exploration of the transformative and multifaceted nature of beadwork in African societies (Ndlovu 2020: 225).

Beadwork is a dynamic cultural resource that connects tradition with contemporary expression. The intricate colours and patterns carry deep meanings, evolving. For communities like *AbaThembu*, beadwork is a vital communication tool, conveying messages about social status, age, and lineage while reflecting societal values. As designs adapt to modern contexts, they maintain their traditional significance while addressing current issues. African designers and artists have recently incorporated beadwork into contemporary art, preserving cultural heritage and engaging with global movements, thereby honouring the past while remaining relevant today. Beata Hamalwa (2012: 32) suggests, "The incorporation of traditional beadwork into

contemporary fashion and art forms a bridge between historical practices and modern aesthetics, ensuring that cultural heritage remains vibrant and relevant in today's society." Here, Hamalwa rightly acknowledges the incorporation of traditional beadwork into contemporary fashion and art as a crucial link between historical practices and modern aesthetics. However, this perspective simplifies the complex dynamics involved in this integration. *AbaThembu* beadwork, for instance, embodies a rich tapestry of cultural identity and heritage, where patterns and colours carry deep symbolic meanings tied to rituals, social status, and ancestral lineage. While contemporary adaptations of *AbaThembu* beadwork ensure cultural vibrancy, there is a risk of cultural commodification or misrepresentation when these motifs are used without proper context or respect. Moreover, the agency of Aboriginal artists and designers within *AbaThembu* community, who preserve and innovate these traditions, is often underappreciated. They use beadwork as a medium to assert identity and resist cultural homogenisation in a globalised world. The phrase 'ensuring cultural heritage remains vibrant' implies a seamless process, yet negotiating authenticity and adaptation is a nuanced and challenging endeavour. A more comprehensive perspective would recognise this interplay as a dynamic space of preservation and transformation, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of *AbaThembu* beadwork as a living cultural practice that bridges the past and future. Presley Mills & Justine Woods (2023: 121) argue that:

> Beading is an essential pathway for Indigenous peoples to restore, revitalise, and reclaim ancestral practices and community connections destroyed by colonisation. As a decolonial practice, beadwork mobilises Indigenous knowledge transmission and is intrinsically tied to Indigenous peoples' emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being.

This statement powerfully underscores beadwork's role as a decolonial practice, emphasising its ability to restore and reclaim ancestral practices while revitalising community connections disrupted by colonisation. It highlights beadwork's spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions, which transcend mere artistry to become a profound expression of resilience and cultural healing. However, it could benefit from a more nuanced acknowledgement of the diverse experiences of Indigenous peoples, as the meanings and practices surrounding beadwork are not monolithic but vary significantly across communities. Beadwork is crucial for revitalising Indigenous practices, especially for African communities affected by colonisation. As a decolonial practice, it aids in reclaiming cultural knowledge and rebuilding community connections disrupted by colonialism. Engaging in beadwork preserves ancestral wisdom and ensures the continuation of this living tradition for future generations. It plays a vital role in emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being, serving as a means of identity,

healing, and resistance against cultural erasure. More than an art form, beadwork reconnects individuals with their heritage, affirms cultural pride, and asserts autonomy in a post-colonial context (Shawna Bowler 2020: 16).

In contemporary ceremonies like weddings and initiations, beadwork holds significant symbolic meanings tied to these critical life events. Jacob Olupona (2014: 56) states, “In African traditional religions, ceremonies, festivals, and rituals embody, enact, and reinforce the sacred values communicated in myths.” From a Xhosa-speaking perspective, the statement, "In African traditional religions, ceremonies, festivals, and rituals embody, enact, and reinforce the sacred values communicated in myths”, holds merit but requires a nuanced critique. Within Xhosa culture, rituals such as *Ulwaluko* and *Imbeleko*[82] are not merely enactments of myth but are deeply embedded in lived experiences, social structures, and ancestral reverence. These practices are more than a reinforcement of sacred values; they are active processes of transmitting wisdom, affirming communal bonds, and negotiating individual identity within a collective framework. However, the term “myths” can be problematic as it often implies a lack of historicity or truth in a Western context. For isiXhosa-speaking people, these narratives are not myths in the sense of fictional stories but are regarded as sacred truths tied to ancestry, cosmology, and moral order. The statement highlights the ritualistic essence of African traditional religions but oversimplifies these ceremonies’ dynamic and contextually responsive nature. While traditional African cultures share similar values and beliefs, these differences are more evident when compared to cultures from other regions (Gabriel Idang, 2015: 100).

4.3. Selected Beadwork as a Symbolic Art Form of *AbaThembu*

This section delves into the cultural meanings and functions of specific beadwork items, particularly *Isidanga* necklace and *Ipasi* headband, within *AbaThembu* society. These selected beadwork pieces serve as the primary tangible heritage that distinguishes boys from men and, to some degree, men from women.[83] The section will explore their functions, roles, and cultural significance within the community. Furthermore, the discussion will highlight the artisans, their techniques, and the cultural knowledge embedded in their designs, illustrating how these

[82] Child-welcoming ceremony among isiXhosa-speaking people.

[83] The Tsolo collection offers insight into how *amaMpondomise, amaMfengu,* or *AbaThembu* peoples and the possible effects of such adornments may have worn beaded items. These effects can be understood in aesthetic, political, and personal terms, serving as a form of expression that responds to European authority within contexts of European cultural dominance, utilising materials made available by the very presence of that power (Nettleton 2013:48).

creations reflect and preserve communal values, traditions, and identity (Knobel Bongela 2001: 28).

4.3.1. *Ipasi*[84] Headband

While the primary focus of this research extends beyond the intricacies of cultural identifiers, it is essential to clarify the distinctions in headgear utilised by different isiXhosa-speaking subcultures, each carrying profound cultural significance. For example, *AmaGcaleka* traditionally wear a beaded headband called *Isiqweqwe sentloko* **(*figure 15)***. This headband and *Ipasi lentloko* are vital symbols of identity and heritage, linking their wearers to their ancestral lineage and cultural beliefs.

Figure 15 – *Isiqweqwe sentloko (amaGcaleka).* WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

This exquisite headband is meticulously crafted and features a distinctive flat tab as its centrepiece. It showcases a vibrant and harmonious arrangement of beads in radiant shades of white, deep red, rich navy, and bright turquoise, each carefully selected to create an eye-catching design. The intricacy of the beadwork reflects artistic skill and a deep appreciation for colour and texture. Enhancing its elegance are six sophisticated pearl buttons strategically placed to add a layer of refinement and charm. These buttons capture light beautifully, improving the overall aesthetic of the piece. Traditionally worn by middle-aged and adult men and women of *AmaGcaleka* cultural group, this striking accessory is more than just a fashion

[84] *Ipasi* (Passport) to manhood among *AbaThembu*.

statement; it embodies the cultural group's rich cultural heritage and artistic expression. Each detail in the design pays homage to the customs and values of its people, making it a unique accessory and a meaningful symbol of their identity (Soga 1937: 72).

Figure 15 – *Usondwana (amaMpondo)*. Photographed by Monwabisi Ngcai.

AmaMpondo[85] men, part of isiXhosa-speaking groups linked to the House of King Faku in the *Nyandeni* and *Mbizana* Local Municipalities, to mention a few, wear a headdress called *Usondwana* or *Uhewulana*, which resembles a triangular handkerchief. Unlike the beaded headbands of *AmaGcaleka*, this headdress signifies cultural identity and societal status, reflecting the unique traditions and history of *AmaMpondo* people. Its triangular design often features various colours, with red being the most significant for men. The headgear plays a vital role in rituals and ceremonies, integrating it into the community's cultural framework. In *AbaThembu* community, men wear a beaded headband known as *Ipasi.* The same beaded headband is known as *Ithambeka lentloko* when adorned by women. It holds deep cultural meaning and signifies lineage. These headbands and headgear represent the rich diversity among isiXhosa-speaking subcultures. These tangible heritage items are potent symbols of cultural identity and continuity, influencing the social fabric of the communities. While a

[85] An alternative manifestation of *amaMpondo* identity is represented through tribal marks, referred to as *ukuchaza* or *ukugcaba* in isiZulu language. These markings typically take the form of vertical incisions on the cheeks, serving not only as a form of cultural expression but also as a significant aspect of social identity within *amaMpondo* community (Cele 2016: 273).

detailed examination of these distinctions is not the primary focus of this study, they offer valuable insights into the expression and maintenance of cultural heritage among isiXhosa-speaking populations (Makuliwe, 1995: 78).

Figure 16 – *Ipasi/Ithambeka lentloko/Intsimbi yentloko (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Permanent Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

Ipasi headband ***(figure 16)***: *Ipasi* headband features woven bead strings in white, navy, and dusty pink and is traditionally worn by middle-aged and older men of *AbaThembu* as a symbol of cultural identity. The dusty pink colour represents maturity within the group. More than just a decorative piece, the headband signifies essential life milestones and rites of passage. Its name, *Ipasi*, originates from the isiXhosa word for passport, symbolising the license to manhood; men must complete their rite of passage, known as *ulwaluko*, to earn this headband.

Figure 17 – *Ipasi /Ithambeka lentloko (AbaThembu)*. Courtesy of Mrs Nokhanyo Gana's collection, photographed by Zukisa Madyibi

In contrast, *Ipasi* ***(figure 17)*** is designed for young men and women, as shown by the lack of dusty pink colour. *Intsimbi yentloko* or *Ithambeka lentloko* headband of the same design is worn by young women who have completed *Intonjane* rite of passage, marking their transition to adulthood and cultural growth. The beadwork goes beyond its ornamental purposes; it ties individuals to their community and marks significant milestones with beauty and tradition. It's a tradition that speaks volumes about the value of heritage and the universal journey of growth and acceptance. This shows how such practices bond *AbaThembu* and other cultural groups, underlining the rich, diverse tapestry of human experience. Thukela Phoswayo has this to say about perceptions and *Ipasi*:

> *Ipasi yintsimbi abanayo umntu xa engena ebudodeni esoluka, ukothula kwakhe Iqhiya, ukuhlamba kwakhe umdiki, lambola ibomvu, uthwala lentsimbi xa efundiswa ubudoda. Athwaliswe lentsimbi ngodade wabo. Yintsimbi ayinikwa ngodadewabo. Kuthiwa lentsimbi lipasi.*
>
> *Ipasi* headband is a beaded accessory that signifies a man's attainment of manhood, typically worn after completing the turban-wearing phase and ceasing the application of red ochre to the face. During the mentorship journey toward manhood, the man dons the *Ipasi* headband. It is a cultural tradition for his sisters to present and crown him with this meaningful beaded headband, which is referred to as *Ipasi.*

From an isiXhosa-speaking man's perspective, the statement regarding *Ipasi* headband captures its symbolic significance in marking the transition to manhood but requires a broader contextual understanding. *Ipasi* headband does signify the completion of key rites

of passage, particularly after the ulwaluko initiation process, where the cessation of red ochre application and turban-wearing are critical milestones. However, the statement oversimplifies the mentorship journey by focusing on the sisters' symbolic presentation of Ipasi, neglecting the broader communal involvement in this transition. The role of the elders, the mentorship by senior men, and the communal ceremonies that celebrate and affirm the initiate's new social role are equally integral. Additionally, while *Ipasi* is a meaningful beaded crown, its significance transcends adornment, representing ancestral approval, cultural continuity, and the wearer's readiness to assume societal responsibilities. Critically, the portrayal of the sisters' role, though critical, should not eclipse the collective aspect of cultural validation in Xhosa identity formation. This critique emphasises the importance of viewing Ipasi within its broader cultural and ceremonial context rather than as a standalone symbol (Mvenene, 2020: 31).

The presentation of the newly graduated initiate during the homecoming ceremony underscores the profoundly communal nature of this tradition and the pivotal role of family support in this life stage transition. *Ipasi* headband, more than a mere accessory, symbolises mentorship, the acceptance of new responsibilities, and the affirmation of the initiate's elevated status within the community. This ceremonial act reinforces the individual's identity as a man and strengthens the bonds between family members and the broader community. By linking personal achievement to collective recognition, *Ipasi* headband becomes a powerful emblem of cultural continuity and shared identity. In addressing the matter of why boys are prohibited from donning *Ipasi*, Nokhaya Maphetshane offers the following perspective:

> *Iintsimbi ezithile nezithile, kukhona intsimbi ekungafunekiyo zinxitywe ngabantu abangekayi endaweni. Umzekelo udibane nenkwenkwe inxibe intsimbi yentloko, iyintoni kwintsimbi yentloko?Kulempilo siyiphilayo ngoku uzixelela uba uyithengile. Kodwa umthetho wakhona kude kuthiwe lipase. Unepasi ngoku lokuya emadodeni. Usukile emakhwenkweni uwelele emadodeni. Ipasi libonisa uba awusekho ngasemakhwenkweni ngoku ungapha emadodeni. Uba awuna pasi awukwazi uya ezindaweni.*
>
> Certain beadwork items should not be worn by people who have not been to the mountain. For example, you meet a boy wearing a headband. What is he wearing in the headband? In this life, one tells oneself that I bought it. Even the custom says it's a passport. It means you now have a passport to be among the men. It further symbolises that one has transformed from a boy into a man. *Ipasi* shows that you are no longer with the boys but now with the men. If you don't have a passport, you can't go places.

This statement touches on the deep cultural significance of beadwork, especially *Ipasi* headband, in marking the transition from boyhood to manhood. However, it oversimplifies the cultural expectations and misinterprets the symbolic weight of such practices. The statement that beadwork like *Ipasi* headband symbolises a "passport" into manhood is partially accurate but overlooks the nuanced social and spiritual roles attached to this transition. The headband is not simply an item to be acquired but rather a symbol of the spiritual and physical transformation that occurs through the initiation process on the mountain *(ulwaluko*). Those who have not undergone this rite of passage are not only physically unprepared but culturally unqualified to wear such adornments, as wearing beadwork without the requisite rites would undermine the integrity and sacredness of the ritual. This cultural practice is not just about social status but reflects a deeply embedded connection to ancestral wisdom, communal validation, and personal transformation. The idea that beadwork is merely a piece of jewellery without acknowledging its spiritual and communal significance risks reducing the rich layers of meaning associated with these rituals to a superficial status symbol (Makuliwe, 1995: 26).

4.3.2. *Isidanga* Necklace

This subsection reflects on the cultural significance of *Isidanga* beaded necklace within the *AbaThembu* community. In rituals involving groups like *AmaGcaleka, AmaNgqika*, and *AmaMpondomise*, which are part of the wider isiXhosa-speaking communities, the act of men wearing this necklace becomes a powerful statement of identity and heritage. As I consider the contemporary shifts in how this necklace is worn, one can appreciate the evolving expressions of culture shaped by modern aesthetics. This reflection sheds light on the profound cultural resonance of the beaded necklace, allowing one to engage with broader discussions around tradition, identity, and the dynamics of cultural evolution among *AbaThembu* within isiXhosa-speaking groups. In his discussion of the influence of global trends on traditional customs, a research participant and cultural expert, Loyiso Nqevu, provides a detailed account of the political and poetic dimensions intertwined with the intricacies of the *Isidanga* necklace and *Isankwana* beanie hat. *Nqevu* pointed out that:

> *Lentsimbi, kuthiwa xa ibizwa, negqirha, negqirha linayo lentsimbi. Igama lalentsimbi sisidanga. Sisidanga esi, iyasetyenzelwa ayithengwa. Ifana nesankwana esi, siyathengwa ngoku. Isankwana ayonto ithengwayo. Isankwana siyasetyenzelwa. Kuthiwe mfondini hambo silobolela pha okanye sisele ityala pha, ubuye kengoku kuthiwe nasi isankwana…*
>
> This beadwork, known as *Isidanga,* holds significance for both diviners and non-diviners alike. Unlike many available items, *Isidanga* cannot be bought; it must be earned. Similarly, the beanie hat called *isankwana*, currently available for sale, is traditionally not meant to be sold. Instead, it is earned through specific actions or responsibilities

within the community. For instance, one may be called upon to represent their family in dowry negotiations or disputes. Upon completing such tasks, the individual may be offered the *isankwana* to recognise their contributions and status within the community.

Isidanga necklace and *isankwana* beanie hat are more than decorative items; they embody cultural identity, status, and earned recognition within the community. Unlike commodities available for purchase, these items function as symbols of social capital, reinforcing the values of responsibility, achievement, and communal respect. The requirement to "earn" them through specific actions, such as representing one's family in dowry negotiations, reflects the African tradition of bestowing recognition through tangible cultural markers. This practice aligns with Indigenous knowledge systems, where visual symbols carry deep meaning and serve to communicate social roles and heritage. By maintaining such customs, communities ensure the continuity of their traditions and the transmission of cultural values across generations (Maliwa 1995: 26).

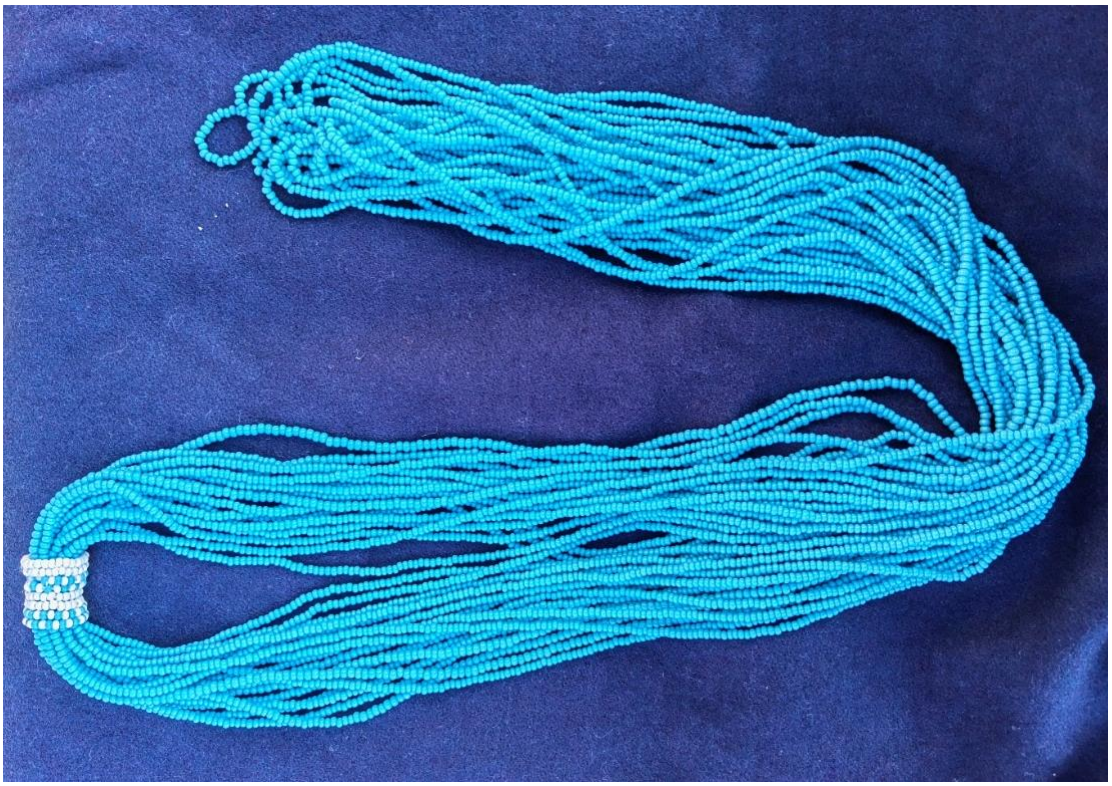

Figure 18 – *Isidanga (AbaThembu)*. Courtesy of Nosinala Mali, photographed by Zukisa Madyibi

Isidanga ***(figure 18)*** is a long necklace with 24 strings of delicate light turquoise beads held in place by turquoise and white glass beads. The necklace is typically worn as a shoulder strap or

hung over the stomach by married men in most episodes. Among isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups mentioned, it is essential to note that *amaMpondo* cultural group does not traditionally adopt this particular necklace style. The absence of a connection to the beaded necklace may relate to the decline of *ulwaluko* initiation ritual among *amaMpondo.*[86] This shift could explain the adoption of *Isitsikili* beaded necklace ***(figure 19)***, which incorporates various colours, unlike the predominantly turquoise Isidanga. Despite this difference, *Isitsikili's* design still resembles that of *Isidanga*.

Figure 19 – *Isitsikili (amaMpondo)*. WSU Beadwork Permanent Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

This exquisite necklace features 17 vibrant yellow, orange, red, white, green, pink, and blue strands. The varying lengths of each strand overlap to form enchanting circles, with the red and white strands elegantly adorned with delicate pearls and secured at the back with buttons. Traditionally, middle-aged men within *amaMpondo*[87] subcultural group of isiXhosa-speaking communities wear this distinctive piece. Fieldwork observations reveal that some men wear *Isidanga* around their necks, cascading above the belt. This differentiation in style may reflect expressions of subcultural identity, highlighting the importance of tradition and cultural

[86] Circumcision was abolished in Mpondoland, which might be related to some people's attachment to Zulu origin (Cele 2016: 274).
[87] Among rural Xhosa speakers, beaded ornaments symbolize social ties expressed through gift exchanges. For example, pale blue became associated with the cultural group in eastern Pondoland from the late nineteenth century (Patricia Davison 1993: 24).

expression in shaping personal and societal perceptions. In discussing the colour aspect, research participant Thukela Phoswayo commented:

> *Kutheni ubalulekile lombala? Ihobe yintaka eqala ukukhala kwezinye iintaka. Intaka ngumphawuli wexesha… ihobe yintaka ehloniphekileyo kakhulu, yiyo lento xa kukhethwa intaka yesizwe ibe yintaka embala uhobe, Indwe. Ihobe yintakka ebaluleke kakhulu kwi – culture Yethu. Intaka ino – lifetime love… Ihobe represent love.*
>
> Why is this colour significant? The pigeon is the first bird to coo, setting the tone for other birds. As a time signifier, a bird's presence is notable. In our culture, the pigeon is held in high regard, which is evident in the choice of a national bird – the Blue Crane- which is distinguished by its bluish colour. The pigeon is a revered symbol, representing love and a lifetime commitment.

From a Xhosa perspective, this quote offers an intriguing interpretation of the pigeon's symbolic significance. Yet, it misses some key cultural nuances and overlooks the complexity of the relationship between animals and colour symbolism in Xhosa traditions. The pigeon, revered for its cooing and role as a timekeeper, holds importance in many African cultures, including the Xhosa. However, the connection to the Blue Crane, as the national bird, requires further context. IsiXhosa-speaking people may associate birds with spiritual significance, but each bird's symbolism can vary depending on its context and the rituals it is involved in. While the pigeon does symbolise love and commitment, it's essential to consider the broader spiritual meanings attached to various birds in Xhosa culture, where different species are often linked to specific ancestral or divination practices. The use of colours in Xhosa beadwork, such as blue, reflects deep ancestral connections, conveying identity, status, and spirituality rather than just concepts of love. The pigeon symbolises love but also embodies a complex network of cultural and spiritual meanings (Mfecane 2016: 204).

Understanding the terminology of Indigenous art forms is crucial to appreciating them. Thukela Phoswayo emphasises the significance of *Isidanga* necklace, which illustrates the relationship between tradition, identity, and memory in these artistic expressions. Delving into the importance of the necklace's name, Phoswayo also highlights that:

> *Igama elithi lentsimbi sisidanga ligama layo lwemveli. Isidanga ke nokuze naleyo into kuthiwe sisidanga yinto yokuba yahlula amakhwenkwe emadodeni ngokwezemfundo yesikolo. Kanti le ngokweziwa kwayo yahlula amakhwenkwe emadodeni, hayi ngokuthi amakhwenkwe ngoba engekayi esuthwini, amakhwenkwe ngokwemisebenzi. Yimisebenzi emnika umntu iwonga lokuba anxibe Isidanga.*
>
> The beadwork is called isidanga in the traditional sense. It symbolises the transition from boys to men in the context of education. However, Isidanga signifies the distinction based on achievement rather than age or status in artistry. It represents life's accomplishments that warrant the privilege of wearing *Isidanga*.

The significance of *Isidanga* beadwork goes beyond marking the transition from boyhood to manhood, particularly during *ulwaluko* initiation. While it symbolises achievement, it is deeply rooted in a broader ancestral rite of passage that encompasses spiritual, social, and communal responsibilities. Wearing *Isidanga* connects the individual to their community and lineage, reflecting their identity and place. Reducing *Isidanga* to mere personal accomplishment overlooks its integral communal and spiritual dimensions in defining manhood within Xhosa culture. Thus, the privilege of wearing *Isidanga* requires fulfilling the broader cultural and spiritual expectations that shape this transition. *Isidanga* beadwork from isiXhosa-speaking groups illustrates the evolution of cultural symbols, blending traditional values with modern interpretations. Traditionally, it signifies personal growth and readiness to contribute to society and honour cultural teachings (Maliwa 1995: 24).

The reinterpretation of the necklace to symbolise achievement rather than age highlights the adaptability of these cultural symbols. In academic contexts, *the graduation hood (Isidanga*) now represents personal accomplishments, emphasising that distinction is based on achievement rather than age or status. This shift honours the wisdom of isiXhosa-speaking people by balancing tradition with innovation and acknowledging individual and community contributions. Zoliswa Mkangaye has this to say about the beaded necklace:

> *Umcimbi wekhaya siyawunxibela. Amadoda afake Isidanga, ingcawe neentsimbi yentloko ekuthiwa lipasi. Iphathe umnqayi indoda. Isidanga sotata side kufuneka siye phezu kwebhanti. Siba hobe ngesiXhosa.*
>
> During traditional weddings, it is customary for individuals to wear *Uvula-Kabini* and *Ithumbu*. Men dress up for ceremonial rituals by wearing *Isidanga*, *Ingcawe* (a blanket), and *Ipasi* headband, often carrying *Umnqayi* (knobkerrie). *Isidanga* beadwork worn by men is usually long, hanging above the belt, and its blue colour distinguishes it.

This Indigenous knowledge underscores the cultural significance of traditional attire during *AbaThembu* ceremonies, particularly weddings. Beadwork items such as *Uvula-Kabini* and *Ithumbu* are expected to be prominently displayed during these events. Rituals associated with family lineage, including *utyalwa bomzi* (beer of the household), *Isidanga, Ingcawe/Umbhalo*, *Ipasi,* and *Umnqayi*[88], serve as essential outfit accessories. These items act as symbols to honour the observed rituals (Soga 1937: 76).

[88] The knobkerrie is traditionally held by those who have completed an initiation ritual, symbolising the transition to adulthood and the embrace of communal values and responsibilities. It represents societal norms and rites of passage within various *AbaThembu* and isiXhosa-speaking cultures.

While identifying the hierarchical structure determining male eligibility for wearing an *Isidanga* beaded necklace, one of the study's informants, Nokhaya Maphetshane, highlighted notable distinctions.

> *Apha kotata ngoku iqala emfaneni, kudala yayi ngaqali emfaneni ngoku kwelixesha likhoyo. Emandulo yayiqala endodeni endala, le seyinabazukulwana. Inxiba Isidanga ifake uvulakabini wayo. Injongo yotata yokuba mababenazo ezintsimbi kusube, kudala xakusiyiwa emgidini okanye londoda ithombise intombi yayo.*
>
> In traditional societies, wearing this necklace was reserved for older men, particularly those with grandchildren. It was not customary for young men to wear this necklace as it is today. This beadwork was often paired with the *Uvula-Kabini* necklace. In ancient times, men adorned with this specific type of beadwork were honouring significant events such as the homecoming or coming out ceremony after completing initiation school. Additionally, it played a role in celebrating women's rite of passage.

This perspective accurately reflects the traditional use of specific beadwork, particularly in the context of *Uvula-Kabini* necklace, which has deep cultural significance. However, it overlooks the evolving meanings and practices surrounding beadwork, particularly in modern contexts. Historically, as the statement suggests, wearing such beaded necklaces was indeed reserved for older men, often those with grandchildren, signifying wisdom, experience, and a completed journey into manhood. However, the association with coming-of-age rituals, like the homecoming ceremony after initiation, was not solely tied to age but to the successful completion of rites that marked an individual's readiness for adult responsibilities. The statement also reduces the role of beadwork in celebrating women's rites of passage. While it is true that men's beadwork signified their rites of passage, women also wore beadwork to mark significant life events, such as marriage and fertility. By focusing only on men's beadwork, the quote misses the role of beadwork as a shared cultural expression, representing transitions and symbolising interconnectedness between the genders in Xhosa society. The rise in younger men wearing such necklaces today highlights the intersection of tradition and modernity, where younger generations seek to claim their place within the ongoing cultural narrative (Masilo Lamla, 1981: 9).

4.4. Beadwork as a Medium of Memory and Heritage Preservation

Beadwork transcends aesthetics to serve as a powerful medium for encoding cultural memory and identity. Its intricate patterns, symbolic colours, and purposeful designs convey stories, traditions, and values that shape community identity. Each bead and thread carries meaning, representing historical events, spiritual beliefs, social structures, and rites of passage. This

visual language preserves oral traditions, connecting the past with the present and fostering a shared cultural consciousness. Janet Hosler (2001: 120) asserts that:

> Beadwork, in its intricate and symbolic form, is a tangible link to the past, embodying ancestral knowledge and cultural traditions. We can decipher ancient civilisations' stories, beliefs, and social structures through these meticulously crafted pieces.

This view captures the essence of beadwork as a tangible link to cultural heritage, yet it oversimplifies the connection between beadwork and ancestral knowledge. While it is true that beadwork carries deep symbolic meanings and reflects social structures, to reduce it solely to a means of deciphering ancient civilisations misses the evolving and dynamic role of beadwork within contemporary Xhosa society. Beadwork is not just a static artefact from the past; it is a living practice that continues to evolve and adapt to present-day contexts. It plays an active role in shaping identity, marking significant life events, and preserving community cohesion. The skills and knowledge involved in beadwork are passed down through generations, not only as relics of the past but as integral components of a vibrant, ongoing cultural dialogue. Furthermore, the notion of beadwork being a 'decoding' of ancient civilisations suggests a distant and perhaps academic relationship with the past when, in fact, it is an ongoing form of expression and identity that is experienced and valued by the community in the present (Hosler 2001: 121-2).

4.4.1. Beadwork and Oral Traditions

a) Beadwork as a Visual Complement to Oral Storytelling Traditions

In isiXhosa-speaking communities, oral storytelling has been crucial for cultural preservation, passing down history, values, and knowledge across generations. Beadwork complements this tradition with intricate designs and vibrant colours that enrich spoken narratives. Like oral stories, beadwork conveys themes of ancestry, spirituality, and societal norms, creating a multi-sensory experience that blends verbal and visual symbolism. Helen Vale (2008: 48) argues that:

> In isiXhosa culture, beadwork is a visual echo of oral storytelling, enriching narratives with intricate patterns and vibrant colours. Like the spoken word, it conveys history, values, and societal norms, creating a multi-sensory experience that intertwines verbal and visual symbolism. Each bead and thread holds meaning, representing ancestry, spirituality, and the enduring power of cultural transmission.

Vale's observation emphasises the strong connection between beadwork and oral storytelling in isiXhosa culture. Beadwork enriches narratives with intricate patterns and vibrant colours that echo the nuances of spoken language. This combination of visual and verbal symbolism creates a multi-sensory experience, embedding history, values, and social norms into each

piece. It serves as a living repository of ancestry and spirituality, preserving isiXhosa culture for future generations. Each bead holds significant meaning, celebrating the resilience of traditions, with patterns and colours reflecting themes from oral stories, such as family lineage and essential events. The portability of beadwork allows wearers to embody these narratives, transforming them into living storytellers whose attire communicates as powerfully as their words.

b) Reflecting Personal and Communal Narratives

Beadwork is closely tied to personal identity and communal belonging. Individually, these pieces signify essential life milestones such as birth, reflecting personal journeys within a cultural context.

Figure 20 – *Ubulunga obusisiyaca obentsimbi (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Permanent Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

For instance, *Ubulunga obusisiyaca obentsimbi* ***(figure 20)***. The adornment features a fringe of beaded filaments and long strands of hair. It includes a necklet made of white beads, accented with fringes of matching beads and extended white hair strands, along with paired bead streamers. Traditionally worn by a student priest or Diviner, this ceremony holds cultural and

ritual significance in the community. During key life events, beadwork visually represents the event's importance and strengthens collective memory. Janeke de Jager (2012: 78) states that:

> Beadwork is a powerful medium for expressing individual identity and communal belonging. Each bead and thread carries the weight of personal journeys – births, initiations, marriages, and even deaths – while simultaneously aligning the individual with the broader cultural tapestry. An initiation necklace, for example, marks a boy's transition to manhood and signifies his adherence to communal expectations and traditions.

The statement rightly acknowledges beadwork as a powerful medium for expressing individual identity and communal belonging. However, it overlooks the complexity of how these expressions function within the specific context of Xhosa cultural practices. Beadwork, particularly in the context of initiation, is a personal marker of transition and a deeply communal ritual, binding the individual to ancestral customs and societal roles. While the statement highlights the symbolic role of beadwork in marking life stages, it simplifies the intricate relationship between the wearer, their community, and the spiritual realm. Furthermore, the notion that beadwork 'aligns the individual with the broader cultural tapestry' suggests a harmonious relationship that may ignore the tensions that arise in the face of modernity and cultural shifts. Beadwork, while still a living tradition, also reflects the challenges of preserving cultural authenticity amid external influences and globalisation, making it a dynamic form of expression rather than a static symbol of tradition (Soga 1937: 135).

4.4.2. Challenges to Heritage Preservation: Modernity and Globalisation's Effects on Traditional Beadwork.

Modernity and globalisation have greatly affected traditional beadwork practices by influencing how they are produced, consumed, and understood. While globalisation has expanded the reach of beadwork to international markets and increased its visibility through platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram, it has also presented challenges.[89]. The commodification of beadwork can overshadow its cultural significance as a medium of storytelling and identity. As production shifts toward mass-produced items, the artistic value of handmade artefacts may diminish, reducing them to mere consumer goods. Gasa (2018: 152) observed that:

> While globalisation has opened new markets and increased the visibility of beadwork, it has also introduced complexities. The commodification of beadwork can lead to losing

[89] Appadurai (1996: 45) states, "Globalisation challenges the preservation of cultural diversity, often leading to the homogenization of cultural expressions."

> authenticity and cultural integrity as artists may feel pressured to conform to market demands rather than express their cultural values. Furthermore, the risk of cultural appropriation is ever-present, where designs and techniques are borrowed without proper acknowledgement or respect for their cultural origins.

This observation highlights the dual-edged nature of globalisation's impact on beadwork, particularly the tension between increased visibility and the risk of cultural erosion. Commodification may pressure isiXhosa-speaking bead workers to prioritise market trends over authentic cultural expressions, potentially diluting traditional designs' intricate symbolism and ancestral knowledge. However, the resilience of Xhosa artisans lies in their ability to innovate while staying rooted in cultural values, often using beadwork to assert identity and resist homogenisation. The risk of cultural appropriation is especially poignant, as Xhosa beadwork carries profound significance tied to rites of passage, social status, and spiritual beliefs that cannot be reduced to mere aesthetics. Borrowing these designs without respect or acknowledgement diminishes their meaning and perpetuates historical exploitation patterns. Globalisation presents an opportunity to showcase Xhosa's beadwork on international platforms, as artisans maintain control over their cultural expressions and receive proper credit and compensation. Beadwork is a hallmark of South African jewellery, reflecting the passion of South African women for this craft (Thami Ngwevela 1993: 19).

Figure 21 – Modern *Ipasi* and *Vula-Kabini*. Internet Source

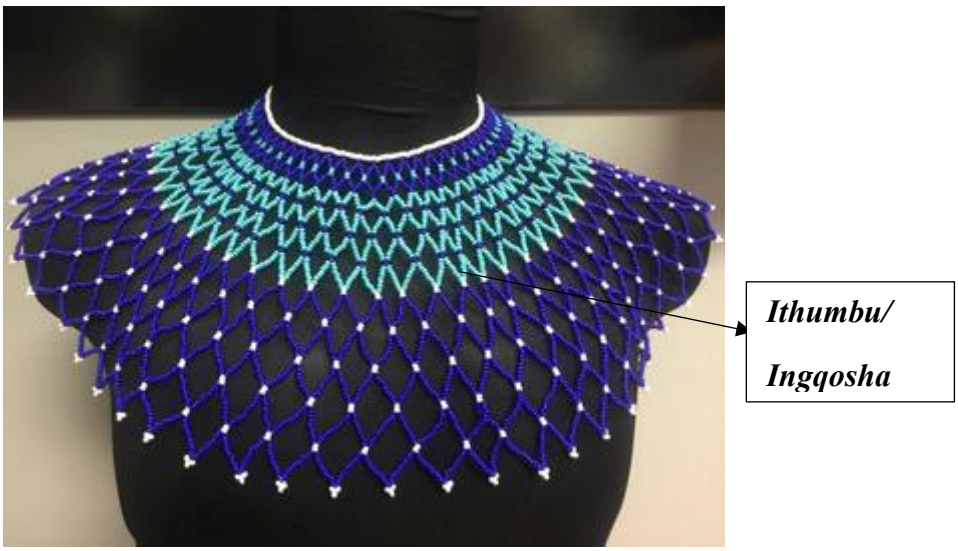

Figure 22 – Modern *Ithumbu*. Internet Source

Furthermore, global markets often adopt African beadwork designs without recognising their roots, leading to superficial representations that miss the art's depth. The push for modern aesthetics can threaten the authenticity of traditional techniques, even as some artists work to preserve them. Balancing the promotion of beadwork with protecting its cultural integrity is crucial. Chika Okeke (2019: 177) asserts that:

> Globalisation presents a complex dilemma for traditional beadwork practices. While it offers increased visibility and economic opportunities, it threatens these art forms' authenticity and cultural integrity. The commodification of beadwork and the risk of cultural appropriation can lead to superficial representations that overlook the art's depth and meaning. Furthermore, the pressure to conform to global trends may cause younger generations to prioritise modern aesthetics over traditional techniques, potentially eroding the cultural values of these intricate creations.

This assertion rightly identifies the dual nature of globalisation's impact on traditional beadwork practices. Increased visibility and economic opportunities provide Xhosa artisans a platform to share their heritage with the world, but these benefits come with significant challenges. Commodification risks reducing beadwork to a mere aesthetic, stripping it of its rich cultural and spiritual significance, such as its role in initiation rites or its ability to convey social status and ancestral connections. The pressure to conform to global trends can lure younger generations away from traditional techniques, but this perspective underestimates the resilience of isiXhosa-speaking communities. Elders and artisans play a vital role in ensuring

the transmission of Xhosa beadwork culture, adapting techniques for contemporary contexts while maintaining authenticity. Although cultural appropriation is a serious concern, globalisation can be harnessed to promote ethical collaborations and recognition, supporting preservation and innovation in the tradition (Ndlovu 2020: 219).

A balanced approach to globalisation is essential for addressing these challenges, maximising the economic potential of beadwork while safeguarding its heritage. The rise of mass production and synthetic materials threatens traditional craftsmanship and the symbolic significance of beadwork, often prioritising market demands over cultural narratives. For example, sacred patterns of *Ithumbu* neckbands are being commercialised without consideration for their meanings, leading to cultural insensitivity and exploitation. It is crucial to uphold the historical and social value of beadwork as society evolves. Nnenna Okore (2010: 187) states that:

> Commodification has fundamentally altered the nature of beadwork, stripping it of its original context and reducing it to a mere commodity. Mass production and synthetic materials compromise the intricate craftsmanship and symbolic meanings embedded within these art forms. Cultural appropriation exacerbates this issue, as global markets often exploit traditional designs without acknowledging their origins or respecting their cultural significance. This undermines the value of these art forms and marginalises the communities that have nurtured and preserved these traditions for generations.

The commodification and appropriation of beadwork present profound challenges to this art form's integrity and cultural significance. Beadwork, deeply rooted in isiXhosa-speaking people's traditions, is not merely decorative; it encapsulates ancestral wisdom, social structures, and personal milestones. Mass production and the use of synthetic materials dilute this rich heritage, stripping beadwork of its intricate craftsmanship and reducing it to a generic, commercial product. Moreover, cultural appropriation amplifies this erosion by extracting traditional designs from their context, often for profit, without crediting or compensating the communities that developed them. Such practices marginalise the guardians of this heritage, ignoring their role in preserving cultural knowledge. To protect the beadwork of the isiXhosa-speaking people, we must advocate for ethical practices that respect its origins and artisans, ensuring production remains connected to its cultural roots. The revival of beadwork in contemporary Africa serves as a form of cultural resistance, reclaiming indigenous practices marginalised during colonialism (Klopper, 1993: 31).

While it's natural for younger generations to adapt traditional styles to modern tastes, the pressure to conform to global standards risks diluting these practices' unique identity and

heritage. Nonetheless, many artists use modern platforms like digital media and exhibitions to celebrate and reshape beadwork, resisting commodification and appropriation. This showcases the resilience of beadwork as a living tradition amid globalisation and cultural preservation challenges. Grace Aneke (2022: 195) observed that:

> While globalisation challenges the authenticity of traditional beadwork, it also provides opportunities for revitalisation. The pressure to conform to global trends can erode essential knowledge, rituals, and meanings, but many artists are creatively navigating these complexities. By embracing digital platforms, organising exhibitions, and fostering collaborations, they reclaim and recontextualise beadwork, ensuring its survival and evolution as a living tradition.

This observation of the dual impact of globalisation on traditional beadwork is undeniable, yet it is not without nuance. While globalisation threatens authenticity by imposing modern aesthetics that may overshadow traditional techniques, it also serves as a platform for innovative resurgence. isiXhosa-speaking innovators such as Laduma Ngxokolo, deeply rooted in their cultural identity, have demonstrated remarkable resilience by adapting beadwork to contemporary contexts without compromising its symbolic depth. Through digital platforms, exhibitions, and cross-cultural collaborations, they amplify the global appreciation of beadwork while safeguarding its intrinsic value. However, this reclamation must be intentional, ensuring that the essence of beadwork, its connection to ancestral knowledge, community identity, and ritual significance is not lost in the pursuit of marketability. The challenge lies in maintaining a delicate balance: leveraging global opportunities while remaining steadfast in preserving the authenticity and cultural meaning that define Xhosa beadwork as a living tradition (Richards 2016: 123).

4.4.3. Contemporary Relevance

With its rich cultural significance and intricate craftsmanship, Beadwork has evolved into contemporary art, fashion, and social media. Modern artists integrate beadwork into mixed media installations, sculptures, and paintings, using it as a material and a symbolic language to convey cultural narratives, personal identity, and social commentary. This fusion of traditional techniques with photography and video explores cultural preservation, diaspora, and decolonisation, bridging ancient practices with contemporary expressions. Richard Woodward et al (2015: 354) state that:

> A renowned South African artist, Esther Mahlangu integrates traditional Ndebele beadwork patterns into her large-scale murals and contemporary art pieces. Her work exemplifies the evolution of beadwork into modern art, where it serves as both a material

> and a symbolic language to convey cultural narratives, personal identity, and social commentary. Mahlangu's art bridges ancient practices with contemporary expressions, exploring cultural preservation, diaspora, and decolonisation themes.

Esther Mahlangu's integration of traditional Ndebele beadwork patterns into contemporary art highlights the profound adaptability of African Indigenous art forms. Her work exemplifies how traditional motifs can transcend their original contexts to address global discourses such as decolonisation, diaspora, and cultural preservation. While her contributions are commendable for amplifying African aesthetics on the international stage, the Xhosa lens would also emphasise the risk of homogenising distinct cultural identities within the broader narrative of African art. Whether Ndebele or Xhosa, beadwork carries specific cultural nuances, rituals, and symbolism that must remain central to its representation. Mahlangu's ability to preserve Ndebele artistry while exploring contemporary mediums provides valuable insights for Xhosa beadwork practitioners. This balance of cultural preservation and modern artistic exploration helps Indigenous art forms remain relevant and resilient against dilution. Beadwork serves as a dynamic cultural resource, using patterns and colours to convey messages that reflect contemporary social realities while incorporating traditional symbolism (Richards 2016: 123-4).

Beadwork is experiencing a revival in fashion as designers blend traditional African craftsmanship with current trends. Both high-end fashion houses and independent designers incorporate beaded elements to showcase African heritage globally. However, this trend raises cultural appropriation and commodification issues, as traditional designs may be reproduced without proper respect for their origins. Despite these concerns, fashion remains a crucial platform for beadwork, enhancing its visibility and cultural recognition. In response to Bruce Cadle's question about whether his work reflects his heritage and the symbolic values of Xhosa traditions, Laduma Ngxokolo indicated that:

> I think it will forever be the case, and the name also upholds that reference, so I deliberately chose the name MaXhosa (which means "the Xhosa people"). The initial concept behind my naming the brand MaXhosa was to contextualise that the brand's aesthetic stems from a foundation of the Xhosa people I referenced. Then, when I [transformed] the brand a couple of years ago, I think it was three years ago, I removed "by Laduma" and substituted it with "Africa" because there was an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate other cultures as well. Since 2011, I've never let go of referencing our Xhosa aesthetic (Cadle, 2022: 255-6).

From a Xhosa-speaking perspective, Laduma Ngxokolo's choice to name his brand MaXhosa reflects a deliberate and commendable effort to root his aesthetic in Xhosa cultural heritage,

ensuring that the artistry and symbolism of the Xhosa people are at the forefront of his work. By evolving the brand to include “Africa” instead of “by Laduma,” he broadens its reach to celebrate a pan-African identity, which aligns with the spirit of unity and shared heritage among African cultures. However, this shift also raises concerns about diluting the distinctiveness of Xhosa identity within a broader African framework. While it is essential to acknowledge interconnectedness, the uniqueness of Xhosa's beadwork, patterns, and traditions should remain central to the brand’s narrative. This perspective captures beadwork as a vital connection to cultural heritage but oversimplifies the relationship between beadwork and ancestral knowledge. Beadwork holds deep symbolic meanings and reflects social structures, but viewing it solely as a means to decode ancient civilisations ignores its ongoing importance in contemporary Xhosa society. Its integration into modern fashion and art creates a dialogue between past and present, ensuring that traditional practices remain relevant today (Richards 2016: 128).

Beadwork is not just a static relic; it is a dynamic practice that shapes identity, marks essential life events, and fosters community cohesion. The skills and knowledge of beadwork are passed down through generations as active parts of a vibrant cultural dialogue, not just remnants of the past. Moreover, framing beadwork as a ‘decoding’ of history implies a distant connection to the past rather than recognising it as a living form of expression and identity actively valued by the community today. Ayodele Olukoju (2023: 124) observed that:

> Social media platforms have revolutionised the landscape of traditional beadwork, providing a powerful platform for artists to share their skills, stories, and cultural heritage with a global audience. This digital presence has elevated the status of beadwork in contemporary art and fashion and empowered younger generations to engage with and reinterpret these traditions, fostering a vibrant and evolving artistic dialogue.

The use of social media to showcase traditional beadwork offers promise and peril. On the one hand, digital platforms have provided unprecedented visibility, allowing Xhosa artists to share their craftsmanship, narratives, and cultural heritage with a global audience. This exposure has elevated beadwork as a significant element of contemporary art and fashion, inspiring younger generations to embrace and reinterpret their heritage innovatively. However, such digital presence also risks oversimplifying or commodifying beadwork, reducing its profound cultural and spiritual meanings to visual aesthetics alone. Furthermore, the potential for cultural appropriation remains a pressing concern, as global audiences might mimic designs without respecting their origins. While social media fosters a dynamic artistic dialogue, it must be

navigated carefully to ensure the authenticity and sacredness of Xhosa beadwork traditions are upheld (Leibhammer 2016: 60).

4.5. Conclusion

Chapter Four concludes by synthesising a range of insights from a thorough analysis of beadwork as a profound and multifaceted symbolic art form. It highlights beadwork's significant role in identity formation and cultural continuity, specifically among *AbaThembu* people. This exploration underscores the dynamic relationship beadwork has with history and culture, revealing how it serves as an artistic expression and a vital thread in the fabric of communal identity. The findings presented in the chapter stress the critical importance of preserving beadwork as an essential component of African Indigenous art and heritage. It acknowledges that beadwork is not static but evolves in response to various contemporary challenges, adapting to socio-economic pressures while retaining its core cultural significance. By weaving ancestral knowledge, social values, and spiritual beliefs into intricate patterns and designs, beadwork is a powerful vessel for maintaining cultural memory. Each piece contains layers of meaning, encapsulating communities' histories and traditions, ensuring that stories, rituals, and collective experiences are effectively passed down through generations.

As a visual language, beadwork bridges the gap between the past and present, providing a means for individuals to connect with personal and communal narratives. However, this treasured art form faces numerous threats from globalisation, commodification, and cultural appropriation, which can undermine its authenticity and intrinsic value. Such challenges necessitate a concerted effort to safeguard this irreplaceable heritage. To address these issues, the chapter advocates for robust preservation efforts that prioritise the aesthetic qualities of beadwork and its cultural integrity. Education is pivotal in this endeavour, fostering awareness and appreciation of beadwork's significance. Documentation of techniques, meanings, and histories associated with beadwork is equally essential, creating a repository of knowledge that future generations can access. Additionally, ethical practices in the market for beadwork are crucial to prevent exploitation and ensure that artistic expressions remain rooted in their cultural origins. By focusing on these strategies, it is envisioned that future generations will appreciate and actively engage with the rich and diverse heritage of beadwork, ensuring its vitality and relevance in a rapidly changing world.

Chapter Five:

5. Beadwork in Practice and Cultural Continuity

5.1. The Role of *AbaThembu* Traditional Dance in Fostering Social Cohesion

This section examines how beadwork enhances *AbaThembu* traditional dance, fostering social cohesion within the community. It shows the relationship between beadwork and dance, highlighting their roles in reinforcing communal bonds, celebrating shared identity, and transmitting cultural values. Traditional African dance[90] It plays a vital role in uniting communities during significant events such as weddings, harvest festivals, and rites of passage. These dances express collective identity and break down social barriers, promoting inclusivity across age, gender, and social status. They also preserve and convey cultural knowledge and values through rhythmic movements and symbolic gestures, strengthening the social fabric of African communities. In this context, dance evolves into a profound expression that intertwines culture, spirituality, and social dynamics. For *AbaThembu*, dance is essential in symbolising the transition from boyhood to manhood. To substantiate this view, Rashida Resario (2018: 101) states that:

> For a deeper insight into African culture, our labour, material culture, aspiration, history, social and economic conditions, religious and economic conditions, moments of festivity and sadness, life, soul and the realities perceived, or are conceived or felt that make us the people, are revealed to the severe seeker in our dance.

The statement resonates deeply with the cultural significance of dance as a holistic expression of identity, history, and lived experience. In Xhosa culture, traditional dances like *Umtshotsho, Intlombe*, and *Ibhasi* embody communal values, aspirations, and the interconnectedness of life stages. The statement that dance reveals life's complexities align with how isiXhosa-speaking people's dances communicate stories, emotions, and cultural continuity, often accompanied by beadwork and attire that amplify the symbolic narrative. Vale's observation highlights the deep connection between beadwork and oral storytelling in isiXhosa culture. Beadwork enhances narratives with intricate patterns and vibrant colours that reflect the nuances of spoken language. This visual and verbal symbolism blend creates a multi-sensory experience, embedding history, values, and social norms in each piece. It acts as a living repository of

[90] African dance contributes to the integration of society. It is frequently part of rites inducting young people or strangers into adult society. It ensures courtship opportunities and motivates young men and women as a prelude to creating a nuclear (Judith Hanna 1973. 170).

ancestry and spirituality, preserving isiXhosa culture for future generations. Each bead carries significant meaning, celebrating traditional resilience, while patterns and colours represent themes from oral stories, such as family lineage and key events. The portability of beadwork allows wearers to embody these narratives, transforming them into living storytellers whose attire communicates as powerfully as their words (wa Thiong'o 1986: 78).

5.1.1. *Umtshotsho* – The Teenage Cultural Dance

Umtshotsho dance ***(figure 23)***, a traditional gathering of boys from *AbaThembu* community and other isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups, serves as a pivotal rite of passage closely tied to the preparation for *ulwaluko,* except among *AmaMpondo* cultural group. Far from being a mere social event, *Umtshotsho* asserts its cultural and symbolic weight by integrating traditional dance and the intricate display of beadwork, exemplified by items such as *Ibhekile* ***(Figure 25)***. This beaded billy can, used for storing smoking accessories, is more than a practical object; it is an artistic and cultural artefact adorned with beads, pearl buttons, and wool pompoms in vibrant crimson-pink hues. *Ibhekile* is carried by boys in the adolescent stage during herding or traditional dances like *Umtshotsho*, underscoring its dual function as a personal item and a marker of identity. Umtshotsho reinforces community values and unity, turning gatherings into celebrations of heritage and identity. This dance connects young men to their cultural roots, highlighting the bond between individual identity and communal belonging. In Africa, dance transcends entertainment, serving as a vital form of communication, social cohesion, and spiritual expression (Stella Effah-Atteh, 1995: 33).

Figure 23 – *Umtshotsho* Dance *(AbaThembu)*. Broster (1976) The Tembu: Their Beadwork, Songs and Dance.

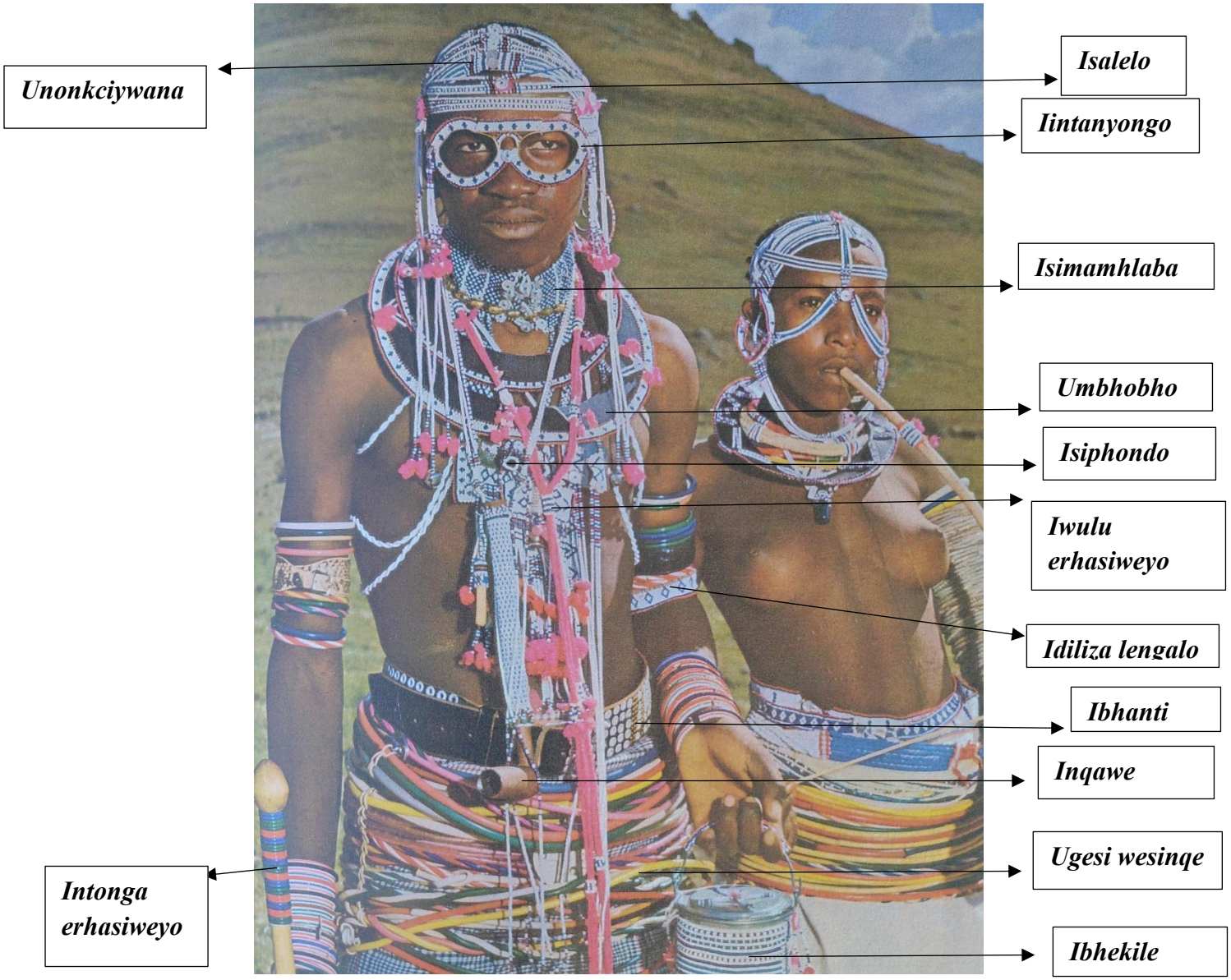

Figure 24 – *Umtshotsho* participants *(AbaThembu)*. Broster (1967): The Red Blanket Valley.

Figure 25 – *Ibhekile (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

The vibrant *Umtshotsho* dance becomes a platform for participants to captivate their audience and assert their individuality through uniquely crafted beaded adornments. While it rightly highlights the artistry of adornments like *Isimamhlaba* neckband ***(Figure 26)*** and body harnesses, it risks oversimplifying the profoundly communal nature of Umtshotsho by focusing on individual expression and competition. *Umtshotsho* is not merely a stage for personal display but a collective ritual that fosters unity, reinforces cultural values, and prepares participants for social responsibilities. Though visually captivating, the adornments are imbued with layers of meaning, symbolising communal identity, spiritual connection, and adherence to cultural norms. By emphasising the interplay between individual artistry and collective tradition, the critique underscores that these beadwork items are not just markers of teenage vibrancy but also tools for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, ensuring that the values of *AbaThembu* and other isiXhosa-speaking groups endure through generations.

Figure 26 – *Isimamhlaba (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

In essence, *Umtshotsho* was more than just a dance; it was a microcosm of our larger societal fabric, a vibrant expression of tradition, community, and the poignant phase of adolescence. Its memory reminds us of when our bonds were forged not through digital screens or modern conveniences but through dancing together under the vast expanse of our shared skies. As a resident of Qebe village, Broster (1976: 17) noticed that:

> Dancing, courtship, and beadwork are intimately woven into the social structure. At the teenage dance, the young girl studies the boys, and if one appeals to her, she buys beads and makes him three headbands. These are called *cela, unonkciywana* and *dayimane*.

In reflecting on the essence of dancing within this context, it becomes evident that its purpose extends beyond mere entertainment. It emerges as a public arena where personal inclinations and tastes are subtly expressed. Yet, these sentiments genuinely find their voice through the private, intimate act of beadwork. The crafting of headbands by the girl transcends simple artisanship, transforming into a deliberate and symbolic gesture. Each

headband, *cela*, *unonkciywana* ***(figure 27)***, and *dayimane* carry layers of cultural significance, mirroring various stages of affection or the depth of her intentions. This practice underscores the pivotal role of beadwork in courtship rituals, embodying a personalised declaration of affection, a testament to commitment, and a vital component in the social fabric of relationship-building. Presenting these beadwork pieces expresses the girl's emotions and establishes a social contract that is acknowledged and esteemed within the community, thereby knitting personal connections into the broader social weave (Benjamin Obeghare & Alethea de Villiers 2021: 389).

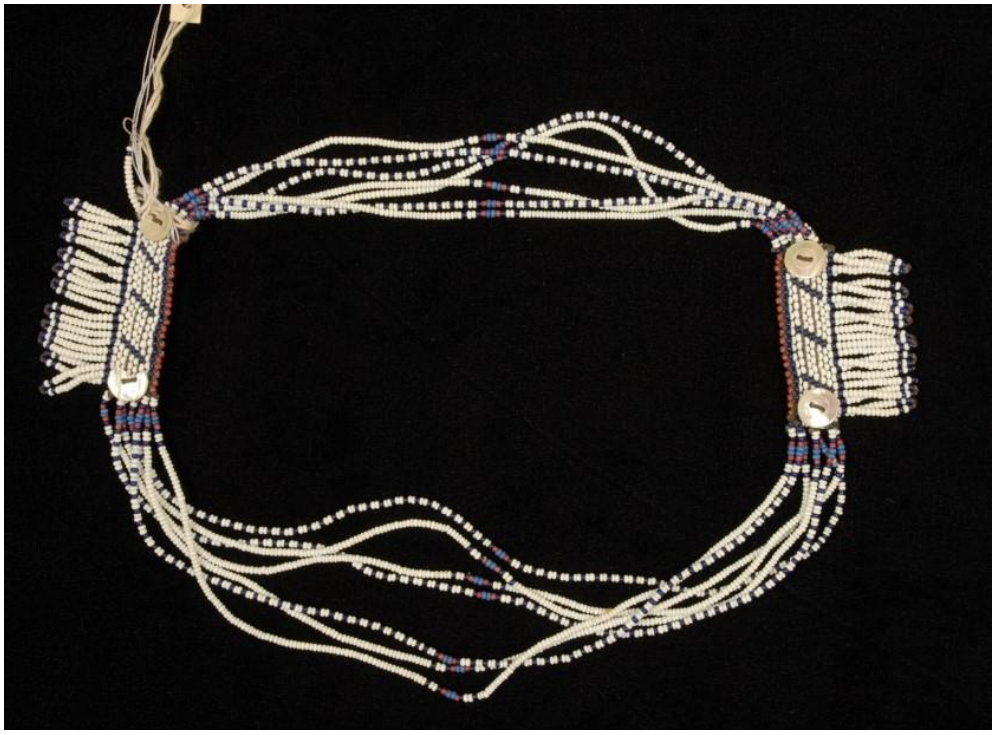

Figure 27 – *Unonkciywana (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

5.4.1. *Intlombe – The Dance for Young Adults*

Figure 28 – *Intlombe* Dance *(AbaThembu)*. Broster (1976): The Tembu: Their Beadwork, Songs and Dance.

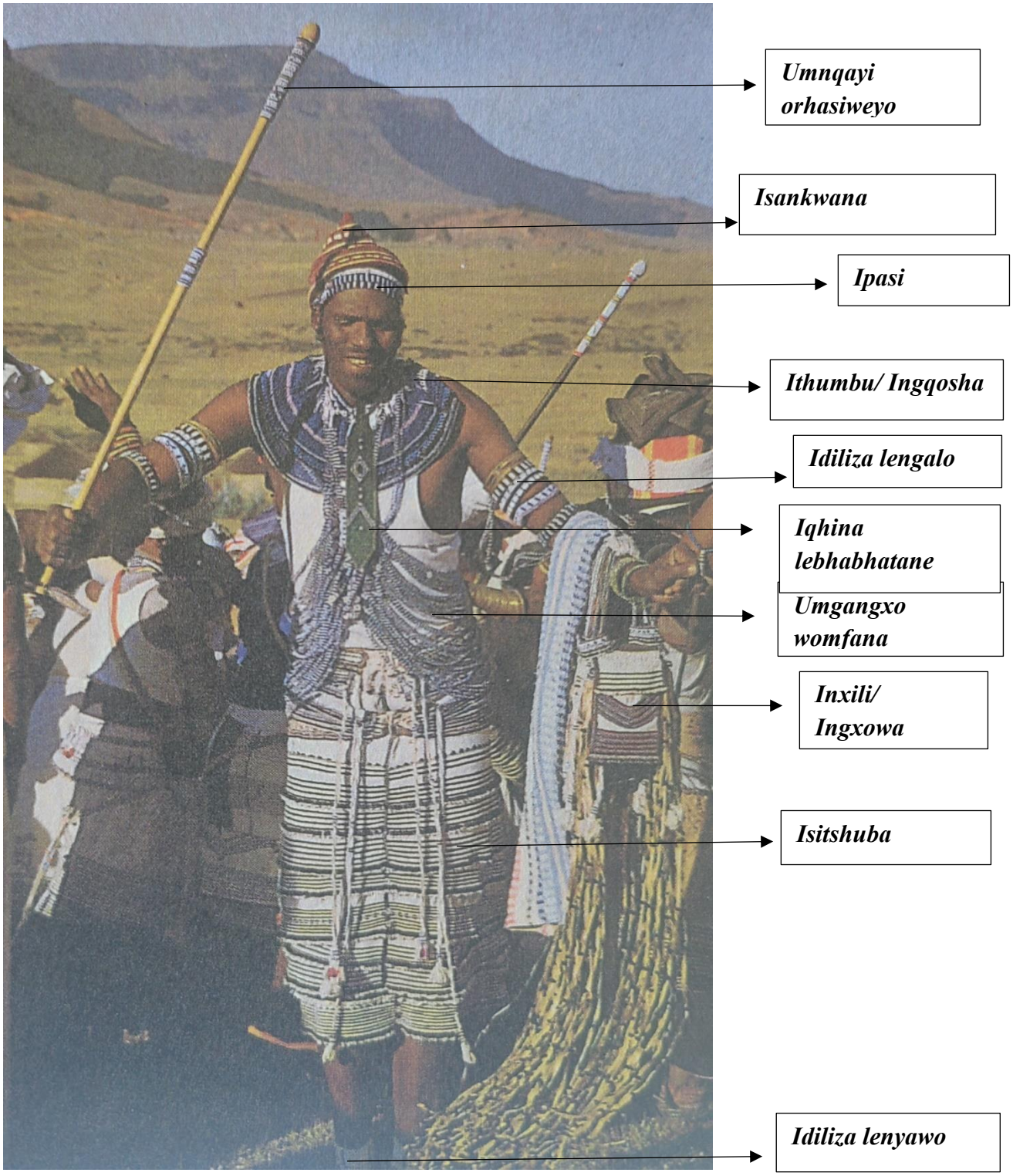

Figure 29 – *Intlombe* Dance member *(AbaThembu)*. Broster (1967): The Red Blanket Valley.

Intlombe[91] ***(figure 28)*** is a traditional dance among *AbaThembu* cultural group, exclusively for men who have completed *ulwaluko* initiation.[92] Boys are not permitted, as they are still considered adolescents. Unlike *Umtshotsho*, married women may attend, while newly married men can participate for a few years. Remarkably, factional battles are rare during the dance, highlighting a culture of respect and harmony. This unity emphasises the importance of cultural practices in fostering identity and community among *AbaThembu*. Reflecting on Intlombe enhances my appreciation for the richness and significance of such traditions in shaping our lives. During her observation of the dance, Broster (1976: 33) further highlights that:

> At intlombe, headbands are ornate, but even greater emphasis is placed on legbands, armbands and body harnesses. The young man wears five or more narrow headbands or two broad ones for ceremonial occasions. From the back of his head to his shoulders falls a spectacular bead fringe in a style reminiscent of ancient Egypt. In Xhosa, this fringe is called Isiyambane, and it has a matching necklace with ornate bead fronds 30cm long, which cover the chest. Both show the usual colour combinations in which green and yellow beads predominate and have great omens for the wearer. A young married man or a bridegroom always displays these colours.

The emphasis on leg bands, armbands, body harnesses, and intricate beadwork during *Intlombe* is a significant marker of a young man's transition into manhood, marriage, and adulthood. The choice of wearing multiple narrow headbands or broad ones, along with the distinctive *Isiyambane* fringe ***(figure 31)*** and matching necklace, not only enhances the aesthetic presentation of the wearer but also deeply signifies his social standing, identity, and role within the community. In this case, beads are far more than decorative elements; they are imbued with spiritual and cultural meaning. The predominance of green and yellow beads is not just a stylistic choice but a powerful symbol tied to marital status and the cultural values associated with these colours, suggesting fertility, prosperity, and the continuation of the family lineage. *Isiyambane* fringe, reminiscent of ancient Egypt, echoes the importance of adornment in marking significant life events while reinforcing the Xhosa people's deep connection to their cultural heritage. This beadwork, worn by a young married man or bridegroom, carries the weight of artistic tradition, highlighting the central role of physical adornment in

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[91] Among other isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups such as *amaGcaleka* and *amaNgqika, Intlombe refers* to a spiritual gathering of amagqirha, involving relatives, neighbours, and friends, primarily for amagqirha to communicate with the spiritual world both individually and collectively (Mndende 2002: 79).

[92] Indoda engenazo iintsimbi ihamba ze. Nanjengokuba sesikhankanyile ngasentla ukuba iintsimbi zilulwimi lothando, olo thando luzala ubungangamsha kumadoda ekuhlaleni. Intsimbi enxitywa ngamadoda iyaziwa ixesha elininzi ukuba ayisuki kowayo, igayelwe ngabantu babucala engazimanyanga ngaqhina lamtshato nabo (Silo 2020: 32).

communicating identity, personal milestones, and societal expectations. It also demonstrates the continuous evolution of beadwork practices, which blend historical symbolism and modern interpretations, ensuring the preservation and relevance of these traditions in contemporary Xhosa society (Costello 1990: 19).

Figure 31 – *Isiyambane (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

Umgangxo womfana ***(figure 32)***, or body harness for young men, is a key feature of the traditional attire worn by *AbaThembu* community during this dance. This intricately crafted beaded harness includes a central metal-encased mirror and colourful bead streamers that move gracefully with the dancers. Made from materials like tin, glass, vibrant beads, and fluffy pink pompoms, it is visually striking and rich in cultural symbolism. The prominent yellow and green beads represent fertility and new life, reflecting the community's values. Each aspect of the harness showcases the craftsmanship and heritage of *AbaThembu* people, making the dance a significant celebration of their identity.

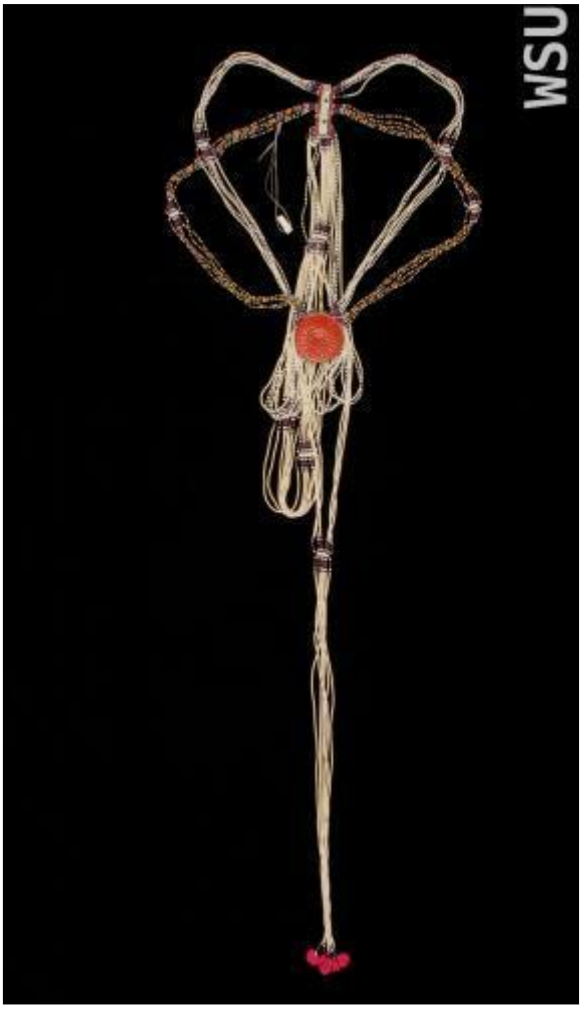

Figure 32 – *Umgangxo womfana (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

5.4.1. *Ibhasi – The Married Man Dance*

Ibhasi ***(figure 33)*** is the married men's dance in *AbaThembu* community, following *Intlombe* and *Umtshotsho* dances within the age grouping system. Membership is restricted to men over thirty, excluding newly married individuals. Governed by an executive committee, this dance's primary focus is the beadwork that differentiates its members from other previously mentioned dances. This dance holds cultural significance, representing the transition from youth to middle age ***(figure 34)***. The beaded adornments carry more profound meanings and connections to the past. This exploration enhances understanding of the complex tapestry of human traditions and identities. Based on her observation of a woman dressing a man to attend *Ibhasi,* Broster (1976: 76) noted that:

> She places a body harness and two wide collar necklaces across his shoulders. Around his neck, he wears ten or more narrow beaded necklaces worn one upon the other to encase the neck in a solid collar of beads. He also wears at least three long necklaces

> hanging to the knees – Uncumo, uvulakabini and isiyeye. Bead colours for the middle-aged group are navy and white contrasted with pink. Since all men desire many children, they also wear long green and yellow necklaces.

This description highlights the intricate beadwork and its symbolic meanings tied to identity, age, and aspirations. However, it simplifies and potentially misinterprets the cultural nuances of Xhosa beadwork traditions. The layering of necklaces like *Uncumo* ***(figure 35)***, *Uvula-Kabini*, and *Isiyeye* holds significant cultural and ritualistic value, particularly in rites of passage and social identity. While the mention of specific colours and their association with age and fertility is accurate in some contexts, the statement that 'all men desire many children' risks reducing complex cultural beliefs to a homogenised stereotype. Such interpretations should instead emphasise beadwork's individual and communal roles in expressing values, spirituality, and heritage. Additionally, attributing colours like green and yellow to fertility requires more profound engagement with the lived experiences and oral histories of the Xhosa people to avoid oversimplification (Adesina Adegbite 2010: 133).

Figure 33 – *Ibhasi Dance (AbaThembu)*. Broster (1976) The Tembu: Their Beadwork, Songs and Dances

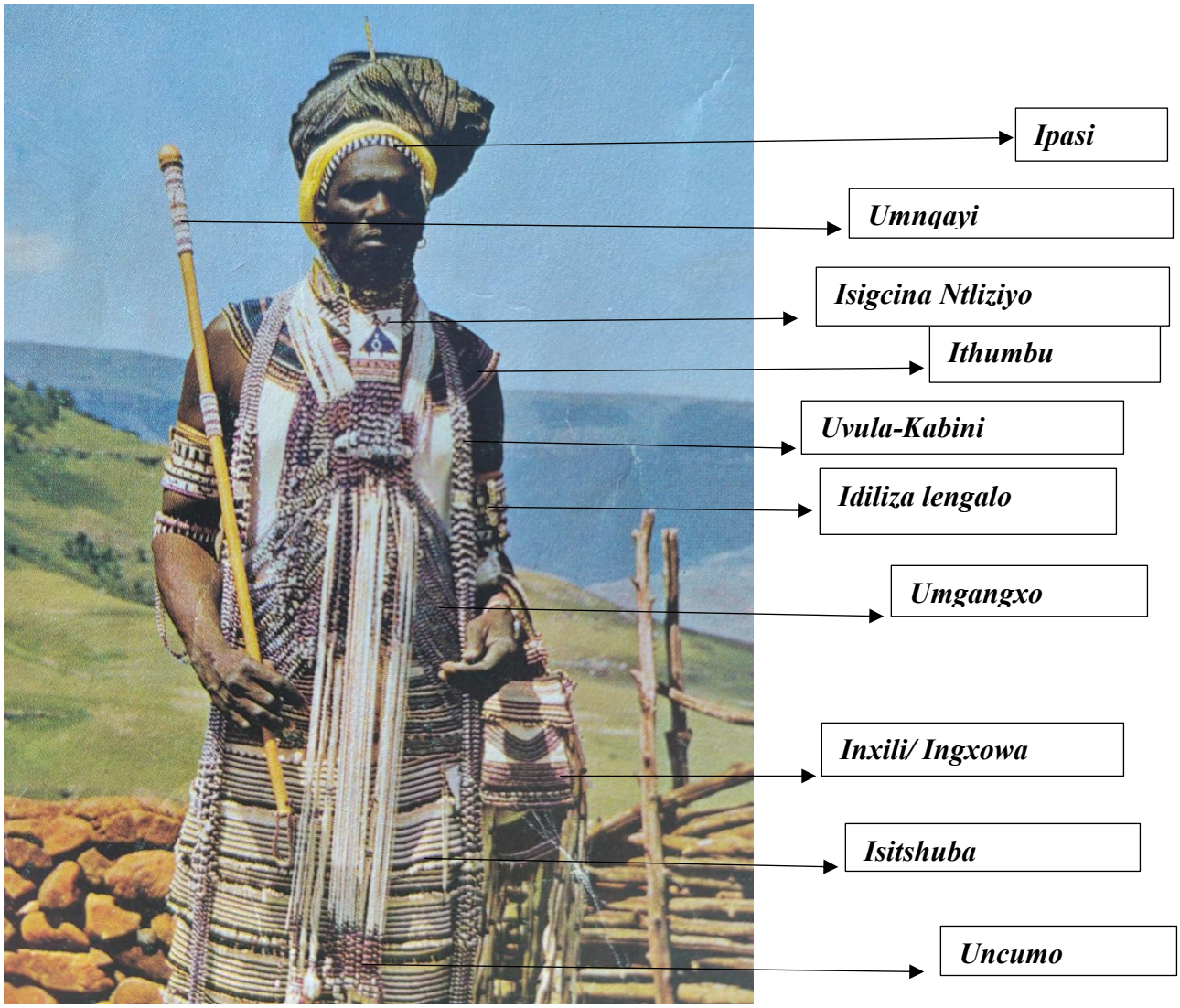

Figure 34 – Man of *Ibhasi* dance *(AbaThembu)*. Broster (1976): The Tembu: Their Beadwork, Songs and Dances.

The stunning necklace features a beautifully beaded strand that elegantly drapes around the neck, combining sophistication and comfort. Adorned with 19 delicate streamers, each 1 inch long, they cascade gracefully over the chest, creating a vibrant tapestry of colours. The beads, chosen for their visual appeal and cultural significance, showcase shades like tranquil turquoise blue, deep navy, pure white, cheerful sunny yellow, and sparkling clear beads that catch the light. This remarkable tangible heritage is thoughtfully crafted for older men and women of *AbaThembu* community, serving as a meaningful ornament for *Ibhasi* Traditional dance. The intricate craftsmanship highlights the artisans' skill and embodies traditional artistic values, making this necklace a beautiful representation of *AbaThembu's* rich cultural heritage (Nonkululeko Sandlana, 2014: 545).

Figure 35 – *Uncumo lwabantu abadala (AbaThembu)*. WSU Beadwork Collection. WSU Beadwork Archives

Figure 36 – *Isiyeye somntu omdala (AbaThembu)*. Courtesy of Nowongile Bilitane. Photographed by Zukisa Madyibi.

The exquisite beaded necklace showcases vibrant colours, each thoughtfully selected to embody significant themes in African Indigenous art. The soft pink beads, reminiscent of warm sunsets, symbolise gentleness and nurturing, while tranquil blue beads evoke spirituality and serenity. Pristine white beads represent purity and new beginnings, and lush green beads signify fertility and growth, reflecting Africa's rich landscapes. Deep blue or indigo tones emphasise royalty and strength, embodying power and heritage. A carefully crafted strip of white beads with navy lines and geometric triangle motifs highlights the cultural significance of *AbaThembu* traditions, where pink also reflects the wisdom of old age and green expresses a desire for renewal. Each pearl button signifies the wearer's reverence for their heritage and aspirations for the future. The elegantly cascading tasselled bead streamers in navy, white, and pink elevate the piece from simple adornment to a statement of identity (Tara Firenzi 2012: 416).

This necklace connects the past and present, linking the wearer to their ancestors and future generations. It embodies the resilience of *AbaThembu* people and serves as a cherished reminder of their cultural legacy, particularly during the vibrant *Ibhasi* traditional dance that celebrates their community's rhythms and stories. The beaded neckband features a closed chevron pattern with dangling bead streamers. Zoliswa Mkangaye observes her customers' general lack of knowledge about beadwork.

> *Umbala omurugwane kunye no navy ziimpawu ezibonakalisa ubudala. Amadoda anokukhetha ukunxiba ukuya kutsho kwishumi elinesibini kwezi ntsimbi zomqala, azigqume ngokupheleleyo iintamo zawo kwesi sihombiso semveli. Ulutsha esele luqabukile nabo bayayinxiba lentsimbi yomqala, nangona yohluka ngemibala. Umzekelo, eyabo inentsimbi emhlophe ehonjiswe ngoonxantathu abe navy kunye nemigca, umphetho otyheli, kunye nomqukumbelo.*
>
> The dusty pink shade and navy are the signs that define old age. Men can wear up to a dozen necklaces, completely covering their necks with this traditional ornament. Young adults also wear this necklace, although it comes in different colours. For example, theirs has a white metal embellished with navy triangles and stripes, a yellow rim, and a finish.

This description attempts to convey the significance of beadwork in demarcating age and identity but lacks the depth to capture its cultural resonance fully. The association of dusty pink and navy with old age aligns with the symbolism of colour in *AbaThembu* cultural group's beadwork; however, it risks essentialising complex traditions by presenting them as static and universal. The suggestion that young adults wear similar necklaces but in different colours demonstrates a recognition of generational distinctions, yet the description of their designs, such as white beads with navy triangles and stripes, oversimplifies and potentially misrepresents the nuanced patterns that carry specific meanings tied to social roles, lineage, and rites of passage. A more nuanced interpretation of beadwork views it as a visual language that embodies identity, spirituality, and cultural heritage. This perspective highlights its fluidity and significance rather than adhering to rigid rules. The colours, patterns, and motifs in beadwork carry symbolic meanings that serve as a form of expression (Van Wyk 2003:14).

5.2. *AbaThembu* Beadwork and Cultural Continuity in Rituals

This section explores the significance of beadwork in *AbaThembu* rituals, highlighting its role in spiritual practices and cultural resilience. Beadwork is integral to ceremonies like *Ukulandwa Kwabantu Abadala* and *Ukuphiwa Kwabantu Abadala Iinkobe*, showcasing its importance in preserving sacred traditions. *AbaThembu* and other South African cultural groups' heritage includes tangible and intangible practices, beliefs, languages, and historical sites, fostering resilience and safeguarding indigenous knowledge. Beadwork is a vital artistic expression that celebrates cultural identity and communication, particularly during ceremonies

such as *Intonjane, Imbeleko, Uduli,* and *Utywala Bomzi*. Participants wear intricate beadwork to mark these occasions, promoting unity within diversity and connecting individuals to their community. The rituals of *Ukulandwa Kwabantu Abadala* and *Ukuphiwa Kwabantu Abadala Iinkobe* honour elders and reflect the values and ancestral wisdom that guide *AbaThembu* society (Bongela 2001: 86).

5.4.1. *Ukulandwa Kwabantu Abadala*

The tradition of *Ukulandwa Kwabantu Abadala* among *AbaThembu* people is a compelling argument for the importance of cultural continuity and connection to ancestral roots. This ritual is not merely a relic of the past; rather, it actively facilitates the integration of ancestors into the lives of their descendants, reinforcing the bond between yesterday and today. This practice vividly showcases the community's rich cultural heritage through family gatherings, traditional beer brewing, and the respectful welcome of ancestors. The leadership of an elder during these gatherings highlights the community's reverence for wisdom and experience. At the same time, the diviner plays a crucial role, especially when the locations of ancestors' graves remain unknown. This illustrates the profound spiritual ties that bind the community to its past. Moreover, carefully selecting ritual dates and delineating roles during *Ibhunga* (family congress) reaffirm this unbroken connection, emphasising the significance of heritage and identity in an ever-changing world (Peter Mtuze, 1999: 42).

Additionally, beadwork, particularly items such as *Isidanga* necklace, *Ipasi* headband, and *Umbalo/Ingcawe* ***(figure 37)*** blanket, embodies the importance of these traditions. These artefacts are not mere decorative elements; they are deeply embedded with spiritual significance and serve as a tangible link between individuals and their ancestors, symbolising respect and continuity. The intricate designs of these items carry rich cultural meanings integral to *AbaThembu* way of life. As underscored by research participant Nowongile Bilitane, the significance of these practices cannot be overstated. They anchor the community's identity, ensuring that *AbaThembu* people remain firmly connected to their roots despite the world's changes. Thus, the tradition of *Ukulandwa Kwabantu Abadala* is essential for preserving cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging and continuity in the face of modernity. Nowongile Bilitane states that:

> *Isidanga asiso sehombo. Ngokomthetho yintsimbi yomcimbi. Asinxitywa nje, asibolekisi. Ukuba kowenu iyenziwa imicimbi kufuneka ubenaso kunye nombhalo. Xa kuyolandwa abantu abadala kufikwa sona, Umbhalo, ipasi nesitshuba. Inkwenkwe nentombi ayinasiko elisesidangeni.*

> *Isidanga* necklace is not for embellishment. This is a beadwork of significant value according to custom. One cannot just wear it or borrow it. If your family observes the customs, you must have it with *Umbhalo* blanket. When resurrecting the spirit of the ancestors from an old homestead to the new location, *Isidanga* should be adorned with *Umbhalo, ipasi* and *isitshuba*. No custom associates a boy and a girl with *Isidanga* necklace.

Isidanga necklace is not just decorative; it holds profound cultural and spiritual significance, symbolising a deep connection to ancestral customs and rituals. Its importance is highlighted by the requirement to pair it with items like *Umbhalo*, *Ipasi,* and *Isitshuba* during ceremonies, reinforcing its role in cultural practices[93] exclusively reserved for adults, *Isidanga* signifies maturity and deep respect for tradition, making wearing it a solemn tribute to one's heritage (Mndende, 2002: 137).

Additionally, items like *Umbhalo* serve as vessels of ancestral bonds, ensuring the continuity of traditions across generations. Nokhaya Maphetshane notes that during the ukulandwa kwabantu abadala ritual, these practices emphasise our unbroken connection to our spiritual heritage and land.

> *Xa kufikwa pha nguye ozothetha athi asisekho apha silapha ngoku, sizonilanda. Kolukwa intambo yengca ezorhuqa ihlahla lekhaya. Umzekelo ihlahla/umthi wase khaya ngumphafa. Kukhethwa ihlahla okanye omthi ongathi awuncincanga, uzokhulekwa ngale ntambo yengca lirhuqwe ngulo uzothetha. Xa kugqitywa kubuyelwa kuzwelitsha. Lo obethetha akuzuphinde athethe. Uyokuqala uthetha kusakufikwa ekhaya.*
>
> In his prepared speech, he will say: we are no longer the inhabitants of this location, and we are here to collect your spirits to be within our household. A rope crafted with grass will be prepared to pull a family tree totem. For instance, *umphafa* tree branch which relates to my family lineage will be used. The elected spokesperson will be responsible for removing the tree branch. After the proceeding and returning to the new location, the spokesperson is no longer eligible to talk. He will only speak when he arrives at the new destination.

This perspective captures the reverence and ritualistic significance of relocating ancestral spirits, emphasising the importance of lineage and continuity through symbolic acts like the use of the *Umphafa* tree branch. Crafting a grass rope and using the *Umphafa* tree as a family totem is deeply rooted in ancestral veneration. Still, the notion that the spokesperson is 'no longer eligible to talk' until arriving at the new location might misinterpret the nuanced roles of ritual leaders. In the Xhosa tradition, the spokesperson embodies a temporary, sacred duty, which may require specific behavioural protocols, but these practices are fluid and context-

[93] An ox is sacrificed to summon the spirit of the departed, allowing them to watch over the edges and entrance of the home (Magubane, 1998: 28).

dependent. A more nuanced critique would explore how this ritual fosters collective identity and spiritual continuity, emphasising its adaptability within the broader framework of Xhosa cultural practices (Mndende 2002: 64).

Figure 37 – *Umbhalo/Ingcawe (AbaThembu)*. Courtesy of Nowongile Bilitane

According to isiXhosa-speaking subcultural groups, *Umbhalo* or *ingcawe* holds deep symbolic significance, representing the concept of *Ukuhlonipha*. It is regarded as being of equivalent value to *Isidanga* necklace. Additionally, the blanket is used to cover its owner when passed on. For example, Nowongile Bilitane eloquently expressed that:

> *Kubalulekile ube nombhalo. Umzekelo utata walapha eyakhe imibhalo yayimibini, wathi ke omnye aze athi xa etshabile ombathiswe wona. Lo ukhoyo usombathwa ngunyana wakhe. Umbhalo ubalulekile endodeni.*
>
> A man needs to have *Umbhalo* blanket. For example, the head of this house had two *imibhalo* blankets. He advised that the other blanket should be used to wrap him up when he passed on. His son still uses the remaining one. *Umbhalo* is a significant blanket for men to have.

This perspective accurately highlights the symbolic and practical importance of *Umbhalo* blanket in affirming male identity and continuity within the family. The passing of *Umbhalo* from father to son reflects the intergenerational transfer of cultural values and responsibilities,

underscoring its role in daily life and rituals, including preparations for the afterlife. However, conceptualising *Umbhalo* as a universal necessity for all men may inadvertently oversimplify its significance, as its application and interpretation can diverge according to regional, familial, and individual contexts. For example, *AmaGcaleka* and *AmaNgqika* may utilise the blanket in ways that differ markedly from the practices observed among the *AbaThembu.* Furthermore, while the example provided emphasises the blanket's role in death rites, it overlooks its broader functions in rituals such as initiation and ancestral ceremonies, where it is a marker of status, protection, and cultural identity. A deeper exploration of its layered meanings within Xhosa cosmology would provide a more comprehensive understanding of *Umbhalo's* cultural significance (Mtuze, 1994: 96).

5.4.1. *Ukuphiwa Kwabantu Abadala Iinkobe*

Before exploring the concept behind the *Ukuphiwa kwabantu abadala iinkobe* ritualistic occasion and the attire adorned, it is crucial to establish the background of *utywala bomzi,* which is intricately connected to this event. In his research findings concerning *utywala bomzi*, Bongela (2001: 127) goes on to say, "It claims that beer drinking in the home is a customary rite in which beer is brewed on a large scale to maintain the pleasant atmosphere of the home and to seek the blessing of the ancestors." Beer brewing and consumption are pivotal cultural practices that promote social cohesion and invoke ancestral blessings. However, referring to these rites merely to create a 'pleasant atmosphere' oversimplifies their more profound spiritual and communal significance. *Utyalwa besintu*[94] is a sacred offering in rituals such as weddings and rites of passage, facilitating communication with ancestors, affirming lineage, and strengthening community bonds. The large-scale brewing process also fosters communal labour and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Thus, it's crucial to recognise that traditional beer embodies profound spiritual, social, and ritualistic functions within *AbaThembu* cosmology (Valentin-Yves Mudimbe & Susan Kilonzo, 2012: 53).

Wearing beadwork also honours our heritage and enhances social cohesion and spiritual connections. These rituals seek ancestral blessings for household welfare, intertwining the physical and spiritual realms for peace and prosperity. Nosinala Mali's participation in these customs provides valuable insights into their cultural significance and the communal bonds they create within her community.

[94] Homemade traditional beer among isiXhosa-speaking communities.

Xa sube kukho utywala aphe khapha, ubutywala kuthiwa bobomzi kuphiwa abantu abadala Iinkobe. Kufakwa Isidanga, Isiyeye afake Uvula-Kabini. Isiyeye sihamba indawo kaVula-Kabini xa ungenaye. Bafake intsimbi bombethe Umbhalo, oomama babhinqile. Ootata balapha kulomzi bombatha iimibhalo bafake ezintsimbi entloko (pointing to Ipasi headband) ngalemini yomcimbi. Ngelixesha kusasilwayo ziintombi, intsimbi ihleli entloko. Kodwa isikakhulu ifakwa ngalemini kuqala uwa inkomo. Ngalemini yezipheko ufaka isidanga, intsimbi yentloko, khange ayikhulule ubelele ngayo ufake lombhalo. Abanye bafake imiizi endaweni yepasi.

During the brewing of *utywala bomzi*, a traditional household beer, a special occasion called *Kuphiwa abantu abadala iinkobe* occurs, where ceremonial adornments like *Isidanga, Isiyeye*, and *Uvula-Kabini* are prominently displayed. Men wear intricate beadwork with *Umbhalo* blankets over their shoulders, while women wear *iimibhaco* skirts. The hosting household's men also wear *iimibhalo* blankets and *Ipasi* headbands. Young lineage women prepare the beer, often wearing the *Ithambeka lentloko* headband, especially on the day of the bull sacrifice. Throughout the event, individuals may continue wearing Isidanga, Ipasi, and *Umbhalo* blankets, with some replacing the Ipasi headband with pieces of reeds.

This lived experience captures the deep interconnectedness between ritual, attire, and cultural identity during the brewing of *utywala bomzi*. It appropriately highlights how beadwork, clothing, and ceremonial roles reflect the event's hierarchical structure and spiritual focus, such as the display of *Isidanga*, *Isiyeye*, and *Uvula-Kabini*. However, the depiction could be critiqued for its potential oversimplification of the symbolic meanings behind these adornments and their dynamic relationship with the ritual. For instance, while the *Ipasi* headband and *Umbhalo* blanket are correctly associated with male roles, their significance extends beyond mere ornamentation, representing status, maturity, and ancestral connection. Additionally, the claim that 'young women of the lineage prepare the beer' overlooks the collaborative nature of beer preparation, where intergenerational knowledge transfer is a critical element. The mention of reeds replacing the *Ipasi* headband introduces a fascinating cultural detail but lacks clarity on its specific symbolism within the ceremony. A more robust analysis would situate these practices within Xhosa traditions' broader spiritual, communal, and cosmological framework, emphasising their fluidity and adaptability across contexts (Goduka and Rozani 2017: 113).

5.3 Intergenerational Transmission of Knowledge: Passing Down Beadwork Traditions

This section examines how beadwork is a medium for transferring cultural knowledge through generations, with women as key transmitters.[95] Beadwork's intricate patterns, vibrant colours,

[95] Young people learn principles, values, traditions, and customs through myths, legends, stories, and community rituals. These elements help them understand the world, create meaningful artefacts, shape their behaviour, and interpret their experiences (Goduka 2005: 62).

and symbolic designs reflect societal values and communal identity in African societies. The art of beadwork is often intertwined with rituals, providing a structured means for cultural knowledge to be passed down. Women craft beadwork and mentor younger generations, helping them understand the significance of each piece, such as social status or spiritual beliefs. Oral narratives shared during the beadwork process enhance this connection to heritage, making beadwork a living tradition that adapts to contemporary influences while preserving its essence. This practice ensures the continuity of cultural preservation, with elders imparting technical skills and the deeper meanings behind patterns and colours, thereby maintaining the cultural narratives of beadwork. Mndende (2015: 87) argues that:

> The transmission of beadwork knowledge is a deeply intertwined process of oral instruction, hands-on learning, and cultural ritual. Elders, particularly women, serve as the custodians of this knowledge, guiding younger generations through the intricate techniques and symbolic meanings embedded in each bead and thread. This intergenerational exchange ensures the preservation of beadwork traditions, allowing them to adapt and evolve while maintaining their cultural significance.

The argument is that the transmission of beadwork knowledge goes beyond technical skills; it is a holistic process deeply rooted in the community's values, spirituality, and social structures. Elders, particularly women, are more than just custodians of beadwork traditions; they are cultural archivists who embody their lineage's collective memory and spiritual essence. Through oral instruction, they teach the intricate techniques of threading, patterning, and colour selection and the symbolic meanings encoded in every bead and design. This knowledge is imparted during culturally significant moments, such as rites of passage, weddings, and rituals of ancestral veneration, where beadwork serves as a visual language that communicates identity, social status, and spiritual connections. The hands-on learning process creates an intimate bond between generations, where cultural pride and a sense of belonging are instilled in younger individuals (Nettleton, 2015:25).

While the quote rightly acknowledges the adaptability of beadwork traditions, it overlooks the complexities of this evolution, particularly in a contemporary context. Younger generations are not passive recipients but active participants in reshaping these traditions to reflect modern realities while respecting their heritage. For example, integrating beadwork into contemporary art, fashion, and digital platforms showcases its dynamic nature. However, this evolution can sometimes lead to tensions between maintaining cultural authenticity and embracing innovation. In isiXhosa culture, beadwork is a sacred and symbolic craft requiring careful adaptation to avoid commodification or misrepresentation. Recognising beadwork as both a

spiritual practice and a living tradition, this intergenerational transmission showcases the resilience of the isiXhosa people's cultural identity amidst changing social landscapes. Elders play a crucial role in preserving these practices, wearing traditional beadwork during ceremonies and instilling pride in younger generations. Women and elders are vital for maintaining beadwork traditions and ensuring community resilience and continuity. The intergenerational exchange in beadwork reflects the adaptability of African traditions; while it evolves to incorporate contemporary influences, its core values remain intact, demonstrating the ingenuity of African cultural systems (Goduka and Rozani 2017: 19).

The meanings encoded in each bead and thread, guided by elder instruction, connect the past and the future, fostering belonging and pride. Thus, the transmission of beadwork knowledge showcases African craftsmanship, affirms cultural identity, and strengthens communal bonds. Alice Huggins (2001: 93) further states that:

> The transmission of beadwork skills from generation to generation is not merely a technical process but a significant cultural exchange. Through this intergenerational dialogue, the core values and symbolic meanings embedded within beadwork are passed down, ensuring the continuity of this rich tradition.

The statement highlights the cultural significance of beadwork in Xhosa society, emphasising it as a meaningful exchange rather than simply a craft. Beadwork carries deep symbolism, conveying stories and embodying values such as courage, resilience, respect for ancestors, and connection to the land. This intergenerational dialogue is essential for preserving *AbaThembu's* identity and cultural heritage. While it discusses beadwork's role in conveying values, it could delve deeper into its connection with specific practices and rituals, such as initiation ceremonies and weddings, where beadwork represents spiritual and social continuity. The phrase 'ensuring the continuity of this rich tradition' may oversimplify challenges from globalisation and commodification that threaten beadwork's authenticity. A more balanced critique should consider how younger generations innovate within these traditions, blending cultural preservation with contemporary adaptation to keep beadwork a vibrant expression of Xhosa identity.

Enid Schildkrout (1999: 124) asserts that:

> With its decadent array of colours, patterns, and textures, Beadwork is a powerful medium for self-expression and social identification. It is not merely an adornment but a visual language that speaks volumes about who we are, where we come from, and what we value.

This statement holds significant meaning in the Xhosa context, where beadwork transcends mere adornment to become a rich visual language. The vibrant colours, intricate patterns, and textures carry symbolic significance, conveying lineage, social and marital status, and personal aspirations. For *AbaThembu* community, beadwork is a powerful form of self-expression, revealing identity and values. It encodes complex narratives about individual and cultural identity, often tied to rites of passage and communal values. However, describing beadwork as a 'decadent array' may overlook its more profound cultural and ritualistic significance. A more nuanced perspective would highlight how specific colours and patterns reflect the wearer's social role, age, or marital status, showcasing Xhosa beadwork traditions' cultural specificity and depth.

5.4. Beadwork, Resilience and Cultural Preservation in Strengthening Community Identity

This section discusses the role of beadwork in maintaining cultural resilience amidst modern challenges. It examines strategies for safeguarding beadwork traditions[96] and ensuring survival in a rapidly changing world. Beaded regalia holds significant cultural importance in South Africa among various groups, such as *AbaThembu*. It symbolises *Ukuhlonipha,* conveying authority and a deep connection between the living and the ancestral realm. Decorating oneself with beaded garments is a way for individuals to honour their ancestors and recognise their enduring presence and influence in their lives. Bongela (2001: 98) supports this perspective by asserting that "In a traditional society, all occasions connected with the reverence of ancestors were honoured by the wearing of bead regalia by both men and women from both the purely indigenous and semi-indigenous levels of society." Beadwork holds profound significance in Xhosa ancestral veneration, serving as a vital link to the spirit world. During ceremonies, regardless of their acculturation level, men and women wear specific bead regalia to communicate with ancestors and seek their guidance. The intricate patterns passed down through generations symbolise ancestral lineage, social status, and respect for the departed. While the connection between beadwork and ancestral reverence is clear, the statement could be critiqued for oversimplifying cultural identity by categorising societies as "purely indigenous" or "semi-indigenous." In the isiXhosa-speaking people's culture, beadwork is a sacred medium filled with symbolic meaning that reflects spiritual alignment and communal unity. Additionally, the choice of specific bead items, colours, and

[96] Protecting physical artefacts is essential to our focus area and time frame. This includes their role in colonial collecting methods, the knowledge practices of that era and beyond, and their potential for archiving (Hamilton & Leibhammer 2016: 415).

patterns intentionally communicates the wearer's role in rituals and their relationship with ancestors. A more nuanced view would highlight how beadwork bridges the physical and spiritual realms, ensuring that ancestral rituals are culturally meaningful and spiritually authentic (Nettleton 2015:25).

5.4.1. *Ukumiselwa Kwentlabi Yekhaya*

In *AbaThembu* and other isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups, a rich tapestry of ceremonial rituals has been preserved and passed down through generations. These rituals encompass various practices, such as *Imbeleko* and *Ingqithi*. They often involve specific requirements, including the use of goats as sacrificial offerings. Central to these ceremonies is the figure of *Intlabi.*[97] Typically, this role falls to the male firstborn of the great house; however, in some cases, the family may select an individual to fulfil this essential duty. Thukela Phoswayo provides insight into the significance of the *Intlabi*, emphasising their pivotal role in these ceremonial practices.

> *Ngokwesintu awumi emaxhantini ungenamfazi, awunakunikwa iwonga lokhokhela ikhaya umzi ungenamfazi. Umkhala wendoda ngumfazi, ixabiso lomfazi kwantu lilapho. Instimbi ekunika iwonga lokumela izinto zobudoda lipasi. Lentsimbi ngumqhele yekanje ukuba sayeka usebenzisa ufele, sesisebenzisa intsimbi. Siyibize ngegama elifana nabantu abafike nayo Ipasi. Ingcawe yinto yentlabi nomxhaka. Umxhaka wawusakwakhiwa ngophondo lwendlovu (ivory). Into abantu abayiphazamisa nesidianga yinto ekunika igunya lobayintlabi, eyonanto ikunika igunya lokuhlaba ngumkakho.*
>
> In our tradition, it is not customary for an unmarried person to perform ancestral rituals at a kraal (*emaxhantini*). Without a wife, one cannot hold the title of household leader. In our culture, a woman has great value, often referred to as a man's "neck." Ipasi headband, adorned with beadwork, symbolises masculinity and leadership, resembling a crown. It's *Umqhele,* although we have transitioned from using leather to beadwork for this purpose, naming *ipasi* after the people who arrived with the passport. The *Ingcawe* blanket and *Umxhaka* headband are closely linked with *Intlabi*. *Umxhaka*, traditionally made from elephant ivory, is often mistaken for Isidanga. It's important to note that authority to be *Intlabi* is granted through marriage, not just *Isidanga* beadwork.

This live experience emphasises the connection between marriage, ancestral rituals, and leadership within the isiXhosa-speaking people's tradition. It highlights that marriage grants a man the authority to lead his household and perform ancestral duties at the kraal. Ipasi headband symbolises masculinity and leadership, reinforcing this idea. While necessary in cultural expression, *Ingcawe* blanket and *Umxhaka* ***(figure 38)*** headband do not confer

[97] Within the family, a designated man is entrusted with the solemn responsibility of conducting ritualistic animal sacrifices during ceremonial events. This chosen individual may often be the first-born male of the lineage, or he may be selected based on a proven track record of honouring family traditions. Additionally, marriage can serve as another criterion that allows one to assume this important role.

authority. Authentic leadership and the ability to perform ancestral rituals are earned through marriage and its responsibilities. The statement also reflects a culturally grounded understanding of leadership, masculinity, and the significance of marriage in ancestral rites. It underscores that marriage is central to being recognised as a household leader and highlights the metaphor of a woman as the 'neck' of a man in Xhosa society (Soga 1937: 28).

However, the statement conflates *Umxhaka* and *Isidanga's* beadwork, which have distinct purposes and symbolism. This may mislead those unfamiliar with Xhosa traditions. While *Intlabi* (initiator) gain authority through marriage, the link between beadwork like *Isidanga* and these roles warrants further exploration, as Isidanga represents spiritual readiness and social standing. The shift from leather to beadwork in crafting items like the Ipasi reflects the adaptability of Xhosa culture, though the phrase 'the people who arrived with the passport' could use more context. The quote highlights key cultural principles but would benefit from clarifying the nuanced differences between beadwork items and their ceremonial significance (Mudimbe & Kilonzo, 2012: 53).

Figure 38 – *Umxhaka (amaGcaleka)*. Courtesy Bonginkosi Mfaxa. Photographed by Augustine Zukisa Madyibi

The *Umxhaka*, or *Ipasi* headband, symbolises masculinity and leadership, resembling a crown that signifies authority and status. The transition from leather to beadwork in *Umqhele* (crown) illustrates this tradition's resilience and cultural continuity. Items like *Ingcawe* blanket and *Umxhaka* are associated with *Intlabi* title, emphasising their importance in defining community roles. Traditionally, the authority of *Intlabi* is linked to marital status; when a father passes, his eldest son typically does not inherit this role immediately. Instead, a younger brother to his father acts on his behalf until the son reaches marital status. This highlights the intricate relationship between indigenous art forms, marriage, and leadership, suggesting that authentic leadership involves social, spiritual, and material aspects for legitimacy (Bongela 2001: 91).

5.4.2. Regalia of Royalty: Traditional Attire of Kings and Chiefs

In Africa, kings[98] and chiefs often wore clothing similar to that of their cultural groups but donned traditional attire for special occasions and artistic events, prominently featuring beadwork. Their beaded necklaces typically included wild animal teeth and various raw materials. For example, the attire of the Enia chief along the Zaire River near Kisangani in the Democratic Republic of Congo reflects these traditions. Thomas Pickenpaugh (1997: 532) noted that "the Enia chief wears an ornate leopard skin hat with red parrot and brown owl feathers, armbands, a leopard skin shoulder belt, and a full necklace of leopard canine teeth alternated with beads." The Enia chief's attire embodies the cultural significance of leopard imagery and animal-based adornments in the Xhosa tradition. The leopard skin hat, shoulder belt, and necklace of canine teeth symbolise power, authority, and a connection to the spirit world. Red parrot and brown owl feathers enhance the chief's spiritual importance and relationship with nature. This attire is a visual marker of high status while reinforcing Xhosa cultural values. However, the description may be criticised for lacking cultural specificity, as it generalises the significance of such regalia without considering its unique meanings within the Enia or other Indigenous traditions. In Xhosa culture, leopard skin is reserved for chiefs and signifies bravery and lineage, while beadwork conveys social identity and spiritual alignment. Pickenpaugh also fails to explore the role of regalia in ceremonies or governance, reducing it to a mere visual description. Furthermore, focusing on animal materials raises questions about ethical practices and conservation. Overall, analysing the attire within the

[98] Nyambura, et al (2012:36) state, "In Yorubaland in Nigeria, professional male bead workers were employed to make the beaded crowns, robes, and other regalia worn by the city kings."

specific spiritual, historical, and social context of the Enia chief and his community would provide more profound meaning (Francis Madukasi 2021: 11).

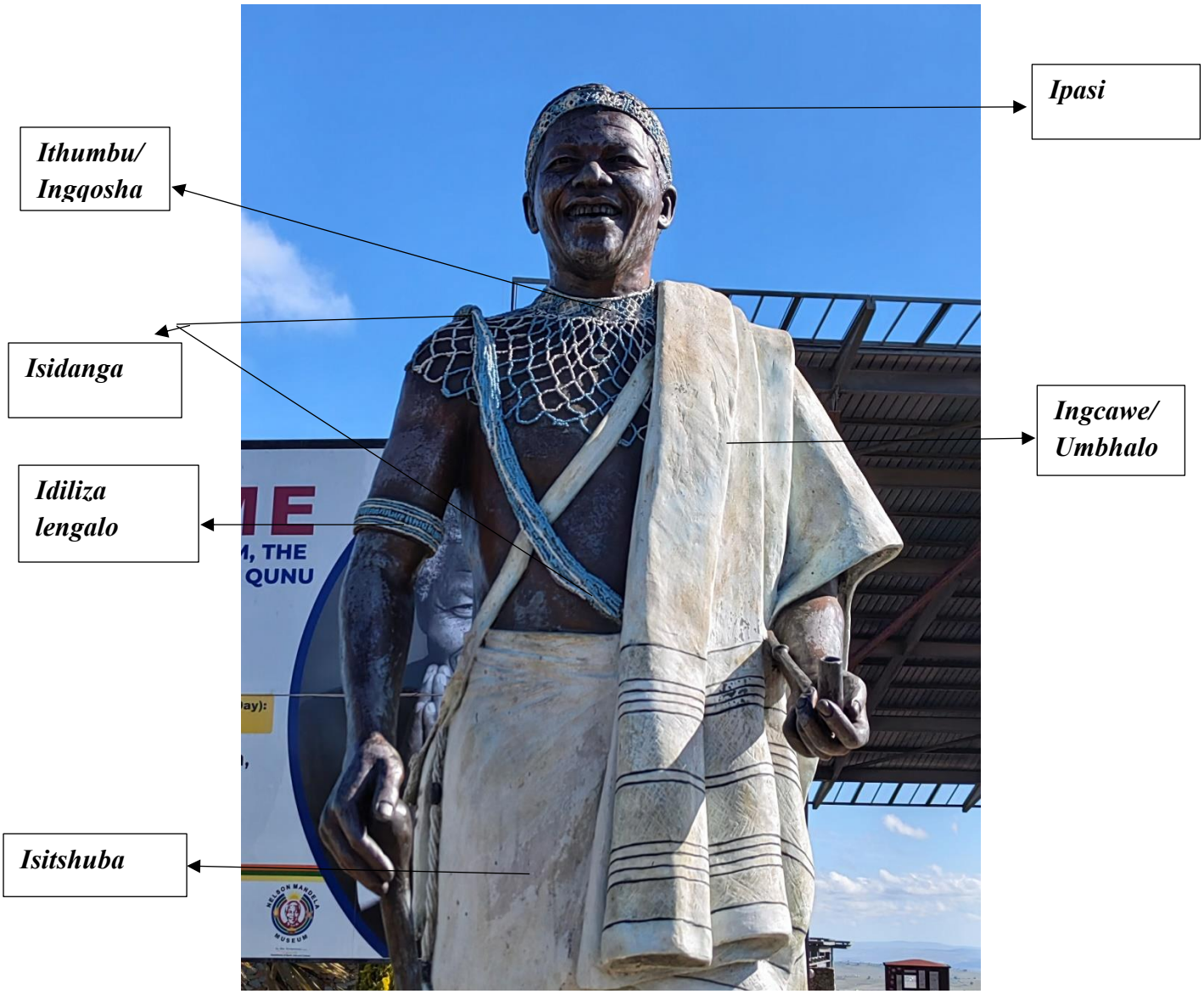

Figure 39 - Nelson Rholihlahla Mandela *(AbaThembu)*. Courtesy of Nelson Mandela Museum Youth and Heritage Centre. (Qunu Location) Photographed by Augustine Zukisa Madyibi.

From the isiXhosa-speaking perspective, unveiling these two sculptures offers a powerful acknowledgement of Nelson Mandela's layered identity, particularly his grounding in *AbaThembu* cultural heritage and his role as a global statesman. The sculpture ***(figure 39)*** in Qunu, which depicts Mandela[99] in *AbaThembu* regalia, is a poignant tribute to his roots and his

[99] Beaded items can convey powerful cultural messages, as demonstrated by Nelson Mandela's choice to wear his Xhosa beads during his sentencing hearing in Johannesburg in August 1962 (Ettegale Blauer, 2006: 95).

embodiment of Xhosa cultural values such as *ubuntu* (humanity) and respect for *amasiko* (traditions). The depiction of *Isidanga*, *Ingqosha/Ithumbu*, *Idiliza*, and *Umbalo/Ingcawe* regalia highlights the symbolic significance of beadwork and traditional attire in affirming leadership and resilience, central tenets of *amaDlomo (AbaThembu)* identity. However, the representation risks oversimplifying his cultural ties if not accompanied by narratives contextualising each element's meaning within *AbaThembu* tradition (Steve Kquofi et al. 2022: 122).

Figure 40 – Nelson Rholihlahla Mandela. Courtesy of Nelson Mandela Museum (Mthatha). Photographed by Augustine Zukisa Madyibi.

The sculpture ***(figure 40)*** in Mthatha, depicting Mandela in Western attire, underscores his ability to bridge Indigenous and global identities while prompting reflection on the tensions between tradition and modernity. From a Xhosa perspective, this duality represents adaptability rather than a rejection of culture, reflecting key aspects of isiXhosa philosophy. These artistic pieces invite viewers to honour their cultural heritage while navigating contemporary identity

complexities. By portraying Mandela as both a custodian of Indigenous knowledge and a symbol of global inclusivity, the sculptures resonate with the Xhosa values of *ukuhlalisana* (harmonious coexistence), urging the protection of cultural traditions alongside meaningful engagement with the broader world. The sculptures illustrate that Mandela's dual identity balances cultural heritage preservation with global engagement. His depiction in *AbaThembu* regalia highlights his connection to ancestral wisdom and the rich traditions of his people, showcasing the cultural accuracy essential for such representations. *AbaThembu* regalia signifies leadership and continuity of heritage, moving beyond aesthetic appeal. This narrative also reflects the historical evolution of African clothing, from wild animal hides to modern blankets, showcasing shifts in material culture while retaining symbolic significance (Kquofi et al. 2022: 126).

Among isiXhosa speakers, traditional blankets worn by kings and chiefs symbolise status and are integral to ceremonial practices, demonstrating the ongoing adaptation of these traditions in contemporary contexts. Understanding these cultural nuances is vital for grasping the dynamic evolution of African heritage in today's global era. Tiyo Soga (1937: 42) emphasises that:

> *Bekusambathwa iminweba yeenyamakazi ngabanumzana, zizidwanube neenkosi… Inkwenkwe ibisambatha ugaga lwethole, naxa wona aweenkosi nezityebi ebezenzelwa zifane nezooyise, nezeentombi zamanene nezityebi zifaniselana noonina.*
>
> Wild animal hides were employed as blankets by the Chiefs and gentlemen… However, while boys from royal and affluent backgrounds emulated their fathers by donning wild animal hides, ordinary boys were clad in calf hides.

Soga's analysis highlights the social hierarchy in traditional Xhosa society through the use of clothing. Chiefs and nobles wore wild animal hides, symbolising high status, while ordinary boys donned calf hides, reflecting their lower standing. This distinction visually marked social hierarchy and lineage, with wild animal hides signifying wealth, power, and spiritual authority. For instance, leopard skins represented leadership and bravery. Boys from royal families emulated their fathers, reinforcing lineage, but this distinction oversimplifies the complexities of social identity. In Xhosa tradition, hides relate to rites of passage, such as Imbeleko, where goat skins are used as newborn blankets. While animal hides symbolise status, they carry richer cultural, spiritual, and communal significance beyond mere displays of wealth. From an African perspective, Soga emphasises the role of material culture in defining community

identity. Using wild animals[100] hidden by authority figures reflects traits like courage and ancestral connections (Pickenpaugh 1997: 535).

The practice reinforces social stratification, as ordinary boys' use of calf hides exemplifies their place in society. This emphasis on attire emphasises cultural values and continuity, showcasing the importance of material culture in maintaining societal order within African heritage. In his examination of the methods by which the royal family occasionally acquired *umnweba* (wild animal hide) outside of gifting procedures, Bongela (2001: 107-8) provides detailed insights, asserting that:

> The skins specially used by chiefs were those of antelopes, leopards and lions. The leopard skin was the most popular, probably because it was much easier to procure than that of a lion, which was, for instance, difficult to get because of its viciousness and extreme bravery. Anybody who had killed a leopard would take its skin to the Great Place and donate it to the chief. After that, he would be rewarded with an ox.

Bongela's insights highlight the cultural significance of leopard skin in Xhosa society, where it was a highly valued material reserved for Chiefs and nobles, symbolising power and authority. Donating a leopard skin to the Chief was a gesture of respect and a way to gain recognition within the community. The challenge of obtaining lion skin due to the animal's ferocity further accentuated the prestige of leopard skin ownership. In Xhosa culture, leopard and lion skins symbolise leadership, bravery, and status, with leopard skin particularly associated with *ubukhosi* (chieftaincy). Donating a leopard skin to the Great Place reflects communal respect for hierarchy and the reciprocity in traditional customs, rewarding the hunter with an ox as a gesture of gratitude. However, stating that leopard skins were more accessible than lion skins oversimplifies these animals' spiritual and cultural significance. Leopards are revered in Xhosa cosmology for their bravery, agility, and wisdom, traits that mirror the qualities of a chief. While this perspective captures the material exchange of skins and rewards, it underrepresents the ceremonial and spiritual aspects, emphasising the interconnectedness of nature, community, and leadership (Bongela 2001: 108).

[100] For generations, humans have utilised symbols to convey thoughts. In regions of Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa, and lowland South America, a recurring motif of large necklaces made from the canines of the most formidable animals in the area has been noted (Pickenpaugh 1997: 525).

Conclusion

Chapter Five highlights the essential role of beadwork in strengthening social cohesion, cultural continuity, and resilience within *AbaThembu* community. As explored throughout the chapter, beadwork is not merely a decorative craft but a powerful tool for connecting individuals to their cultural roots. Through its incorporation into traditional dance, rites of passage, and other communal rituals, beadwork fosters a shared sense of belonging, helping maintain the community's social fabric. It also transmits cultural values and wisdom from generation to generation, ensuring the community's heritage is preserved and celebrated. Beadwork, therefore, becomes a symbolic link between the past and present, allowing members of *AbaThembu* community to honour their ancestors while adapting to contemporary societal changes. In addition to its role in cultural continuity, beadwork exemplifies resilience within *AbaThembu* community. The chapter has highlighted how beadwork, through its ongoing practice and evolution, remains a dynamic art form that adapts to modern contexts without losing its cultural significance. Despite external pressures, such as colonialism, globalisation, and the shift toward Western aesthetics, beadwork has shown remarkable flexibility, incorporating new materials, techniques, and influences while preserving its core symbolic meanings.

This adaptability underscores the community's resilience in preserving its traditions while navigating a rapidly changing world. Beadwork's ability to evolve while remaining firmly grounded in cultural heritage ensures its continued relevance and importance in personal and collective identities. Ultimately, this chapter affirms that beadwork is an art form and a living cultural artefact that plays a crucial role in preserving and evolving *AbaThembu's* identity. Through its vibrant patterns and intricate designs, beadwork serves as a medium for self-expression, social identification, and communal solidarity. It functions as a bridge that connects *AbaThembu* community to its ancestral past while engaging with the future, ensuring that the community's values, traditions, and knowledge are passed on to future generations. By acknowledging beadwork's significance as both a cultural symbol and a dynamic practice, this chapter emphasises its enduring relevance in preserving the heritage of *AbaThembu* people. It highlights its potential as a source of cultural pride and resilience in the face of global challenges.

Conclusion

This study reflects beadwork's historical and cultural significance within *AbaThembu* community, showcasing its resilience and adaptability amid colonialism and globalisation. Beadwork serves as a decorative art form and a medium for artistic expression, preserving ancestral knowledge and asserting identity and heritage in postcolonial and contemporary contexts. Each chapter enhances our understanding of beadwork's multifaceted role in shaping identities. Chapter Two establishes the historical context of beadwork within colonial frameworks, revealing it as a site of cultural resistance and resilience. It emphasises beadwork's importance as a repository of ancestral knowledge, acting as a visual language that conveys communal narratives. Chapter Three examined how beadwork shapes male identity in *AbaThembu* culture, highlighting its role in gendered practices and ceremonies like *ulwaluko*. It situates beadwork within Heritage Studies, emphasising its importance in understanding identity and societal roles. Chapter Four built on these insights, exploring beadwork's symbolic role in identity formation through case studies of traditional pieces like Isidanga, Ithumbu, and Ipasi. It underscored beadwork as a vital symbol of individual and collective identity while stressing the need to preserve its cultural integrity against commodification and appropriation. Additionally, it showcased beadwork's ability to reinforce and challenge traditional gender roles within evolving cultural narratives.

Chapter Five explores beadwork's vital role in promoting social cohesion and cultural continuity. It highlights beadwork's presence in communal rituals, traditional dances, and rites of passage, emphasising its ability to foster belonging and transmit cultural values across generations. The chapter also illustrates beadwork's resilience, showing its adaptability to modern challenges while preserving its core meanings as a cultural artefact. This study underscores beadwork as more than an artistic practice; it serves as a living heritage that connects the past to the present, allowing communities to honour their ancestors while navigating contemporary complexities. By examining beadwork through the lenses of gender, identity, and cultural resilience, the research showcases its significance in shaping and preserving *AbaThembu's* heritage. The exploration calls for further consideration of the intersections of gender, culture, and identity in Heritage Studies. It challenges us to view beadwork as a historical artefact and a dynamic cultural practice that influences lived experiences. As beadwork faces global issues like commodification and cultural appropriation, strategies are urgently needed to preserve it, including education, documentation, and ethical market practices. Ultimately, beadwork reflects the richness of *AbaThembu* culture, providing

insights into how tangible heritage shapes human experiences. Its adaptability and symbolic depth position it as a crucial element of African Indigenous art, deserving ongoing study and preservation. This research reinforces the importance of heritage practices in fostering understanding, unity, and cultural pride within diverse cultural landscapes.

Summary of Key Findings

My exploration of *AbaThembu* community revealed the deep cultural significance of their vibrant beadwork. Beyond aesthetic appeal, these artworks are essential markers in rites of passage for young men, reflecting the community's heritage, values, and identity. The beadwork is a vital connection between the ancestral past and the present. The ulwaluko ritual particularly resonated with me, marking a transformative moment that conveys communal values and an individual's new status. Ceremonial pieces like the Isidanga, Uvula-Kabini, Isiyeye, and Ithumbu neckbands symbolise various initiation stages, representing the values and responsibilities of manhood. Delving deeper, I discovered that each bead and pattern narrates stories of lineage, status, and aspirations, reinforcing social cohesion and a collective identity among *AbaThembu*. Furthermore, I noted the evolving nature of beadwork, influenced by globalisation and cultural exchanges, which hints at future changes in designs and materials. This adaptability shows how the community maintains its cultural essence while incorporating new influences, ensuring traditions remain relevant. Beadwork is an art form and a medium for expressing gender identity and social values. For instance, specific colour arrangements signify gender, social status, and personal achievements. Overall, my journey into the world of *AbaThembu* beadwork offered new insights into the relationship between tradition and modernity, shaping identities within the contemporary community and deepening my appreciation for the rich cultural tapestry it represents.

6.1.2. Recapitulation of Major Insights

Exploring beadwork in *AbaThembu* community reveals its vital role in expressing and preserving cultural narratives. Beyond decorative art, beadwork embodies identity, tradition, and communication, particularly during male initiation rites. In these ceremonies, beadwork symbolises the transition from youth to adulthood with meaningful messages about values and responsibilities. Additionally, beadwork reflects broader aspects, such as gender roles; for instance, beadwork often indicates marital status, social standing, and personal stories. This demonstrates women's role as guardians of cultural knowledge, teaching the younger generation the significance of their craft. Furthermore, beadwork's relevance persists amid global influences, adapting to contemporary themes while maintaining its cultural essence. This

evolution showcases beadwork as a historical artefact and a dynamic element of *AbaThembu's* cultural identity. Studying beadwork unveils a rich tapestry of communication and tradition, illustrating how these practices reflect societal values and provide a canvas for individual and collective expression, bridging the past, present, and future through their vibrant cultural legacy.

6.2. Contributions to the Field

6.2.1. Advancements in Heritage Studies

The research on *AbaThembu* cultural group's beadwork reveals its crucial role in shaping male gender identity. It advances Heritage Studies by highlighting the significance of Indigenous art forms in constructing cultural and social identities. By examining beadwork's symbolism and meaning, the study emphasises its importance in forming individual and collective identities within *AbaThembu* community. This exploration challenges the static, Eurocentric frameworks in Heritage Studies, advocating for a more inclusive understanding that values the complexity of cultural expressions. Beadwork is depicted as an active participant in cultural narratives, illustrating living traditions and resilience rather than a mere relic of the past.

By connecting beadwork to indigenous art forms and social identity, the research enriches our comprehension of how objects influence relationships and gender construction. This interdisciplinary approach intersects with gender studies, anthropology, art history and social history, promoting cross-disciplinary dialogue. The findings call for decolonised Heritage Studies that integrate Indigenous perspectives and methodologies, advocating for global equitable representation of cultural heritage. By prioritising Indigenous voices and validating their artistic practices, the study underscores the significance of cultural sovereignty and the rights of Indigenous communities to define their heritage. In summary, this research offers valuable insights into the interplay between art, identity, and culture, challenging scholars and practitioners to rethink cultural heritage engagement, preservation, and interpretation toward more respectful and inclusive understandings of our shared human experience.

6.2.2. Implications for Cultural Preservation

The research emphasises the significance of preserving traditional practices like beadwork amid rapid global change. It highlights the cultural resilience of Indigenous communities facing the threat of cultural erosion due to globalisation. This study showcases beadwork's enduring nature, demonstrating its adaptability while retaining deep symbolic meanings and cultural significance, particularly in male initiation rituals that represent core cultural narratives and

values. By documenting these aspects, the research aids in passing down these vital cultural practices to future generations, helping to maintain the fabric of cultural identity. It also recommends innovative preservation strategies, including digital archiving and educational programs, to ensure these practices remain relevant and accessible in a modern context. Digital repositories can connect traditions with present adaptations, supporting ongoing cultural evolution. The research offers valuable insights for policymakers and cultural institutions, advocating for inclusive and respectful approaches honouring Indigenous perspectives. It stresses that cultural preservation involves more than maintaining physical art; it includes sustaining the living traditions and meanings behind these practices. Ultimately, the study champions the conservation of beadwork and other traditional art forms. It proposes a dynamic and inclusive framework for cultural preservation that recognises their intrinsic value as expressions of human resilience and identity in a changing world.

6.3. Reflective Insights

6.3.1. Personal Reflections

Throughout my research journey, integrating a self-reflexive approach significantly influenced the study's outcomes. Engaging with *AbaThembu* community's cultural contexts and art forms was more than an academic exercise; it was a profound exploration of the meanings that define this vibrant culture. This required introspection and an awareness of my positionality in the research landscape. By embracing this approach, I critically examined my assumptions and biases and considered how my cultural background impacted my interpretations. This self-reflexive journey allowed me to connect authentically with the people and practices I studied. Acknowledging my dual role as an insider and interpreter, I approached the research with humility and openness, fostering a nuanced understanding of the cultural significance of beadwork in *AbaThembu* community. I saw beadwork as art, a living tradition, an expression of identity, and a reservoir of communal memory. The experience deepened my appreciation for Indigenous knowledge systems, highlighting the importance of respecting their value in and beyond academia. Additionally, it emphasised the need for reciprocal relationships in research, advocating for a participatory approach that honours community voices and preserves Indigenous knowledge. Integrating self-reflexivity into this project has been crucial to its success, promoting respect, empathy, and integrity. These insights will shape my approach as I continue my scholarly journey, reinforcing the importance of reflexivity, cultural sensitivity, and ethical responsibility.

6.3.2. Theoretical and Methodological Reflections

Using various theories as a framework allows a valuable exploration of the intersection of tradition and modernity in *AbaThembu* beadwork. This approach highlighted how cultural identities are negotiated in contexts where traditional practices meet contemporary influences, particularly in understanding the evolving role of beadwork in shaping male gender identity. The combination of self-reflexivity, visual analysis, oral history narratives, and archival research effectively captured beadwork's multifaceted nature and cultural significance. The self-reflexive method was essential for maintaining ethical standards and cultural sensitivity, as it encouraged continuous reflection on my influence in the research process. However, this approach had limitations, including the challenge of balancing objectivity with subjectivity, which occasionally skewed interpretations. The requirement for high self-awareness and ongoing critical reflection was also time-consuming and emotionally draining. Despite these challenges, the self-reflexive approach enriched the depth and authenticity of the research, facilitating a more nuanced exploration of beadwork's role in *AbaThembu* community. The insights gained have informed this study's outcomes and shaped my future research approach, emphasising humility, empathy, and cultural sensitivity.

6.4. Implications for Future Research

6.4.1. Recommendations for Further Study

Recent studies have opened intriguing avenues for research into beadwork across various African cultural groups. These studies can reveal how communities utilise indigenous art forms such as beadwork to construct and express gender identities, highlighting differences and commonalities in cultural practices. Exploring beadwork as an alternative archival medium can illuminate Indigenous knowledge, histories, and marginalised social dynamics often overlooked in traditional texts. Focusing on women's roles in beadwork traditions is also vital. While early research concentrated on male identity within *AbaThembu* community, examining women's contributions can enrich our understanding of this art form, as they are essential custodians of cultural knowledge. Moreover, the effects of globalisation on beadwork deserve attention. As traditional practices navigate challenges and opportunities in a globalised context, investigating how these influences impact the meanings of beadwork for younger generations can offer insights into cultural continuity and resilience. Finally, the role of digital media in preserving and promoting beadwork traditions is crucial. In our digital age, technology can document and share cultural practices, engaging younger audiences and ensuring the longevity of these traditions. These research areas can deepen our understanding of beadwork's cultural,

social, and economic significance in African communities, shedding light on the resilience of traditional practices amid the evolving relationship between tradition and modernity.

6.4.2 Emerging Trends and Areas of Interest

In the evolving landscape of cultural practices and identity, several trends highlight the interaction and influence of cultures today. A key trend is the fusion of traditional Indigenous beadwork with modern art and fashion, facilitating a dialogue between past and present. Artists integrating these practices often explore their cultural significance, raising questions about whether modern adaptations enhance or dilute their value and authenticity. Beadwork is a unique archival medium, encoding Indigenous knowledge and histories often marginalised in traditional records (Hamilton & Leibhammer 2016: 24). Another vital aspect is the role of digital platforms and social media in sharing and transforming cultural practices. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok allow communities to showcase their traditional art. Still, they also challenge issues of authenticity, ownership, and cultural appropriation, requiring careful navigation to honour the origins of these art forms. Interdisciplinary approaches that draw on anthropology, art history, and digital humanities are essential for grasping the complexities of cultural practices and Indigenous art. This holistic perspective is crucial for examining beadwork's significance in a globalised society. Future research can deepen our understanding of cultural identity and material culture, fostering informed engagement with and preservation of cultural heritage. Beadwork is re-entering, with contemporary artists innovating traditional techniques and exploring new materials. This resurgence reflects a growing appreciation for handcrafted objects and a desire for unique, personalised adornments (Valerie Hector, 2005: 11).

6.5. Final Thoughts

6.5.1. Conclusion

This study examines *AbaThembu* beadwork as an art form and a symbol of male gender identity. It highlights beadwork's role beyond decoration, emphasising its significance in cultural rites like initiation ceremonies, which connect individual identities to a shared historical narrative. The research underscores the importance of beadwork in intergenerational dialogue, marking key moments in young males' transitions to adulthood while reflecting community teachings and bonds. Additionally, the study advocates for a decolonised approach to Heritage Studies, challenging traditional views that overlook Indigenous knowledge systems. Focusing on *AbaThembu* beadwork addresses gaps in the literature about Indigenous

art and its effects on identity and gender, revealing the complexity of these cultures. The findings provide practical insights for cultural preservation, stressing the need for community involvement and Indigenous leadership in discussions about heritage. Overall, this research enhances our understanding of *AbaThembu* beadwork, its significance in identity formation, and the importance of decolonised methodologies. It also offers a framework for exploring culture, identity, gender, and heritage in other Indigenous contexts.

6.5.2. Call to Action

Preserving cultural heritage in the face of globalisation is a pressing challenge that requires ongoing dialogue about adapting and celebrating traditional practices in contemporary contexts. Collaboration among scholars, policymakers, and communities is essential to safeguard cultural heritage, ensuring future generations can access the knowledge and practices that shape their identities. Cultural heritage includes tangible items, like artworks, and intangible elements, such as traditions and languages, and is vital for maintaining cultural diversity amidst increasing homogenisation. As cultures blend and global communication expands, unique practices risk being lost, emphasising the need for intensified preservation efforts. Research into the intersections of identity, gender, and material culture can enhance our understanding of cultural practices and inform more effective preservation strategies. Technology plays a critical role in cultural preservation by providing digital tools for documentation and sharing knowledge. Virtual reality and online exhibitions can enhance global access to cultural heritage, fostering dialogue around conservation. However, technology should complement, not replace, traditional methods of transmission. Community involvement is key, with preservation initiatives needing to be community-driven and respectful of local voices, particularly marginalised isiXhosa-speaking cultural groups. Empowering communities as heritage custodians enhances preservation efforts' relevance and effectiveness. Ultimately, preserving cultural heritage should be a dynamic process that honours historical roots while embracing cultural evolution, enriching our understanding of identity, and promoting inclusivity in our global society.

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