WALKING WITH DIGNITY
THE DURBAN RICKSHAW RENOVATION PROJECT

By Rowan Gatfield (PhD candidate, Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, UKZN)
This research, which is inspired by a PhD study in Anthropology, discusses the 120-year-old history of the Durban Rickshaws, a tourist attraction and service situated along Durban's 'Golden Mile' or beachfront. Further, it discusses the homogenisation and commodification of visual forms and colour conventions, found in the traditional beadwork of polities within rural KwaZulu-Natal, often sold as authentically 'Zulu'.

Informed by relevant historical texts and qualitative research, in the form of site visits to KwaZulu-Natal museums and archives and through in-depth interviews with curators and makers of beadwork situated across the province, it details how polity identities are being revisited and recreated, to assist the Rickshaw Pullers economically by renovating the rickshaws and the pullers costumes according to genuine visual traditions of pre-colonial societies within KwaZulu-Natal.

THE GOLDEN MILE

USHAKA MARINE WORLD
ERSKINE TERRACE
OR TAMBO PARADE
SNELL PARADE
BATTERY BEACH ROAD
• To expose the students at Workspace to the fundamentals of Zulu pattern design, with the view of inspiring new in-roads into the reformulation of this source into design material that fits with contemporary design aesthetic.

• To restore an interest in the Rickshaw service amongst the Durban public and within the hospitality, tourism and related industries.
The Rickshaw Renovation Project is a collaboration between staff and students of Workspace, a Work Integrated Learning Graphic Design Studio, in the Department of Visual Communication Design at Durban University of Technology;

The Durban Rickshaw Pullers Association (DRPA);

and the Business Support, Tourism and Markets Unit (BSTMU) of eThekwini Municipality.

This Project aims to renovate twenty-five Rickshaw carts, outfits and headdresses worn by the Rickshaw Pullers.
A comprehensive and updated history

* An updated history based on historic accounts and associated literature the Rickshaw Pullers inception in 1892.

This updated summary culminates in the establishment of the Rickshaw Restoration Project.

Ros Posel (1996) *Amahashi: Durban Rickshaw Pullers*
Rickshas, also spelt as ‘Rickshaws’, were imported into the early Natal Province, by Natal Sugar Baron, Sir Marshall Campbell from Japan in 1892.

Human rights debates and ban in Asia,

Wallahs can still be found in Calcutta, India.

Relegation of men to a position, ordinarily reserved during the 1800’s, for animals was unchallenged.

This speaks volumes about the colonialist perspective regarding the ‘other’.

2012 RICKSHAW WALLAH (GEENS 2102)
Examples of these early vehicles, still on display at Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, are evidence that these carts were not fitted, from the outset, to be drawn by animals or by a motorized source. (Rickshas, Cars and Coaches 1954, Posel 1996).

Owners rented the carts to rickshaw pullers, and provided accommodation.

Many pullers lived in hovels, which afforded them little protection from the cold and wet and often had only pails for sewage disposal.

Pneumonia was reported as one of the reasons for 3 month periods of service.
1902 - 24 020 men registering as pullers. 2170 rickshaws thronged the streets
Required to be registered and to wear a license badge and a uniform, known as the ‘kitchen suit’, worn by many workers.

Despite the impositions of colonial rule, these men were resilient and creative. Drawing on their own culture, they began to adorn themselves in various forms.

Wore ‘Isiyaya’ – a bunch of feathers worn on the head. Added extra braids and bangles of plaited reeds, with seeds, which rattled upon their white washed lower legs.

Pullers would paint their legs with whitewash in a manner that imitated the knitted patterns of white school socks worn by local schoolgirls.
Most significant is the use of *uphondo*, cow horns,

Irony regarding the reduction of Zulu men to the position of beasts of burden.

Silent ‘commentary’, - assimilating the appearance of a bull, used to draw ploughs.

However, Wearing of *uphondo*, still practiced today, is a statement of equity and power. – Identifying with the bull and its power, ferocity and ability to pull something as difficult as a plough (Khoza 2011)

Some pullers also believed that the horns would bring them good fortune. (Brown 1989)

Cattle are revered, slaughtered to engage the *Amahlozi* - exchange of bridewealth or *iLobolo*. 
By 1920, two distinct groups of pullers had formed

Mpondo of the former Transkei-docks and inner city

The Mandlakazi and uSuthu Clans in Nongoma – tourist trade

Marketplace changed to accommodate other forms of transport
Social Identity theoretical framework

Has offered individuals various forms of emancipation

Economic security to the two clans – Mandlakazi and uSuthu. Became known as the Rickshaw people

Entrenched as part of Durban’s Identity 1952 (DPA) adopted the Rickshaw as their logo.

‘Official’ tourist activity - Visual spectacular, showmanship, performance and entertainment

Internationally recognised – disseminated through holiday photographs –

Socially accepted as being of the Zulu identity

1950 DURBAN PARADE WINNER
EZAKWANTU GALLERY (2012)
In 1960 Sharpeville Massacre

Sadly by 1968, Durban’s ‘tourism image’ had become seriously tarnished.

The rickshaws were relocated to a single rank at Erskine Terrace, six hundred metres from the nearest toilet.

In 1973, a Mr Hickman sold the remaining rickshaws to a Mr Van Weers, who simply handed over sixty rickshaws to the pullers. (Posel 1996)


The DPA decided to intervene building four new rickshaws, taking the pullers ‘under their wing’.

Also the period of civil conflict and international embargos – loss in tourism. 1970 - 1995

EZAKWANTU GALLERY (2012)
1993 – 1996 saw the heightened Civil conflict

Between 1995 and 2000 - ten trips to the rickshaw site, by those from Gallery Ezakwantu from Cape Town. During the same period, that the DPA were busy restoring the rickshaws

Local History Museum, Durban; South African Cultural History Museum, IZIKO, Cape Town; South African Spier Contemporary Art, African Centre, Stellenbosch; University of Witwatersrand Art Galleries; Gertrude Posel Gallery, Johannesburg, Zulu Cultural Museum, Ulundi; British Museum, London; Fowler Museum of Cultural History, USA; Norma Canelas and Norman D. Roth Collection of African Art, USA; Seattle Art Museum, Loan Competition, USA.” (Gallery Ezakwantu 2012).

Subsequently, the Phansi Museum in Durban confirms they had received the donation of a rickshaw costume a few years ago. (Mazibuko 2012)
Where visual traditions, had been lost, alternative means of cart and outfit decoration were sought.

Homogenisation, of visual forms and colour conventions, of genuine polity-based visual traditions, found in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

Beadwork and the rickshaw service sold as being authentically ‘Zulu.’
The ‘Zulu’ brand

- The ‘Zulu’ term seems unchallenged

- The movie Shaka Zulu (1986), ‘Shakaland’, Zulu Kingdom. uShaka MarineWorld and King Shaka Airport also point to a position by those in power to perpetuate the Zulu legacy.

- John Wright, in Zulu Identities, (2008) explains that the Zulu kingdom that emerged under Shaka in the 1820’s was a conquest state. It was an amalgamation of discrete, previously independent chiefdoms, each with its own established ruling house, its own identity, its body of memories and traditions prior to the Zulu conquest.

- To this end, Jabulani Sithole, Zulu Identities (2008) argues that there are those that have denied ever being subjects of any of the Zulu Kings.

- Nlanqweni, AbsEmbo, Qwabe

- Msinga – Isizwe - isigodi
Visits to eNyokeni verified the existence of geographically based identities.

Usuthu (top) Mahlabatini (bottom)

PHOTOS: GATFIELD R 2011
Reflexivity as a Graphic Design Practitioner

Design practice and Branding

Visit to archives and museums – identities were recorded and verified with experts and in texts.

Visits to Msinga

When viewed as a combination of a design construct and limited colour palette, the regions or polities represented by the respective identities were relatively easy to identify. What also became evident is that both form and colour relationships served to indicate possible inter-polity allegiances or polities within a broad geographic region.
• Reassess the position regarding polity identities affected through Mfecane, Colonialism, the Apartheid regime, Globalisation, Tourism, the Curio Trade and the ‘Zulu Brand’
The Durban Rickshaw Renovation Project

Workspace has undertaken to renovate and restore the twenty-five Durban rickshaws and puller’s outfits. The aim of this project is threefold:

Consultation and Partnership:
Sample groups, meetings with Pullers Association and Municipality officials and university colleagues

Sourcing funding and donations – NPC, Plascon, Universal Bolt and Nut, Sportsman’s Warehouse, Dunlop

Cognisant of the existent visual traditions, inspired by cultural nuances

First rickshaw renovated by myself, students and the owner William Sibiya
Lawrence Khoza, the next scheduled recipient for engagement with the project, remarked when reflecting on the project, “I see William Sibiya now walks with dignity” (Khoza 2012).

Since the inception of the project Sibiya has purchased a pair *imbathatha*, traditional Zulu sandals, traditional sheepskin leggings, a traditional Zulu whistle for attracting customers.

These small acts of personal investment in the project, as well as his attentive engagement is possibly an indication that this project may be facilitating a level of catharsis, the dynamics of which remain to be seen.
“Scholarship cannot be based on a closed and everlasting definition of ‘the African’ or a definition of Africa, rather we should be critically unraveling the heritage of authoritarianism, colonialism and the rule of race.” (Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences 2011:21)

This research project aims to illustrate that research concerning polity identities in KwaZulu-Natal can serve to reposition knowledge, framed through the effects of history, globalization, cultural hegemony and homogenization, and to ‘spotlight’ a new form of cultural equity, similar to that of brand equity, that could serve as the basis for a variety of social upliftment interventions.