

The South African Nguni Female Body and Traditional Dress as a National Identity ‘Exploit’

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ABSTRACT Most South African public places portray multiple images of what the country offers as one of its identity and heritage. The images depict carefully chosen colours many of which signify Nguni female clothing artefacts. Within the country, any person asked to identify some of the country’s national symbols, though vaguely familiar with what embodies the country’s identity and heritage, would most likely think of Nguni female dress artefacts or the colours that are commonly used with the artefacts. Such is the regard for this symbolic identification that many feel patriotic at its exposé – often seen at public places that ‘sell-off’ South Africa, for example, airports, tourists’ centres, hotels, etc. Whilst acknowledging affection for the images, the paper questions what they represent and who the beneficiaries of the images are, arguing that women who are in most cases bearers of the images, either as producers or models for the artefacts are accorded little or no regard. Although democratic South Africa through its legislation fosters a liberated expression and representation of its citizenry - the essence of who women are; that is, their bodies, dress and crafts are employed to exploit their quintessence whilst giving back very little to them. Employing Marxist feminism and post-colonial theories the researcher explains how the tourism industry has ‘ab/used’ the Nguni female identity and its related artefacts for commercial benefits. Drawing on data gathered from selected women traders as well as images found at public places the paper argues that the Nguni female body, her dress and the craft maker of her artefacts have been unfavourable used – employing one of the ‘taken-for-granted’ national identities