

# 'Topless' tradition for tourists: Young Zulu girls in tourism

Maheshvari Naidu

## abstract

---

This study works through the ethnographic narratives of two young girls who perform in a tourist cultural village, and probes how certain cultural constructions of 'Zulu girl' or maiden are enacted in the context of cultural tourism. The article demonstrates that the girls live with a certain level of cultural discordance between their own experiences as young Zulu-speaking girls and how they are positioned in tourism consumption as 'Zulu maidens'. The study situates the narratives of the two performers, Zodwa and Pumi [pseudonyms] alongside the perceptions of a group of Zulu-speaking girls as an outside audience and how they see the dancers.

---

## keywords

---

cultural tourism, performers, staging, tourist, host

## Women and girls, girlhood and girlhoods: Sameness and difference

Margaret Anderson's (2005) aptly entitled article *Thinking about Women: A Quarter Century's View* points out that feminist scholarship was anchored in an idea that was profound at the time, which was to take women's lives seriously, and asked where and how women fit into the dominant frameworks of different disciplinary concepts and theories. The questions we pose more recently are where and how do girls fit into dominant frames of the various disciplinary concepts and theories?

A significant feature of Girlhood Studies is that it prioritises research on girls' lives, not merely as older children or younger adults, or even as young women, but as girls. Far from being simply about academic semantics and hairsplitting, such corraling into a discrete area of study means a distinct space and visibility, and recognition of the unique cluster of realities that visit girls. In their editorial in *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2009, p. viii) articulate that "the field of Girlhood Studies seeks to locate, and advocate for, girls as the focus of research and action so that researchers and activists



*"The girls told me they don't dance too closely to the tourists and prefer that the male dancers go up and strike their vigorous poses."*

may engage in work that is not simply about girls, but which is for, with, and by girls". Just as valuing women's lives meant that women's culture could be celebrated and studied, recognising and valuing the discreteness of girl's lives means that girls' culture can likewise be valorised or critiqued, but at the very least, studied.

The definition proffered by Mitchell and Reid-Walsh goes on to define Girlhood Studies in terms of "whoever those girls are", alluding to the 'many faces of the girls' or diverse sociocultural realities within which the girls are situated. As Second Wave feminists pointed out the fallacy behind research attempting to focus on the 'universal' woman, so too is it fallacious to assume that there exists, in any real sense, the category of 'universal girl'.

Thus the issue of 'difference' quite rightly takes precedence in much of feminist theories that are positioned in Third Wave sensibilities. These theories sought initially to legitimate the reality of the diversity of women's experiences across the intersectionalities of class, race, sexualities, and geopolitical situatedness. This recognition of 'difference' must necessarily extend into research on girls, and references to girls' practices and their spatial location point to the polysemic plurality of girlhoods. There are, of course, similarities of biological experiences around puberty and the onset of menstruation, etc. for (all) girls. It is perhaps truer, however, that these changes are also experienced and enacted within particular culturally constructed frameworks of understandings and very particular coming-of-age rituals, whether

secular or traditional and religious. Sawicki (1986: 24) two decades ago proposed that, rather than fragment feminist studies, the notion of difference can be used as a resource for building feminist practice and theory able to find resonance with the complexity of gendered existences, in particular cultural situations.

It is revealing, however, that the dolls that our young girls play with are, in most instances, iconic of a category of white middle class, such as Barbie and the recent Bratz (even though the Bratz are clearly non-white in appearance). Such global reach and consumerism undergirds how particular stereotypes of 'girl' are commodified and embedded even at the level of doll-play. This points perhaps emblematically to the pressing necessity that studies on girlhood/s also need to be situated in African sociocultural and political realities. Certainly issues around the constructed culture(s) of girls as cheerleaders and girls' virtual networks around chat-room communities allow penetrating windows into how girls engage in everyday practices.

### **Studies on girlhood/s also need to be situated in African sociocultural and political realities**

These are not, however, windows into the lives of black 'African' girls and their engagement in heading up households and raising siblings in the absence of parents lost to HIV/AIDS, or sexual predation in exchange for marks at poorly resourced schools. Many of these girls also engage in part-time work (as in tourism), not always for personal pocket money, as American or European girls might, but often as an additional source of income for their families.

#### **Context: Girls in cultural tourism**

This article raises issues related to the gendered representation of young Zulu-speaking girls in the cultural tourism industry. It seeks to interrogate

the visual positioning of 'Zulu virgin girl' as a cultural idea to be purchased within tourism. Anthropological and sociological scholarship in tourism problematises what kind of impact cultural tourism may have on the cultures and the people involved. Theoretical issues such as commoditisation, mediatisation and fetishisation are of critical concern.

By working through the ethnographic narratives of two young girls who perform in a tourist cultural village, this article probes how certain cultural constructions of 'girl'-hood are enacted in the context of tourism. The article unveils that the girls live with a certain level of cultural discordance between their own experiences as Zulu-speaking girls and how they are positioned in tourism consumption as 'Zulu maidens'. The study situates the narratives of the two performers, Zodwa and Pumi [pseudonyms] alongside the perceptions of a group of Zulu-speaking girls as an outside audience and how they see the tourists' consumption of the dancers.

The narratives of the two girls are captured through 'conversations' and unstructured interviews. Being an Indian female much older than them, my own positionality was a point of awareness. As in any ethnographic study, ethical concerns need to be addressed, more so when there are minors involved. As anthropologists we are aware that positional stances necessarily impact on the people we choose to study. In this study, I am not only an outsider by virtue of age (an adult) and status (a researcher) but also as Indian and outside the experience of growing up in Zulu culture and Zulu girlhood. A qualitative approach, emphasising sustained ethnographic contact, then was critical. This allows the young participants time to "get to know" me in a sense, before they choose (should they wish to) to share their vital stories. I had already been working in this particular field-site for over a year on a larger project before working specifically with the girls over several months. This allowed rapport to be established between myself and the

young participants who were already accustomed to seeing and talking to me, and facilitated a level of trust, despite differences in age, race, status and experience.

One hundred and sixty randomly sampled school-going girls (15-18 years) were surveyed with structured questions. This group of Zulu-speaking girls, assumed to have a level of cultural familiarity with the Zulu dance, was contacted through three key informants from three different racially mixed schools in the greater Durban area. In each of these government schools there was at least a 40% or higher presence of black African girls.

The ethnographic windows granted by Pumi and Zodwa create a lens for us to see inside the girls' practices in tourism. Likewise, surveying the wider sample of Zulu-speaking girls who are not themselves performers allows a broader probing of how Zulu-speaking girls view the idea of 'Zulu girls' being sold and purchased in an international tourist market.

### Introducing Pumi

Pumi is a girl of 15. Her radiant smile extends to her eyes as she coyly betrays that "yes" boys do "interest" her, although pointing out that many are just plain annoying. She tells me that she enjoys many subjects, but finds some "boring", and says that her mother thinks she ought to spend more time with the school books.

At this point Pumi's narrative strays from what could well have been the text in the story of a 15-year-old living anywhere and becomes a local story. While not wanting me to note the name of her school, she pointed out that it was urgently in need of textbooks and teachers "who cared". Pumi also told me that she worked over most weekends and the holidays, and "helped her mother". Since her mother works all week in the cultural village as a 'Zulu dancer', Pumi takes care of the cleaning and cooking. On the weekends however, she "helped her mother" at the tourist village and "danced as well". She

had accompanied her mother to the tourist village most days as a little child.

The mother worked from 08h00 to 16h30 and was allowed to bring her little children "to work". Pumi said she would occasionally "join in", much to the delight of the foreign tourists, charmed at the sight of a 3-year-old in a beaded skirt. She sighs that, "of course" she then grew old enough for school. She pulled a face and told me she then no longer accompanied her mother but was watched by her aunt while her mother was at work. She said she has "good" memories of those times when she had spontaneously won over the tourists.

### Introducing Zodwa

Zodwa's quiet nature and 'little girl' features belie her 14 years. She attends the same school as Pumi and is in grade 9, a grade behind Pumi. Unlike other 14-year-olds who may scramble to music and dance classes, Zodwa has "to help her mother" during the week - she does the cooking since her mother returns from work late. Like Pumi, she works at the cultural village over the weekends, although in her case it is her aunt who invites her to join the group.

She told me that the people at the cultural village are all related to each other. Since her mother "worked elsewhere", she was not taken there as a child, but began going to the tourist village when Pumi had started there about two years ago. Zodwa says "everybody here is family", and that the men and women had been performing there for many years (some of the women continuously for about 17 years, others for about 14 years). For some of the women it was the only work they had ever engaged in.

From what the girls described, it appeared that unlike the other performers who were paid a set weekly wage for working 6 days week, the girls were paid just for the weekends they worked. This money, they claimed, went to their families rather than being spent on themselves.

## Zulu cultural tourism

Pumi and Zodwa are examples of a small number of girls that have entered (usually through other family members) the tourist industry as “ethnic” performers, or “Zulu” dancers. Unlike the women in the group, when Pumi and Zodwa perform the Zulu cultural dance for tourists, they dance bare-chested, wearing only a beaded skirt (with shorts underneath) and beaded jewellery around waist, ankles and sometimes the neck. This is explained by the guide as signifying that the young girls are *intombi* or unmarried “virgin maidens”. This signification is something many tourists claim to be aware of, from their reading of postcards and other popular tourist literature.

### The tourist still persists in searching out these created products, thereby feeding a growing market

Indeed, ‘African heritage’, ‘traditions’ and ‘culture’ have found consumer markets in global cultural flows and the transnational movements of tourists. Echtner and Prasad (2003: 66) note that the primary targets of marketing efforts with respect to tourist destinations are located in the First World, as the so-called developed countries are the main generators or producers of tourists. In KwaZulu-Natal, ‘Zulu’ and ‘Zulu heritage’ and particularly the Zulu dance have emerged as popular products that have found a demand in such global markets. Most foreign tourists that were approached confirmed that they wished to view “exotic” and “iconic” images in the dance of the “Zulu Warrior” and “Zulu dancing maiden”.

MacCannell (1992) claims that the global diffusion of Western culture and accompanying institutions of tourism create a niche for showcasing deterministic forms of ethnicity. He points to ethnicities in tourism, where so-called exotic cultures become tourist attractions. ‘Zulu’ is one such ethnicity, and cultural commodities such as the Zulu dance narratives and ‘Zulu’

bodies showcased in cultural villages are likewise increasingly positioned to meet tourist expectations (Naidu, 2009).

Pumi and Zodwa performing topless in the cultural village is quite possibly not so much about allowing the tourists to experience African-ness and seeing the Zulu maiden. It is also perhaps less about preserving cultural heritage, and possibly more about re-creating or reifying cultural identities as products that have found a supply in global tourism consumption.

While anthropological and sociological studies in tourism have alluded to the ‘post-tourist’ (Urry, 1990; Ritzer and Liska, 1997) who is fully aware of the simulated scenes of ‘authenticity’ in tourism products, the point is that the tourist still persists in searching out these created products, thereby feeding a growing market. In turn, the tourist market and marketers are kept busy positioning the so-called real and authentic. As part of this positioning, bare-breasted females, unmarried and culturally assumed to be virgins, are often seen performing the Zulu dance for tourists. The rationale on the part of the tour managers in charge of tourist villages is that this is deemed culturally acceptable and indeed a part of Zulu culture.

Zulu-speaking girls, when interviewed about what they thought of the tourists’ consumption of female ‘cultural’ bodies, reveal that the issue of what is cultural, and for whom is complex and tiered with layered understandings. The experiences shared by Zodwa and Pumi, as the girls who perform for the tourists, also indicate a cultural discordance between how they see and experience themselves as Zulu girls and how they perform their Zulu-ness in the dance narrative. The narrative they share shows that while they are at times “fine with” dancing for tourists, there are many instances when they are extremely uncomfortable, when it seems like they have to dress the part (or in this case un-dress the part) of Zulu girl.

Of course, in many of the constructed meetings or intercultural participation in tourism encounters, African-ness or specifically Zulu-ness, is the "specificity" (Van Binsbergen, 2003: 400) that is required to make the experience 'successful' for the tourist. This means that the girls, as young virgins, are bare-chested or topless when they dance.

Thus, to satisfy tourists' demands, host culture comes to be performed or 'staged' and comes to be consumed in tourism. It was not so much that Pumi and Zodwa were staging or being made to stage being virgins – the staging in this context (as the girls' narrative reveals) is about them having to perform bare-chested, to sell the idea of Zulu and virgin body.

Formulated in semiotic terms, the body is able to act as a transmitter of information (Lock, 1993: 137). Most participants who identified themselves as being 'Zulu' shared in the understanding that 'dress' held particular meanings within the Zulu culture (see Magwaza, 1999). The 'dress' of young Zulu girls, which entailed only the beaded skirt, transmits the information that she is still an *intombi* and virgin. However, within the context of cultural tourism, it appears that the girls' bodies have been appropriated as part of the package of Zulu ethnicity and culture, to transmit to the tourist audience the idea of how Zulu virgin maidens look and act (even if they did not necessarily look and act that way).

Particular packages of cultural codes (even on the body) have been acknowledged (Schroeder, 2005) as influences on consumer's relationships with products. For the consumer it is important to order and consume the right product, and within the realm of tourism consumption this is perhaps especially true. Conversations with some of the international tourists show that they are very clear about what they would like to see. Conversations with them revealed that they were attracted to "Zulu warrior imagery", exotic "indigenous costumes of skin" and in the context

of women, images of "Zulu beaded dancers". None of the males or females volunteered as to whether they specifically wished to see the 'topless' girls. However, many mentioned that they were familiar with images of Zulu maidens who, as one tourist put it, "danced only in beads".

Somehow, seeing this 'package of imagery' (skin-clad warriors and beaded women and girls) was understood by many tourists as getting a taste of Africa. The guide at the cultural village also confided that there were times when he would be approached by the guide accompanying the group of tourists who would request that the *intombi* or bare-chested girls be included in the dance.

### **It seems like they have to dress the part (or in this case un-dress the part) of Zulu girl**

The website 'Zulu Culture and Customs' states "Maidens are known as *amatshitshi*. They are found walking around Zululand bare-breasted, thus indicating their single status" ([www.zulu-culture-history.com/zulu\\_girls\\_maidens.htm](http://www.zulu-culture-history.com/zulu_girls_maidens.htm)). Of course there are no girls walking around bare-breasted in the manner evoked by the website, designed by all appearances for foreign tourists.

The reconstruction of identity in the tourist transaction is said to "begin with the gaze of the foreigner acting as a kind of reference point, and guarantor of identity" (Lafant et al., 1995: 36). Cultural identity, in this case for the Zulu girls, is reconstructed within selective imagery and symbols (Naidu, 2009). The performers perform certain aspects of 'culture' in products like the dance. These are the symbols and images of 'African' that the international tourist appears familiar with, and seems to want reinforced or vindicated in their experience of and encounter with Africa and African people.

## Dancing for tourists: Listening to the girls' stories

Pumi and Zodwa tell me that there are times when they "feel uncomfortable" to dance bare-chested "for the tourists". Host and guest are oppositional categories made prominent in tourism and cultural impact studies by Valene Smith. These categories exemplify the division between those who come to see and consume and those who are seen and consumed in the transaction.

Pumi told me that "girls nowadays do not have to dance like this to show that they are the unmarried girls or virgins in the group. We do this in our homes, but only if it is a special celebration ... like party for wedding", and "even then most times, we wear a T-shirt". Over several conversations and observations at the village it seemed clear that the girls were comfortable with their bodies and appeared comfortable with what Western eyes might have perceived as a level of 'nudity'. While in the initial interviews they would put on a T-shirt before talking to me, there were many times in the later conversations that they were at ease talking to me 'as they were'. What they seemed uncomfortable with, however, was the staged context of touristic contact between them, as dancing and posing 'host', and the paying 'guests'.

### They felt that some of the male tourists "want to see tits"

Interviews and conversations with many young Zulu-speaking girls revealed that, for most of the girls, even coming-of-age celebrations like the *umumelo* are not times of elaborate rituals or when they would dance topless. Many young Zulu-speaking girls indicated that one "did not have to be topless" and that "it was difficult to suddenly become that traditional". Some pointed out that there would be a level of awkwardness if they were compelled to be topless and "boys were around".

Zodwa also shared that "while it is okay in the village" that, "here for the tourists it is not the same". There were many occasions that both the girls referred to the tourists as "the customer", making implicit that to them the whole exchange was more a business transaction that happened to be about the tourist seeing a little Zulu culture, rather than a sharing of Zulu heritage and culture as such.

Zodwa told me that they "want to make the customer happy.. but ...", and punctuated her narrative with awkward bodily movements, as if she did not want to talk about it. It was thus still opaque as to what exactly the girls were uncomfortable with when they performed. It is only in the latter meetings that the girls opened up to me and shared that they felt that some of the male tourists "want to see tits" and they are able "to feel the men looking" at them in a sexual way. They told me that it is not always "bad" but that there are times when "they want to cover up". However, it appeared that the girls did not cover up despite their unease. The reasons were not straightforward. There was no direct coercion by the guide at the cultural village, who seemed aware of their feelings and put it down to the "urban ideas" they "encountered at school". He told me that he would be supportive if they chose to 'cover up'. The owner of the cultural village was also someone, by the performers' own accounts, that they had a good relationship with.

However, it was not so easy for the girls to 'cover up'. They seemed to be attempting to mirror the images that stared back from tourist postcards. From what the girls intimated, they appeared caught between 'older' cultural constructions of 'Zulu girl', and how they were feeling about their uncovered bodies now. They shared that it was the "times of performance" that they felt "uncomfortable" and pulled in different ways about being and "showing" a Zulu girl. This may be seen as a natural part of growing up and confronting what one experiences as incongruous

in one's own cultural worldview. However, cultural touristic experiences that reinforce certain cultural 'stock images' work to create further tension for the girls which they seem to question but are powerless to change.

The girls told me they don't dance too closely to the tourists and prefer that the male dancers go up and strike their vigorous poses. This was something I had observed in all the performances. The females always remained at the back and appeared to be shielded by the males from the "customers". I had thought I was reading too much into this until Pumi's narrative bore out the observation. Both the girls told me that the women, who would have been young girls of about 16 when they had begun working many years earlier, had stopped coming in too close to the tourists some time ago.

The girls seemed to be struggling to articulate a sense of being exposed to the tourists' gaze. The 'gaze' (Foucault, 1979, 1980) is concerned with the gathering of information which works to inform and create discourse on that particular subject, and works to empower the status of the spectator. In this context the tourists are the empowered spectators whose gaze acts to further 'discipline' (Foucault, 1979) the girls into being the 'topless maiden'. The girls, on the other hand, appear to be examples of the objectivised subject.

Foucault (1982: 777) refers to individuals being turned into subjects by particular modes or "dividing practices". The girls are already divided from the tourists, for they are the objects of tourism. However, they come to be further divided and fetishised as the (barely clothed) Zulu maidens in cultural tourism. The girls' bodies emerge as being "owned bodies" (Butts, 2007: 62), and a kind of proprietary right over their bodies is enacted through the inscriptions of 'Zulu' and 'cultural maiden' that attempt to plastically mould and shape how they ought to be gazed on in the performance. The 'disciplining gaze'

is thus embodied in those around and, perhaps more disturbingly, also in the girls, as disciplined subjects (Brush, 1998: 38).

### **Consuming young African cultural bodies: Listening to other Zulu-speaking girls**

As we turn to a wider group of Zulu-speaking girls, we see that there are diverse responses when the school-going group of informants was asked what they thought of the positioning of young Zulu girls in tourism.

Some communicated that, as the girls were "just expressing their culture", it was "okay" and they felt that the girls "maybe did not mind". A few informants stated that the girls who danced bare-chested for the tourists "must be okay with it". Several referenced their particular exegete of 'bare-chest' to the notion of 'culture' or 'tradition'. Some said that there was "nothing wrong" with the girls dancing topless for the tourists and they "need not be ashamed" or embarrassed about their culture" and are "just maintaining the tradition" and "keeping it alive".

As a counterpoint, however, most of the participants felt strongly that positioning the female performers in this manner "was demeaning to the girls, or "rude to them"; other participants used the phrase "making them [the girls] cheap". A large number of responses expressed that this must necessarily "be awkward for the female performers". One commented: "tourists see this and think this is who we are, always in skins and with our girls with breasts exposed," and "they seem to enjoy seeing us Africans like this". Other informants pointed out that the tourists come thinking "they know what Zulus must look like," and "they see all these postcards of African girls wearing only beads covering the chest."

All the informants understood that 'bare-chested' was culturally associated with 'being a virgin'. Some referred to the observation that "this was how it was in the past", and "we don't



walk around like that all the time". Some of the girls maintained that "it made sense in the Reed Dance celebration... but not for the foreigners... not just for their curiosities." While the Reed Dance has also become somewhat mediatised, these participants were of course referring to celebration from their perspective, with many believing in its cultural value.

In response to questions about how they thought the international tourists consumed these cultural bodies, many admitted that they felt that the male tourists would experience not just a cultural but an erotic element in the dance. Many of the girls who were interviewed claimed that "it must be tough" to have to smile next to "some strange guy so he can take a photo home." From the cluster of responses from participants who felt that they saw no problem with the female dancers having to pose with the tourists, all articulated that "as long as this was done with the permission of the girls."

### **Reveals cultural tourism as another mode by which the girls are "made subjects"**

However, the issue of permission to consume is far from straightforward. Who is meant to give the permission - is it the young girls themselves? Observations at several cultural villages reveal that even though in most instances one of the male Zulu performers steps forward with the invitation to (further) consume with the lens of the camera, this is very much part of the directed narrative, with the performers acting out the roles scripted for them within the tourist experience.

All the informants also felt that the photographs were to be used for cultural and not any other subversive purposes. Once refracted through the photographic lens though, the girls have no control over how these digital images travel back to the host lands. And while most images would be innocently enough assembled into tourist travel albums, responses from the informants indicated

their awareness that there are reasons other than cultural for photographing topless young girls. Even a cursory Google search of 'Zulu maiden' calls up several sites where many voyeuristic images of (Zulu) 'topless' dancing or posing Zulu girls are posted, and many other sites and newspaper blogs that draw attention to headlines from the last few years about pictures being placed in pornographic sites in certain instances. Zodwa and Pumi's communication of a sense of vulnerability is thus not without grounds.

It is perhaps to be expected that the tourists also seek to capture the experience through photographs. The tourist gaze that is further refracted through the camera lens is, however, associated with the power that tourists activate against locals by gazing at them. It was not possible to ask the foreign male tourists just how they perceived the bare-breasted girls. Considering that most male tourists visiting were in the company of their female partners or in large tour groups, it was not feasible to ask if they saw an erotic element embodied in the girls. My inferences are thus based on the volume of media around the 'inappropriate' use of visual images as well as, more importantly, how the girls experienced the tourist encounter.

While conversations with a few local Zulu-speaking males referred to being able to see the girls' breasts "as cultural" and certainly "not sexual", most other male informants from across the cultural-linguistic groups (Zulu included) admitted that they "were male" and could not avoid the sexual connotation attached to "seeing breasts".

Given all of this, the vulnerabilities expressed by Zodwa and Pumi become even more understandable. While literature and anecdotal accounts point out that the breasts are not perceived as sexual for the Zulu (as would be, say, the upper thigh area), the conversations revealed that breasts had become sexualised even within the Zulu-speaking community. Breasts have of course always been sexually objectified in most

Western cultural contexts. (This in turn allows for the bizarre contradiction that images of all breasts - except those of 'natives' or of "African" women(!) - are censored in popular print media.)

While almost all of my participants answered the related question that the performers "always look happy", dozens of sessions of participant observation at cultural villages and interactions with the girls there paint another picture. It was clear that the girls were able to 'switch on' facial and bodily demeanor that sold them as thoroughly enjoying themselves in front of the tourists, who sought out this encounter with what they perceived as 'the African Zulu' and the 'Zulu topless maiden'. This, the girls confided, they managed to accomplish no matter how tired or bored they might have been, and was very much an expectation of their job. This did not mean they despised the act of dancing, but that the very sense of enjoyment they portrayed was also performed.

### **Conclusion: Back to Pumi and Zodwa**

The bodies of girls like Pumi bear the imprint of many different inscriptions, not merely those attached in cultural tourism. However, the windows that Pumi and Zodwa's narratives allow us reveals cultural tourism as another mode by which the girls are "made subjects" (Foucault, 1982: 777). Butler (1988: 524) claims that the feminist intellectual tradition describes 'woman' (equally true for 'girl') as an historical 'situation', and emphasises that the body suffers cultural construction through scripts sanctioning how one acts out one's body. The body is thus a site of social grounding on which social and cultural processes are inscribed and where power relations are articulated. The situation is rendered worse when these cultural constructions come to be co-opted into products for tourism consumption. This takes away the space for one to question and interrogate those constructions as they come to be sold to a voyeuristic global tourist market.

The girls share experiences that speak about

a level of cultural discordance with how they see themselves as Zulu girls and how they perform with their bodies as Zulu girls. The fissures and tears in the fabric of what is cultural and for whom is also borne out in the perceptions of other young Zulu-speaking girls who have strong views on how the girls in tourism are consumed and the difficulties the young performers would experience in playing the 'topless maiden'. Judging from what the girls communicated to me, it seemed that there were instances where toplessness and bare breasts had also become a sexualised 'spectacle' in tourist spaces like cultural villages.

Like Pumi and Zodwa, the school-going informants were comfortable with the idea of being bare-breasted. What they were not comfortable with was the sense that this is solely how they were perceived by foreign tourists, and in turn positioned in cultural tourism. It is pointed out that local people in tourism activities participate in staging 'culture' as a resource exchange for money, which merely "replaces one type of oppression with another, called poverty" (Ballengee-Morris, 2002: 238). Pumi and Zodwa participate as bare-chested performers in what they understand as a 'cultural product' sold to the 'customer' or tourist, even they though they confess to feeling "uncomfortable". In performing 'topless' for the tourists they are on some level experiencing a degree of hurt that they are not able to articulate.

Tourism is one of the largest industries worldwide (Urry, 2007), and cultural tourism, as part of the larger processes of tourism in South Africa, has shown itself to be a substantial income-generator. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that people feature as the artefacts in cultural tourism. Within the North to South transnational flows, so-called cultural bodies are increasingly positioned to meet the demands of global tourism flows.

Girls are relatively more disenfranchised, yet they sit at the critical threshold in their lives where they are attempting to forge a sense of self that

seeks to articulate in the adult world that they will soon enter. It is thus critical to engage with the processes of making people such as Zodwa and Pumi and those who organise these events aware that there must be terms negotiated around what girls wish to represent about themselves to foreign tourists.

For this, much more grounded research and much more listening to the stories of girls like Pumi and Zodwa are required. We also need research that is more participatory in nature. For example, more studies need to be asking how these girls view themselves in tourism, and what tourism practices may be doing to them, so that their needs and expectations are not superseded by those of the tourists.

## References

- Anderson M (2005) 'Thinking about Women: A Quarter Century's View', in *Hypatia*, 2: 25-33.
- Ballengue-Morris C (2002) 'Cultures for Sale: Perspectives on Colonialism and Self-Determination and the Relationship to Authenticity and Tourism', in *Studies in Art Education*, 43, 3: 232-245.
- Bordo S (1993) *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Brush P (1998) 'Metaphors of Inscription: Discipline, Plasticity and the Rhetoric of Choice', *Feminist Review* 58: 22-43.
- Butler J (1988) 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist', *Theory Theatre Journal*, 40, 4, 519-531.
- Echtner CM and Prasad P (2003) 'Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research* 30, 3, 660-682.
- Foucault M (1982) 'The Subject and Power', in *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 4: 777-795.
- Foucault M (1979) *Discipline and Punish*. Harmondsworth: Peregrine.
- Foucault M (1980) 'The eye of power', in Gordon C (ed.) *Power/Knowledge*. Brighton: Harvester.
- Grosz E (1990) *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Grosz E (1994) *Volatile Bodies towards a corporeal feminism*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Ishemo SL (2004) 'Culture and Historical Knowledge in Africa: A Cabralian Approach', in *Review of African Political Economy*, 31, 99: 65-82.
- Jaggar M (1998) 'Globalizing Feminist Ethics Alison', in *Hypatia, Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy*, 13, 2: 7-31.
- Lanfant MJ, Allcock B and Bruner EM (eds) (1995) *International Tourism: Identity and Change*. London: Sage.
- Lock M (1993) 'Cultivating the Body: Anthropology and Epistemologies of Bodily Practice and Knowledge', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 22, 133-155.
- MacCannell D (1992) *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers*. New York: Routledge.
- Magwaza T (1999) *Function and meaning of Zulu female dress: A descriptive study of visual communication*, Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Mitchell C and Reid-Walsh J (2009) 'Girlhood practices Girlhood Studies', in *Berghahn Journals*, 2, 1: v-viii.
- Naidu M (2009, in press) '(Re)Constructing Identity in Global Culture: Inscribing the Zulu Female Body in Tourism Consumption', in *Oriental Anthropologist*.
- Ritzer G and Liska A (1997) '"Post-tourism": Complimentary Perspectives on Contemporary Tourism' in Rojek C and Urry J (eds) *Touring Cultures. Transformations of Travel and Theory*. London: Routledge, 96-109.
- Sawicki J (1986) 'Foucault and Feminism: Toward a Politics of Difference', in *Hypatia Motherhood and Sexuality*, 2: 23-36.
- Schroeder JE and Borgerson JL (2005) 'Identity in Marketing Communications: An Ethics of Visual Representation' in Kimmel AJ (ed.). *Marketing Communication: New Approaches, Technologies, and Styles*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Urry J (1990) *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage.
- Urry J (2007) *Mobilities*. USA: Polity Press.
- Van Binsbergen W (2003) *Intercultural Encounters: African and Anthropological Lessons Towards a Philosophy of Interculturality*. Munster: Lit Verlag.

MAHESHVARI NAIDU lectures in Anthropology in the School of Anthropology, Gender and Historical Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. She is attracted to issues of identity and alterity as they come to be inscribed on the body of 'woman'. Her research areas are Feminist Anthropology, Anthropology of Religion, and Anthropology of Tourism and Transnationalised Religion. Maheshvari is widely published, with many articles that look at how the female body comes to be appropriated and 'disciplined' (à la Foucault) within sets of normative scripts. She considers her eight year-old son, Kialan, to be her most avid student and her finest teacher!

