



**FROM NELSON MANDELA: A GENDER CODED SEMIOTIC READING OF
A SOUTH AFRICAN TOURIST NECKLACE**

VERÓNICA E. BETANCOURT

Abstract

In 1995, Nelson Mandela gave my grandmother a South African beaded necklace, which she then gave to me. Spurred by its unusual provenance, I analyzed the necklace as both a visually recognizable tourist good produced by indigenous South African women for a tourist market and as a beadwork gift enmeshed in, but not bound by, gendered codes of South African gift-giving practice. Further, I comparatively interpret the necklace within the visual culture of South Africa and the U.S. in the late 20th and early 21st centuries in order to discern the interplay of the necklace with the self-identified gender of those who perceive it. Through these lenses, complemented by self-reflexive narrative that investigates the process by which I made meaning of the necklace, I investigate how this necklace is a form of self-determination promoting women's global economies.

Keywords: *South African beadwork, tourist art, self-reflexive narrative*

Storied Gifts

My grandmother, Ethel Ríos de Betancourt, was a world traveler, particularly in her third career as the executive director of the Community Foundation of Puerto Rico. I remember marveling at the triangulation of her routes—"I'll be flying from Puerto Rico to Lima, but first I'll stop in Washington to see you." My sister and I were her only grandchildren, and our presence near DC meant that my grandmother, regardless of airline or destination, routed all flights for her business travel through one of the DC area's airports. The layovers were brief, rarely longer than an evening, but always accompanied by some kind of present, usually from far away. We were the beneficiaries of Puerto Rican pastries, Zimbabwean t-shirts, dolls from Bulgaria, and little girls' jewelry from throughout Latin America. Among these gifts was a South African necklace, which became the object of this study.

I began with a quest for authentication, driven by the desires of a U.S. museum professional keen on ascertaining provenance. My material culture inquiry led to the focus of this essay, a gender-coded semiotic reading of the necklace as both a type of tourist object and a token of a particular gift exchange (Peirce, 1960). The essay is also a self-reflexive narrative inquiry (Bochner, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of my changing understanding of the necklace and South African women's economy.

In attending to the variable signification of the necklace as a tourist good and as a personal gift, I explore the impact that the economic life of this necklace has on my own meaning-making process (Appadurai, 1986/2003). By following the physical movement of the material object, from its likely origin in a rural South African village to my dresser drawer in the U.S., I also broaden the semiotic analysis from the reading of the human social codes that shape the interpretation of the necklace to attend to how "from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-

in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” (Appadurai, 1986/2003, p. 5). Through self-reflexive narrative inquiry I structure this article as a chronological narrative of how I came to own and interpret a particular necklace: first from an art historical perspective, then from a critical Latina/o studies vantage, and finally as a synthesis of the prior views in relation to my own body and biography. As a result, this essay is a palimpsest whose layers mirror my own process of coming to understand the necklace in its changing visual culture context. Furthermore, by indicating the history of my research and reflection, I emphasize the partiality and social and historical contingency of my interpretation; given 10 more years, I may interpret the necklace differently.

This self-reflexive narrative is not just about me. The partiality and contingency of my researcher’s account of the South African necklace, and my indication of my positionality as a Latina museum scholar, functions both to signal my role in creating this narrative and to avoid creating a totalizing interpretation of the necklace. Given that African material culture has often been abused by Western scholars in the service of colonialist, racist, imperialist ethnographic projects (Hardin & Arnoldi, 1996) to create theories that totalize understanding of African cultures in order to subordinate them, I seek to clearly denote my situated understanding through a self-reflexive narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Women’s labor and bodies have played a critical role in the existence of this necklace. Through a feminist lens that acknowledges how patriarchal notions of authorship and craft in Western Art History have diminished women’s labor (Parker & Pollock, 1981/2013), I trace how women’s hands and histories have influenced the creation, circulation, and signification of the necklace. From South Africa to the U.S., the necklace’s travel and interpretation has been predicated on its status as a work made for women’s consumption beyond South Africa. Mandela’s gift to my grandmother disrupted the anticipated pattern and use for global circulation of a tourist good. In this initial and continued giving, the necklace functions as both a South African product meant for a tourist market and a gift that operates along different lines of exchange whose value is not defined by the market. It makes a difference that this necklace was given, twice, and that I now give a part of its story, as ascertained through research, and a part of my story.

A South African Tourist Type Necklace

Sometime around 1995, my grandmother went to South Africa to attend a conference. It was in this context that she met Nelson Mandela, then president of post-apartheid South Africa. Even to me, an elementary school student, her meeting Mandela was an extraordinary privilege. I had seen his visage on both the evening news and magazine covers and learned about his biography, political struggles, and importance in unifying South Africa with a democratically elected government. I couldn’t believe that my grandmother, the woman who got on the kitchen floor to play with me, had stood in the same room with the leader of South Africa, a man whose spirit was indomitable even after 27 years of imprisonment. It was even more unbelievable that he had spoken with her. Then she told me the most unbelievable part: “I brought you something from my trip. Here is a necklace for you, Verónica, and a bracelet for you, Alicia. President Mandela gave them to me for my granddaughters.”

The necklace lay heavy in my hands (Figure 1). It was a close-fitting necklace and completely beaded from one ball end of the closure to the loop on the other side. This jewelry was like none I’d ever had; I couldn’t discern its construction, had read nothing about such beadwork in any of my art books, and was mystified by how so many seed beads had been wound around the central coil. To my 10-year-old self, it was a beautiful geometrically patterned mystery from a far away place; its existence was as inconceivable as the possibility that my grandmother had met Nelson Mandela. Yet it was there in my hands. Though I was given evidence I could wear around my neck of this encounter and exchange between the world’s most famous South African and my not-nearly-so-famous grandmother, I could not quite believe my grandmother’s story. Suspicions that she might have purchased the necklace at the Johannesburg airport or received it as a conference welcome gift burrowed into my young mind and persisted.



Figure 1. A South African necklace given by Nelson Mandela to Ethel Ríos de Betancourt, for the author.
Photographer: Michael Kellner (2014).

An Art Historical Desire to Authenticate

When my grandmother gave me the necklace, I revered it. It was imbued with the aura and the authenticity of material culture that came not only from South Africa, but also from the hands of its president. Though I did not know a theory for my belief at age 10, many art museum visits throughout my childhood had sensitized me to Benjamin's (1936/2004) concept of aura, that original art works held a value and presence specific to their place in time and space distinct from their mechanical reproductions. Looking at and holding the necklace, I felt its power in the physical materiality of the object (Jules-Rosette, 1984). In my naïve imagination, I estimated that Mandela likely chose the specific necklace that I held in my hands as a representative of South African cre-

ativity and artistic accomplishment. In essence, because the necklace felt special to me as a unique work of art with aura (Benjamin, 1936/2004), I attempted to impose Western categories of genius and art upon it. However, my possession of something original was fragile and contingent on my notions of authorship and artistic creation as something achieved by named individuals. The many museum labels and exhibitions of my youth made it clear that within a Western context, "Raphael" was worth more than "School of Raphael," and the necklace's singular provenance lacking a named singular creator left me troubled. I only reluctantly shared the story of its provenance because it seemed a boastful tale. I had naturalized and internalized sexist assumptions regarding artmaking as a masculine activity, populated by named geniuses (i.e. "masters") whose work was more valued within art history than that of unnamed women artists (Parker & Pollock, 1981/2013; Nochlin, 1971). Within this schema, I transferred the role of artmaking onto Nelson Mandela, the first gift-giver, as the likeliest genius in selecting what I assumed to be a singular work of aesthetic accomplishment. Notably, my grandmother was a conduit for the gift exchange and not an active participant in the construction or interpretation of the necklace's meaning.

As I wore the South African necklace throughout high school, then college, I questioned whether the necklace was as unusual as I first believed it to be. Close looking and formal analysis yielded a better technical understanding of the necklace's construction and visual composition. The necklace gives the impression of an unbroken hoop of seed beads, as the beads are spun around the necklace as a single continuous strand. Occasionally, the brown cotton thread that holds the beads punctures the backing fabric in order to affix the pattern in place. The equivalence in size, shape, and approximate placement of the distinct beads only serves to emphasize their one difference: color. Bands of red and white, each 2½ inches long, alternate along the course of the necklace, interrupted by smaller bands of orange, periwinkle, rose, and translucent gold, which are, in turn, separated by black linear demarcations only one bead thick. These interludes of four colors are half the length of the red and white bands they separate, contributing to a sense of balance and rhythm throughout the necklace. Black triangles radiate from the outer edges of the four-color interludes and create movement within the de-

sign, ensuring that the viewer's eyes shift over the length of the necklace. However, this formal analysis left me with a superficial understanding of the necklace and no better sense of whether it was as uncommon as I perceived it to be at age 10.

Fifteen years later, research about beaded necklaces yielded a number of pieces that resembled mine—big bands of color broken by smaller bands of contrasting colors and edged with triangles. Images of near-identical jewelry came up in my search listed as Zulu, Xhosa, and Ndebele. I couldn't even assign the necklace to a likely ethnic group, and the greatest degree of geographic specificity lay in the eastern part of South Africa. I realized that my necklace was a common pattern, perhaps one of the most mundane in that it was meant for tourists. An expert opinion from Dr. Carol Boram-Hays (personal communication, July 25, 2014) confirmed my impression; Dr. Boram-Hays noted that many different ethnic groups in South Africa make these necklaces for the commercial market and that they were ubiquitous in the mid-1990s. My necklace was just another item in a global tourist trade.

South African beadwork has mutable color associations, with color preferences and signification changing according to availability of beads through European trade (Costello, 1990; Bedford, 1993); geographic location (Boram-Hays, 2005), political control of bead use such as restrictions of bead-wearing to royalty during the Zulu empire (Pemberton, 2008; Boram-Hays, 2005), religious background (Van Wyk, 2003), generational preferences (Boram-Hays, 2005), and the beadworkers' literacy (Jolles, 2006). However, white is a color that remains associated with divinity and spirituality across multiple ethnic groups (Costello, 1990; Bedford, 1993). My own necklace bears three large bands of white amongst its red, black, gold, and periwinkle patterning. I do not know if this choice in color scheme would have been typical in the mid-1990s or even if it would have been meaningful in the context of the tourist trade. It is possible that as a work of tourist art meant for a tourist market (Graburn, 1976), the color choice was informed by what was popular amongst tourists to South Africa at the time, as gallery owners and the traders who took beadwork made by women to market exchanged information with beadworkers regarding what sold well (Costello, 1990). Likewise, community, cultural, or personal symbolism for the beads

might not have been meant to be legible to those outside the beadmakers' culture (Graburn, 1976). Western consumers can be keen to have fixed codes by which they might read the beadwork (Bedford, 1993), in a sense, a semiotic key by which they might gain entry into a community to which they don't belong. African art sellers have been sensitive to this desire and have responded by creating stories of symbolism that satisfy their prospective clients and make them more likely to purchase the item (Steiner, 1995). My art historical desire to read the necklace through defined indigenous South African iconographic codes had been thwarted. Instead, I analyzed the necklace by considering how it moved (Appadurai, 1986/2003) from production to market, as a means of understanding the way that gender had shaped its entrance into a tourist economy and its movement through a gift exchange.

Tracing Women's Labor Amidst a Tourist Market

The easy availability of these necklaces, whether labeled as Ndebele, Zulu, or Xhosa, was remarkable across craft markets in South Africa. Photographs (see Figure 2) as well as publications (Boram-Hays, 2000, 2005; Costello, 1990; Mashiyane, 2006) attest to the vibrancy of the tourist beadwork market within South Africa. Necklaces similar to mine continue to be made today. Brighter colors that evoke the South African flag seem to be more popular (based on a look at contemporary photography of South African jewelry merchants and photographers' Flickr accounts), but necklaces covered in equal parts of solid colors bounded by small black triangles remain a popular tourist product. My relationship to my South African necklace changed when I learned that such necklaces were made in heaps and even sold online. The allure of the impenetrable, beautiful, handmade object lessened the more it became an example of a tourist type; my desire for the necklace to be aesthetically unique was clearly misplaced. Thus, I turned to considering how tourist bead necklaces related to other beadworking practices in South Africa, as well as how the social context of gender informed the signification of my necklace as material culture (Hardin & Arnoldi, 1996).



Figure 2. Essenwood Market, Durban, South Africa. Photographer: Karen Lotter (2007), <http://flickr.com/photos/ethekwinigirl/486102542/>. Used with permission.

The production of beadwork items no longer satisfies a demand within indigenous communities. In 1990, South African scholars were already noting the disappearance of traditional beadworking among Xhosa communities as they were documenting existing beadreading and beadworking practice for preservation and future revival (Costello, 1990). As the market demand for South African beadwork increased, older women taught younger women the skills needed to fashion beadwork for export (Costello, 1990), thus transforming indigenous South African women's beadwork into labor that significantly increases their incomes through the creation of beaded jewelry for sale, whether in tourist markets, in galleries, or as commissioned piece work for luxury fashion designers (Costello, 1990). What was once a transfer of cultural knowledge regarding the beadwork codes and techniques related to the marking of life stages

and changes in relationship status from one woman to another has been translated to the transfer of how to make beadwork that tourists will buy (Costello, 1990; Klopper, 1993; Steiner, 1994). With this shift, the practice of beadwork can become even less regionally bound or localized, as style is not necessarily an outgrowth of the beadworker's social or geographic location but instead a product of broader cultural exchange. Boram-Hays (2005) notes that whereas women under apartheid had significantly limited mobility due to their restriction to their designated local region, in post-apartheid South Africa women are able to travel for employment opportunities. Thus, women encounter other beadworkers from diverse areas at in marketplaces, such as in large cities or at art festivals, which facilitates the continued exchange of beadwork styles. Though I initially lamented the lack of iconographic specificity of the necklace, I now read its Black South African style as a sign of the greater regional mobility and aesthetic exchange practiced by South African women.

Within a tourist context, the presentation of an object's authenticity via inaccessibility, privacy, sacred status, or the patina (Straight, 2002) of wear increases the value of the work for sale (Jules-Rosette, 1984; Nettleton, 2010; Steiner, 1994, 1995). A tourist artwork does not have to be authentic in order for it to gain a tourist's appreciation, but only appear authentic (Graburn, 1976). This preference continues to be a contemporary one that influences the perception of necklaces like mine (Nettleton, 2010). When Ngema (2014) interviewed U.S. tourists and South African stall tenders in Durban, both groups lamented the lack of the appearance of African authenticity in the seaside marketplace. South African merchants in the Durban marketplace knew that their wares were similar to those in art galleries, yet they felt that tourists did not trust the authenticity of the arts and crafts displayed for sale when the surrounding stalls, made of metal and concrete, did not evoke Africa in a tourist mind as had their prior stalls made of natural materials with thatched roofs. The U.S. tourists viewed the South African merchandise in the Durban marketplace as both suspect, preferring the imprimatur of authenticity offered in a gallery space, and lacking in the aura of genuine artistic creation when placed alongside flip-flops and other manufactured items meant for tourist purchase along the beach in Durban (Ngema, 2014). In short, the tourists did not want to know that they were buying tourist art

as they bought it.

In my case, I didn't have this experience of authenticity as constructed by and for Western tourists (Steiner, 1995). Instead, I had my grandmother present unpackaged South African jewelry around my family's kitchen table in the suburbs of DC. There was no story of a precious necklace found as a testament to the journey of the intrepid Western traveler. Other than my grandmother and Nelson Mandela, there were no people included in the story of the making and acquisition of the necklace; the female labor of its creation was obscured. Neither did Mandela play the role of merchant and provide a narrative of symbolic meaning or certification of authenticity that is often sought by Western collectors of African art (Jules-Rosette, 1984). Such obfuscation speaks to the desire for artistic anonymity expressed by many Western collectors of African art (Steiner, 1994, 1995). This anonymity allows collectors and consumers to "destroy in their imagery of the African art object all traces of production, and, in the end, celebrate the decontextualized results of dehumanized labor—the mysterious sparkle of the commodity cult" (Steiner, 1994, pp. 163-164). In the case of South African beadwork made for a tourist market, this erasure of labor is also an erasure of indigenous South African women and their aesthetic aims for their work (Jules-Rosette, 1984). My questioning of the necklace's provenance—could it really be from Mandela?—emerged in part because I had no other version of its genesis. At age 10, I didn't know that beadwork was a product of one of many anonymous indigenous South African women's labor. I did know who Nelson Mandela was and at age 15 I began to wear the necklace with the pride of having a gift from him.

The Necklace as a Gift

While the woman who made my necklace will never be known to me, which is a result of the cultural and economic systems that govern the creation, sale, and consumption of African art and tourist art (Steiner, 1994, 1995), I can return to the chain of gift-giving that delivered the necklace to me. One thing that makes this particular necklace distinct (as opposed to its many counterparts that were made during the mid-1990s

and that continue to be made today) is its provenance and attachment to Nelson Mandela as a specific individual. Given that an artist or craftsman's anonymity is a precondition for authenticity of African art within a Western schema (Nettleton, 2010; Steiner, 1994, 1995) and that maintaining this anonymity can perform a vital commercial function of making work more saleable to tourists (Steiner, 1995), it is unsurprising that my necklace has no known maker. Despite the impersonal beginnings of the necklace, as a work made for an unknown tourist, this common piece of jewelry acquires more personal layers of signification through its role as a gift.

Examining the circulation of this tourist-type necklace at the level of the gift defined through personal relationships and exchange outside the market, I uncovered semiotic meanings that influence its reading and my own department regarding the necklace as a fair-skinned Latina art museum professional. It is within this circulation of the necklace as a gift that I have found the most personal meaning in the object as well as more layers of signification to unfold. I was a participant in a chain of gift-giving that held some parallels with South African gift practices, but had largely been subverted in the fluidity of gender roles assumed, or disregarded, by Mandela and my grandmother, as discussed below.

Gendered Giving

Within the Ndebele community, women are the sole beadworkers (Mashiyane, 2006), as has typically been the case in Xhosa (Klopper, 1993) and Zulu communities (Carey, 1998). Historically, Ndebele beaded jewelry is made strictly for others and usually for men, whether as a present to an admired young man or a husband or as part of a dowry and marital trousseau (Mashiyane, 2006). Likewise, indigenous South African men of Xhosa backgrounds are typically only recipients of beadwork, not givers (Klopper, 1993). Thus, in this gift-giving system, gender defines women as those who give and receive beadwork and men as the direct or indirect recipients of that beadwork. I say indirect because an instance of an older woman giving a younger female family member beadwork either once she is married or in anticipation of her marriage is considered a

transfer of wealth (Bedford, 1993) that enhances the status of the man in the family as much as, if not more than, the status of the woman sporting the beads (Klopper, 1993). Alternately, a woman's mother-in-law may give her beadwork as a solidification of their relationship and an expression of its soundness (Ngwevala, 1993; Pemberton, 2008).

As such, my necklace is a part of a rural, South African cultural tradition of gift-giving which comports with my grandmother's gift of the necklace to me. But indigenous South African intentions and traditions may become secondary concerns when we consider that rural, indigenous South African men did not make beadwork gifts for women or typically give them (Klopper, 1993). Mandela, or his team, purchased works that were already made for tourists, and though he was giving an obviously and intentionally South African work to a foreign visitor, he was still breaking the typical rules of beadwork gift-giving within rural South African society. Furthermore, Mandela gave the necklace to my grandmother, contrary to traditional South African social codes surrounding the exchange of beadwork goods between women and men. However, these rural South African rules of gift-giving may not have held the same sway within a South African urban context. The reversal of gender roles in the gift exchange between Mandela and my grandmother may have been possible because the necklace was a tourist item meant to circulate more freely than indigenous beadwork meant for rural South African cultural traditions (Graburn, 1976).

My own cisgender femaleness aligns with U.S. expectations for what sort of a person would wear the South African necklace. I am uncertain of who would currently wear this type of necklace in South Africa; when I have seen photographs (usually of performers, such as singer Sandra Ndebele¹ or the dancers at Mandela's 1994 inauguration²) taken in 1. Ndebele sometimes wears tourist necklaces like mine, but most often sports this pattern as a headband when performing in concert or when photographed for promotional materials (Sandra Ndebele, 2015).

2. See a photograph by David Turnley of a dancer at Nelson Mandela's inauguration at <http://www.corbisimages.com/stock-photo/rights-managed/TL030881/tribal-dancer-at-nelson-mandelas-inauguration?popup=1> (Tribal dancer, 1994).

South Africa or Zimbabwe, women sport these tourist necklaces. Costello (1990) suggests that such tourist goods and other non-traditional beadwork were also popular among fashion-conscious Black South Africans around the time my grandmother gave me the necklace. Were I a Latino male, I doubt that I would have received this necklace from my grandmother. I am even less certain if Mandela would have given it to her as a gift for a grandson. Cross-dressing in South Africa through beadwork is possible; Klopper (1993) noted that male and female diviners may wear beadwork typically associated with the opposite sex, thus enacting a form of cross-dressing, and in 1993, Proctor and Klopper indicated that "by a generation or two ago ... cross-dressing [had] become relatively common, with young men increasingly wearing beaded items originally made specifically for women or older men and vice versa" (p. 61). Mandela, though not of the generation mentioned by Proctor and Klopper, may have felt comfortable giving a bead necklace as a gift for a boy. However, I doubt that I could have received such a gift as a boy. Though some men in my family wear gold chain bracelets and necklaces or Catholic medallions, a beaded necklace would have likely been out of the question for being too closely associated with femininity. Had my own gender presentation veered masculine, I doubt that I would wear the South African necklace. This gift was offered to me because I am a feminine woman for whom this tourist necklace was intended and considered acceptable.

While the necklace may be a common South African tourist item, it is not yet so prevalent in the U.S., as I have never seen another like it in 20 years. Given its relative rarity stateside, I receive frequent inquiries regarding this visually arresting work, which allow me to both note its provenance via Nelson Mandela and my Puerto Rican grandmother as well my part in a gift economy. These comments typically come from feminine women—a few queer men have commented on the necklace, as have male artists and art historians—but the necklace as a piece of jewelry, not art, is a topic for discussion that seems to mostly exist within a feminine framework in the U.S. Though I do not know its female maker, the necklace does bond me to other women, from my grandmother to those who engage me in conversation regarding my necklace.

Nelson Mandela and Beadwork Necklaces

Mandela's choice of a beaded necklace as a gift may have been practical, as I now know that there are so many of my type of necklace, but it was also political and (perhaps unwittingly) personal. Mandela chose to sit for a formal portrait in 1962 prior to his trial and sentencing.³ He sported a Thembu beadwork necklace and traditional costume in a sign of affiliation with his Xhosa background and protest against the South African apartheid regime (Proctor & Klopper, 1993). The apartheid government outlawed the publication of this photograph until 1990, when the African National Congress was decriminalized. The photograph of Mandela was also the signaling of a new social and political structure beyond the confines of the ethnically segmented/classificatory apartheid system (Proctor & Klopper, 1993). This calculated image was a calling card for revolution, for the reclamation of the rights, traditions, and culture of Black South Africans. Mandela's Thembu collar and dress were signs that the past could remain in the present and that a future built on the indigenous peoples of the continent of Africa could be foretold.

Winnie Mandela also made strategic use of indigenous dress to signify her politics, appearing in Thembu dress in 1962 and inciting a discussion regarding the appropriateness of indigenous garb for political leaders. In the early 1990s, a photograph of Winnie Mandela wearing West African dress and South African beadwork appeared in national news (Proctor & Klopper, 1993). The dual signaling of a Black indigenous affiliation and a pan-African affiliation through the combination of South African beadwork and West African dress functioned as a means of demonstrating ethnic belonging while superseding its categories as defined by apartheid. Given that part of apartheid's practice was to limit the physical, social, and economic mobility of Black South Africans, Winnie Mandela's choice to combine aspects of West African and South African indigenous dress could be read as signifying the very mobility that the apartheid government had denied them (Boram-Hays, 2005).

³ See this collection of photographs from Mandela's life, which includes a portrait of Mandela sporting Thembu traditional garb <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/nelson-mandela-a-life-in-photographs> ("Nelson Mandela," 2013).

Likewise, Nelson and Winnie Mandela's having had their photographs taken while in costumes of their own styling, not meant for economic purposes, disrupted the colonial anthropological practice of taking pictures of traditional Black South African subjects for the purpose of crafting a narrative of natural, primitive Africa for Western viewers and a marketable curio for Western collections (Errington, 1998; Van Wyk, 1993). The Mandelas' choice to wear beadwork when photographed is an act of self-determination in acknowledging their indigenous heritage as a vital facet of their fight for political and social justice. Their deployment of indigenous dress as part of their self-representation for images that would circulate nationally was a tactical visual intervention that countered expectations that 20th century political leadership wear Eurocentric clothes. Similarly, photographs of Nelson Mandela were not banned during apartheid, but the picture of him in Thembu dress was, thus signaling its distinct political effect (Proctor & Klopper, 1993). Tourist bead necklaces, in the same style as mine, even made an appearance at Nelson Mandela's inauguration ceremony worn by female dancers. Thus, South African beadwork produced by indigenous women became another feature of the visual culture of indigenous South African political triumph and resistance as well as part of the images that were reproduced by global media. In this visual culture tradition, my beaded necklace may embody the Mandelas' spirit of resistance as well as their strategic use of indigenous beadwork to disrupt and defy Eurocentric sartorial expectations of South African leadership.

The Necklace on My Latina Body

Necklaces are made to be worn, and just as a consideration of the Mandelas' corporeal, photographic, historical, and cultural relationship to South African beadwork informs the reading of the beaded necklace, so does my own body. Jewelry is fully activated when worn, and its kinetic relationship with the body has similarities to performance art (Bedford, 1993). As such, I must ask what performance my body and the necklace create. How do I affect the reception and perception of the necklace and of me by the way I wear it on my body (Figure 3)?



Figure 3. Verónica E. Betancourt, the author, wearing her South African necklace. Photographer: Michael Kellner (2015).

Much as my childhood valuation of art was heavily shaped by Western ideals of named artists and Eurocentric schools of artistic progress defined against craft, so have the Western concepts of art shaped the treatment of indigenous beadwork in South Africa. Apartheid-era policymakers encouraged beadwork creation as indigenous craft, not Black art (Preston-Whyte & Thorpe, 1989; Klopper, 2004), which was another

means of denying indigenous South Africans access to and representation within dominant art culture (Klopper & Godby, 2004). South African beadwork was strategically reclaimed as an art form (Bedford, 1993) by curators, historians, artists, and artisans through exhibitions. And by these means beadwork entered into the realm of state-sponsored South African art culture. Institutions such as the South African National Gallery changed their collections and acquisitions practice to move beadwork displays from anthropological dioramas and natural history exhibits to art galleries (Bedford, 1993; Klopper, 2004). However, the very project of subsuming beadwork into the category of art is one of translation; indigenous South African groups that made beadwork historically did not saddle this work with the expectation that, like Western art, its intrinsic aesthetic value was tainted by the value the market assigned to it (Pemberton, 2008; Steiner, 1994). The possibility of being both an aesthetic good and a material good thus allows my necklace to flow between market economies and gift economies (Still, 1997).

In my own life, I wear and have worn the South African necklace as a fair-skinned Latina art museum professional, museum visitor, and art history student. In all the spaces where I have worn this necklace, it has been showcased as the most important part of the outfit, never stacked as a collection of jewelry or subsumed by a bold patterned shirt. As such, I have been treating it as an art object meant for display on my Western, museum-going body. The necklace's visibility as an indigenous South African work on my body appears in visible contrast to my whiteness within a U.S. racial formation. With racial formation in the U.S. being oriented toward White/Black dichotomies and assessing entry into Whiteness (Omi & Winant, 2015), my own fair skin and mid-Atlantic English may suggest nothing beyond that privileged racial status, and my being Latina has gone unnoticed. The likeliest phenotypic marker of my Latinidad lies in the stereotypic curvaceous Latina body, which is my body as much as it has been noted as Jennifer Lopez's body (Negrón-Muntaner, 2004) or Selena Quintanilla's body (Aparicio, 2003). I mark my Latinidad linguistically through the diacritic mark in Verónica and the Spanish fluency that I work to keep as another part of my inheritance from my family. As such, others may read my wearing of the necklace as yet another White tourist acquisition of a generically "African" or South

African tourist item that could have been acquired as part of a legacy of colonial exoticism of the African other. My Latinidad is as invisible as the necklace's provenance and connection with a history of indigenous South African resistance to apartheid. Akin to Winnie Mandela's creating of a pan-ethnic signification of indigenous Africanness in her 1990s mixing of West African clothes with South African beadwork (Proctor & Klopper, 1993), I wear the necklace in part to supersede the racial formation that governs how Latinidad is interpreted in the U.S by providing a visual signifier that prompts conversation and allows me to invoke my Puerto Rican heritage.

Gender and Choice in Jewelry

My grandmother was defined in part by her necklaces. Since I can remember, she would point out a large pendant of Baltic amber on a thick gold chain and ask me, "Verónica, do you know what this is?" I would respond that it was an amber necklace, and she would correct me, saying, "It is my amber necklace now, but one day, you'll wear it to remember me." My grandmother was a much taller and larger woman than I am; the scale and heft of the amber necklace is commanding on my frame. When I wear it, I am reminded of the many things she accomplished while wearing it: authoring a book on Greek art, serving as the dean of humanities at the University of Puerto Rico, founding a communications program at another university, and leading the Community Foundation of Puerto Rico as its executive director. And, more than these items, which could be a listing from her obituary, the amber pendant is a sign of her determination and strong will. My family suffers from an excess of personality and confidence—I think she's more than a little to blame. These two necklaces, the amber pendant and South African necklace, both from equally distant places that I have yet to see, are my physical inheritance from my grandmother. Her stories and accomplishments are inspirational, and I cannot help but feel that the necklaces are imbued with a sort of personal potency that may perhaps transfer to me.

What I have also realized in this investigation is that I, too, am defined by my necklaces. As a dutiful child, I sported a medallion of the

Virgin Mary (in profile, head bowed in prayer), which was sometimes exchanged for any number of crosses. I made some of the fashion decisions regarding what Christian accessory coordinated with a particular jumper or smocked Argentinean dress, but was primarily under the influence of my mother's sartorial and spiritual hand. My other grandmother and aunts also participated in an economy of giving jewelry that nudged me toward an ever more mature performance of Latina femininity as I grew. Though my father may have selected the occasional necklace, these pieces of jewelry largely operate within a familial schema of encouraging an appropriate feminine presentation of the self. It was not until I renounced Catholicism and removed the rosary that hung over my bed (structurally a necklace, but one that I would never physically wear, only symbolically carry) that I turned my attention to developing a sense of style about my necklaces. It was at this time, my junior year of high school, that I began to wear the South African necklace and began to consider my own self-determination with more care.

Though the South African necklace was a gift, it was never one I felt compelled to wear in order to please the givers. At age 10, the necklace felt too large for my slight neck and, once I began wearing the necklace in high school, both Mandela and my grandmother lived far enough away that they were unlikely to make note of when or whether I wore it. That this necklace was always a sartorial choice for me stands in contrast to some of the connotations that traditional beadwork might hold for indigenous South African women.

Durham (1999) noted that in southern Africa, the work of maintaining ethnic identity through dress falls primarily to women. Though beadwork may have been made by women and given among women, its adoption and wearing was mandated and encouraged by men, "... the dress and manner of rural, married Zulu women was subject to the careful controls of *hlonipa* (prescriptions of respect and avoidance) in which dress was a central symbol" (Durham, 1999, p. 395). As such, sporting traditional beadwork as part of traditional dress may be not only a performance of cultural heritage, but also of male control wherein traditional beadwork was clearly coded as ethnic, female, and belonging to a domestic sphere. The domesticity connoted by traditional beadwork was heightened as industrialization and urbanization increased through-

out the 20th century, with urban-dwelling men—including many involved with Zulu consciousness activities—seeking to maintain rural homesteads and traditionalist wives as a means of visually signifying their traditional Zulu values (Boram-Hays, 2005; Durham, 1999). Thus, for a woman to routinely wear traditionalist beadwork, as a part of her dress, signaled her traditional orientation and that of her family (Boram-Hays, 2005). Though my necklace is a tourist item and does not signify a rural domestic sphere as traditional beadwork can, I am still sensitive to its entanglements in the politics of sartorial choice. The South African tourist necklace functions as a pan-ethnic signifier of Black South Africanness, even if the anonymity by design of its creator belies women's labor (Nettleton, 2010; Steiner, 1994, 1995). In wearing it and writing this essay, I choose to bear its multiplicity of signification and remember the women—known and unknown—who played a role in delivering the necklace to me.

Material Culture's Immaterial Resonance

This investigation began with a story and an impenetrable surface of bright, bold beads and a 10-year old's enthusiasm for Nelson Mandela, one of the world's important men, determining my excitement about the gift. Now on the other end of writing, I realize that the necklace is no longer a celebrity item, but a sign of women seeking opportunity and finding means for circulating their work in the world. Were I to sell the necklace, I would have no way to legitimate its provenance and extract a market price for its history with regard to Nelson Mandela. However, by engaging in this self-reflexive narrative and examining the means by which women have defined the existence of the necklace and the visual culture that surrounds it, I am able to create a personal valuation that exists outside the market.

Though I first exalted the necklace despite its emergence from a nameless, faceless, female sphere of beadwork tourist art because the necklace was associated with Mandela, I now appreciate the ways in which gender-fluidity in its gift-giving has inflected the necklace such that it is a marker of female self-determination and an economy that allows an object to be both gift and marketable good. As a scholar, I must

also note the economy of knowledge exchange that this necklace has wrought as a gift. The necklace has allowed for this multiplicity of explorations because it is not only a tourist object, but also a gift (Still, 1997). However, it is a gift that has left me structurally without the ability to reciprocate. Both Mandela and my grandmother are deceased, so I am unable to return a material good to them. Perhaps my feminist academic labor of documenting the many readings of the necklace may count as my contribution in this chain of signification and giving.

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Author's Bio

Verónica E. Betancourt is a doctoral candidate in Art Education at The Ohio State University, where she also earned her MA in Art Education. Betancourt holds a BA in Art History from Swarthmore College. She researches the intersection of Latina/o Studies and Museum Studies and works to improve visitor inclusion at art museums. Her research has been published in *Multiculturalism in Art Museums Today* and in *Oxford Bibliographies in Latino Studies*. She was a 2013 Latino Museum Studies Program Fellow for the Smithsonian Latino Center and her scholarship has been supported with grants and fellowships from the American Alliance of Museums, the Caucus on Social Theory in Art Education, and The Ohio State University. Betancourt has worked in both curatorial and education departments at institutions such as the National Gallery of Art and the National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC, and the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio.

Betancourt welcomes scholarly conversation and collaboration and can be reached via her email betancourt.6@osu.edu or website www.veronicabetancourt.com.