

## Chapter 3

### Branding Maputaland:

#### Eco-tourism, Cultural preservation and the crafts trade

*"THEMBALETHU [a "cultural village" on iLala Weavers' premises] is a contemporary version of the traditional Zulu kraal and is typical of the style of homestead found in these North-Eastern [sic] regions of Zululand. An interesting feature of the modern 'Cone-on-Cylinder' (rondavel) style of homestead is the Headman's hut, which is built in the square shape, to differentiate his hut from the others"*

-Source: iLala Weavers Brochure (n. d.)

*"This live-in museum will provide visitors with the opportunity to experience first hand bead working, basket weaving and other crafts used in their daily lives"*

-Source: iLala Weavers Brochure (n. d.)

*"But it is their culture!"*

-A domestic tourist on the living conditions of people in Maputaland.

For more than a century, people in Maputaland were subjected to great brutality at the hands of nature conservation authorities: their land was forcefully taken away from them; they lost access to grazing land, agricultural plots and natural resources; and their movements were severely restricted and monitored. In the post-apartheid era, nature conservation and its twin industry, eco-tourism was touted as the industries that would deliver economic development to Maputaland. Such was the belief among South African politicians that tourism would "bring development" that they proclaimed it as one of the key elements of the so-called African Renaissance (Mokaba 1998: 7). To this effect, the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism launched a R180 million Tourism Action Plan for marketing South Africa as an international tourist destination in 1999 (Moyle

1999:140). In the same year, the National Department of Agriculture initiated the LandCare project which, among other things, promoted more sophisticated craft products for a growing tourism sector (Kotze 2000: 22). Various advertisement campaigns, such as the proudly South African campaign<sup>1</sup>, have also been launched locally to raise awareness among South Africans about the potential of the tourism industry to create jobs and promote economic development. In Maputaland, the large-scale LSDI promoted tourism as a prime strategy to deliver development and macro-economic growth to the area (Turner 2001:374).

As an economic activity, tourism played to the international community's insistence on environmental protection (cf. Dold 1999: 32). Tourism was also portrayed as a growth industry<sup>2</sup> whose economic benefits would trickle down to every level of the economy. This trickle-down effect was supposedly set in motion by the salaries that local people earned in the tourism industry. In the literature it was assumed that these salaries were spent within the local economy and that these spending patterns stimulate growth in such sectors as retail and agriculture<sup>3</sup>. Besides the cash that the tourism industry supposedly injected into local economies, it also promised to expand the consumer market within such economies. It promised to do so by attracting wealthier consumers to the area, thereby increasing the spending power within the local economy, and increasing the money-earning potential of entrepreneurs. This condition stimulated the informal

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<sup>1</sup> Large retailers such as Woolworths attach a Proudly South African logo to a product if more than 80% of the product was produced in South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> The neoliberal rhetoric allows for the interchangeability of economic growth and development. According to this rhetoric, economic growth trickles down to all spheres of the economy, triggering development in the most marginalised sectors.

<sup>3</sup> In a promotional article about the Shamwari Game Reserve, Cameron (1999: 127) describes how profits from this "project" trickled down to local people. See also Turner (2001: 372) on the supposed positive effects of eco-tourism on local people.

economy and the creation of supposedly lucrative local industries such as the production and sale of crafts.

The LSDI veered somewhat off the path of neo-liberal economic doctrine. In its development plans, it did not wait for the trickle down effect of the tourism industry. Instead, the LSDI intervened directly in the informal craft industry of Maputaland<sup>4</sup>. To this end, they trained crafters and built numerous craft stalls next to the tarred roads that take tourists to their destinations.

Of all informal sector activities that the LSDI could promote it focused on the craft industry. Like other developers, the LSDI were enthusiastic about the fact that craft projects required low capital input, used only locally available resources and relied on traditional skills (Grundy 1984: 11; McIntosh 1991a: 247; and Kotze 2000: 21-22). Furthermore, the craft industry supposedly provided for a wide spectrum of production possibilities: from part-time independent piecework to full-time work on an industrial scale. This, combined with the fact that production was locally situated also made the craft industry an ideal economic activity for women and a unique solution to the supposed feminisation of poverty (Preston-Whyte 1991: 262). Another conceived advantage of the crafts industry was that all tourists supposedly wanted to buy souvenirs of their visits (OECD 1995: 10, 24-25, 29-30). In theory, the crafts industry thus lent itself perfectly to solving some of the economic problems facing Maputaland, namely a large unemployed female population with few marketable skills and no capital.

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<sup>4</sup> The development fraternity in South Africa has promoted informal sector activities since the 1980s as a means to absorb surplus labour and to provide entrepreneurial experience to the poor. However, many writers are highly critical of this practice, claiming that it plays a key role in maintaining and perpetuating an unequal and discriminatory social order in society as a whole. The informal sector also relieves the state of its welfare obligations (Van der Waal & Sharp 1988: 136-144).



Various other developers and game park owners in the region also became involved in craft projects in Maputaland<sup>3</sup>. Increasingly, craft production was embraced as a fitting companion to the planned eco-tourism business in the area (McIntosh 1991a: 247). To this end, developers continuously stressed the importance of “sustainable utilisation” and controlled access to nature conservation areas. In this discourse, nature conservation officials featured prominently as scientific managers of the resource base. Their monitoring and control of people in parks were justified by the patronising concern they had for the locals’ informal businesses. Thus the management of the resource base took central stage to the success of the craft industry, not the market for the products or its profitability. Developers did survey upon survey to determine exactly how much the crafters were harvesting, where and how often but little in the way of market research and advertising.

Many developers also tried to control the human danger that lurked on the borders of their nature conservation areas through the craft industry. It was often said that the production and sale of ethnic crafts contributed to the conservation of “heritage” and “culture”. Duggan (1997: 31-47) claims that the preservation of certain traditions led to ethnic pride and “cultural revitalisation” among indigenous peoples. Conservationists in Maputaland often depicted local people as degenerate and blamed the loss of their culture on the “reckless” manner in which they utilised natural resources (See Anon 1998a). KZN Wildlife even held education workshops that taught local schoolchildren about their lost “indigenous conservation techniques”. In these workshops, the conservation officials

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<sup>3</sup> Some of these projects merely provided training workshops for crafters while others aimed to promote the craft products of Maputaland to a wider international market. Still other “craft projects” concentrated solely on the erection of craft markets. Depending on the developer, the craft projects also varied widely in extent

taught children about cultural taboos pertaining to certain animal and plant species, and about sustainable harvesting techniques.

In this chapter, I will investigate the role of developers such as the LSDI in establishing a formal crafts industry in Maputaland. I will pay particular attention to the process through which developers aimed to make tourists' experience more predictable, calculable, efficient and controllable. I argue that the "development" of the craft industry led to increased rationalisation in that trade. I will also look at the ethnic "branding" of the region and at tourists' expectations about the people they visited and the crafts they bought. I will show how ethnic stereotypes affected tourists' buying behaviour and influenced development plans for the crafts trade. Central to such plans were the pressure to get craft producers to make more recognisably Zulu crafts. These development pressures have impoverished local crafters, led to the growing importation of foreign crafts and dehumanised contact between craft producers and tourists. This process has also led to more control over both producers and consumers. I argue that these were the unanticipated consequences of a rationalised trade.

The chapter will be organised as follows. Starting with a theoretical discussion about rationalisation and authenticity, I will move on to an ethnographic analysis of the process through which the craft industry in Maputaland was "developed". I will then look at the supposed expectations about authenticity among tourists. Lastly, I will analyse the effect of the craft industry's "development" on the crafters. By looking at the developers, the tourists and the crafters, I will draw some conclusions about the unanticipated consequences of an increasingly rationalised industry.

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or size. Some "public" projects like the one at Mbaswana cost millions of rand while others did not even run into four figure sums.

### **About rationalisation and authenticity**

My analysis of the development of the crafts trade necessitates a brief discussion of the concepts “rationalisation” and “authenticity” as they are used in social scientific literature.

The classic social theorist Weber (1947: 333-340) discerned a basic similarity of structure and process in the otherwise dissimilar enterprises of religion, government, education and business. According to Weber, these activities exemplified the characteristics of bureaucratic organisation. First, there was a division of labour in which experts were employed to perform specific tasks, making the organisation as a whole more efficient. Second, they followed a principle of hierarchy in which each position was supervised by a higher authority. Third, rules and regulations ensured uniform performances of every task and produced continuity beyond the lifetime of individual employees. People’s authority within a bureaucracy was based on legal-rational rules rather than tradition or charisma. Bureaucracies were also characterised by their impersonality. Weber wrote that in a bureaucracy, work was carried out *sine ira et studio*, “without hatred or passion”, making it supremely rational. Last, within a bureaucracy, hiring was based on technical qualifications rather than on favouritism. In his analysis, Weber (1947) also noted that bureaucracies had potential negative consequences such as a too strict adherence to rules that could stifle initiative. This pointed to the unanticipated consequences of supremely rationalised processes. Weber was alarmed at the



bureaucratisation of social life and warned that people would one day be caught in the “iron cage of rationality”.

Weber’s work on bureaucracies spawned a deluge of social research on “formal” organisations (Gouldner 1950; Merton 1968; and Udy 1959). In a recent exploration of the bureaucratisation process, Ritzer (1996) focuses on the “McDonaldization” of society. He described the McDonaldized society as a system of “iron cages” in which all institutions are dominated by the production principles of the fast-food restaurant, McDonalds. In this fast-food restaurant, all tasks are broken down to the smallest possible level and are then rationalised to find the single most efficient method for completing each task. All other methods are then deemed inefficient and are discarded. The result is an efficient, logical sequence of methods that can be repeated incessantly to produce the same outcome. This outcome is predictable and all aspects of the process are easily controlled. Additionally, quantity (or calculability) becomes the measurement of good performance. It is a model that universities, hospitals, businesses and other “formal” social organisations have eagerly copied.

In the process of McDonaldization, products are standardised (McDonaldized) and differences between the products of distinct companies are eroded. As more and more companies around the globe take on the characteristics of McDonaldized systems, the consumers have little choice but to frequent these businesses, as fewer and fewer options are readily available. In this context, multinational corporations such as McDonalds have to manufacture a sense of difference (Ritzer 1996). They do this by spending large sums of money on the development of a brand (cf. Klein 2000).

However, Ritzer (1996) shows that like bureaucratisation, McDonaldization has unanticipated consequences that sometimes undermine its goals. For instance, at these fast-food outlets, people often have to wait in long lines for their food. The system of efficiently producing and distributing McDonalized food also creates tonnes of waste and a food cultivation system of questionable ethics.

Whilst social scientists working on development have emphasised the bureaucratic nature of development agencies themselves (vide Chambers 1980 and Hoben 1980), few have considered how development initiatives force bureaucratisation and different degrees of rationalisation onto its target industry. The aim of this chapter is to explore these processes, particularly the McDonaldization of the craft industry in Maputaland.

Another important component of my argument is that the rationalisation of craft markets in Maputaland was driven by the supposed expectations of tourists. According to the literature, the majority of tourists expect to find authentic experiences and objects in their travels to foreign places<sup>6</sup>. Authenticity refers to the degree to which an experience or object seem real (not staged), or to the degree to which such an object or experience conforms to expectations about it. The tourists' obsession with the authentic has been explained on two fronts.

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<sup>6</sup> Littrell, Anderson and Brown (1993), claim that tourists define the authenticity of crafts based on the characteristics of the object, the craftsperson and the shopping experience. Building on their theory, Harkin (1995) approached the study of authenticity from a phenomenological perspective. He defined authenticity as the fit between an object (signifier), its context (the referent) and the idea of what a "real" object looked like (signified). On a more empirical level, McIntosh and Prentice (1999) studied tourists' search for authenticity in the context of historical parks in Britain and claim that authenticity has as much to do with the reliability of face value as the cultural desire and interpretation of genuineness. In a study of tourists that visited Spain, Waller and Lea (1999) identified four factors relevant to the authenticity of tourist experience; the direct contact with the distinctive culture of the place to be visited, the number of tourists at the site (equating larger numbers with inauthenticity), the level of independence that the tourist experiences and the level to which the place to be visited conformed to stereotypes about it. They claim that shared



First, various writers have indicated that tourists are actually seeking *existential* authenticity. According to these writers, the search for existential authenticity is a post-modern activity born out of a fundamental discontent with modern western life (See Waller & Lea 1999; Wang 1999). This discontent centres on the alienation that modernisation, secularisation, urbanisation and globalisation caused in the West (Nas 2002:142-143). For writers of this timbre, the search for authenticity can thus have little to do with the realness of toured objects or events. Instead, the search for an authentic state of being is facilitated by the liminal<sup>7</sup> experience that tourists have when they are removed from the constraints of daily life (Murphy 1985:130).

Other authors such as Graburn (1979) and Harkin (1995) argue that the quest for authentic experiences and objects is merely a means to an end, this end being enhanced status. According to these writers, tourists seek the exotic because it has the prestigious connection with international travellers and explorers. By being associated with the class of people who go on these exotic travels, a tourist's social standing is raised by his travels (Littrell, Anderson and Brown 1993: 199). In this context, Harkin (1995:653) points out that souvenirs have to be markedly different from things regularly consumed by the collector's reference group because if they were too commonplace his/ her travel expedition will diminish in value, as will his/ her claims to higher social status.

In my analysis of craft "development" initiatives, I have used these insights to show how the craft industry in Maputaland was McDonaldized. Predictability and control became central features of the industry as a result of development. Another feature of the McDonaldized craft industry was that it manufactured and imitated the ethnic brand

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social representations of authenticity exist and that tourists seek it to some extent. Wang (1999) linked the search for authenticity to the study of liminality.

constructed by developers and advertisers. I will show that this ethnic brand became the standard against which tourists judged their experiences as authentic or not.

### **McCrafs: Developing a rational craft industry**

When I did my research, a large network of craft markets and stalls criss-crossing the Internet connections, tarred highways and dusty roads that took tourists to their destinations in Maputaland. In structure, some of these markets closely resembled modern shopping malls, complete with tenants, hierarchical steering committees, and contracts. Other markets were so transient and short-lived that they could at best be described as “informal”. At these markets, individual craft traders could come and go as they pleased. While stalls and markets varied widely in terms of their structure, appearances and content, there was a general pattern discernible for the degree to which craft markets were rationalised. The rationality or informality of craft markets in Maputaland was reflected in the degree to which such markets catered for tourists. The most informal markets catered exclusively for local people while the most formal market was built to serve as a one-stop craft mall for tourists. To a large extent, the increased formalisation of craft markets was due to the interference of developers who aimed to cater to the supposed needs of tourists.

Perhaps the most informal craft markets in Maputaland were held on a monthly basis at the points where social pensions were paid out. Since a large portion of the adult population in this region was unemployed, state pensions were an important source of income for many households. Numerous traders peddled their goods to the rows of

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<sup>7</sup> On liminality see Van Gennep 1960 and Turner 1967.

people that waited for their state pensions to be paid out. Although the buying was slow, the craft traders counted on the pensioners' old-fashioned taste to get rid of stock that was out of fashion. Second-hand clothes traders and food peddlers also rushed up and down the queues, tempting the tired pensioners with their wares. Pensioners could queue for up to ten hours before they were paid. At some point, they inevitably bought a drink or some snacks for the irritated grandchildren that most of them brought with. By midday, most of the pensioners and traders dispersed. If it was early enough, some traders moved on to the Mbaswana market to try and sell the remainder of their wares.

After receiving their pensions, thousands of people streamed to Mbaswana to buy groceries at the supermarket and to visit the stalls set up by hawkers a few blocks away. Many craft producers also came to buy raw plant materials such as *ilala*, *induli*, *idambayi*, *iqumbe* and *incema*<sup>8</sup> from the traders who set up stalls a block away from the supermarket. Even traders from other markets frequented the Mbaswana pension market to buy finished *ilala* and wooden crafts. Apart from the trade in raw materials, and in crafts, some women sold second-hand clothing spread out on pieces of plastic. The customers had to arrive early because there was a rapid turnover in the better crafts. Most traders in raw materials and crafts were gone by noon. After the midday heat subsided somewhat, only second-hand clothes traders and the rowdy customers of the beer garden remained at the Mbaswana market. Although women brewed and sold beer in the beer-garden, this space was largely a male preserve. Women were only there in a serving capacity and were seldom allowed to consume beer in public. Men slaughtered cattle near the beer garden, and hung the freshly slaughtered meat up in the trees to benefit from the



coolness of the shade. Customers stepped up and ordered meat, which was cut off the carcass in front of them and then barbecued on a grill next to the stall. As the day progressed the beer garden customers became rowdier and sometimes violent.

The traders selling at the Mbaswana pension market had considerable freedom: there were no organisational bodies or authorities that tried to control their movements or access to the market. This informality and flux allowed traders to maximise their profits. For instance, the traders selling second-hand clothes occupied a spot in the morning that allowed their potential customers to browse, away from the throngs of crafters buying raw plant material. By the time that the beer-garden's customers became rowdy, the second-hand traders moved to the raw plant material spot, which allowed their customers a quick exit from Mbaswana. I never saw a tourist at this market and local white people generally stayed away from Mbaswana on market days.

A multitude of hastily erected craft stalls dotted the sides of Maputaland's dusty tracks at irregular intervals, becoming more frequent as one neared larger villages such as Mbaswana. For the most part, the roadside stalls near Tshongwe, Mphakathini, Mozi and Mozi ZG Camp were flimsy in appearance, often with just a piece of plastic or dead palm leaves on top of a lopsided H-figure construction. Rusty car doors, dead tree branches and old tyres all served to prop up the structures. Most of these stalls sold only wooden crafts like bowls, walking sticks and wooden kitchen utensils. In addition to the main stock of wooden crafts, some stalls also sold 'traditional' Zulu shields made of cowhide. I took inventories of five of these stalls. None of them had more than twenty-one items for sale. In fact, the average number of crafts per stall was at a paltry fifteen. Roadside traders

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<sup>8</sup> Of the eighty people selling raw materials at Mbaswana, fifty-six of them lived at Mabibi near Sibaya Lake. This was the only place in the area where one could harvest *incema* while other raw materials were

rarely sold their wares to the tourists that drove by at high speed, and received most of their orders from traders at other local craft markets such as Mbaswana and Ubumbano. Generally, a stall was erected, owned and manned by a single family who lived near the road. Outside the confines of the family, there were no written rules or higher authorities to which roadside stall owners answered.

The craft stall at the gate to the Sodwana Bay Park was a bit more rationalised than the other roadside stalls because it had a definite, although egalitarian, organisational structure. Its occupants were unrelated and only allowed talented men to join their ranks. They provided training for new recruits, did quality controls of the displayed crafts and shared money in the off-seasons. The men said that they used the same stall because the combined effect of all their crafts attracted more tourists. As such, each crafter could only produce fifteen items per month, which looked rather sorry when arranged in front of a stall next to a dusty road. Unlike the other roadside stalls, this stall catered exclusively for tourists. To this end, they sold small wooden replicas of expensive four-wheel drive vehicles and fishing boats, complete with diving equipment and rear-view mirrors. On advice from a local developer, the men also made provision for tourists to place orders for specific brands of vehicles and customised boats.

Arguably the most successful craft market in the Maputaland region<sup>9</sup> was located inside the Sodwana Bay National Park. The Ubumbano craft market consisted of a neat U-shaped row of wooden stalls. It was nestled in against a dune overgrown with indigenous flora. Tall trees in the centre of the row gave ample shade to the large

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also in abundance here.

<sup>9</sup> When I did my research, the Sodwana Bay National Park was the most popular reservation in all of KwaZulu-Natal. On visits to the craft markets in other reservations in the area, it became clear that these

numbers of traders. The craft market was close to the beach and next to the road that led to the campsites and chalets within the Park. Brightly coloured baskets, sarongs, wooden bowls, reed mats and drums were displayed from the dark recesses of the stalls and on the open spaces in front of them. During the tourist high seasons, this craft market was a hive of activity as throngs of tourists browsed its stalls and haggled over prices (See Illustration 1, below).

**Illustration 1: The Ubumbano craft market, December 2000**



Only women were allowed to sell at the Ubumbano craft market. I conducted a survey of 131 traders at Ubumbano and found that eighty-three (63%) of them bought finished crafts from markets in Mbaswana, Tshongwe, Pongola, Manzini (Swaziland) and Durban. Although 113 (86%) of traders at this market still produced some of their own crafts<sup>10</sup>, eighteen (14%) traded solely in goods sourced from other markets. This allowed the traders at Ubumbano to display a large variety of items.

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markets had very small numbers of visitors compared to those at Sodwana Bay. For instance, when I signed in at Tembe Elephant Park at 16:00 on a February day in 2002, I was only the second visitor for that day.

<sup>10</sup> Only a small percentage of these women harvested the raw material they used in the production of crafts. For the most part, Ubumbano crafters bought their raw materials at the bimonthly market in Mbaswana.



An elected committee of nine members managed the Ubumbano craft market. They comprised a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, vice-secretary, a treasurer and three regular members. Membership was restricted to people over the age of twenty-one and the annual membership fee was R20 per family, including those that did not sell at the market. This arrangement allowed men (who were not allowed to sell crafts) to stand for committee elections. Since the committee's inception, its chairman had always been a man. The committee decided on such matters as the distribution of stands to families, what kind of stands to clump together and on the "development" of the market. All membership fees went towards a communal bank account, to be used for possible future upgrades of the market. In the past, this money was enough to build the plank walls that housed the current market, while donations from SANLAM<sup>11</sup> and TELCOM<sup>12</sup> ensured that the market had a roof. In the allocation of stands, the senior traders tended to get the stalls at the more popular bottom end of the market, closest to the tourist parking lot and the popular pineapple stands. During the off-seasons when fewer people attended the market, traders were allowed to negotiate better stalls among themselves. However, since the LSDI started a pilot craft production project at this market, the Ubumbano committee seemed more eager to stop such informal agreements and to police the payment of membership fees. Although elected, the Ubumbano committee was not autonomous as its chairman answered to a KZN Wildlife official who issued directives and approved committee agendas.

All along the tarred roads constructed by the LSDI, this Initiative built similar-looking craft stalls from which local people could sell their crafts to tourists. These

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<sup>11</sup> A large South African banking group.

<sup>12</sup> The South African telecommunications company.

rectangular buildings consisted of neat rows of individual stalls and for the most part remained fenced and locked. According to Khumbula Ndlovu, a prominent IFP politician in the area, this was because the LSDI still had to “get those crafters on their books so that they can get their money back”. He suspected that the LSDI would levy a rent on the occupants of these stalls. Another local man, Gijima Zikhali, said that the LSDI would not unlock these markets unless the “community” elected a committee that would take responsibility for the buildings. I could not locate a single LSDI employee who could confirm or deny these charges. What was clear however, was that these buildings offered tourists a very efficient way to get hold of souvenirs.

In 2000, the Uthungulu Regional Council (URC), in collaboration with the LSDI, built a large market building in Mbaswana at great cost. Aesthetically, this was a more pleasing building than the clones on the LSDI roads. The stalls differed in size and were set at angles relative to one another while the whole structure had a thatched roof. A tarred LSDI road would eventually pass right next to this new market, making it accessible to the expected large numbers of tourists. A local committee, consisting of eleven members, managed the new market building and levied rents of R50 per month on individual stalls. According to Godi Mhlongo, the URC did not want to hand the new building over to “the community” without having ensured that there was a proper institutional structure to take responsibility for its maintenance. The subsequently elected committee, of which he was the chairman, had to formulate and enforce rules that would ensure that the building was properly maintained. The majority of tenants in this new building found the rules to which they had to adhere to irksome. One trader, Ncamsile Penarie, complained that she wanted to sublet her stall because she could not afford the

rent. When she told the committee about this, they warned her that she would lose her stall if she sublet it. They later relaxed the rules somewhat and told Ncamsile that her tenants would have to sign a contract with the committee. The potential tenants were suspicious of the deal and decided not to rent space in the building. Ncamsile was so disappointed that she wanted to move to another market but was forced to stay on because of her contract.

Within the ordered cement confines of this new building in Mbaswana, there was limited scope for those events that made the pension market next to it so unpredictable. For instance, one could not hang a carcass off the beams of the new market, as the walkways were too narrow for livestock. The height of the stall counters also forced traders to stand up while serving their customers. In contrast, the pension market was characterised by clusters of talking, gossiping women serving their customers in between breast-feeding babies and serving up food to hordes of children running past. The simple fact that stalls were separated by walls and had built-in counters made these activities, so much part of the vibrant pension market, impossible.

The Ubumbano craft market, the new Mbaswana thatched market and the various LSDI craft stalls were the most rationalised of all the markets in my research area. At all of these markets, “development” money paid for the structures in which the traders were housed. In return for their largess, the developers insisted that elected local committees manage the buildings. As an LSDI developer said to me, “someone has to take responsibility for this structure else we will have to build another one next year”. With the election of ‘responsible’ committees, the developers forced hierarchical structures, bureaucratic procedures and rules onto a trade that was characterised by its informality.



These committees in turn, allowed for greater control of the traders. Craft committees could control access to 'their' markets through levying membership fees. But the committee was not autonomous and had to answer to various developers. The Ubumbano craft market's chairman had to report to a KZN Wildlife official, while the chairman at the Mbaswana market (Godi) liaised with the Uthungulu Regional Council. Godi also had to have their communal bank account audited by outsiders.

From a tourist point of view, the new Mbaswana market, the Ubumbano craft market and the LSDI stalls were more efficient than other craft stalls in the region. Their stable locations ensured that the tourist lost no time in searching for obscure markets. Furthermore, the compact layout of these markets guaranteed that a potential customer would not need to walk far to get what he or she was looking for. As such, the new buildings presented the tourist with a kind of supermarket for crafts where everything was under one roof. For tour operators, such markets presented a predictable way to give their clients a taste of the local culture. The security risks were minimal and few detours needed to be taken. These new markets became increasingly bureaucratised while they functioned to deliver predictability, calculability, efficiency and control for both the developers and tourists (See Ritzer 1996). In this regard, one can definitely indicate a process through which the developers' involvement in the crafts trade has led to the McDonaldization of the industry in Maputaland.

The McDonaldization of the crafts trade in Maputaland made it easier for formal sector businesses<sup>13</sup> to outsource their production to these markets. As such, craft producers in the region were easier to find and contact while their committees exercised

quality control. iLala Weavers, a business enterprise situated near Hluhluwe, outsourced some of its production to ‘informal’ crafters. This enabled iLala Weavers to advertise itself as “a community driven employment project”. iLala Weavers were not merely involved in the consumption of McDonaldized services and products but actively engaged in the invention of ethnic authenticity. The business premises comprised of a gallery and warehouse full of *ilala* baskets as well as a live-in village called Thembaletu, where tourists could observe how “real” Zulu people did beadwork, weaving and other crafts (See Appendix 5). On their 2000 website, iLala Weavers posted photographs and short biographies of “the artists” wearing “traditional” Zulu clothes. The site gave the impression that “traditional” local artists drove the whole project and that the money they generated went toward community development projects. In actual fact, a white man (Jan Botha) owned the business. A large portion of his stock came from anonymous producers at local markets such as Ubumbano. While doing fieldwork, Jan often came to Ubumbano to place and pick up orders. He insisted on paying less than the tourists for crafts and gave deadlines that forced the producers of laundry baskets to work up to eighteen hours a day. Jan only paid R240 (or R11.43 per day) for an order of thirty *ilala* paper baskets that took three weeks to complete (See Illustration 2 and 3, below). For three *ilala* laundry baskets, which took between seven and ten days to complete, Jan only paid R80 (See Illustration 4, below). For *ilala* “trays”, Jan only paid R25 per set. These trays took between two and seven days to complete, giving the crafters between R3.57 and R12.50 per day (See Illustration 5, below). Overall, Jan did not pay the crafters anything near the government’s minimum wage.

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<sup>13</sup> Afri-can-do, African Baskets and Curios and AfriCult were formal sector businesses that advertised their crafts on the Internet. These businesses outsourced the production of crafts to women in Maputaland and

**Illustration 2: *iLala* paper baskets, December 2000**



**Illustration 3: Woman producing *ilala* paper baskets, December 2000**



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only advertised, sold and redistributed the wares.



**Illustration 4: Woman producing *ilala* laundry basket, September 2000**



**Illustration 5: iLala trays, September 2000**



Jan allowed little creative licence in the production of crafts and gave meticulous instructions on the use of colours, weaving techniques and designs. In order to ensure that the crafters produced exactly what he wanted, Jan forced them to buy plant dyes from him. These dyes were twice as expensive as the ones on sale at Mbaswana and would not “take” unless a large quantity of it was used. In one case, Jan refused to pay Dumisile Zikhali for an order that she delivered because he could not recall that Dumisile bought her dyes from him.

The easy access to crafters that the McDonaldized craft industry allowed made such exploitation possible. However, this exploitation was fuelled by developers’ promises that locals would grow rich through the sale of crafts. Dumisile meekly accepted Jan’s refusal to pay for the crafts that he ordered from her. She hoped that his next order would be larger and that he would notice her willingness to please. Dumisile did not want to burn her bridges before the expected boom in the trade came.

### **Tourists and their branded expectations**

Whereas the developers and formal sector businesses actively pushed for the rationalisation of the crafts trade in the Maputaland region, tourists were more ambiguous about the process. On the one hand, they wanted easy, predictable access to cheap souvenirs. However, on the other hand, most tourists to the region looked for authentic crafts that did not reflect any of the characteristics of the “McDonaldized commodities” that they could buy at home.

Sodwana Bay was a rather exclusive vacationing spot, known as a good scuba diving and deep-sea fishing destination. But one needed an (expensive) four-wheel drive vehicle to get there, as well as expensive diving and fishing equipment. One either had to own a boat or charter one at great cost from a local business. As such, these activities remained the prerogative of the wealthy. Only wealthy foreign tourists could afford to go to Sodwana Bay, as accommodation in the area was almost exclusively located in up-market game lodges where a night's lodging could cost anything upwards of R1 000 per person sharing. Furthermore, no packaged tours went to Sodwana Bay while many foreign tourists chartered private aircraft to take them to their destinations. Likewise, among the South African tourists that I encountered at Fanie's Island and at Mapelane, Tembe and Ndumu nature conservation areas, there was the general impression that that Sodwana Bay was a "yuppie hangout" for domestic tourists.

Although these tourists had to drive (or fly) past decrepit houses and patchy crops on their way to Sodwana Bay, they were not particularly shocked to see such poverty. I talked to thirty-five foreign tourists whom had visited Sodwana Bay. Three of them were from Germany, two from Ireland, seven from France, three from the United States of America, nine from the Netherlands and two were from Belgium. I could not determine the nationality of the remaining nine foreign tourists. These tourists often referred to the poverty they observed as particular to the people in the area's "culture" and felt that it was part of an authentic experience. Some of them thought of the straw or mud-and-wattle huts as quaint hangovers of a pre-modern era and lamented the "Westernisation" apparent in areas where tin roofs replaced the "traditional" straw. I asked a Dutch woman



if she would live in the houses she described as quaint. Shocked, she replied that it is not in her culture to do so.

I also talked to thirty-three domestic tourists at Sodwana Bay. Most of them were from Gauteng. These tourists continuously contested the presence of “locals” in the park<sup>14</sup>. A man from Johannesburg, Guy Peters, told me that if it were not for the Natal Parks Board’s militant protection of the area during apartheid, there would not have been anything left of the natural environment. According to Guy, the locals were destructive and careless, and had to be controlled. He was vexed that Sodwana Bay was given to the locals and said that nothing good could come of it as “they are not on our level of development”. Some of the other domestic tourists contrasted the local communities’ “parasitic reliance” on nature conservation areas with their own hard work and financial contributions to the upkeep of the parks. On numerous occasions domestic tourists refused to pay the community levy at the entrance to the Sodwana Bay Park. One these culprits retorted that, “why should I pay for them to lie under the trees all day?”

I also found a slight difference between the motivations of domestic and foreign tourists for buying crafts at the Ubumbano craft market. In this regard, I interviewed twenty-seven foreign tourists and eighteen domestic tourists there. On the whole, the foreign tourists were more preoccupied with searching for existential authenticity in their buying experience (See Figure 1, below). For instance, eleven (41%) foreign tourists bought crafts at Ubumbano because they believed that the market had an authentic atmosphere. Four of these tourists were particularly impressed with the fact that women produced crafts where one could see them. This was a far cry from the ‘invisibly’

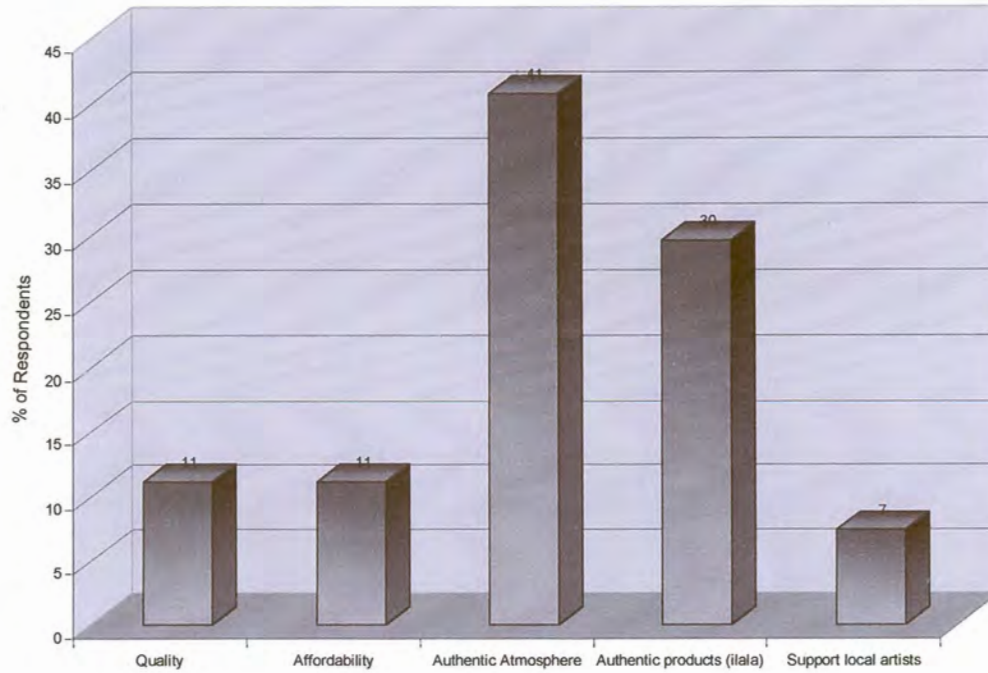
produced factory goods that they usually bought at home and made the experience seem more “real”. One man, Antoine Gaugris, remarked that the Ubumbano market was “unspoilt” because there was no evidence of factory-produced goods from the East. Two other foreign tourists remarked that it was “refreshing” to see the traders smiling and being so friendly to strangers. They told me anecdotes about their shopping experiences in the United States, where shop assistants were often rude to their customers.

Ritzer (1996) shows how the employees of international corporations such as McDonalds are forced to have scripted interactions with customers. Part of this script is a smile and a friendly greeting. Given such mechanical interactions, it is not surprising that the foreign tourists complained that the smiles they receive at “home” were not real. For many foreign tourists, part of their experience consisted of verifying their visual impressions of the market. Most of them tried to interact with crafters. Often, they were delighted to find out that almost no one at the market spoke English. It was a verification that the global village where English is almost the *lingua franca*, did not reach this remote location. They were also pleased when the women refused to have their pictures taken. One French woman remarked to me that they were probably scared that the camera would steal their souls. She believed that these crafters were so isolated in this remote part of the world that they were ignorant of the most basic of technologies, supporting her belief that she was truly away from the world she knows.

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<sup>14</sup> In this regard, Turner (2001, 365-366) shows that domestic tourists in South Africa continuously contest those instances in which local communities receive as part of the land claim settlements, an income from nature conservation or have harvesting access to conservation areas.

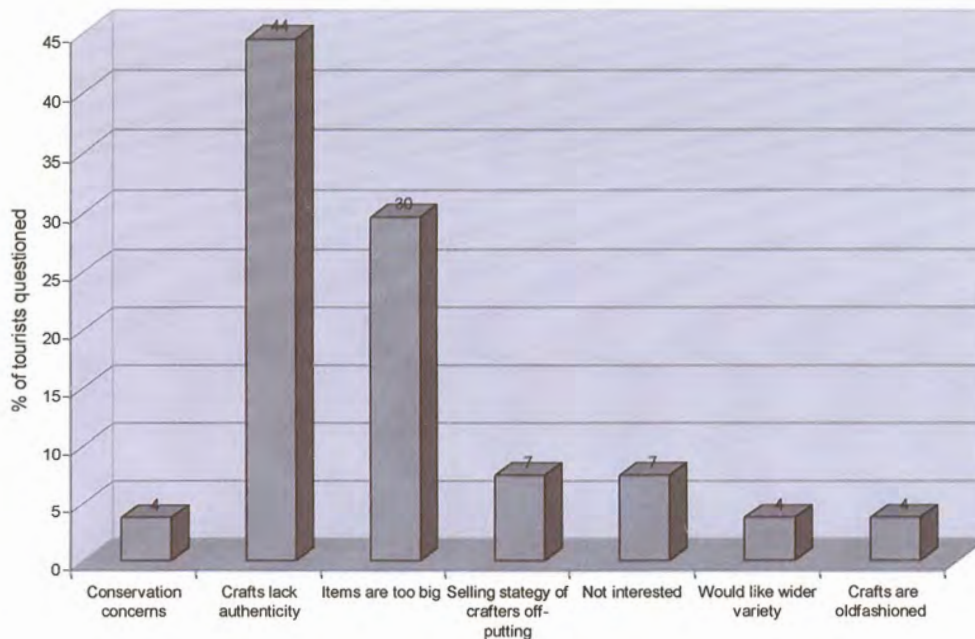
Figure 1: Why foreign tourists bought crafts at the Ubumbano craft market, December 2000



For the twenty-seven foreign tourists I talked to, the crafts they bought were souvenirs of a liminal experience. Eight (30%) of them only looked for crafts that were small enough to transport while another three (11%) cited affordability as their main concern. However, twelve (44%) of the foreign tourists I interviewed complained about the inauthenticity of crafts at the market (See Figure 2, below).



**Figure 2: Why foreign tourists did not buy crafts at Ubumbano craft market, December 2000**

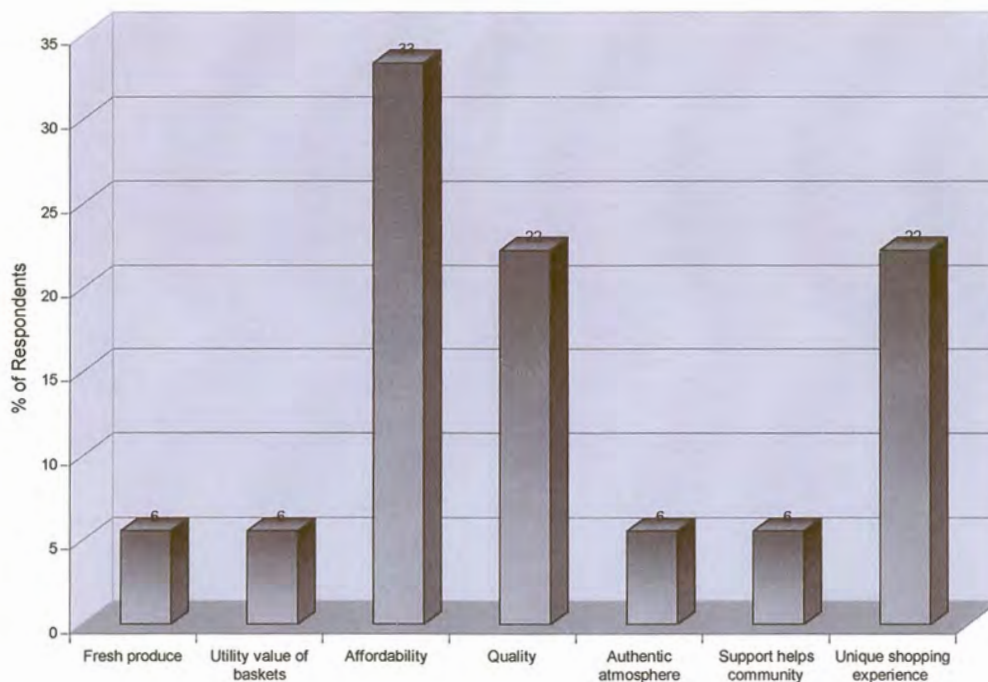


Five of these tourists complained about the plastic linings of some of the baskets. Three others said that the crafts were not unique to the area and would not remind them of the Zulu they visited. One man remarked that he did not like the Nike, Billabong and other commercial logos on the *umhlala* (monkey-orange) crafts that the little boys sold. He suggested that they return to “real Zulu patterns”. These replies seem to suggest that the perceived authenticity of crafts played a large role in the tourist’s decision to buy it. In this regard, souvenirs were reminders of a unique experience (the hustle and bustle or spontaneity of the Ubumbano craft market) and therefore needed to have some kind of resemblance to that experience.

The majority of the eighteen domestic tourists I interviewed at Ubumbano, emphasised affordability, quality, and utility value in deciding which crafts to buy (See

Figure 3 and 4, below). Only one domestic tourist said that she liked the market's authentic atmosphere. Local tourists were familiar with buying crafts in South Africa, and for them crafts were not icons of liminal experiences. These tourists also kept their interactions with the crafters to a minimum. A major complaint was that the traders were not willing to haggle over prices. There was also widespread suspicion that the traders only pretended not to understand English.

**Figure 3: Why domestic tourists bought crafts at Ubumbano craft market, December 2000.**

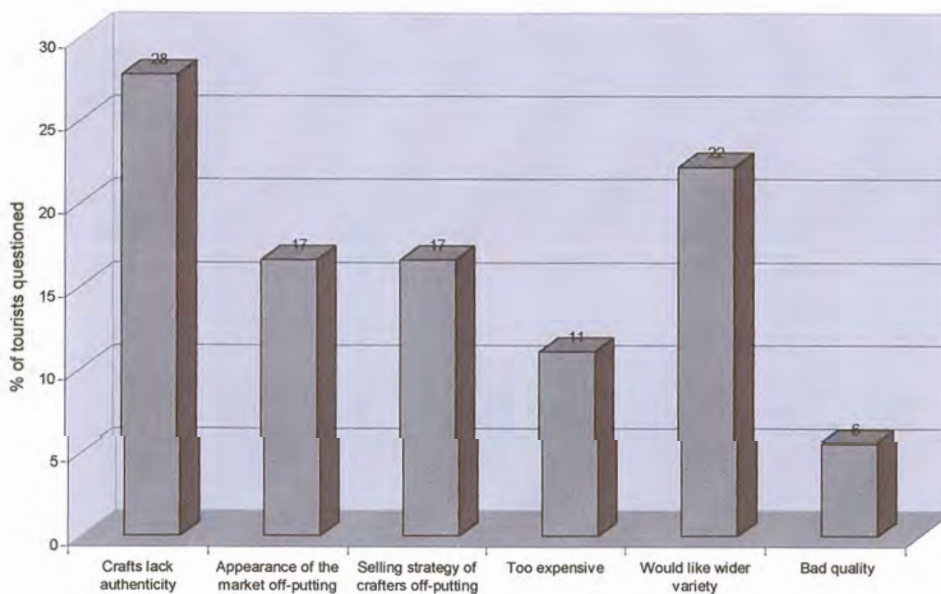


Domestic tourists did not explicitly search for exotic crafts such as wooden masks. For example, one woman said that she did not “want that ugly thing in [her] house”. Most of their purchases were destined to decorate living rooms at home. When I did my fieldwork, natural fibres were fashionable in the South African interior decorating industry. The abundance of these materials at Ubumbano made it possible for domestic



tourists to search for cheap alternatives to expensive decorator’s pieces. But for domestic tourists the purchase and consumption of crafts differed from that of everyday commodities. Due to Sodwana Bay’s reputation as an upmarket vacation spot, crafts from this region supported the claim of domestic tourists to higher social status. To own these crafts was a token that one had visited Sodwana Bay. At the Ubumbano craft market, I also saw many tourists with whole lists of things to buy for their friends and family at home. I heard one tourist who was obviously poorer than her companions say to a friend “No, those baskets look like the ones at Durban. They’re going to think I went to Marine Parade [the seafront district of Durban]”. Through her purchase this woman did not want to be associated with Durban- obviously a less prestigious tourist destination. She searched for crafts that would signal to people at home that she went to Sodwana Bay, an up-market resort.

**Figure 4: Why domestic tourists did not buy crafts at Ubumbano market, December 2000**





Thus for both domestic and foreign tourists, the authenticity of crafts sold at Ubumbano craft market was important. The perceived authenticity of such crafts depended to a large measure on the degree to which they conformed to preconceived notions about the producers and their products. Such expectations were largely informed and shaped by the media.

In its advertising of the Maputaland region to tourists, marketers often reverted to the tribal idiom when describing people living there<sup>15</sup>. According to these advertisers, Maputaland was home to the proud Zulu “tribe” where Zulus lived authentic lives according to their own culture (Ross 2001). This culture supposedly reflected a simple self-contained society in which the various families, living in separate kraals under patriarchs, were the basic units (Grossert 1978). As hangovers of a pre-modern era, the Zulu was also said to have very little contact with the outside world and produced what they needed from raw materials that they got from their immediate environment. However, people living in this region wore clothes produced in factories all over the world. The idea of a self-contained society was also shattered by the fact that a large portion of the economically active population of the area had been employed outside it for more than a century. In a survey I did of 129 women at the Ubumbano craft market, sixty-three (48%) were living in woman-headed households. Despite these discrepancies, the Zulu warrior in his loincloth made of animal hides and a spear still remained the defining symbol of the Zulu living in Maputaland today.

Although the area was never home to the “Zulu”, marketers advertised the area as such. Commercial tour operators did not only mirror expectations of the type of images

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<sup>15</sup> On the depiction of local people as “tribes”, see De La Harpe (1999); Grossert (1978 2, 38), Jolles (1993) and Mountain (1990).

that tourists would want to buy, but also actively engaged in the construction of the identities of people to be visited<sup>16</sup> (Mellinger 1994). Postcards of “real” Zulu were also for sale at most of the tourist areas. In this context, the “Zulu identity” offered the marketer a unique product. It had been “advertised” for almost a hundred and fifty years through the media. Furthermore, this identity proved to elicit strong reactions from the “buying public”. In the nineteenth century the Zulu first came to prominence when they defeated the British army at Isandlwana with nothing more than “primitive” spears. This historical defeat caused a sensation throughout imperial Britain and the rest of the world. When the British later destroyed the Zulu kingdom the Zulu were the subject of much sympathy. The depiction of the Zulu as a noble warrior-nation with a proud heritage had endured until this day (Ross 2001). Movies were made about Zulu warriors and king Shaka, and the exotic Zulu lifestyle was even popularised by the Boy Scout movement. In this sense, the Zulu identity was an internationally recognised brand (cf. Hamilton 1998:8-35).

It thus made business sense to just extend the area in which the Zulu was said to live, and to convince the inhabitants of that area to successfully copy the brand. Developers trained crafters to make more authentic, easily recognisable “Zulu” baskets and local people had to perform “authentic” Zulu ceremonies. I witnessed one occasion where a lodge owner asked “visiting” Zulu dancers to discard their T-shirts because it did not look “real”. Women were expected to dance topless, despite their reluctance to do so. Far from being the revival of a proud tradition, the production of Zulu baskets and staged

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<sup>16</sup> Mellinger (1994: 759, 777) points to the powerful role that tourist postcards of the period between 1893 and 1906 played in the construction and perpetuation of stereotypes about African Americans. He concludes that the media plays a large role in shaping tourists’ expectations about the people and the crafts that they would encounter on their travels.

performances was an invention of a tradition framed by contemporary stereotype and economic interests.

Tourists that visited the Sodwana Bay region searched for authentic crafts that were unique to the area and that did not betray a McDonaldized production process. Ironically, this expectation of authenticity was a result of the McDonaldization of the tourism industry in the region. As such, expectations of ethnicity and uniqueness reflected on the success with which the region had been “branded”.

### **Developing poverty: The craft producers**

‘Development’ changed the relationship between local people and the tourists that visited their areas. Since neo-liberal economists placed their hope of economic growth and community development on tourists, tourists became powerful actors. Tourists’ expectations about Maputaland and its people therefore played an integral part in the marketing and development of the area. Numerous developers have tried to shape local people and their products to better comply with the tourists’ expectations.

Local people were motivated by the expectations of jobs and higher wages in the long term to conform to these expectations. The supposedly secure income that they could derive from crafts and performances would spontaneously flow into the area once local people correctly mirrored stereotypes about themselves.

Developers such as iLala Weavers and the LSDI pressurised crafters in the region to produce more easily recognisable Zulu crafts. They paid much attention to the “revival” of the art of beer-basket weaving and sold beer baskets (*izichumo*) as



items (See Illustration 6, below). However, a finely woven beer basket of 15cm in diameter took five days to complete. This was in contrast to the local baskets, coarser in weave and 30cm in diameter, which only took one day to complete. Developers who commissioned both types of baskets only paid R15 for these articles. Although the “real” Zulu baskets were more time-consuming to produce, the crafters who produced them were not compensated for their extra effort.

**Illustration 6: Zulu baskets (*izichumo*)**



Locals did not simply conform to stereotypical ethnic depictions of themselves because developers had told them to do so. They learnt of these preconceptions and expectations through their own encounters with “guests” in the market. In the literature, there is widespread recognition that “hosts” are generally well aware of the stereotypes or expectations that their “guests” have of them (See for example, Graburn 1979:4-19). At the Ubumbano craft market, these stereotypes were constantly played out and exaggerated. As such, craft producers continuously manufactured more exotic and grotesque crafts.

At the Ubumbano craft market, women went to Swaziland to buy wooden masks that were “roughly made”. These ancient-looking Swazi masks were actually brand new but went through an artificial ageing process. Freshly painted masks were sanded and

were left in the sun for a few days until it had a weather-beaten look. The producers also attached dirty raffia to some of the masks to contribute to the general appearance of decay. In buying these masks, tourists often believed that they were buying priceless “tribal” heirlooms. Instead, they were buying mass-produced and brand-new commercial crafts. Apart from this deceit, these masks were also never part of the cultural repertoire of the area.

Prudence Zikhali was one of the women who regularly went to Swaziland to buy these crafts, and bought some of these ancient-looking masks in Manzini. Prudence did not like these masks and said that their ugliness scared her. However, she had a feeling that these masks would appeal to the tourists who had “strange” tastes. Her intuition proved to be very profitable. Prudence was amazed when tourists who drove brand-new luxury cars bought such ugly old things. Nevertheless, other hawkers at Ubumbano noticed that Prudence’s ugly masks sold faster than the other highly stylised, polished masks from Swaziland. They started buying the “older”, more exotic masks. One hawker even lamented that there were so few ugly, old masks for sale at Manzini and that she had to look somewhere else for them. Thus, the exotic expectations of tourists fed back to the traders and influenced production techniques.

The traders at Ubumbano were also aware of the prices that tourists were willing to pay for crafts. Hence, craft traders in both the formal and informal sector were forced to find cheaper sources of production. They outsourced craft production to ever-poorer sections of the economy<sup>17</sup>. This process happened on all levels, from the shift of production within the household to a shift of production to sweatshops in other



postcolonial countries. Within households, older women required their daughters-in-law to produce crafts until they settled elsewhere with their husbands<sup>18</sup>. A middle-aged woman, Kiphile Zikhali, expressed the wish that her son would get married so that she could retire. She still wanted to sell crafts but did not want to go through the arduous task of harvesting raw materials, dyeing and drying them and weaving baskets. Women without access to the labour of daughters-in-law, cast their sights onto poor, socially marginalised neighbours. These neighbours often included recently widowed women from elsewhere and women with limited access to the female networks in the region. At Ubumbano, Thobile Mlozi told me that she bought crafts from her neighbour, a widow who could not afford to go to the market in Mbaswana. This woman originally came from Jozini and moved to the Mbaswana area many years ago, after getting married. She did not get along with her in-laws and could not make many friends due to all her domestic duties. When her husband died, she was left penniless and isolated. The widow became dependent on the alms of her neighbours. They soon grew tired of supporting her. She decided to start making crafts to sell. Once she had a reasonable amount of finished crafts, the widow approached her neighbours for a loan so that she could go to Mbaswana to sell her crafts. They refused and instead offered to buy her stock. Thobile paid only R9 for a basket that could command between R20 and R30 on the markets. She said that the widow did not have a choice in accepting this measly sum as “she had to eat”.

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<sup>17</sup> According to the literature, the shift of production to ever poorer and more marginalised people is central to the process of globalisation (Douthwaite 1992; Klein 2000; Van der Waal & Sharp 1988: 136-144).

<sup>18</sup> In the past, women only had to work for their mother-in-laws until they bore their first child. Thereafter, married couples usually moved to a house of their own (Krige 1950). Nowadays, most women have



Many traders at tourist-orientated craft markets such as Ubumbano stopped producing crafts and bought finished products from places such as the Mbaswana pension market. These traders thus shifted the burden of production onto local markets. I took a sample of 129 traders at Ubumbano. Seventy-nine of them bought finished crafts from other markets. Of that number, seventy-four (94%) bought crafts in Mbaswana, seventeen (22%) bought crafts in Swaziland, sixteen (20%) in Durban, one at eMozi and one in Pongola. Two women also bought monkey-orange crafts from small boys in the area<sup>19</sup>. It is thus clear that a large percentage of crafts sold at the Ubumbano craft market was not produced there.

Imported crafts, such as sleeping mats produced in Taiwan, started to replace local crafts. The Taiwanese mats were made from a thin grass-like material, had low-quality prints of elephants, giraffe, and other animals on them and were rounded off with material piping around the edges. Before Ubumbano traders went to Durban to buy these mats, crafters in the region produced their own sleeping mats from locally available reeds and rushes. Since the Taiwanese alternative became available, more and more of them switched over to the imports. They explained that the laborious production of local sleeping mats did not justify the low prices that tourists were willing to pay. The harvesting of raw materials such as *incema*, *induli*, *inhlanhla* or *iqumbi* generally took one whole day (fourteen hours). To dry these raw materials took an additional two to three days. Once the reeds had been dried, it took between one (for the very small mats)

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children before they get married while economic reasons often restrain couples from moving into their own houses.

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, the further the market where the finished crafts were bought, the higher the mark-up on that product. Products from markets that were close to Ubumbano such as eMozi, Mbaswana, and the local boys were generally marked up by 141%, while crafts from Swaziland were marked up by 214% and those from Durban by 293%. By buying crafts from Swaziland, the Ubumbano traders shifted the burden of production

and seven (for the large mats) days to make a sleeping mat. In all, a sleeping mat selling for R30 could take up to eleven days to complete, giving the crafter only R2.73 per day for her labour. At the time of my research, this was not even enough to buy a loaf of bread. Of course, this amount did not include the costs that crafters incurred by hiring cars (R20) to get to the harvesting sites, the per-bunch-transport-fees<sup>20</sup> (R5) or the rope (R30) to tie the culms together. Given these expenses, many crafters said that it was more expensive to make sleeping mats than to buy them from Durban. The introduction of Taiwanese sleeping mats considerably lightened the workload of local crafters but alienated the tourists to whom such crafts were generally sold.

### **Conclusion: Escape from the iron cage**

The development of the eco-tourism industry in Maputaland, and specifically the crafts trade, created the impression that crafters would soon be caught in what Weber (1947) described as an “iron cage of rationality” from which there would be little escape. This impression does not, however take cognisance of the many unforeseen consequences that a more rationalised industry has spawned. I termed these consequences unanticipated because they were often at odds with the general aims of the developers and sometimes even undermined these aims. The developers hoped that by “developing” the crafts trade, they would revitalise an old tradition, create an income for craft producers and stimulate the local economy. They also hoped that their branding of the region would attract more

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to a neighbouring country's poor. This shift was even further for crafts bought in Durban as most of it was imported from Asia and India.

<sup>20</sup> Additional to the car rental, crafters had to pay R5 per bunch of raw materials that they wanted to transport.



tourists and that the easily accessible craft markets and products would enhance the tourists' visit.

Contrary to the developers' expectations, craft producers' incomes have spiralled downwards as local production techniques were making way for the mass-produced crafts from other postcolonial countries. In trying to get the craft producers to make more "authentic" crafts that would supposedly sell better, the developers actually impoverished them. "Real" Zulu crafts were more laborious to produce and did not bring greater profits. This in turn, led local craft traders to outsource the production of crafts to poorer sections of their community and to producers in other countries. Poor women whom were supposed to benefit most from the development initiative, thus became trapped in low-income production jobs. Growing numbers of foreign crafts were also imported to the area, supplanting local alternatives. In no sense was there a revitalisation of tradition.

Furthermore, the branded expectations of Maputaland (created by the marketers of the area) often led the tourists to mistake the authentic crafts they sought with fakes they were presented with. This became apparent when the tourists bought wooden masks which were artificially aged and produced on a massive scale in the factories of Swaziland. Since these staged performances conformed to the expectations that tourists had of the area, they remained blind to its forgery.

Another unanticipated consequence of the ethnic branding of Maputaland was that tourists were not willing to pay more for labour-intensive "authentic" crafts. In this regard, the branded depiction of local people as isolated and self-sufficient hangovers from an earlier age made it possible for tourists to frame the producers in such a way that they could justify paying less for these crafts. First, tourists were duped to believe that



craft production was an idle hobby in which production times were irrelevant. None of the brochures stated that the locals depended on the sale of these crafts for subsistence. The static depiction of locals also allowed some tourists to assume that locals were immature. At the Ubumbano craft market for instance, I often saw foreign tourists hand out sweets to the women as if they were “good children”. I once overheard a Dutch woman tell her husband not to “spoil” the trader by giving her too much money. In a certain sense, the KZN Wildlife’s patronising management of the women also supported this view<sup>21</sup>. Since tourists were duped to believe that local people are not part of the global economy, they believed that these people do not know the value of money.

Another unforeseen consequence of the McDonaldization of the crafts trade was that the predictability, efficiency and control of the process undermined the perceived authenticity of the tourists’ experience. The structure of the stalls at Mbaswana forced a muted and sterile atmosphere onto the market. This contrasted sharply with the lively atmosphere at the popular Mbaswana pension market. In their effort to deliver crafts to the tourists more efficiently, these developers eroded the attraction of their product. Crafts differed from other commodities and often served as souvenirs of authentic experiences. The stark conformity of the cloned stalls undermined such authenticity. These stalls did not allow the crafters to produce crafts while selling them. This could lead the tourist to (rightly) suspect that the crafts were mass-produced and therefore less authentic. Ironically, the global market created a demand for primitive, handmade, rare and authentic crafts that could not be met through “traditional” production techniques.

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<sup>21</sup> They decreed that the women may not haggle with tourists over craft prices. The KZN Wildlife officer in charge told me that “it is for their own good”.

## Chapter 4

### Land claims and corporate imitation:

#### Men brokering development in Maputaland

*"Men only talk, talk, talk..."*

-A woman in Mbaswana on the effectiveness of the Municipal Council Meetings

*"If you want [donor] money, you must seat the women in front"*

- A man at the launch of the Ingwavuma Small Business Association on the obvious presence of women at the gathering.

The commercial ethnic branding of Maputaland was echoed in a small but influential group of local men's political claims. It was also reflected in a local upsurge in the popularity of all things 'traditional', including chieftaincy. In the latter regard, many of my interviewees claimed that chiefs were part of the local tradition.

Chiefs were the main executors of apartheid policies in the former homelands (Mamdani 1996: 37). In this regard, a particular version of African tradition, tribal authority and customary law, defined by the state, was central to the apartheid project. The groundwork for this manipulation had already been laid long before 1948. In 1951 the Black Authorities Act established Tribal, Regional and Territorial Authorities for the homelands and meticulously circumscribed the functions of each authority. Each chieftaincy was created by a separate decree mentioning the size of the chieftaincy and the number of councillors in the (newly established) Tribal Councils. Hundreds of laws, by-laws and government regulations gave chiefs wide-ranging powers, making them the "administrative factotums of apartheid" (Evans 1997). In this system, co-operative headmen were made into chiefs while uncooperative chiefs received no official

recognition (Oomen 2000: 72). When the popular revolt which engulfed South Africa in the 1980s penetrated rural areas, chiefs were often branded as collaborators of the apartheid regime (Van Kessel 2000).

Despite local resistance to Tribal Authorities during apartheid, the institution of chieftaincy in Maputaland has shown great resilience in the post-apartheid era. Ethnic identity also remained an important political tool. This was the case in many other rural areas in South Africa where chiefs and headmen still remained in charge of communal land. They continued to play a role in land allocation, dispute settlement and continued to carry out administrative tasks as they had for the past decades. Some areas even saw chiefs growing in popularity despite the establishment of democratically elected municipal councils in 1998. In the post-apartheid situation, tradition and ethnicity thus continue to be dynamic political forces and have proved that they were not merely anomalies of apartheid (J. & J. L. Comaroff 1997: xiv; Oomen 2000: 71<sup>1</sup>; and Fokwang 2003).

The post-apartheid policy environment also protected the position of chiefs. South Africa's new Constitution recognises the institution of traditional leadership in terms of customary law. The Black Administration Act of 1927 still regulates the criminal and civil jurisdiction of chiefs and headmen to adjudicate disputes and offences in 'Tribal' courts. Furthermore, the Remuneration of Public Office Bearers Act of 1998 ensured that each of South Africa's eight hundred chiefs still receive an annual salary from the state.

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<sup>1</sup> Oomen (2000) uses the problematic concept of "retraditionalisation" to describe the post-apartheid popularity of chiefs. She argues that after the collapse of apartheid (which sought to despoil and deny Africans their "culture"), people are going back to their roots. This view implies that irrespective of the advent of democracy, Africans still revere the institution of chiefs because it is part and parcel of their "culture".



In general, the South African government showed great reluctance to dismantle the Tribal Authority system and to refrain from engaging in the politics of ethnic identity<sup>2</sup>.

Whatever the case may be for the generic salience of 'tradition' elsewhere in South Africa, this chapter investigates the specific conditions under which Tribal Authorities remained important political actors in Maputaland. I attempt to show that the salience of Tribal Authorities in Maputaland is as much a result of local agency as of nationally imposed policies and the political complicity of the state and developers to this resurgence at local and national levels. I argue that 'development' has created a space in which chiefs could claim to be authentic and legitimate mouthpieces of the 'tribes' that the land claims process redefined. To a large extent, chiefs' claims to political legitimacy were financially very rewarding as it gave them access to large sums of money. However, their claims to ethnic authenticity and political legitimacy put chiefs in direct opposition to regular men in the region who were not part of the Tribal Authority structures. The chiefs' complicity to the 'development' of the region also made them politically impotent to challenge the LSDI's emphasis on eco-tourism and nature conservation as economic development initiatives.

On the margins of the local political scene, regular men had to recycle the current ethnic discourses in ways that would ensure them access to some of the development resources. Of particular concern here, was the ten thousand male migrant workers from the region that lost their jobs on the Witwatersrand in 1999. Many of these men returned home to families that hardly knew them, expecting 'development' and some security in

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<sup>2</sup> In 1999 Contralesa threatened to boycott the national elections because the government had not ensured their positions through new legislation. Since these traditional leaders were deemed a powerful political body, Nelson Mandela met with the country's traditional leaders and increased their salaries. (Hlongwa 1999:4).

terms of employment. The return of unemployed senior men impacted on local young men's notion that they too would one day go to the mines to earn a living. These young men had to deal with an uncertain future in which experienced men could not even find employment. In a context where Tribal Authorities and older men hijacked the only lucrative employment, these young men were disdainful of tradition.

When I started my research in Sodwana Bay (Umhlabuyalingana district), one of the first women I talked to grouped all local men into the following categories; the Tribal Authorities, the "politicians" outside the Tribal Authority structures and the men that "just walked around". In the course of my research, I tried to dispel this typology by looking at its many ambiguities but found it a useful guide to analyse local men's involvement in 'development'. This chapter aims to explore this typology, its nuances, contradictions and validity with reference to ethnographic material collected from Maputaland.

My discussion is divided into four parts. First, I discuss the post-apartheid upsurge of popular support for chiefs in Maputaland despite the transfer of all communal land to the Ingonyama Trust and the democratisation of local government. In this section, I focus on the agency of the Zikhali and Mabaso chiefs in the land claims process, and show how chieftaincy has been adapted to the exigencies of new political and economical environments. Second, I consider the ways in which chiefs and local politicians connected to the wider provincial and national systems. I discuss the nature of the ethnic identities employed and their strategic importance in the continuing dialectical political process between chiefs, the state and developers. Third, I consider how men on the margins of the political arena "worked politics" and engaged with local-level committees

that seemed to be ineffective pockets of bureaucracy. Lastly, I discuss the experiences of young men whom, by virtue of their age and inexperience could not work politics or hope to be employed in the eco-tourism industry. I will pay particular attention to what seems to be violent reactions to their marginalisation.

### **Paradoxical Popularity: Reinventing chieftaincy in Maputaland**

For a while it seemed as if chieftaincy in Maputaland was doomed to disappear. When elected municipal councils were constituted with the democratisation of local government in 1999, chiefs lost their legal responsibilities *as chiefs* and retained only *ex officio* status (Fischer 2000:ii, 2-3, 9). The Local Municipality became responsible for the delivery of services and for keeping the peace while chiefs were relegated to the realm of “traditional matters”. As such, certain chiefs were automatically included in a Municipal Council before the elections took place, provided that they did not stand for a political party. In terms of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act of 1998, the total number of headmen and chiefs in a Local Municipal Council could not exceed twenty percent of the total number of councillors. The provincial Member of the Executive Council (MEC) identified chiefs who could participate in such proceedings<sup>3</sup>.

My research area fell within the Umhlabuyalingana Local Municipality whose borders were determined by the Local Government: Municipal Demarcation Act of 1998. The Umhlabuyalingana Local Municipal Council was constituted of nineteen IFP councillors, five ANC councillors and four politically neutral chiefs. KwaZulu-Natal’s

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<sup>3</sup> Vorster (2001:121) considered these provisions to effectively terminate the role of headmen and chiefs as local government institutions.



MEC appointed the Tembe, Mabaso, Matshabane and Mbila (Zikhali) chiefs to sit on this council.

On a macro-political scale, the change to democratically elected councils was part of the ANC government's modernisation discourse and presented an onslaught on the province's major political party, the IFP. As a conservative political party with a strong traditional base, the IFP sought to uphold the patriarchal power of chiefs, headmen and tribal councillors through emphasising the authenticity and legitimacy of such institutions (Marks 1978:189-193; Mackinnon 2001:572-575; Serote, Mager & Budlender 2001:165).

In 1994, the material basis of chiefs' power was corroded when all "communal" land in the KwaZulu homeland was incorporated into the Ingonyama Trust, headed by King Goodwill Zwelithini. Legally, the Ingonyama Trust denuded chiefs of the right to grant Permission To Occupy (PTO) permits to subjects or to levy rentals on land traditionally under their jurisdiction<sup>4</sup>. This meant that chiefs' incomes were significantly diminished. Under the new law, all developments on land bigger than five hectares or worth more than R500 000 went directly to the Ingonyama Trust Board for clearance. The Tribal Authorities concerned had to supply letters of consent, while any attempts by these authorities to extract money from applicants landed them in legal trouble. Even in the case of small development projects, Tribal Authorities only supplied applicants with a "consent to grant a PTO", which was then processed by the Department of Tribal and Local Government Affairs in Ulundi for final clearance. Furthermore, land not included

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<sup>4</sup> The new provincial government levelled increasing critique at the autocratic and "tribalistic" Trust. In 1996 they passed the KwaZulu Ingonyama Trust Amendment Bill to restructure the Trust (Phahlane 1998: 3). However, the "IFP ... objected to the board's administering to the material welfare and social wellbeing of the members of the tribes instead of the tribal authorities" (Anon 1997:2). Despite this objection, the revised Ingonyama Trust Act was accepted in 1998. In terms of the new Act, King Zwelithini still headed the Ingonyama Trust but was assisted by an eight-member committee appointed by the Land Affairs minister in consultation with the KwaZulu-Natal premier (Payne 1998: 34).

in the Ingonyama Trust but “released” through the land claims process was transferred to trusts, not the Tribal Authorities. The end of the apartheid era thus saw the legal and economical basis of chiefly authority in the Maputaland region severely undermined.

Despite the apparent marginalisation of chiefs in formal political processes, I was surprised at the growing popularity of chiefs in Maputaland. Many of my interviewees supported chiefs because they were not “politicians”. After more than a decade of war, local people were growing wary of the violent clashes between the IFP and the ANC. They admired the “neutrality” of chiefs. People in the areas of Mbaswana, KwaNgwanase and Tshongwe also streamed to Tribal Authority buildings whenever the respective chiefs and their councillors held court. Many women at the Ubumbano craft market indicated that they preferred to settle their disputes in a chief’s court rather than at the magistrates’ court. They complained that “no one listened” at the magistrate’s court and that damages were only paid to the court, not to the victims of crime. Chiefs also reached decisions quicker than the magistrates, and endless delays due to technical problems (a lack of legal representation, the loss of charge sheets, the disappearance of witnesses etc.) caused considerable frustration in the magistrate’s court. Even local white businesses preferred to settle their labour disputes in the Tribal Courts since this saved them on legal costs and gave them a public platform to explain their actions, especially if these involved the dismissal of a worker.

At first, I put local people’s reliance on chiefs down to the inability of “democratic” local government institutions in dealing with a rise in crime. I also suspected that the municipality’s inability to deliver on promises of a better life for all made people turn to chiefs who were at least visible and available. In these instances, the



popularity of chiefs was easily explained with reference to the deficiencies of other forms of local governance.

What was harder to explain was the popular utilisation of ethnic discourses and the support that chiefs enjoyed for their attempts to revitalise old “traditions” (See Ill. 7, below). The region saw a revival in first-fruit ceremonies, dance contests and beer festivals under the instigation of local chiefs. These ceremonies became popular social events where traditions were freely reconstructed. For instance, a first fruit ceremony that I attended in the Ingwavuma district, saw gumboot dances (originating from the mines in Gauteng) alternate with church choirs as “traditional” entertainment. In costume, the dancers mixed animal hides with luminous leopard-print sleeveless T-shirts, cowry shells with empty tins, and bullhorns with shrill pennywhistles. Despite this glaring eclecticism, chief Ndlovu claimed that the ceremony replicated ancestral ceremonies to the letter. In his keynote address, he recalled a romantic past when food was abundant and all men had jobs. The revitalisation of “tradition” in this context presented a conscious reclaiming of a (synthetic) past in an alienating present. These movements exhibit De Boeck (1998: 50)’s claim that in the post-colonial world, the individual is cut off from his past while he is at the same time also excluded from the promises of modernity. (He calls this dislocation the “zombification” of post-colonial reality). In Maputaland, the past was but a faint memory while the majority of inhabitants remained excluded from the LSDI’s promises of a better life. Under these conditions, chiefs opportunistically manipulated pre-colonial symbols to ensure their own power and authority.

At the inauguration of Nkosi Mabudu Tembe in May 2001 for instance, various neo-traditional leaders pointed to the way it was before the European-imposed central



government fragmented and marginalised “their people”. They depicted chiefs as leftovers of an authentically African past around which Africans could reconstruct their identities and regain pride and independence. Their speeches were interlaced with references to the Tembe as an imagined community from the past, which faced onslaughts of the present. As one speaker remarked, “The Tembe must speak with one voice to become strong again”.

**Illustration 7: “Real” Zulu chief, Shakaland**



Harder to explain was the preponderance of chiefs, headmen and “tribal” councillors on the democratically elected land claims committees and on the land trusts that were established in the wake of successful land claims.

### **Chiefly agency: The Zikhali land claim and the Mabaso Game Reserve**

As representatives on the land claims committees and land trusts, chiefs showed astute political acumen and enjoyed the support of the state and developers alike. This was apparent in the role of the Zikhali chief in a land claim, and in that of the Mabaso chief in erecting his own game reserve.

In the land claims process, the Zikhali chief went to great lengths to mobilise an ethnically defined group. Land claimants had to prove their adherence to the Zikhali “group” by drawing a genealogy and showing a historical link to the Zikhali land. As leader of the Zikhali people, chief (*inkosi*) S. J. Zikhali founded the Zikhali land claims committee. In 1998, the committee lodged a claim for land on the Sodwana State Forest, the Sodwana National Park, and a portion of Cape Vidal. Three years later, on the 21 July 2001, the land claim was officially settled amidst much local celebration. At the ceremony in Mbaswana, title deeds to land valued at R56-million were handed over to the eMandleni Trust, of which *Inkosi* S. J. Zikhali was the founding member.

The eMandleni Trust was made up of all members of the Zikhali Claimant Community and was managed by a Board of Trustees. In membership, this Board closely resembled the Zikhali Tribal Authority, who comprised the chief, seven non-hereditary headmen (*izinduna*) and six additional members. The land that the Trust managed became “private” once the title deeds were handed over. As such, the land administered by the eMandleni Trust fell outside the jurisdiction of the Ingonyama Trust. All profits, concessions and rent on the land went directly to the eMandleni Trust to be distributed among its members. In essence, the Zikhali Tribal Authority regained control over communally held land by transforming itself into a Board of Trustees.

The land settlement determined that the title-holders could not physically occupy the area but that they would share in the future earnings from eco-tourism to this World Heritage Site. Much was made of the potential contribution of the area to the macro-economic growth of South Africa’s economy and to improve the quality of life of locals. This optimism was fuelled by and announcement of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park



Authority that international investors showed an interest in investing in the Site (Thulo 2001: 8).

The decisions by the Zikhali claimant community not to occupy the area and to enter into partnership with the nature conservation authorities were not unanimous or independently reached. There was considerable contestation within the community before the eventual settlement was reached. At the Ubumbano craft market inside the Sodwana National Park, a group of older women told me about their wish to move back onto the land. Judging from the lush vegetation and the abundance of fresh water, the old women (*gogos*) believed that land inside the Park would be more fertile than land in Mbaswana. They also yearned for the security that a piece of land would bring them. Apart from these considerations, the older women also wanted to move onto the land because they distrusted the communal trust that would manage their investment once the land claim settlement had been finalised. Because the trust excluded women, my informants were convinced that it would only look after men's interests. Women even threatened to squat on the land illegally.

In response, the land claims committee initiated "workshops" to convince the defiant women of the rationality of their proposed partnership with the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park Authority and with KZN Wildlife. Elderly women had to attend countless of these workshops. Outside the workshops, other members of the claimant community laughed at them for desiring nothing more than "cows and goats" and accused them of forcing the locals "back to the bush" with their ignorance. This accusation played itself out against the modernisation discourse of the eMandleni Trust's Board. The Board used a rhetoric that portrayed the older generation as vanguards of tradition and stumbling



blocks to development. In this regard, the eMandleni Board mobilised tradition in their transactions with developers but when dealing with those they supposedly represented, the Board used development as a key rallying device. Workshopped into submission, the women relented. They remained deeply cynical of the Trust but were, according to Lungile Zikhali, “just too tired to listen anymore”.

In the case of the eMandleni Board, community representation was financially very rewarding. Apart from the remuneration for their services, Board members also had the prerogative of deciding what happened to the R5 million that the Zikhali community received from government as consolation for not being able to move back onto their land. The Board also made decision on R22 million given for development within and outside the Sodwana Park, and R4.44 million for the planning of new projects. In addition, they received an annual share of eight percent of the profits<sup>5</sup> generated by eco-tourism within the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park.

In October 2001, the adjacent Mabaso Tribal Authority declared its own 4500-hectare game reserve on communal land. According to newspaper articles, the reserve was established to harness the enormous potential of eco-tourism in terms of job-creation and money-generation for the “community” (Bishop 2001b: 3). KZN Wildlife welcomed the project as a “sustainable development initiative” and donated R331 000 to kick-start the project. The Nedbank Green Trust also donated more than R1 million for this purpose and the Wildlands Trust<sup>6</sup> raised money to construct a fence (Bishop 2001b: 3, Moore 2002: 5).

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<sup>5</sup> This amount is minimal, but the land claims commissioner involved in the “case”, assured me that their capacity-building workshops would enable the Trust to negotiate a better deal.

<sup>6</sup> The Wildlands Trust is “an independent fund-raising and project management organisation concerned with conservation-based community development in KwaZulu-Natal” (Moore 2002: 5).

Before establishing the Mabaso Game Reserve, the Mabaso Tribal Authority obtained a long-term lease for the land from the Ingonyama Trust, and thereby secured the confidence of the investors. The investors were apprehensive to invest in a venture on communally owned land, where land titles were insecure. To broker the deal with the Ingonyama Trust, the Mabaso Tribal Authority appointed the Uthungulu Resorts and Leisure Company<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, they set up a Section 21 company<sup>8</sup>, Funjwa Holdings, to manage the revenue from the reserve (Bishop 2001b: 3). The Mabaso chief was director of this company, while its other members comprised of Tribal Councillors.

With the creation of Funjwa Holdings, the Tribal Authority “corporatised” its functions. Inherited titles were translated into a hierarchy of corporate titles; from chief executive officer to middle-management posts. This transformation illustrated the political genius of the Mabaso Tribal Authority. As “traditional leaders” they could not apply for a PTO from the Ingonyama Trust, since this would intimate a re-instatement of Tribal Authorities over communal land. However, as a development company, this ethnic corporation had the right to apply for a PTO from the Ingonyama Trust.

Funjwa Holdings became a site of ethnic recycling. It used “old”, “stable” ideas about chieftaincy and ethnicity in a new context, creating the space in which those ideas could be re-evaluated. In this new context, chiefs expanded their area of jurisdiction to

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<sup>7</sup> Uthungulu Investment Holdings, a “black empowerment company” is chaired by Myeni, a rich member of the Zulu royal family and prominent member of the IFP. As a member of the Zulu royal family and thus intimately connected to Zwelithini, Myeni approached the chiefs in Maputaland and persuaded them to sign over the development rights to the area to his company so that he can broker deals with developers. Myeni claimed that his company “is trying to help the local people get involved in tourism by bringing together the developers and the custodians of the land”. However, the Ingonyama Trust declared the agreement between Uthungulu Investment Holdings and the chiefs null and void. It also reaffirmed its own position as the sole custodian of the land. Myeni then approached each chief individually, promising to secure a lease from Ingonyama and to introduce a developer, for which it will take a finder’s fee (Moore 1999a: 36; Moore 1999b: 11).

<sup>8</sup> A non-profit company under South African tax laws.



include development. The legitimacy of the Board and its director was closely tied to that of the chief and his councillors. The “old” idea that all communal land should be vested in the Tribal Authority was also recycled. Developers welcomed the transformation of chiefdoms into legally recognised “ethnic” corporations because this facilitated auditing practices. The ANC government also welcomed these “democratic” trusts, as indicative of progress and development in the hinterland<sup>9</sup>.

In the above two examples, I described how two chiefs in Maputaland regained their control over communally held land. The Zikhali chief negotiated his position through his recourse to traditional rhetoric in the land claims process. He utilised development rhetoric to convince a group of older people to agree to form a Trust instead of moving back onto the land. As founding member of this trust, chief Zikhali saw to it that his Council was well represented on the Trust’s Board, thus renegotiating the position and importance of the Tribal Authority. The Mabaso chief regained control of land within the jurisdiction of the Ingonyama Trust by imitating the development corporations that acquired leases on the land. He transformed his Tribal Authority Council into a legally recognised company, thus obtaining legal control of the land as a development company.

Actions such as those by the Zikhali and Mabaso chiefs to regain control over land had very definite implications for the definition of citizenship in Maputaland. The apartheid system had made communally held property, in separate ethnically defined territories, the basis of political dependency upon chiefs. This system also laid the foundation for the definition of rural Africans as chiefly “subjects” rather than as citizens

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<sup>9</sup> The ANC is thoroughly committed to the modernising discourse, which depicts chiefs and chieftaincies as hangovers of a pre-modern era, bound to disappear with modernisation.



able to engage with “civil society” (Mamdani 1996:22). In the new South Africa, undoing the wrongs of apartheid and restoring citizenship rights to rural black people required uncoupling the relationship between chiefs and communally held property. It also required restoring land forcefully expropriated during the colonial and apartheid eras. Land restoration was seen as a means of restoring full citizenship rights to the African population (James 2002:3).

Enshrined at the heart of these debates about political reform was a language of rights rather than property or ownership (James 2002:3). In the Maputaland region, the language of rights has allowed nature conservation authorities to hang on to land to which local people had lodged successful claims. According to the rhetoric of the land claims commission, the Zikhali and Mabaso land claimants’ sovereignty and citizenship was restored when they received the titles to their land. However, the communal nature of the Trusts to which these titles were awarded, opened the way for chiefs to assert their “traditional right to rule” within a new context. These chiefs transformed their offices to become directors while their citizen-subjects were now shareholders. The uncoupling of chiefs and communal property envisioned by the land claims process was thus not been affected. To a large measure, this was due to romantic conceptions of equality and the supposed immobility of chiefs. Since the chief was given the same status as other claimants, it was assumed that this (synthetic) equality would endure in the post-settlement context. For this reason, there were no rules regulating the composition of Communal Property Associations (CPAs) or Trusts. These notions were naively simplistic.

The conception of people in the Zikhali area as shareholders had political, social and economic implications. By co-opting them into the nature conservation business, the shareholders became politically impotent to challenge the practice of nature conservation areas on their land. The promise of future earnings from eco-tourism also placed specific responsibilities on local people. They were expected to be friendly and welcoming to tourists in the area and to conform to ethnic expectations about them. As owners of a nature conservation area, the Zikhali people also had the responsibility to utilise the resources within its boundaries on a sustainable basis<sup>10</sup>. This responsibility obscured the reasons for over-harvesting such as continued land shortage in the communal areas.

### **The complicity of the state and developers**

Chiefs in Maputaland engaged in a three-way dialogue with developers and government officials. The association between chiefs and developers has taken the form of a contest of representation, in which each conformed to the other's style (Werbner 1996: 17). In this regard, government seemed reluctant to disengage from discourses on ethnicity while developers often negotiated with chiefs as sole "traditional mouthpieces" of local people (Ntsebeza 2001). This was much cheaper and far less time-consuming than getting consensus-type answers from a "target community". Chiefs benefited from this deception since they were invited to dinners and to launches of development projects, and received expensive "gifts" from developers in exchange for their "partnership". In one case a developer even took the Tembe chief on an all-expenses-paid two-week tour of the

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<sup>10</sup> As part of the land settlement, the Zikhali and Mabaso are allowed to harvest plant material within the park.

United States of America. The particular developer wanted to enlarge his existing tourism business in the Tembe Elephant Park from which the Tembe people had been relocated, but KZN Wildlife prevented him from doing so. By befriending the Tembe chief, whom had lodged a land claim on the park, the developer covertly pressurise KZN Wildlife to concede to his demands. The developer frequently appeared in public with the chief and often alluded to his friendship to the “king”. The veiled message to the nature conservation authorities was that if they did not concede to his demands for increased land, he could send the land claims process in a different direction by influencing his “friend”. In the end, KZN Wildlife submitted and granted the developer more land and exclusive business rights to Tembe Elephant Park.

On their part, chiefs interpreted these bribes in terms of tributary gift logic (cf. De Boeck 1996:80). They distorted the interpretation of traditional “tribute payments”, to legitimate bribes and to rally support for their lobby against the power of the Ingonyama Trust. Chiefs claimed that even outsiders recognised their legitimacy and that the Ingonyama Trust should devolve its powers to them, the legitimate trustees of communal land.

In other contexts, chiefs echoed the modernisation and economic growth rhetoric of government and developers. This was the case when the Mabaso Tribal Authority launched a game reserve to ostensibly “bring development” to the people of Mabaso. Donors were eager to fund this venture as it fitted neatly into all the categories so fashionable in development: a community-owned and community initiated eco-tourism venture that aimed to protect endangered species and utilise natural resources on a sustainable basis while ensuring the socio-economic development of its owners. In the



Mabaso case, it became clear that local chiefs were not mere passive victims of larger forces. Neither were they scheming despots, bent on hanging on to their rule despite local and government opposition. Rather, this case showed that a complex dialectics of power was at play, in which both the chief and developers took active part (De Boeck 1996: 80-99).

### **The Municipal councillors**

A widely held perception in my research area was that democratic institutions such as the Umhlabuyalingana Local Municipal Council should be responsible for “development”. Many people judged the success of the Local Municipality in terms of their ability to deliver resources such as running water and electricity. Rather than interpreting democracy as a system of political rules that aimed to ensure procedural fairness (i.e. elections, rule of law, equality among citizens), most people stated that the substantive aspects of democracy (i.e. improving economic conditions) were more important<sup>11</sup>.

In the Mbaswana area, the only visible ‘development’ projects were initiated by the LSDI and by what locals vaguely referred to as “the government”. According to my interviewees, the tarred roads were clearly the work of the LSDI as they posted signs with their logo on at regular intervals next to the road. They were less clear about which government department erected the new craft market or were busy with the housing scheme just outside Mbaswana<sup>12</sup>. However, locals believed that the Umhlabuyalingana Municipality had nothing to do with these two projects. The only ‘development’ project

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<sup>11</sup> Williams (1999: 8-11) came to similar conclusions for the Mvuzane Tribal Authority in KwaZulu-Natal.

that locals attributed to the municipality was a planned water-supply project. There was widespread agreement that this project was riddled with corruption and that it was heading towards failure.

One interviewee, Zodwa Zikhali, complained that she did not know how to be included in the Mbaswana water supply project even though she lived in the Umhlabuyalingana municipal area. In desperation, Zodwa paid “someone” R500 for water pipes. After talking at some length, it became clear that she had paid for an illegal connection to the main water pipe. After the man had not contacted Zodwa for more than a month, it became clear that she had been swindled. Moreover, Zodwa did not know the man’s full name and surname. Zodwa and her listeners blamed the ineffectiveness and inaccessibility of the local municipality for her “troubles”.

Like many other people I talked to, Zodwa blamed the local municipality, rather than government for the slow delivery of essential services such as running water supplies. She reasoned that the ANC-controlled government did not help people in Maputaland because they “were IFP”. Zodwa said that the five ANC councillors in the Umhlabuyalingana Municipal Council were really government spies, whose sole job it was to report to the government about local activities. These ANC councillors could not ask the government to intervene in the local situation because they would only get in trouble with the nineteen IFP councillors. This suspicion bore itself out against the background of more than a decade of violence between the ANC and the IFP supporters in the region.

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<sup>12</sup> The Uthungulu Regional Council (the body that comprised of the various District Councils in northern KwaZulu-Natal) was actually responsible for the building of the craft market in Mbaswana.

Another factor that clouded the Mhlabuyalingana Municipality's local reputation was their inability to bring cheap electricity to the area. In this regard, ESCOM, the national electricity supplier, claimed that it would be too costly to extend their electricity grid to the northern parts of KwaZulu-Natal. Instead, ESCOM sponsored a range of "alternative" energy projects (see Dube 1995: 625-636). I was present at a meeting of the Umkhanyakude District Municipal Council<sup>13</sup> at KwaNgwanase where a development company tried to convince the Council to introduce solar electricity panels in the region. However, a group of people from Mbaswana objected that these panels were regularly stolen. After a long discussion, it was decided to put the project on hold until the developers could come up with a way to insure the panels.

In the meantime, locals said that Municipal Councillors "talk, talk, talk all day" while little was done. The fact that these councillors constantly travelled to other districts and to provincial meetings to discuss development did not impress the locals. According to one old man, the councillors always came back with empty promises, "which no one can eat from".

My own experience with Local Municipal Council meetings seemed to confirm the locals' criticism. Overall, these meetings were characterised by tenacious bureaucratic procedures. Literally hours were spent on going through the attendance register, reading the minutes of previous meetings and confirming the current meeting's agenda. During one particularly strenuous meeting, the assembled councillors argued for forty minutes about the correct procedure for handing in a letter of absence. A councillor sparked the argument when he read his excuse for not attending the previous meeting to those

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<sup>13</sup> The Umhlabuyalingana, the Jozini, the Big Five False Bay, the Hlabisa/ Impala and the Mtubatuba Local Municipalities formed part of the Umkhanyakude District Municipality.



assembled before handing it over to the secretary. After a long debate about his supposed *faux pas*, the official rules were consulted, but could not resolve the issue. In the end, the councillor handed his letter to the secretary who then reread the whole letter out loud.

In these proceedings, the hierarchy of chairman, vice-chairman, secretary and councillors was strictly adhered to. No one could speak out of turn and issues often remained undecided because the head of a task group was not present or had not consulted with his Tribal Authorities (who also sat on the council). In the light of these circumstances it was not surprising that few decisions were taken at Local Municipal Council meetings. Baba Ngubane reflected the opinion of many others when he said that the Local or District Municipal Council should only be informed of local activities once all decisions had been taken “at home”. Many interest groups came to the Municipal meetings to report on local activities as a matter of due course, without gaining any direction from the council.

To a large extent, the Municipal Councils’ (in)action could be attributed to their emphasis on procedural fairness. This was not only illustrated through their bureaucratic adherence to rules and hierarchy, but also in the emphasis that they placed on gender reform. Although women remained largely underrepresented in the Umhlabuyalingana Municipal Council<sup>14</sup>, a lot of lip service was paid to the need to include and “empower” local women. Where women were included as municipal councillors, they inevitably filled the roles of secretaries and caterers. At one public municipal function I attended in kwaNgwanase, the large number of women in attendance puzzled me. Before I could remark on this, Timothy Mbuli laughingly remarked to me that if one wanted money, one

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<sup>14</sup> See Budlender (1998: 679-687) and Serote, Mager & Budlender (2001: 166-167) for precise figures on the gender composition of local councils.

just had to “seat the women in front”. At this particular occasion, the municipal council wanted to impress a group of donors so that they would fund an entrepreneurship programme.

Williams (1999: 6-10) shows that people in the Mvuzane area south of Maputaland identified chiefs as those people who solved “problems” of the community, while elected councillors were responsible for their development “needs”. To a large extent, this distinction also held for people in my research area. Although the municipal councillors stuck doggedly to democratic procedures, they often sought the permission of the four “undemocratic” chiefs to proceed when decisions were made. On the one hand, this was a function of the IFP majority in the council who emphasised the importance of “cultural traditions”. On the other hand, the municipal councils consulted with Tribal Authorities because these Authorities regularly sorted out “problems” in the region.

#### **“Working politics”: Regular men**

As I stated earlier, ten thousand men returned to Maputaland in 1999 after they lost their jobs on the Witwatersrand mines. Unemployment was a hard blow to these men. In a survey I did of 129 households at the Ubombo craft market, twenty-five households (19%) indicated that they received remittances from men living in other areas. Only five of these men worked outside KwaZulu-Natal. Four migrants still worked on the mines. Thus, only three percent of the sampled households still relied upon the remittances of migrant mine workers, the source of income that had been the mainstay of many households only fifteen years previously.

Since employment was scarce, many men were supported by the meagre earnings of their wives and older children. The gendered division of labour prohibited many men from taking up female occupations such as agriculture, trade or basket weaving. Official politics (a male domain) could absorb only a fraction of all the men who returned to Maputaland.

Despite these limitations, many local men were “working politics”. Maputaland saw a proliferation of local-level committees and task-teams, all headed by entrepreneurial men. Any group of people working as a co-operative (or something resembling it) at an activity that might be loosely construed as a “development project” could utilise the rhetoric of “grassroots representation” and form a committee to look after their affairs. I met representatives of “youth living with AIDS”, “vegetable growers” and “people testing for cataracts”, to name but a few.

Men took great pains to keep politics a male domain, and sometimes even assumed leadership positions of women’s groups. This was the case at the Ubumbano craft market where John Mlambo was elected as chairman of the committee even though no man was allowed to sell at the market. Apparently, a man had always chaired the Ubumbano committee, even when they were corrupt. For instance, the previous chairman of the craft market never showed up for any meetings and illegally used almost R30 000 in the Ubumbano bank account (save R150) and still served his full term. John’s leadership had some ruinous consequences for members of the Ubumbano craft market. For instance, in December 2001, John approved plans to open a privately owned curio-shop on the beach. Many tourists bought their hats and curios from this stall rather than walking to the craft market behind the dunes. Crafters at Ubumbano complained that their



income for the December holidays (traditionally the tourist high season) was considerably lower than in other years. Some women even made more money during August (mid-winter) than they did during the December holidays.

Men like John Mlambo chaired a whole range of such committees and showed extraordinary activity in attending meetings and “networking”. These men were not paid for their services. Most micro-level committees could not even cover their representatives’ transport fees to meetings in neighbouring districts. However, in attending enough committee meetings over a wide enough spectrum, individual men built up political capital and large networks of mutual obligation. A man’s commitment was often measured in terms of the amount of money he spent on attending a meeting. The hosts of meetings often took note of the distance attendees travelled and the difficulties they had to overcome to attend the meeting. These inventories of hardship were expressed during the obligatory sessions during which attendees had to introduce themselves and state where they came from. The meetings were characterised by resolute bureaucracy. I did not attend a single meeting where the minutes of a previous meeting was left out or where those present were not noted on the roster. While attending countless of these meetings, I gained the distinct impression that the contents of meetings were not as important as their attendance.

When a particular project received money from donors, leaders usually commissioned someone within their network to help them set up a business plan or to help them organise more funding. Such partnerships promised large financial returns for the commissioned man. However, in order to secure potential commissions like these, one had to “get around”. Kehla, a well-connected local politician, called it “spreading the

gospel". On their part, the developers did not object to working with local men on projects earmarked for women.

Despite the disastrous decisions that men made on behalf of women and their self-interested politicking, women seldom spoke of men as the source of their oppression. At the Ubumbano craft market, everyone praised John for his efforts to "develop" the market and none of the women campaigned for the position of chairperson. It was also taken for granted that the next chairperson would also be a man. This was not because the crafters were apolitical or that they were blind to the effects wrought by a *chairman's* decisions. Rather, many of the women felt that politics was an impotent male domain, where things seldom got done. Women like Jatlula Ngobese said that they would rather do the work and leave the "rest" up to the men. The "rest" referred to that domain where things were endlessly discussed. Most women remained deeply cynical of men's ability to actually change things with their "development".

### **Out in the cold: Delinquents and development**

By virtue of their unpopularity or age, a large group of local men did not serve on any local committees. Young men were generally regarded as unsuitable for leadership positions. These men were truly left out in the cold. They were unemployed and were likely to remain that way in the light of the LSDI's emphasis on the development of a service industry traditionally reserved for women. Even manual labour for men in the region had dried up as developers started to employ women. Local contractors were starting to use women in jobs that were widely considered to be "men's work". The

contractor that built the last stretch of the LSDI road to Mbaswana used female workers in two of his construction teams. On questioning one of the engineers about this, he replied that women worked harder than men because they had children to feed. Women were also less likely to strike or cause trouble. It was a sentiment that I heard from many employers during my research. As women were entering the female-friendly service industries, male workers were becoming obsolete. As their economic potential to earn wages decreased, local men became less and less desirable as long-term sexual partners or husbands.

In this context, it was not surprising that large numbers of young men who were “up to no good” roamed the countryside. According to women at the Ubumbano craft market, these men were organised into gangs and made money through illegal activities such as gunrunning, selling *cannabis* to tourists), theft and muggings<sup>15</sup>. The gangs were widely feared, and they were known for the extreme violence that they perpetrated against their victims. Gangs of young men regularly raped women and assaulted elderly people. A group of women in the Mbaswana area were so fed up with crime that they asked the Zikhali Tribal Authority to do something about the matter. In response, the women were told to wear longer skirts and to walk about in groups. The women were not so much outraged at the answer, than they were at the blatant impotence of the Tribal Authorities (or for that matter, any other authorities) to deal with the “problem” of delinquent men. For their part, the gangs were disdainful of the Tribal Authorities and derided the committee chairmen for “scratching in the ground like chickens” for money.

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<sup>15</sup> Since they were viewed as extremely dangerous, I did not risk doing an intensive study on these men and most of my information was second-hand.



At the Ubumbano craft market, teenage craft traders remarked that there was a growing trend among young boys to follow in the footsteps of their older delinquent brothers. Dudu and I interviewed a small group of runaway boys at Sodwana Bay who made a living by begging and stealing from tourists. These boys did not attend school because they “did not learn anything there” and none of them had any plans for the future. Socially, the boys did not keep in contact with their families and lived in a gang with other boys. As a gang, they shared their daily income and looked after one another. They could not tell us exactly where they stayed and Dudu guessed that they lived “in the bush”.

Delinquent men targeted the most vulnerable members of society; pensioners, women that lived on their own, and individual harvesters. Gangs frequently mugged pensioners just as they collected their state pensions. Crafters were especially afraid of the gangs who raped women at harvesting sites. These attacks were an assault on the reproductive capabilities of women, in an environment where a lack of employment opportunities and strict gender role prescriptions hampered men’s abilities to be productive members of society.

### **Conclusion: The impotence of men’s politics**

Chiefs in the Maputaland region did not present primordial or uncontested political realities. In this regard, the institution of chieftaincy was fundamentally challenged in the 1980s when people in the region protested against the chiefs’ complicity to the apartheid system. Some writers even claimed that South Africa could not be democratic without the

summarily abolishment of the whole chiefly institution. The history of the region also bore witness to constant succession disputes. In my research area, the cases of chief Zikhali and chief Nxumalo illustrated the extent to which the chiefly position was dependent on the individual agency of chiefs. The political importance of both chiefs is partly attributable to their individual ability to adapt and participate in discourses with the wider provincial and national political arenas. However, development projects and the land claims process created a space in which local chiefs and other Tribal Authorities could act as brokers between developers and local communities.

It was in this position that chiefs were often politically emasculated. In the developers' language, "representing" people often meant merely being present at meetings. Chiefs became empty tokens of the developers' notions of "community representation". In development planning sessions for instance, the mostly white development fraternity spoke English. For most chiefs, this was a third or fourth language. Apart from the basic communication problem, developers often outnumbered chiefs at the planning sessions. Chief Ndlovu also complained that development plans were often drawn up by the time that the "community" was consulted. This was the case with the LSDI's tarred roads and the Uthungulu Regional Council's erection of a craft market. The enormous amounts of money that some chiefs received for their "cooperation" also forced them to sedately accept whatever the developers proposed. As such, most chiefs were forced into a precarious position. Chiefs were not in an economic position to resist "development" while their "official" political marginalisation meant that they could not contest the legitimacy of developers in the "democratic" domain. The

chiefs' ability to talk back to the developers was thus often stymied in a one-on-one situation.

Whilst chiefs had little influence in their encounters with developers, they offered valuable resources to local people. Here, chiefs' courts were often an effective alternative to the magistrate, and chiefs like Petrus Nxumalo promised to bring development where the municipal councils failed to deliver on promises. However, chiefs' impotence in this arena was also showed up. For instance, chiefs lacked the power to address the problems of escalating crime and the growing numbers of delinquent youth. Very often, the arrangement between chiefs and subjects whom they claimed to represent precluded chiefs from intruding on people's autonomy. Ordinary people were often extremely cynical about politicians. They considered politicians to be as inevitable as taxes and death. There was also an acceptance that chiefs would look after their own interests first. As long as these interests did not interfere with the locals' daily lives too much, people were content to subscribe to the fiction that the chiefs "represented" them.

In the eyes of local people, municipal councillors were even more impotent. In their emphasis on the procedural instead of the substantive aspects of democracy, these councillors represented just another forum in which men spoke all day long. They seemed unable to change people's lives and were therefore useless. Unlike the chiefs, these municipal councillors did not even have political capital in the form of "tradition". In this regard, democracy had a different meaning for people in Maputaland than for the councillors. Democracy was "something to eat from", not just the "opportunity" to be vaguely "represented".



In the cracks between the spheres where municipal councillors, chiefs and developers met, some local men started to “work politics”. They created networks of local men who identified and filled situations where local people “needed” to be represented to outsiders. In this capacity, men often imitated the rhetoric of municipal councillors and chiefs. Unlike the municipal councillors, local people did not even expect to “eat” from the representation that these men promised them.

Despite the apparent “illicit cohabitation”<sup>16</sup> between chiefs, the state, municipal councillors and developers, local people were not “zombified” through their arrangement with politicians (cf. Mbembe 1992: 4). They maintained a world apart from politics in which things were “done”. When the autonomy of this world was threatened by the ambitions of the developers, local people resisted. They have not given over to the hollow pretence and the fatalistic banality that characterises Mbembe (1992)’s postcolonial world.

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<sup>16</sup> In the postcolonial state the relationship between the state and its subjects is fraught by the fact that the commandement and its subjects have to share the same living space (Mbembe 1992: 4).