

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE MOMENT

PICTURING AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PROJECT IN SOUTH AFRICA AND SWAZILAND

[Severin Lenart]



VOL. I: PHOTO ESSAYS AND
FIELDWORK REPORTS,

2007–11

HALLE (SAALE) 2013

MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
DEPARTMENT 'INTEGRATION AND CONFLICT'
FIELD NOTES AND RESEARCH PROJECTS IV

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The Complexity of the Moment – Picturing an Ethnographic Project in South Africa and Swaziland: Vol. I: Photo Essays and Fieldwork Reports, 2007–11

Published by Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle (Saale)
P.O. Box 11 03 51

D-06017 Halle/Saale (Germany)

Phone 49|0345|2 92 70

<http://www.eth.mpg.de>

ISSN 2193-987X

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Cover Photo: Abbreviation SD on car number plates in Swaziland signifies in common parlance Sobhuza Dlamini, former king and *iNgwenyama* of the Kingdom of Swaziland, Piggs Peak, Swaziland, 2009 © Severin Lenart

Printed 2013 by Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle (Saale)
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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

(GÜNTHER SCHLEE)

ABOUT THE SERIES

This series of *Field Notes and Research Projects* does not aim to compete with high-impact, peer reviewed books and journal articles, which are the main ambition of scholars seeking to publish their research. Rather, contributions to this series complement such publications. They serve a number of different purposes.

In recent decades, anthropological publications have often been purely discursive – that is, they have consisted only of words. Often, pictures, tables, and maps have not found their way into them. In this series, we want to devote more space to visual aspects of our data.

Data are often referred to in publications without being presented systematically. Here, we want to make the paths we take in proceeding from data to conclusions more transparent by devoting sufficient space to the documentation of data.

In addition to facilitating critical evaluation of our work by members of the scholarly community, stimulating comparative research within the institute and beyond, and providing citable references for books and articles in which only a limited amount of data can be presented, these volumes serve an important function in retaining connections to field sites and in maintaining the involvement of the people living there in the research process. Those who have helped us to collect data and provided us with information can be given these books and booklets as small tokens of our gratitude and as tangible evidence of their cooperation with us. When the results of our research are sown in the field, new discussions and fresh perspectives might sprout.

Especially in their electronic form, these volumes can also be used in the production of power points for teaching; and, as they are open-access and free of charge, they can serve an important public outreach function by arousing interest in our research among members of a wider audience.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Unlike other authors in this series, who are part of the



International Max Planck Research School on Retaliation, Mediation and Punishment

department *Integration and Conflict*, Severin Lenart has been a PhD candidate in the Project Group *Legal Pluralism*, the precursor of our department *Law and Anthropology* (Professor Foblets). His supervisors were Keebet von Benda-Beckmann and Richard Rottenburg. His connection to me consists in his status as a member of REMEP, the *International Max Planck Research School on Retaliation, Mediation and Punishment* (www.remep.mpg.de), of which Hans-Jörg Albrecht and I are the chairpersons. It has been a pleasure being associated with Severin Lenart and his work in courses and workshops and as one of the members of his doctoral committee.

INTRODUCTION

(SEVERIN LENART)

This booklet, published in the FIELD NOTES AND RESEARCH PROJECTS series, serves the complementary purpose of providing pictorial illustrations of my doctoral fieldwork in South Africa and Swaziland. I conducted ethnographic research for my dissertation (Lenart 2013) between October 2008 and October 2009 as well as for five weeks in September and early October 2011. I had built this study on insights I had gathered for my Magister thesis (Lenart 2007a) during a previous stay in the region between February and April 2007 (cf. Lenart 2007b; Schweitzer and Lenart 2008).

In my PhD I explore the ways traditional leaders establish and maintain authority in plural and institutional settings in eMjindini/Barberton, South Africa. The argument runs as follows: when we consider the importance of the production of locality – and thus the construction of space and boundaries as means of governance for the exercise of authority (cf. Lenart 2012a) – it becomes apparent that land and government recognition form the basis of the traditional leaders' claim to authority while the management of disputes is the principal pathway through which traditional leaders not only maintain but, most notably, try to expand their political and normative authority over people living beyond the actual territorial boundaries of their chieftaincy. Through the close geographical proximity of the rural eMjindini chieftaincy and the urban township of Barberton, the residence of many headmen (*tindvuna*) in the latter and the constant mobility of people between both, different sets of rules, rights and norms travel and shape the notion of the chieftaincy's legitimacy and its related practices. To analyse these processes, I examined the dynamics in legal arenas among the chieftaincy, state and non-state institutions and the local populations in two adjoining siSwati (Swazi) speaking regions. The first, and the main focus of my dissertation, is located in the South African province of Mpumalanga and the other, as a comparative excursus, in Hhohho, the north-western district of the Kingdom of Swaziland (see map 1). My main purpose of doing research in Swaziland was not necessarily for systematic comparative reasons, but rather to help me developing a broader understanding of my main field site in South Africa, since people there were constantly referring to conditions and practices in the kingdom. In regard to dispute management, my PhD focuses on the variegated ways people deal with problems arising from the belief in invisible forces and gender/marital related issues – matters which deeply affect rural and urban populations alike.

During my prolonged stay in the region in 2008/2009, I came across a variety of topics which, for different reasons, could not make it into my final dissertation. Some of them were more related than others to my actual subject matter, but all of them somehow interacted at one or the other point, be it due to the very same actors or simply because they happened at the same time or

at the same place. Most of the topics presented in this booklet directly refer to my PhD thesis, like the sections on cultural festivals, traditional healing and witchcraft related disputes (see also Lenart forthcoming for the section ‘Thabiso and the demons’). But there are also two sections which are not dealt with in my dissertation, namely ‘illegal gold mining’ and the ‘Barberton Commercial Medicinal Plant Project’ known as Tinjojela (but see Lenart 2012b; cf. Thornton 2004). This variety of fieldwork topics is presented in mainly three ways: photo essays, extracts from fieldwork reports to my supervisors in Germany, and verbatim, translated court cases from customary courts in South Africa and Swaziland. These cases were first fully transcribed and then translated from siSwati into English by my field assistant, Thabisile Msibi, and my siSwati teacher, Gugu Mavayeya. The pictures for the photo essays were all taken between 2005 and 2011 by myself, except photos XX–XX which were taken by my Swaziland field assistant, Nkosinathi Magagula.



Map 1: South Africa (Mpumalanga Province) and Swaziland (Hhohho District)

In this introduction I want to contextualise the fieldwork topics in this booklet by adding some background information about my ethnographic research and the field sites in South Africa and Swaziland. For that reason I render an excerpt called “Doing ethnography in the field” from my dissertation (Lenart 2013: 46–57):

DOING ETHNOGRAPHY ‘IN THE FIELD’

I first visited the southern African region in the year 2005 when I undertook a journey with three fellow students. Our trip took us from Johannesburg via Swaziland to KwaZulu-Natal, and further via Lesotho to the Western Cape where we then met with our Anthropology professor from the University of Vienna, his wife and other students to conduct ethnographic research in the wine regions around Cape Town. In this practical course of ‘doing ethnography’ (Geertz 1973), we explored the processes of social and political transformation in the South African wine industry where, together with two colleagues, I investigated in particular the effects of the land reform in viticulture (Handl et al. 2008; Schweitzer and Lenart 2006; cf. Zips 2008).

The challenges of the transformation and redistribution of land has been one of the important cornerstones of the South African transition from apartheid to a democratic dispensation (Ntsebeza and Hall 2007). I set myself to study these processes when I decided to conduct further research in South Africa in the course of my university studies. This time, however, I chose to do it at the other end of the country, in a place that was practically unknown to me but its scenic beauty I had already seen during the road trip two years before. As probably often, the decision of doing ethnography in the place one chooses it to do, may be a sheer coincidence. By making arrangements for my planned research trip, I got in touch with different South African anthropologists via email in order to gain support for my endeavour. In fact, all of them offered me to visit them at their respective institutions, but one submitted an offer I could not reject. Robert Thornton from Wits University kindly suggested to do research in Barberton, a small town in the Lowveld region in the province of Mpumalanga, where he had a project.

On my arrival in South Africa in February 2007, I then got in touch with him and he provided me with contact details of his then research assistant, Zelda Gama. Over the phone she told me to get off of the minibus at the eM-jindini taxi rank in the township where she would be awaiting me. This is just what I told the taxi driver. Astonished about the request of a white-skinned man to dismount in the ‘Black’ township,¹ the driver seemed to be convinced

¹ I use ‘White’, ‘Black’, ‘Coloured’, ‘Indian’, ‘Asian’ etc. with a capital letter in order to point to the social, political, economic and racist constructions of these categories which became statutory with the South African *Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950*. Thereby I aim to take account of their specific meanings in the southern African context because neglecting them would mean to neglect the social realities

that I had no idea – and he was absolutely right at that time – so he dropped me at the main taxi rank in the central business district of Barberton, some 4 kilometres further, a place seemingly more appropriate for a ‘White’ stranger. However, once picked up by Zelda, we boarded a taxi and drove back to the township where I moved into a small guest house that should become my home for the next three months. The decision of the taxi driver to drop me at the taxi rank in town rather than in the township, is comprehensible for me as things are now. But back then, it struck me with some surprise. Although I had read a few things about apartheid at that time, and even had been travelling and doing (group) research in the country before, I still knew fairly little about how the legacy of racial segregation has continuously influenced the daily life of probably all South Africans. Causing astonishment of being a ‘White’ person in a ‘Black’ environment should become a constant concomitant while doing ethnography in southern Africa. In the course of fieldwork in 2007, I mainly focused on the relationship between the resurgence of chieftaincy and the politics of land (Lenart 2007a; Schweitzer and Lenart 2008). Different aspects of this study such as the land reform process through which the institution of chieftaincy was re-established in eMjindini Trust, have important influence on my dissertation (Lenart 2013), as land in the sense of territory represents one major pillar in the traditional leaders’ claim to power and authority in the eMjindini/Barberton area (cf. Lenart 2012a). With the assistance of Zelda Gama, who unfortunately passed away after my third stay in the region in 2011, I met people from all strata of society ranging from the local state administration and the land and business sectors to workers, farmers, and traditional leaders as well as healers. One of these traditional healers also gave me a Swazi nickname since he had difficulties pronouncing and remembering my real name. From then on people call me *Siyaya*, loosely translated meaning something like ‘we are going forward’.

With this ‘groundwork’ of data and the contacts I had established during my first stay, my second access to the field in October 2008 was fairly easy to implement. After having arrived and organised a car in Johannesburg, I moved off in the direction of the rising sun, the province of Mpumalanga,² where I should spend eight months in eMjindini/Barberton before moving to Piggs Peak and Mpofu to conduct comparative research in Swaziland’s north-western district of Hhohho for four additional months (see map 2³).

on the ground and the daily use and fixation of these categories despite that the South African parliament repealed the act in 1991. Using these categories, however, does not convey my personal opinion on these issues.

² Mpumalanga means east or literally ‘the place where the sun rises’ in siSwati, isiZulu and some other Bantu languages.

³ I am indebted to Lisa Wiesenthal for the spadework of this map, especially the drawing-up of the Swaziland field sites. I would like to thank her for the substantial support.

Borders and borderlands may provide important resources for human agency in many different ways, especially if they mark a boundary between two different ideological polity systems as we find in siSwati speaking southern Africa (Bukurura 2001: 422–423; Simelane and Crush 2004; cf. Kynoch et al. 2001; McGregor 1998; Peberdy and Crush 1998). A second consequent reason is that the ethnographic sites represent fields of multiplex and overlapping socio-cultural identities. The majority of people in the Umjindi Municipality, for instance, identify themselves not only as South Africans and/or Barbertonians, but also as Swazis within a transnational community. And thirdly, there is the on-going process of the revitalisation of the eMjindini chieftaincy in all its facets, which is explored in my dissertation.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN FIELD SITES

The deeply folded and peaked Makhonjwa mountain range with grassy ridges and forested valleys defines the south-eastern frontier of the Umjindi Local Municipality. This administrative subdivision close to the Swaziland border comprises diverse tracts of land including an urban area, agriculture and forestry, several nature reserves and gold mines with adjoining settlements, sparsely populated rural areas and a chieftaincy in eMjindini Trust. Umjindi was established in the year 2000 and is estimated to be home for around 78,000 inhabitants, thereof about 71,000 urbanites (Umjindi Municipality 2008a: 14; cf. Wiesenthal 2010b: 7–8). While the town of Barberton and its suburbs were classified as ‘White’ under apartheid, the territory allocated to the ‘Black’ majority was referred to as ‘Black’ township or ‘Black’ location, separated by a ‘Coloured’ and an ‘Indian’ location serving as buffer zones.

Today’s official name of the former classified ‘Black’ urban area is eMjindini, confusingly enough, just as the chieftaincy.⁹ This attribution arose from the apartheid categorisation of all African people into ethnic ‘tribes’ in the 1960s following the then ideology that “all Africans were thoroughly ‘tribalized’ at heart, and therefore spiritually and culturally anchored in ethnically defined ‘homelands’” (Posel 1991: 27). This also implied an affiliation to a specific chief. In the case of eMjindini/Barberton there was no homeland, but a chief. This chief was the current chief’s grandfather, Chief Mhola, and that is why the African population of the township was associated with the eMjindini chieftaincy. But in common parlance the township, today composed of 15 Extensions and a number of informal settlements,¹⁰ is referred to

⁹ In various historical accounts the term eMjindini is also spelled as Mjindini (Bornman 2006; Curror and Bornman 2002; Macmillan 1991; Masebula 1988), Emzhindini (H. Kuper 1947) or Emtshindini (H. Kuper 1980). Today, the orthographies eMjindini, Mjindini or Emjindini are common in the area.

¹⁰ At the latest from the late 1980s, the township has expanded extensively and initial informal settlements continuously have been upgraded with so-called RDP-houses, a subsidised housing scheme included in the socio-economic policy framework

as location, *lokasie* (Afrikaans), *eLokshini* or *eKasi* (siSwati), and the term eMjindini usually denotes the chieftaincy. For the sake of readability and to avoid confusion, I shall speak of the ‘township’ when referring to eMjindini Township, and of ‘eMjindini Trust’ when specifically referring to the trust area. Further, I decided to use the name ‘eMjindini’ for the (imagined) chieftaincy, which comprises eMjindini Trust, the township but also surrounding land as well as the town and suburbs of Barberton (*Babtini* in siSwati). When I talk about the area in more general terms without particular reference to the chieftaincy, I shall speak of eMjindini/Barberton.



Photo 1: A rainy summer day in the Barberton central business district (2008)

called *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP) partly implemented by the African National Congress (ANC) since 1994 (cf. Ramutsindela 2001). For an illuminating study on subsidised housing in eMjindini/Barberton see Wiesenthal (2010a, 2010b).



Photo 2: A historic building in Barbarton

(2007)



Photo 3: Food stalls in front of a large supermarket in Barbarton

(2008)



Photo 4: Barberton

(2007)



Photo 5: Crown Street, Barberton

(2008)



Photo 6: Government-subsidized houses in eMjindini Township, Barberton (2007)



Photo 7: Extension 11 of the eMjindini Township, Barberton (2007)



Photo 8: Fruit stalls in eMjindini Township, Barberton

(2007)



Photo 9: Former hostels and now family units, eMjindini Township, Barberton

(2008)



Photo 10: Pine tree plantations in a wintry scene, Makhonjwa Mountains (2009)



Photo 11: The Makhonjwa Mountains during summer (2008)



Photo 12: Makhonjwa Mountains seen from eMjindini Township, Barberton (2008)

In many respects eMjindini/Barberton constitutes a ‘micro-cosmos’ of the South African society in the configuration of a small town. Economic activities of the area represent a cross-section of the South African economy with active mines, large- and small-scale farms, a small industrial branch as well as financial and business services (Umjindi Municipality 2012: 54). This constitutes a remarkable diversity for a small town and is probably one of the reasons for its relative stability despite the closing down of a number of gold mines in the last years. The official statistics, however, reflect only one part of the actual economic activities. Especially the township, but not exclusively, features an important and essential ‘informal’ economy. Presumably all inhabitants participate in this sector in one or the other way. This includes taxi and transport companies, small businesses like tuck or spaza shops, informal drinking places (*shebeens*), garages, barbers and hairdressers. Further, it includes services such as room letting and traditional healing, as well as criminal activities like smuggling marijuana from Swaziland, poaching, ‘illegal’ gold mining and trading with stolen commodities.

In addition to the diversity of economic activities, there is also a diversity of languages in the area. The mother tongue of most people in Umjindi is siSwati (77%), followed by Afrikaans (7.8%), English and Xitsonga (both

4.1%), and isiZulu (2.3%).¹¹ Other languages, though in relatively smaller numbers, are Sesotho, Sepedi, isiXhosa, Setswana, isiNdebele and Tshivenda, thus all eleven South African official languages are represented (Umjindi Municipality 2008a: 19). From the 78,000 inhabitants of the municipality, 86.8% identify themselves as 'Black' and/or 'African', whereas 9.9% as 'White', 2.7% as 'Indian/Other' and 0.6% as 'Coloured' (Umjindi Municipality 2010: 29). When looking at the figures of the urban area alone, it turns out that 91.7% consider themselves as 'Black' and/or 'African', 5.9% as 'White' and each more than 1% as 'Indian' or 'Asian', 'Coloured' or 'Other' (Umjindi Municipality 2007: 9). For eMjindini Trust, official documents indicate that about 2,300 people live in the area (Umjindi Municipality 2012: 245). But according to the secretary of the chieftaincy they have already registered around 3,000 inhabitants.¹²



Photo 13: A rural homestead in eMjindini Trust

(2009)

¹¹ All these figures are to be treated as rough indications because the numbers vary in different publications of the Umjindi Municipality. However, these numbers help to convey a certain picture of the size and diversity of the area.

¹² Interview with male *mabhalane* (secretary) of eMjindini, eMjindini Trust, March 17, 2009.



Photo 14: Housing in eMjindini Trust

(2009)



Photo 15: Government-subsidised housing in KaMadakwa, eMjindini Trust

(2009)



Photo 16: A commercial farm next to eMjindini Trust

(2009)



Photo 17: eMjindini Trust settlement

(2009)



Photo 18: eMjindini Trust settlement

(2009)

The heterogeneity of the socio-cultural conditions also becomes apparent in the religious configuration. Umjindi is home to a small but well-established Muslim community¹³ as well as a huge diversity of Christian churches. The different church affiliations range from the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and Roman Catholic to Anglican and Apostolic, and further from Pentecostal to numerous Born Again Churches. The vast majority of the ‘Black’ population, however, practices a hybrid form of Christianity and traditional African religion including ancestral cults and the belief in magic and witchcraft. Other features that need to be emphasised are the area’s poverty¹⁴ and the high unemployment rate of officially 25.1% (Umjindi Municipality 2010: 26), an official HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of around 20% (ibid. 47),¹⁵ and its patriarchal character.

¹³ Although their religious orientation mainly tends towards the Indian subcontinent, one can easily observe a strong Arabic influence, especially a traditional Saudi clothing style (e. g., *taqiyah*, *thawb* or *thobe*) (cf. Shell 2000).

¹⁴ The percentage of people and households living in poverty in Mpumalanga is 44.1%. There is no data available for Umjindi (Umjindi Municipality 2008a: 21).

¹⁵ In the whole of South Africa the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is estimated at about 17.8%, see e. g., <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sf.html> (retrieved September 24, 2012). For a fascinating study on sex, networks and AIDS in South Africa and Uganda see Thornton (2008).







Photo 19: Churches in Barberton, eMjindini Township and eMjindini Trust (2009)



THE SWAZILAND FIELD SITES

The loop R40 road forms an arduous, though short and scenic access from Barberton to northern Swaziland through what has become the Barberton Makhonjwa Mountain Lands World Heritage Site area. These mountains contain the oldest and best preserved sequence of volcanic and sedimentary rocks on earth.¹⁶ However, shortly after the border crossing point, the road opens up to look out on a uniform but colourful sea of houses in Bulembu, a former asbestos mining town¹⁷ and now privately owned by Bulembu Ministries Swaziland, a North American religious non-profit organisation.¹⁸

Driving on, a terrible rocky downhill road then leads to the small town of Piggs Peak (*eSpiki* in siSwati) in the Highveld region of Hhohho. This town was once an asbestos and gold mining centre and is now known for being the capital of the Hhohho District and a service centre to its hinterland. It has a population of about 6,000 people and its economy is mainly supported by the forestry¹⁹ and retail industry, accounting together for over 90% of all employment in the town. There are more than twenty different churches as well as a small central business district with a shopping complex and a market hall in the town's centre. Business activities range from small to medium-scale retail outlets such as supermarkets, furniture and clothing shops as well as financial services. The Piggs Peak town council sees a wide potential for development,²⁰ especially in the field of tourism which is currently fairly weak in the town but given to some extent in its vicinity.²¹ The different residential areas differ in their size and their socio-economic conditions ranging from middle-class houses with garages and gardens,²² to densely populated informal settlements consisting mainly of mud stick houses. Piggs Peak further hosts a number of government offices providing public services to the town as well as its hinterland, which includes rural areas such as Ntfontjeni, Bulembu, Maguga and Buhleni.

16 See <http://www.bmmlworldheritage.org> (retrieved January 28, 2013).

17 The Havelock mine operated from 1939 to 2001 and was at times the fifth-largest asbestos mine in the world and the largest private employer in Swaziland (McCulloch 2005).

18 See <http://www.bulembu.org> (retrieved January 28, 2013).

19 Two timber companies, Mondi Timber and Swaziland Plantations, have vast expanses of afforested land within and around Piggs Peak and each operates a saw mill and/or a processing unit.

20 Interviews with male mayor of Piggs Peak, Piggs Peak, September 16, 2009; and male planning engineer of the Piggs Peak town council, Piggs Peak, June 29, 2009.

21 The most prominent tourism attractions are the Hawane Malolotja Nature Reserve, Maguga Dam, Matsamo Cultural Village, Piggs Peak Orion Hotel and Casino as well as the Phophonyane Falls.

22 Through the construction of the Maguga Dam on the Komati river at the beginning of the century, Piggs Peak's housing sector was hugely improved.

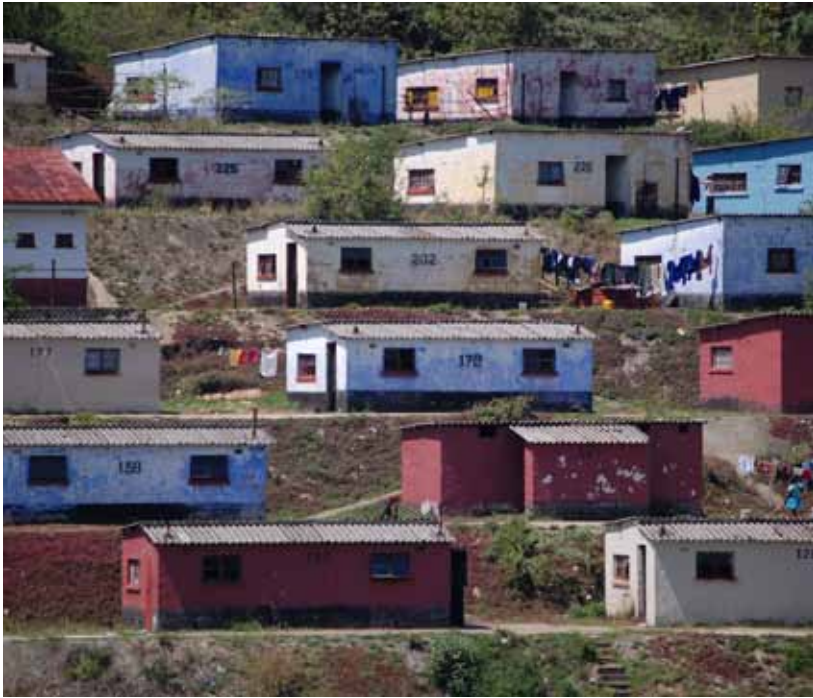


Photo 20: Housing in Bulembu, a former asbestos mining town (2009)



Photo 21: Bulembu is now privately owned by Bulembu Ministries Swaziland (2009)



Photo 22: Forest plantations around Pigg's Peak

(2009)



Photo 23: Mangwaneni Township, Pigg's Peak

(2009)

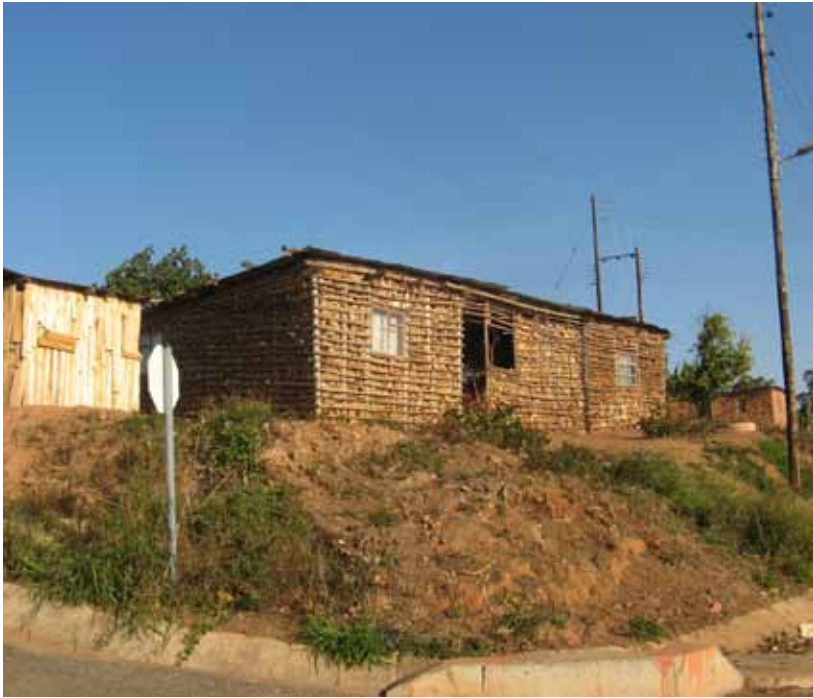


Photo 24: A mud and stone stick house in Mangwaneni Township, Piggs Peak (2009)



Photo 25: Mangwaneni Township, Piggs Peak

(2009)



Photo 26: Pigg's Peak town centre

(2009)



Photo 27: Glen Village, Pigg's Peak

(2009)

Buhleni, which is situated in the Lowveld of the Hhohho District, is famous for accommodating one of a number of royal residences in the kingdom. Every year on a weekend in February, this place is home to the national *Buganu* ceremony, where His Majesty King Mswati III and the queen mother join regiments of *emabutfo* (warriors) and *lutsango* (women's regiments) in a ceremony of song and dance in celebration of the harvest of the marula fruit and its processing into *buganu*, the popular fermented marula beer.²³ The place of Buhleni consists of a couple of houses, a supermarket, a taxi rank and a police station and serves as a small service centre to its rural environment.

Eastbound, the tarred road changes into a dirt road which leads to Mpofu, my second Swaziland field site. The village of Mpofu, meaning eland (antelope), is situated at the confluence of the Mpofu and Komati rivers and the vegetation is characterised by tall grassveld and scattered trees, the so-called sour bushveld. This 'out-of-the-way place' (Tsing 1993) was founded in the course of the Swaziland Land Settlement initiative in 1946, is structured into eight units and falls under the chieftaincy of Mkhuzweni, a royal village a few kilometres to the west.²⁴ Mpofu is a poor rural community where roads are unpaved, transport facilities restricted and clean water a limited resource. When the few existing bore holes go haywire or people cannot afford to pay the electricity bill to pump the water to the community taps, women and children have to walk to the river to fill containers with river water for cooking, drinking and cleaning. This water, however, may place them at risk to get in touch with parasites that cause bilharzia and typhoid fever. Another striking feature of this place is the noticeable high number of destitute families and children orphaned by HIV and AIDS. Swaziland tops the inglorious list of the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the world with estimated 25.9% of the adult population living with the disease, resulting in one of the lowest life expectancy rates worldwide.²⁵ To improve livelihood conditions for such families and children, many women in Mpofu render church welfare work, run regular soup kitchens or congregate in women's garden associations to produce healthy vegetables and fruits.²⁶ In every which way, Mpofu is surrounded by either bushveld, small agricultural fields or sugar cane

²³ This fruit takes on such an important role in Swazi society that the Swaziland National Museum dedicates an extra section to the marula tree and the preparation of marula beer in its permanent exhibition.

²⁴ There is no data available for the number of inhabitants in Mpofu.

²⁵ See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/wz.html> (retrieved August 30, 2012).

²⁶ Interviews with female member of the Methodist Church, Mpofu, September 3, 2009; and female member of the Zion Christian Church, Mpofu, September 12, 2009; and vice-chairwoman of the Free Evangelical Church, Mpofu, August 22, 2009; and female member of the Apostolic of Zion Church, Mpofu, August 22, 2009; and female member of a garden association, Mpofu, August 5, 2009.

plantations, the village's sole local economic basis.²⁷ In general, the majority of households in north-western Swaziland depends on remittances sent by relatives from South Africa, some from eMjindini/Barberton and others from Nelspruit, Johannesburg or other cities. Or they receive periodic food donations from international donors such as the Red Cross, USAID or UNICEF (cf. Mabuza et al. 2008; Mabuza et al. 2009). The perceived level of poverty, different sources name about 69.2%, is considerably higher than in South Africa where it officially ranges at a level of 23%.²⁸



Photo 28: At the outskirts of Mpofu

(2009)

²⁷ Interviews with female member of a farmers' association, Mpofu, September 27, 2009; and chairman of a farmer's association, Mpofu, August 8, 2009.

²⁸ See e. g., <http://data.worldbank.org/country/swaziland> and <http://data.worldbank.org/country/south-africa> (retrieved September 24, 2012).



Photo 29: An abandoned house in Mpofu

(2009)



Photo 30: Papayas growing in a women's garden association, Mpofu

(2009)



Photo 31: A homestead in Mpofu

(2009)



Photo 32: Laundry washing, Mpofu River

(2009)



Photo 33: A traditional homestead in Mpopfu

(2009)

BEING ‘IN THE FIELD’

My dissertation is based on ethnographic data I gathered over altogether twelve months of fieldwork (2007–2011) in eMjindini/Barberton and four months (2009) in north-western Swaziland. I mostly conducted participant observation (Bernard 2011: 256ff) during various aspects of everyday life as well as official events such as state and chief’s courts’ hearings, village meetings, cultural ceremonies and national celebrations. I conducted structured, semi-structured and narrative interviews (ibid. 156ff),²⁹ archive research, gathered legal and policy documents, statistical information, newspaper articles, engaged in photography, collected stories and narratives such as those about witchcraft (see dispute section in this booklet), and took siSwati language lessons from a school teacher of the township. During research, I worked closely with four research assistants who all contributed to this study in their particular ways. As already mentioned, Zelda Gama supported me during my first stay in 2007. For the period of 2008–2009, I worked with Dumisani Msibi and his sister Thabisile in South Africa, and in Piggs Peak with Nkosinathi Magagula as well as, again, with Dumisani in Mpopfu. For one month in 2011, I again cooperated with the same pair of siblings.

²⁹ In this booklet, the names of interviewees and informants are not specified, but information on gender and profession or position is provided. In those cases where a name is given, they are pseudonyms.



Photo 34: Being in the field, eMjindini Township, Barberton (2008)

The first three months of fieldwork in eMjindini/Barberton, I spent together with Lisa Wiesenthal who also conducted research for her thesis in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Wiesenthal 2010b). This combination of male and female ethnographer presented itself as a valuable access to situations and insights which otherwise would have probably been denied for both of us. We discussed and reflected on experiences and observations, and quite often we got different ideas about the same situation. Lisa and I regularly undertook what she termed 'location walks' (ibid. 11), exploratory strolls where different people showed us around the township to get to know the various neighbourhoods and their inhabitants. In some cases, we met already familiar faces, whereas in others we got to know people who later also became friends and valuable informants, like the leading committee member of a local community policing forum. Many a time, we (and later I alone) were either invited or asked to participate in various everyday or special activities, like cooking and eating together, paying visits to family and friends, going places, attending healing ceremonies, weddings and church services, or simply spending time together under a shady tree while drinking beer.

In this way, the snowball or chain-referral method (Bernard 2011: 147–148) helped me to steadily expand my contacts in the field. Another beneficial research device was the car I bought for the year, an old Mazda 323 model. It turned out to be valuable not only because of the long distances between the different places in my research area, but most notably because the majority of people I worked with usually travel by foot or taxi, which operate, however, only on specific routes and cost money, a limited resource

of most of my interlocutors. The car thus offered many possibilities to make contact with people who either hitchhiked, directly approached me or whom I offered to give a ride. I often took along headmen, traditional councillors, complainants or defendants after a Sunday's court session when leaving eMjindini Trust for the township. In this manner, I regularly seized the occasion to further enquire about specific aspects of the disputes that were heard in the chief's court, or I tried to organise appointments with the parties to a dispute. In a few cases, it also happened that I took both disputants home at the same time, which created a particular kind of atmosphere in the vehicle, but nevertheless made it easier to establish contacts and so to explore the post-decision phase of a dispute. At another occasion, I was asked by a traditional healer to accompany him for cutting medicinal herbs (*muti*) in the bush. We then drove through eMjindini Trust to a neighbouring farm to fetch specific tree barks. While the healer was busy cutting and knocking, he explained to me the effects of the bark, which assists people in various difficult situations including court trials, if prepared in a specific way.

This healer together with Zelda Gama, my former research assistant, further introduced me to *Tinjojela*, the Barberton commercial medicinal plants project. This developmental project was initiated in 2002 with the aim to reduce the pressure on wild stocks of medicinal herbs as they are used for traditional healing.³⁰ Since its establishment the project has seen various ups and downs, culminating in its eventual downfall in 2008 and its revival in the following years (see further below in this booklet). One day, it happened that I met one of the Tinjojela workers at court. She had brought her neighbour to the chief's court because she was accused of practicing witchcraft. Our previous acquaintance at the project helped to facilitate follow-up meetings and so to explore the post-decision phase of her dispute.³¹

The attending of court sessions was generally one of my main activities during fieldwork. Every Sunday morning, my research assistant Dumisani and I drove by car to the chief's court in eMjindini Trust to do what Moore (2001: 99) describes as the principal form of social voyeurism: local dispute-watching.³² We took our seats in the far right corner of the old barn that is used for the hearings where we could perfectly listen to the stories while observing the proceedings.³³ While I speak conversational siSwati, I worked

³⁰ Additionally, food gardens were set out to enable subsistence farming and facilitate cash crops to generate immediate income for the community.

³¹ See the case study *Children, witches and hot intestines*.

³² In the Mkhuzweni (Mpofu) chief's court in Swaziland court sessions were held on Saturdays.

³³ I am well aware of the fact that we as ethnographers are not 'flies on the wall', quietly transparent observers (Malkki 2007: 173), but that we can and indeed do influence and shape local dynamics through our presence and participation, as I also describe in one of the chapters in my dissertation (Lenart 2013: ch. 5).

together with translators to assist me during chief's court hearings and interviews that were conducted in the vernacular. In the eMjindini and Mkhuzweni (Mpofu) chief's courts, I was also allowed to record the sessions, which were later transcribed and partly translated by my assistant Thabisile (as seen in this booklet). Further translations, my siSwati teacher and I undertook in our regular language lessons. For that reason, verbatim (translated) excerpts are quoted in the various case studies discussed in the ethnographic chapters.³⁴ Together with my research assistant Dumisani, I also observed court proceedings in the Barberton and Piggs Peak magistrate's courts in which English was the main language,³⁵ as well as the Swazi National Court and the Mkhuzweni (Mpofu) chief's court.

Before I moved to Swaziland in June 2009, I accepted an offer by the main headman of eMjindini to accompany me for an exploratory trip to the area around Piggs Peak, where he was born and raised in Nsangwini until he moved together with his father³⁶ to eMjindini/Barberton. I was kindly introduced to his family, we explored the surrounding rural areas and took some important steps to set up my fieldwork in the kingdom.³⁷ When I finally returned to Piggs Peak a few days later, I moved into a small next-door room in a guest house that was managed by a Zimbabwean family who thought to have no prospects in their home country as long as Robert Mugabe was still in power. The family was well integrated in the local community, and through them I also met a number of other migrants with whom a regular and lively exchange of our insights and experiences in Swaziland arose. When I spent time in Mpofu, I lived in the homestead of my research assistant's brother, who at times was a leading member of the local community police. I decided to do fieldwork in Mpofu because my South African assistant Dumisani was born and raised in that area. This, on the one hand, made the process of introducing and being accepted by the chief's court much easier, and, on the other, facilitated the access to the area and its people under the prevailing time circumstances.

A constant companion of my research in both South Africa and Swaziland was alcohol, or *tjwala* as it is named in siSwati. Alcohol is a ubiquitous part of everyday life in rural and urban areas alike. Particularly in the former, the production and distribution of traditional beer (*umcombotsi*) are closely

³⁴ As with interviewees and informants, the names of the disputing parties and other involved actors are pseudonyms.

³⁵ In the Barberton magistrate's court, we mainly attended court sessions on the issue of 'illegal' gold mining (see further below in this booklet).

³⁶ Before the current main headman took up his position in eMjindini, his father used to be in that position until he passed away.

³⁷ Among these, getting a research permission from the Hhohho Regional Administrator (the former District Commissioner) was the most important task.

intertwined with consumption, and in both drinking provides a focal point of relaxation and socialising, patterns which are associated with so-called ‘heavy drinking cultures’.³⁸ Alcohol has always had a central place in African religious belief as a medium for communication with the ancestors because, as Bryceson (2002a: 5) points out,

“[t]he pervasive practice of calling on the intercession of the ancestors to sanction production, distribution and consumption of alcohol may be linked to the uncertainty and seemingly supernatural changes associated with producing and consuming alcohol, as well as the perceived overall importance of the plant used to make the alcohol to the group’s material survival.”

On the one side, at times alcohol had eased the access to get in touch with people while, on the other, had also restricted their ability to communicate. In several cases, I had to cancel and postpone arranged interviews and either leave the setting or adapt myself to the given situation (cf. Room et al. 1984). But ‘no one’s fieldwork is perfect’ (Cerwonka 2007: 5) and so I often tried to make the best of the prevailing circumstances. Following this, my ethnographic research was not “a mythical, exotic, and purely intellectual experience that [was] separate from the mundane details of ‘normal’ or ‘real’ life”, but nevertheless it was “a potentially profound intellectual, physical, and emotional experience” (ibid. 6; cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

³⁸ Bryceson (2002b: 270) identifies five main features of ‘heavy drinking cultures’: “First, drinking is accorded a major role in leisure activities. [...] Second, drinking is used as a means of establishing a collective social identity and demarcating status. [...] Third, heavy drinking cultures have a social tolerance for frequent or copious drinking and drunkenness. [...] Fourth, there is a higher risk of mortality due to alcohol-related disease and accidents. [...] Fifth, adverse socioeconomic consequences, including marital discord, family breakup, violence and child welfare problems, are frequent [...]”

UMMEMO CULTURAL FESTIVAL

(PHOTO ESSAY: eMJINDINI ROYAL VILLAGE,
eMJINDINI TRUST, BARBERTON, SOUTH AFRICA)



Photo 1: The regiment (*libutfo*) (2009)



Photo 2: *Sibhaca* dancers

(2011)



Photo 3: A show fight

(2011)



Photo 4: Shawl and tablet: the amusement of onlookers

(2011)



Photo 5: The musical instruments

(2011)



Photo 6: Steely determination

(2011)



Photo 7: Members of *lutsango*, the Swazi women's regiment

(2011)



Photo 8: The flying warrior

(2011)



Photo 9: One-eighty

(2011)



Photo 10: Chief Kenneth Mawa Nkosi (2nd from left) and his regiment

(2011)



Photo 11: Merriment

(2011)



Photo 12: The modern warrior

(2011)



Photo 13: The furniture salesman in his element

(2011)



Photo 14: The butchers (2009)



Photo 15: The transport to the pots (2009)



Photo 16: The guys at the cattle kraal

(2009)



Photo 17: Chief Tikhontele Dlamini (right) in discussion

(2009)

UMHLANGA REED DANCE

(PHOTO ESSAY: LUDZIDZINI ROYAL VILLAGE, KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND)



Photo 1: Boys in traditional Swazi attire (2009)



Photo 2: Festive entry of the *timbali* ('flowers', young maidens) (2009)



Photo 3: Continued entry of the *timbali* (2009)



Photo 4: Subjects for photographers

(2009)



Photo 5: Waiting for the entry

(2009)



Photo 6: Swazi princesses at the first row

(2009)



Photo 7: Marching in

(2009)



Photo 8: The red feathers of the *ligwalagwala* bird indicate their royalty

(2009)



Photo 9: A visiting dance group from Namibia in pink-coloured dresses

(2009)



Photo 10: Royal offspring

(2009)



Photo 11: The warrior

(2009)



Photo 12: The audience and some other warriors

(2009)



Photo 13: Waiting for the king

(2009)



Photo 14: Making arrangements

(2009)



Photo 15: King Mswati III (11th from left) with princes and other influential men

(2009)

‘ILLEGAL’ GOLD MINING¹

(BARBERTON, SOUTH AFRICA, AND PIGGS PEAK, SWAZILAND)

Barberton was founded in 1884 with the discovery of gold. Today a considerable part of its economic structure is still based on the mining industry. There are several mines operating in the area: Sheba mine, New Consort mine, Fairview mine and Agnes mine among others whereby Agnes mine is running through a restructuring programme and is therefore currently inoperative. All of these mines belong to major transnational corporations. Through various conversations with different people from the municipality, traditional healers, business men as well as mine workers, I have found that the ‘grey’ or ‘hidden’ part of the mining activities around Barberton have, small positive effects but also serious negative implications.



Photo 1: The town's landmark

(2009)

Umjindi Municipality of which Barberton is the district capital has an official estimated unemployment rate of about 26.3% of the economically active population and nearly 70% (2001) of all households earn less than R1,600 per month (Umjindi Municipality 2008b). Additional sources of income are therefore needed and people take advantage of different prospects. Support of ‘illegal’ mining presents a risky but lucrative opportunity, apparently not

¹ Extracts from two fieldwork reports (October 2008 to March 2009) to my supervisor in Halle (Saale).

only for poor people from the township but also for police officers, security guards, business men and other people. An investment of about R500 for 'illegal' mining activities can be rewarded with up to several thousand rand in only a few days. Room renting in specific extensions of the township in conjunction with 'illegal' mining is another source of additional income. One of the local newspapers suggests that the 'illegal' miners are also responsible for the extraordinary number of pregnancies in exactly the same extensions. One woman told the local newspaper: "The girls that don't want to tell you the truth are also involved with these guys. What can we do? These guys are prepared to give us as much as we need, sometimes as much as R5,000 at once. Who is going to refuse that?" (*Umjindi Guardian*, November 15, 2008). Furthermore, provincial traffic officers are blamed that their presence on major highways around the town are more of a guise to take personal advantage of the 'illegal' mining trade rather than actual traffic policing (*ibid.*).

However, two court cases were tried recently in the magistrate's court because 41 suspects were discovered in two different shafts of the New Consort mine and have been arrested by the police who, for the first time, went underground searching for 'illegal' miners. Based on conversations, I can assert that the issue of 'illegal' mining and its consequential social impact have the potential of being a valuable field site for the study of conflict management. It comprises different actors such as transnational corporations, security companies, local and provincial police forces, trade unions, the magistrate's court as well as traditional leaders who are involved due to 'their' people's engagement in legal and 'illegal' mining activities. I am especially referring here to the chieftaincy of Mekemeke (Lomshiyo) under the senior Swazi Chief Tikhontele Dlamini near Low's Creek (about 30 km from Barberton).

'ILLEGAL' MINING AND ITS CRIMINAL PROCEDURE

"We've got a recent spate of 'illegal' miners, that is really getting drastic measures", statements like this from a prosecutor are not taken by surprise these days by any person in Umjindi whether he/she is a court official, salesman, tourist guide or simply unemployed. It reflects the very reality of the local situation. One cannot say it is a fairly new phenomenon but currently, especially in the last six to seven months, it escalates to a degree where the head of security of the Barberton mines states in court that his worst fear is that the so-called 'illegal' miners take over the mines and consequentially losses of jobs lead to increased suffering in an already poverty ridden province. Barberton mines employ about 2,500 people that means approximately 10,000 people are in one way or the other depending on these incomes. 'Hidden' or 'informal' economic strategies through 'illegal' mining are not covered by these numbers but there is obviously no doubt that it boosts various sectors of the economy such as house renting, purchasing of cars (mainly German brands) as well as any other small businesses and



Photo 2: A gold mine close to Barberton

(2011)

services (e. g. shebeens) conducted in and around Barberton. Apart from the economic influences, ‘illegal’ mining has serious social and cultural implications, too. It affects social relations on various scales, some dramatically and others incidentally. Due to the huge influx of prompt cash – the gold is shortly after its extraction exchanged into South African rand – gender relations, for example, are often somehow newly defined; and not only between men and women but to a certain degree also between men themselves, that is, men who ‘do have’ and men who ‘do not have’. This entails an even harder competition between women in favour of a man than it has already been so far because in Swazi tradition², and we know that it is something that is constantly being made (Macmillan 1985: 643), a man is regarded as the head of the homestead, meaning he is responsible for the whole (extended) family. One of my informants in the eMjindini township, a young woman from Swaziland, confirms this trend by stating that “I don’t need any man in my life because I earn my own money now. What then do I need a man for?” Relationships, and especially sexual relations, are to a great extent determined by economic factors. If a man can afford to have a second, third or even fourth wife – or today rather ‘girlfriends’ – he is culturally allowed to do so, even expected to do so, in order to be a ‘real’ Swazi man and gain respect from his fellows. Questions of polygamy, masculinity and its consequences apparently display themselves in the legal arena too (see Lenart 2013). At

² This is to a certain degree applicable to all Southern Nguni groups (see e. g. Hammond-Tooke 1993).

this point it is solely sufficient to mention this dimension in conjunction with ‘illegal’ mining and I will discuss these questions in another context more in depth in a following report.

So, what is actually happening in the Barberton mines? Why are mine and court officials speaking about it as if it was a war already lost? Like the situation in Zimbabwe where syndicates have taken over land and mines and the government is doing nothing, actually promoting it. To obtain a clearer picture of the situation, I will first give a description of a visit to the scene of the crime, disclose some encountered difficulties and will then lead over to the prosecution of arrested ‘illegal’ miners in the criminal court and its related problems.

THE VISIT TO THE SCENE

The tour we started on a cloudy Tuesday morning – that is a magistrate, a prosecutor, a legal-aid attorney, an interpreter and myself together with seven security guards, some of them in camouflage and heavily armed with automatic guns and rifles – should give us, or differently put the persons who work for a court of law, since I was invited by the senior prosecutor to accompany them, a better picture of the war they are fighting right now in and around the mountains comprising the southern Lowveld (as mine and court officials call it). This mountain range contains from a geological perspective the world’s oldest well preserved sequence of volcanic and sedimentary rocks (between 3,200 and 3,600 million years of age), valuable gems and rich gold deposits (cf. Currer and Bornman 2002).³ Nearly every town or settlement in the southern Lowveld area was founded around gold prospecting in 1884 (Barberton) and 1886 (Low’s Creek), respectively. Hence, there are innumerable active and inoperative shafts scattered around the mountains; numbers vary from 167 to more than 300 shafts on two single mines. Some mines are even connected underground. According to this and the given ecological realities, dense bush and animals such as black mambas, pythons, leopards and so on, the area is difficult to access and consequentially to control.

The adventure started at Fairview mine, not far from my residential area, where we changed the magistrate’s car for a 4x4 *bakkie*, as pick-ups are called in southern Africa. We drove to the famous Sheba mine where gold nuggets like in Hollywood movies have been extracted and there we were joined by the security guards who are working for a private company. On the way up to the top of a mountain on a perilous unpaved road we passed ruined buildings of the Sheba School and Victorian Hotel dating back to 1886. We finally stopped on the plateau to fix our equipment. Not knowing at all what to expect, I decided to put on a helmet and a torch and follow the security

³ Barberton and its surrounding mountains are currently running through a process of being declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Photo 3: Gold-bearing mountains

(2009)

guards to the entrance. Some remained outside because they were either to plump to fit through the exit holes or already have been underground and not willing to go there again. Before we left, we were told that there is a 60% chance of encountering ‘illegal’ miners which, of course, did not ease my mood at all. After a ten minutes’ walk through the bush, we arrived at an entrance that was observed by another security guard wearing a bullet proof vest; again my pulse soared. The security guards made sure that their weapons were loaded before we entered the shaft. Although the tunnel was bigger than I had expected one had to watch his head all the time not to bump into stones. On either side of the main tunnel numerous bypaths led either to dead ends which were sometimes used as enmeshments and even shoot-outs, or they led to other shafts that showed the way further down to different levels. Sheba mine has currently about 30 underground levels whereby others like Consort or Fairview mine even have 54 and 60, respectively; that means going down a couple of kilometres below the surface of the ground. However, we simply walked straight to a four way junction and turned right in direction of a small little light that showed the way to one of the numerous entries/exits which are frequently used by ‘illegal’ miners. We were told this is the N4 of the mine, meaning it is a highway like the National Road 4 between Johannesburg and Komatipoort going to Maputo. Apart from rubbish like empty plastic and liquor bottles, batteries which they use for small flashlights, bags and other human and non-human waste, we could also identify fresh footprints and even smell the presence of these people. What is most astonishing or difficult to imagine is the fact that these men go underground and stay



Photo 4: Barberton Gold (Pty) Ltd.

(2009)

there for not only hours or days but even weeks and months. Accordingly, the hygienic circumstances are catastrophic; there is no fresh water and no toilettes. This has even led to the outbreak of cholera in late 2008 in one of the mines unaffected of the cholera crisis in Zimbabwe and some South African provinces. As if it would not be risky or dangerous enough these ‘illegal’ miners are organised in syndicates and fighting themselves and the security guards underground with AK47s. Wounded or dead ‘illegal’ miners are currently a daily discovery and the police even stopped going down since two of their officers had been wounded in a shoot-out at the end of last year. Only 30 guards from Sheba mine are now patrolling the whole area and almost everybody expects the police to be involved in one way or another, because even police officers themselves were caught digging for gold or robbing ‘illegal’ miners systematically as a revealing local newspaper reported, too (*Umjindi Guardian*, March 2, 2009). When we arrived at the exit-hole we were able to communicate with the people who remained outside and they informed us that the ‘illegal’ miners had left a pot with freshly cooked mealie pap (maize powder; the staple food of southern Africa) behind and probably are hiding somewhere. They could easily hear us because we were a group of people talking aloud and actually not willing to meet them at all. However, we were not supposed to take this particular exit but rather turn around and pass the junction again and keep on walking through the mountain to another valley. Nervous enough, the guards raised our excitement once again by stating that ‘now it is going to be really dangerous’. I was frightened but at the same time quite thrilled. We passed numerous dead ends, shafts and holes full of rubbish and eventually after an hour all together arrived at our final exit which required us to crawl on our knees to get out of the mountain. There we found a small garbage dump and also spotted smoke from a fire in the dense bush where other ‘illegal’ miners were busy cooking their food until one of the

guards fired a gunshot in the air and immediately the fire was extinguished. To get back to the cars we had to climb up a steep mountain again and then the whole adventure more or less came to an end.

While we were underground the people outside heard a blast that was carried out by ‘illegal’ miners. Blasts, drilled holes and fires underground are the most serious problems the mine workers have to deal with because they are threatening the whole security concept and shafts can simply collapse. Trespassers who conducted ‘illegal’ mining in Consort mine on Friday, February 20, set a fire to cook their food underground with a primus stove but eventually timber caught alight and soon the fire got out of control. But, as reported, another rival faction was mostly affected and these “illegal miners died of carbon-monoxide poisoning, [...] it’s a slow death. The victim becomes incapacitated. Eyes burn and it is painful to breathe”, as the mining manager told a local newspaper (*Lowvelder/Laevelder*, February 27, 2009). The following Tuesday there were five confirmed, including a 14-year old boy, and 35 unconfirmed dead bodies found in different sections of the mine. The few survivors who were brought to hospital and later arrested identified the families of the deceased to help excavating the remains since the capacity of the mine had already been exceeded and the operation turned out to be extremely dangerous. The mine is now closed for restructuring since even the timber which supports the shafts burned down. In the eMjindini township where many of these miners stay steadily or temporarily, this story sometimes turns out to be told as follows: This particular Friday security officials of the mine opened a gas tank on purpose and the ‘workers’ – as they always accentuate in the township that they are going to work – were enticed into a trap. Once they started to cook or even light a cigarette the whole thing exploded. That is why so many of them died underground.



Photo 5: An exit at Sheba gold mine

(2009)

However, but an incident like that is nothing uncommon or unusual at the current stage where the gold mining company Pan African Resources bears losses of about three million rand per month and had arrested numerous persons in the last six to seven months and chased away innumerable trespassers counting from one to even 200 on a daily basis.⁴ Citizens from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland as well as local residents are mainly amongst the trespassers who conduct the mining.

‘WELCOME TO THE WILD, WILD WEST!’ – THE PROSECUTION OF ‘ILLEGAL’ MINERS

Once those miners have been arrested and taken over by the police, they are supposed to be brought before a court of law within 48 hours according to the criminal procedure.⁵ In general, the responsible magistrate postpones then the trial for further investigation or because of the absence of a lawyer or a free legal-aid attorney. But sometimes the accused refuse to be defended and prefer to stand themselves. So far I have observed few ‘mining trials’ where the accused had raised their voice comprehensively; they solely shook their heads while receiving the translation from the interpreter.⁶ The most common argument of defence, if they defend themselves at all, is that they were solely looking for a job and got arrested inculpably by the mine securities.⁷ But why do these young men defend themselves, if at all, or do not use the possibility of legal aid? Do they regard their situation, once arrested and standing a trial, as hopeless and lost? Or do they have other strategies through their own or other’s experiences? These are probably difficult questions to answer since I have not had any contact with arrested or convicted miners so far and have not conducted interviews yet with possible or actual attorneys. But I will try to give some preliminary thoughts on it in the course of this section, though they need to be taken with caution at this stage.

⁴ The head of security gave a brief overview in court about the numbers of arrests, injuries etc. from 2nd December 2008 to 17th February 2009; I will just give some numbers without date to illustrate the dimensions: 50 arrested (ar.); 200 ar.; 1 ar.; 3 injured (in.); 23 in.; 4 ar.; 2 noticed (no.); 50 ar.; 10 chased (ch.); 40 no.; 19 no.; 1 ar.; 8 ar.; 4 ar.; 18 ar.; 20 no.; 20 no.; 1 in.; 2 no.; 30 no.; 2 ar.; 1 ar.; 6 ar.; 1 no.; 1 in.; 1 ar.; 1 in.; 20 no.; 3 no.; 5 ar.; 1 deceased (de.); 30 no.; 1 de.; 2 in.; 1 ar.; 25 no.; 15 ar.; 10 ar.; 30 ch.; 1 ar.; 4 ar.; 1 ar.; 10 ar.; 3 ar.;

⁵ *Criminal Procedure Act No. 51 of 1977.*

⁶ The languages used in the criminal court in Barberton are English and Afrikaans which are then translated into siSwati. However, the Department of Justice had taken the decision to use all eleven official languages in South African courts. This was first realised in Lehurutshe magistrate court in North West Province using Setswana on February 24, 2009 (*Sowetan*, February 25, 2009).

⁷ Private security companies are responsible for about 99% of the arrests. They are mostly trained by former military officials and “since then the arrests are escalating like a snowball going downhill because they are like military robots, very highly trained, very disciplined, very deadly”, as the responsible prosecutor repeatedly accentuated (Interview with male prosecutor, Barberton, February 19, 2009).



Photo 6: Relatives of 'illegal' miners at the Barberton magistrate's court (2009)

Since September 2008 91 'illegal' miners had been convicted in the criminal court by the well-collaborating and specialised team of a senior prosecutor and a magistrate. 69 of the convicted had received a two-year prison sentence (three years with one year suspension), currently the maximum punishment in this regard. All of them guilty because of trespassing and hence contravening the *Mine Health and Safety Act*.⁸ However, I will give some brief examples of court proceedings relating to 'illegal' mining in the Barberton criminal court to develop some further questions which could be potentially examined.

The case of the 'silent man'

This case was heard at the Barberton criminal court on February 18, 2009. The person was indicted of trespassing and attempted theft of gold in one of the Barberton mines where he was also arrested.

Firstly, the prosecutor, dressed in a black robe, announced the name of the accused after the previous case of ten 'illegal' miners had been postponed for the beginning of March. The police officer in charge called out the name of the accused from the stairways leading from the court room to the outdoor waiting area and got a reaction from another officer responsible for the detainees. The accused entered the court room barefooted in green long-

⁸ The full legal charge reads as follows: That the accused is/are guilty of the crime of contravening the provisions of Regulation 3.1.1, promulgated by Section 98 of Act 29/1996 read with Section 91(1)(b), 92, 95, 102 and Schedule 4 of the *Mine Health and Safety Act No. 29 of 1996*.

underwear accompanied with a strong smell which sometimes causes the prosecutor to wear a face mask. Afterwards a witness, the head of security from Barberton mines and a former police officer, was asked to come to the witness box. A series of questions and answers started when the prosecutor asked the witness to describe his nature of responsibility to the court. It seemed as if the whole procedure, the sequence of questions and prompt answers was well prepared in advance. But that is actually not surprising at all since this troika, the magistrate, the prosecutor and the head of security know each other very well through their recurring cooperation on visits to scenes (like the one described above) and numerous appearances before the court. So, the head of security began to name the problems they are facing through 'illegal' mining by ill equipped people. He talked about different issues (security costs, hijacking of underground locomotives etc.) and mentioned instances where security or police officers were involved in gunfights with these miners. In general, he gave an overview of the current situation but did not talk about the accused specifically but rather took him as the embodiment of a diverse group of people termed the 'illegal miners'. Then the magistrate offered the accused the chance to raise questions to the state's witness but he solely rejected by shaking his head. The interpreter then took on the articulation.

It was now time for a 35-minute break to drink tea and prepare the final statement which was then held in a very emotional and clear manner by the prosecutor. Again, the accused was standing for all 'illegal' miners and the problem in general. The statement was phrased in aggressive and blaming words: He argued that they are fighting in Barberton for the entire national economy and the private securities of the mines are now making the investigations since the provincial government and the civil services seem to have their fingers in because they are complaining that the 'illegal' miners do not have clean water and so on. Then he led over to a discussion of what seems to be his ultimate solution to these problems; ruthless sentencing. The argument was that other former 'Third World' countries in East Asia and Arabia have economically transformed to 'First World' countries through ruthless sentencing. This turned out to be a plea for capital punishment which was abolished in South Africa during the political transformation in the early 1990s. It should discourage people to commit these kinds of transgressions. In this context he had recourse to the saying or question of who was first: the chicken or the egg? The same would apply to poverty and crime. His frustration is leading from the very fact that the law sets conditions for South African citizens to get the possibility of bail rather than imprisonment if it is not a 'serious' case; meaning exceeding R60,000 or three years imprisonment. Otherwise the case must be transferred anyway from the district court

to the regional court.⁹ The prosecutor argued that bails¹⁰ are easily being paid by those syndicates and thus worsening the current situation because once they are free they will go underground again. Finally, South Africa was considered as a sewer and simply becoming just another African country. This argument is well known in public and academic circles; the exceptionality of South Africa which even culminated in the past in the absurd negation of the country as 'being African' and hence not worthy for African Studies.

After the prosecutor had concluded his plea and demanded a sentence of three years of imprisonment for the accused, the magistrate opened her final judgment and first welcomed everybody to the 'Wild, Wild West'. She summed up the case by stating that the accused had been arrested together with other 'illegal' miners though he did not possess any gold at that time. But his intention was to go there and steal gold which represents the most serious crime in Barberton at the time. Like every other arrested 'illegal' miner he refused to mention his bosses probably because simply of fear to be killed, no matter he is in prison or not. However, she admitted that the accused (both in a singular and plural meaning) is only the tip of the iceberg. At this stage she already stopped talking about the accused in a personal manner and switched to a general argument like the prosecutor and the witness had done before. Barberton can get a ghost town in a few years if this trend keeps on and thus, she argued, the rights of the accused have to count very little. This is one interesting aspect many officials in the legal arena insist on; they perceive the new ('First World') constitution to be inappropriate for the present ('Third World') situation in South Africa simply because it grants too many rights for the accused and leaving out the complainant. And this has led to the desperate and overextended situation state courts are dealing with currently. The magistrate closed the case by sentencing the accused to three years imprisonment whereby one year to be suspended.¹¹ She added promptly that if she could she would certainly punish harder which clearly conveyed not only her personal but also the prosecutor's and the witness' discontent with the current South African state of the law. The accused was offered again the possibility to pose questions; he solely shook his head and remained a 'silent man'.

The case of the 'job seeker'

This case was tried in the Barberton criminal court on February 27, 2009. The accused was arrested at Sheba mine on November 1, 2008. He is about

⁹ The regional court of Barberton is working as a periodical regional court of Nelspruit such as the periodical courts of Low's Creek, Malelane, and Komatipoort are part of the Barberton district court.

¹⁰ Bails used to be R150, then R500, R1,000 and now rose up to R5,000 and occasionally 'R7,500 for non-South African citizens.

¹¹ The magistrate's verdict needs to go to the High Court for review.

25–35 years old and rejected the possibility of legal aid, so he defended himself. There were two witnesses present in court, one was the police officer who arrested him and the other one was his mother.

First, the accused was confronted with his arrest where it was stated that he was taken into custody because he did not produce any official permission to be at the mine. He was asked whether he agreed with the accusation but he negated and insisted that his presence at Sheba mine was simply due to job seeking. The first witness, a police officer, was called to the witness box. He stated that he incidentally found the accused at the entrance of the mine together with workers who were leaving the premises and wearing overalls, gumboots and torches though the accused did not wear an overall or any of these items nor anything else, that is, gold or a firearm. When he approached him he noticed that the accused was injured on his right hand which seemed to be caused through a mistake while being underground according to the accused as the officer stated. Further he argued the accused was not supposed to be at the place where he found him but rather, if he would have been a job seeker, outside of the mine. The accused was then asked by the magistrate if he agreed with the accusations of the police officer. Again he disagreed and emphasised that he was not underground but only moving around and suddenly found himself at the entrance where he was captured and arrested. The argument of the witness that everybody would need a permission from the security guards to enter the mine was retorted by stating he had been on his way to the securities. But the witness went on and questioned his presence behind the gate what was solely replied with a ‘suddenly I found myself



Photo 7: At Sheba gold mine

(2009)

inside the fence'. Now it was tea time again. Afterwards the prosecutor questioned the accused in an ironic way whether he passed standard 10 at school since if someone wants to get inside a fenced area he should use a tarred road and enter through the entrance.

The argument of the accused was that they did not know the right way only the short cut he and others had taken. So, the prosecutor got sceptical since the accused was the only person who was present at court. It turned out that other people the accused was with at that time ran into a forest, though the area was fenced and full of stones, tree clusters and snakes as the prosecutor stressed since the court officials know the place very well. It went on for a couple of minutes until the prosecutor went into detail with the actual argument of the accused. If he really would have been looking for a job he would have carried his standard 10 certificate, CV and all the other stuff and not only his I. D. as he stressed. Then the magistrate took over by saying that the evidence is not sufficient enough but the case of entering the premises of the mine without any permission would be cancelled, but the fact that he went there to steal gold was still pending. Before the second witness, the mother of the accused, was questioned about the proof of her son's statement and her livelihood, the prosecutor enquired about the income and workplace of the accused to see whether he would be in a position to pay a bail. In the end, the magistrate argued that the accused was telling confusing and contradicting stories and hence will be sentenced to 18 months imprisonment since he did not had any gold or firearm in his possession which would have certainly raised the verdict.

CONCLUSION

Coming back to the initial question of why these young men sometimes defend themselves and sometimes use the possibility of legal-aid and/or have other strategies, it is necessary to put the issue in a broader context. Many of those who go underground without any official permission are young male aged approximately between 14 and 35 years. I observed numerous trials, for example, one group of 59 'illegal' miners who were captured at the end of the first week of March at Sheba mine; 38 were South African citizens, 13 from Mozambique, four from Swaziland and four from Zimbabwe. The majority are young mainly uneducated men – there is also a 14-year old amongst them – from the township in Barberton, Sheba siding (a settlement next to Sheba mine), Matsulu or any other place not far from the mines. So, it is mainly locals who do that job and either come out with gold and money and go there probably again or they face a trial and consequential imprisonment. And actually from various conversations I can assert that they are mostly not regarded as criminals as long as there are no firearms involved; 'my friends who do 'illegal' mining just wouldn't break into a house or something like that, but there are just no jobs around here'. They rather grab the risky chance



Photo 8: Former 'illegal' small-scale miners, the so-called *tinvikunyane* (moles) (2009)

to earn money and support their families, buy cars or build houses, or simply consume liquids and sexual services. However, once they are arrested and brought before the court some of the accused use the possibility of legal-aid, which means the trial needs to be postponed for further consultations. At the next trial some of them suddenly change their mind and do not want any further legal protection, or it is just the other way around. They have either realised that, if they are on bail, they can delay their presumable conviction by 'playing' the legal-aid card or they were 'briefed' by more experienced detainees how to defend themselves: "They know how to argue, believe me, even if they don't know the court proceedings they know how to try to fight for their innocence. Yes, and you'll get the ones obviously that have been in court many times; they might as well be an attorney."¹² This is to be seen in conjunction with a general sceptical attitude among adolescent and adult males towards the police ('they are corrupt') and the judicial system of which the free legal-aid attorneys are part of ('they are all playing the same game'). However, I will follow up on these issues by interviewing legal-aid attorneys I have recently met and conduct further observations in court.

Another issue that regularly comes up is the current state of the South African criminal system at large as I have also mentioned briefly further above. Everybody I have been talking to at the state courts were complaining about the criminal system and its overprotection of the accused party especially with regard to bail matters or as one litigant asked me how the South African criminal system is compared to the German one: 'It's fucked up, isn't it?'

¹² Interview with female head prosecutor, Barberton, December 10, 2008.

Photo 9: Down in the abandoned Piggs Peak gold mine (2009)





Photo 10: Light at the end of the tunnel, Piggs Peak gold mine (2009)



Photo 11: Good luck! In the abandoned Piggs Peak gold mine (2009)



Photo 12: View of Piggs Peak from the former gold mine (2009)



Photo 13: Late 1880s. Labourers working at a gold mine on the Komati River. Swaziland National Museum (2009)



Photo 14: The abandoned Piggs Peak gold mine cemetery (N. MAGAGULA, 2009)



Photo 15: Resting place of John Baylis at the mine cemetery (N. MAGAGULA, 2009)



Photo 16: In memoriam

(N. MAGAGULA, 2009)

TINJOJELA¹

(BARBERTON, SOUTH AFRICA)

This project is located next to the eMjindini township of Barberton and between the two main highways coming from Nelspruit to the town. The aim of the project is to reduce the pressure on the wild stocks of medicinal herbs as they are used by traditional healers (*tangoma*) and are growing around eMjindini/Barberton in nature reserves and on private land. Thus many commonly used herbs should be cultivated on the premises of the project. Additionally so-called food gardens (maize, wild spinach, sweet potatoes etc.) should enable subsistence farming for the beneficiaries and further facilitate cash crops to generate immediate income for the community. At the same time the community's awareness and concern for environmental issues – as a governmental White Paper for Environmental Policy suggests – should be raised through this project.

Tinjojela has been initiated in the year 2003 due to the arrestment of three *tangoma* who had been caught cutting herbs on private land. After a court case and release of the accused, the municipality provided 30 hectares of land and since then has been leasing it to the legally established entity, the Tinjojela Trust, for a certain period of time with a prolongation option. Tinjojela is funded through the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) and administered by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). At one stage CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) also came in to support the project but quit after a short span of time due to undisclosed reasons. Now after the continuous downfall of the project in the last couple of months another organisation (GWI Project Managers) has been applied to assist the process of rebuilding. There have been five meetings so far in November and early December 2008 to re-start the project with a new group of trustees and a new steering committee (the following were mentioned: Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency, Department of Agriculture, Department of Environment and Tourism, Department of Health, Umjindi Municipality and the local community). Since the meeting on November 28, 2008 which was held for the first time in the town hall in the township rather than in the air conditioned rooms of the Barberton Museum in town, which presented a hurdle for many beneficiaries because of the distance and their shortage of money for transport, a social facilitator from Umjindi Municipality is involved to support the project with careful planning and communication skills. There was a first meeting with him on Monday 1st December before we had a further meeting with two representatives of the municipality

¹ Extracts from two fieldwork reports (October 2008 to March 2009) to my supervisor in Halle (Saale). See also Lenart (2012b).

to develop a business plan among other things. The way forward for now is to nominate ten out of 45 beneficiaries who should, together with two representatives from the local municipality, form a new trust with a new name – “Jinda Traditional Medicinal Projects”. This would then probably be already the third trust for this project because there is no legal clarity up to now if a second trust has been properly established and registered so that it can function as a legal entity to receive the funds from the government. The government and the municipality hold a position that the second trust does not exist legally although leading persons from the community persist that they have established this trust with a lawyer in Pretoria after the first one failed to perform its duties. Unfortunately, the beneficiaries do not hold any official documents, only a first draft without any names and signatures and many people from different organisation who were in charge either died or changed their professions.

So far the DEAT had only access to the old trust’s papers which names the former trustees but “nobody is allowed to force people to step out of the trust”, as a representative of the municipality said during one of the meetings. So, the only way forward would be that the municipality calls a meeting and hands over the land to the new trust with the argument that the old trust does not utilise the land in an appropriate way and thus needs to be disbanded. The DEAT is willing to fund the project again with four million rand but needs to get sure that the money is used in a proper way. Certain people from the previous trust who are no longer involved – there is only one man left from the former trustees – misused a large amount of money for their own expenses rather than using it for the benefit of the project. The financial and funding aspects need to be addressed more seriously and guidance is needed since even the former treasurer and current chairman has openly admitted that “I’m a treasurer but honestly I know nothing about that.”² The project further is indebted to Eskom (South African Electricity Provider) with several thousand rand because of outstanding electricity bills, but in future the municipality should provide electricity with reduced prices and maybe, if feasible, solar energy should be applied. For the operational part of the project a so-called co-operative should be formed and five out of the ten trustees should constitute a managing board or board of directors which will be advised by a small group of experts from different departments and organisations. During the last meeting between the local municipality, the social facilitator and members of the community, the lawfulness of the proceeding was doubted because different opinions about the legal procedure were prevalent. It was interesting to see how these officials deal with these issues or developmental programmes at all.

However, the whole area and infrastructure of the project has been severely vandalised since my last visit in April 2007 and the project in itself hardly

² Interview with male treasurer of Tinjojela, eMjindini Township, March 16, 2007.

Photo 1: A food gardener (2007)



exists anymore. The project has to address severe security problems since the place was vandalised and important infrastructure such as irrigation piping, cold rooms, electricity cables, windows and small ‘appropriate-technology’ tractors have been either destroyed or stolen. Not only leading persons of the project but also representatives of the various governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as the local police were convinced through their on-site visits that the vandalism must have been done by persons or a group of persons who have known the project and have not agreed with its little but steady success and hence wanted to destroy it and set an example. This interpretation of the incidents is fostered by personal rivalries and conflicts between many beneficiaries and the former chairperson. The latter was one of the three captured *tangoma* in the veld when fetching herbs. When the trust was finally established, she was elected chairperson and member of the six-headed committee but failed to attend several important meetings between the beneficiaries and the administrative Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). She was also blamed for nepotism and personal favouritism when

using money that was provided for communication and tools pertaining to the project. She was further hiring and firing people without any consultation and took ownership of the project and did not want to share responsibilities with anybody else. In the first place, she is made responsible for the downfall of the project.

These internal conflicts were and still are toughened through her traditional healing knowledge and practices, though not only in accordance with the ethical standards of the different healer organisations present in Barberton (Lwandle Libumbene, Progressive Primary Health Healers etc.) but rather in a negative way by using witchcraft. Because there have been several incidents in the past which have been explained with the occult most if not all of the beneficiaries are either afraid or even under threat of her powers. This has been displayed on various occasions such as the meetings I have attended. When people were asked about the downfall of the project and the former chairperson’s name was mentioned most of the beneficiaries dropped their heads without answering. Others already left the project because they were afraid that the woman had enchanted the premises and people would get sick when entering the area. MTPA has started to exert pressure on the beneficiaries to elect a new chair and a committee whereby a new trust should have been founded. But this is a controversial issue as I have already outlined above. In November 2006 a new chairperson and committee was finally elected with one accord, even the former chairwoman voted for the new chairman. Afterwards she started to insult the newly elected chair by threatening him with death “You will die! You will die!”

On New Year’s Eve he and his wife (who is also a traditional healer) were invited by their *gobela* (senior *sangoma* – teacher) to her place in Bush-

Barberton Commercial Medicinal Plant Project

The Products....



Beetroot



Spinach



Cabbage



Salad



Rose Geranium



The nursery



African Potatoe

buckridge, Mpumalanga. He and his wife were not in a good mood that day although everybody else was happy. That is why he approached his *gobela* to prepare some *muti* (medicine) for him. Together with his cousin, who just bought a new car, they drove to another place by taking a short cut. Initially he wanted to take the longer route though he was persuaded. While his cousin was driving the car, he and his wife were sitting in the back and he turned around twice and realised a car that is approaching them in a very fast pace. After he shouted thrice that the car will hit them the accident happened. Surprisingly nobody in their car was injured and even the car had only little scratches on the bumper. The other car, though, was totally damaged and the front seat passenger was severely injured on his head. If he would not have been treated by his *gobela* before, he would have probably died in this accident as he told me a couple of days ago. As the new chairperson of the project he went back to the fields to tell his people what has happened and that he is in danger. He also went to that woman who threatened him after his election to show her that she cannot kill him. When he told me that story, he imitated her act of stunning and behaviour by dropping his head and whispering. Three months later in March 2007, he was struck down by an unknown man while walking through the township. He opened a police and court case and the aggressor was sentenced to three years imprisonment. The aggressor was asking for pardon because he was not 'himself' when attacking the other man, but the chairman could not forgive him since he did not know him at all and therefore there was no reason for him to do so. Anyway, he went back to Tinjojela where the former chairwoman was busy working in the fields. Again she was surprised to see him and he tried to talk to her but she was not able to speak clearly and she refused to look up and avoided any eye contact. That has been interpreted by some people as a sign of guilt. Since then she is practically no longer part of the project, although she apparently is from a legal point of view, and most if not all of the current beneficiaries avoid any personal contact with her and even hesitate to talk about her freely. She has been denounced as a powerful witch who is using her knowledge for bewitchment. The anxiety of internal conflicts and bewitchment when having a project where different *tangoma* are working together was already raised in an evaluation study of the project conducted four years ago (cf. Thornton 2004).

In short, the Tinjojela project offers various possibilities for studying conflict and dispute management with and without witchcraft implications. Firstly, there are different types of stakeholders and other groups or organisations involved ranging from the various governmental departments (agriculture, environment and tourism, health) to the local municipality and the provincial tourism and parks agency to the local community of healers and non-healers. Further, there are local, national and international development organisations represented. Secondly, conflicts and disputes between the ben-

eficiaries themselves and other people or groups of people have been a significant part of the project right from the beginning. There have been disputes about corruption, nepotism and favouritism as well as disputes between healers themselves and healers and non-healers about economic potentials and the aim of the project itself, that is, who should benefit from it. Court cases at the magistrate's court have been fought in the past, and the police has been involved due to theft and other criminal activities which have occurred just recently. Thirdly, aspects of witchcraft play a significant role in the project and affects people's acting and behaviour. The Tinjojela project presents on the one hand an illuminating field for the enquiry of past conflicts but, on the other, – and to a much greater degree – it offers a diverse pool for studying conflict management right from the very beginning of the re-establishment of its fundamental structures.

I will be able to follow the development or the comedown of the project (since its success remains undecided) for nearly a whole year (even when I will be in Swaziland) and due to my close relationships with the chairman and some beneficiaries from the community but also the acquaintance and/or friendship with clerks from the local municipality strengthened through my regular attendance of the meetings, I am in a confident manner that this project can offer me valuable insights into the different modes of disputing which are at the core of my study.



Photo 3: A food garden with an irrigation system

(2007)



Photo 4: Another food gardener

(2007)



Photo 5: One more food gardener

(2007)



Photo 6: Cactus cultivation



(2007) Photo 7: Remnants of the cactus cultivation
(2009)



Photo 8: Storage container and 'appropriate technology' tractor

(2007)



Photo 9: Burnt storage containers

(2009)



Photo 10: Vandalised office building

(2008)



Photo 11: Reduced to the skeleton

(2009)



Photo 12: The former office

(2008)



Photo 13: The vandalised cold room

(2008)



Photo 14: Everything is gone (2008)

DYNAMICS OF THE TINJOJELA DOWNFALL AND ITS ATTEMPTED RESURRECTION

Since 2003, Tinjojela has seen various ups and downs culminating in its eventual downfall and attempted resurrection. The downfall occurred as a consequence of different factors such as misconduct on various levels, lack of commitment as well as internal conflicts.³ The current attempted resurrection has mainly been initiated by the Deputy Minister of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT). The real motives behind that are not known by the stakeholders involved; at least they pretend not knowing it. But what is actually interesting in that regard is that DEAT is ready to fund it with four million rand despite or maybe due to the complete downfall; that is more than double of the funding the project initially received (R1.8 Mio.). People from the local social service departments suppose issues of corruption or misuse of funding at higher levels whereby they as local government providers have to deal with the complex and often frustrating problems on the ground. However, I won't investigate into governmental corruption in Pretoria and Nelspruit or the like but rather focus on specific dynamics at the community level. Actually, there has not been much progress except at some technical and implementing levels. What seems to be a difficult and well known problem in developmental affairs is the involvement of the actual beneficiaries at the planning stage. A new business plan is being drawn up by a private consulting company in Umhlanga Rocks near Durban, about 700 kilometres away from the actual project site. Since the restart of the project in November last year the responsible implementer has been twice to Barberton and has spoken to two of the trust members once. What is lacking is some kind of a social facilitator to organise the beneficiaries and the whole communication set up. A person from Barberton I know is promoting himself for this field of activity but the process is still in its initial phase. There is hardly any communication and even contact between some of the trustees regarding their work. This exactly would be fundamental to build a useable and working basis amongst the people who are or will be involved on a daily working relation.

However, through academic assistance, a survey is currently conducted to identify possible beneficiaries that are traditional healers (sg. *sangoma*; pl. *tangoma*) or herbalists (sg. *lignedla*; pl. *emagedla*) and some of those might become involved at one stage or the other. But here the conflicts already begin or more precisely, they continue. The survey should have been conducted by several healers and herbalists and supervised by an external assistant; though she is well known to the participants. It turns out that even at this stage similar dynamics

³ Interestingly a company promoting rural development called Novafrica from the northern province of Limpopo still uses the Tinjojela project as one of its successful case studies, though only by name, where their expertise of project management had been put in. (<http://novafrica.org.za/services.asp>; accessed on March 4, 2009).



Photo 15: A re-start meeting in the eMjindini town hall, Barberton (2008)

are appearing like taking main ownership of the project by its current chairperson, *babe M*.⁴ Or the motive might rather be to grasp the first advantage of getting some kind of payment resulting from one's involvement in the project.⁵ Two of the leading figures were trusted the duty to lead the process, but it was also meant to include further people. Weather-conditioned the questionnaires had been stored at one of the leader's house and now he is refusing to hand over the forms to the others. Instead he is trying to get hold of the agreed R 50 per filled questionnaire and to do this work more or less on his own. In principle this could be easily resolved by simply making more copies but at the core dynamics of past conflicts are identifiable. At other occasions the chairperson also insisted that his and his best friend's (*babe N*)⁶ attendance (a newly elected trustee though formerly employed by the trust) at official meetings are sufficient enough and the remaining trust members need, if at all, only be informed afterwards which then mostly lacks an ordinary style of communication; be it airtime for the cell phone or rather commitment to inform them personally.

⁴ *Babe M* is a practising *ligedla* and member of the organisation Lwandle Libumbene. He has never been 'initiated' to become a *sangoma* though he 'had spirits'. He is living with another *sangoma* but they are not married. *Babe* means father in siSwati and is the respectful appellation for an adult man whereas *make* for an adult woman.

⁵ The funding for the survey is actually not provided by DEAT but by Wits University.

⁶ *Babe N* has been working for Tinjojela from the beginning but he is neither a *sangoma* nor a *ligedla*. He is the best friend of *babe M* and both are living not far from each other. His partner is also a *sangoma* though currently not practising; they are not married.

This again has to a great extent to do with the influence and abuse of alcohol which is a constant factor in this social setting. However, further developments will probably shine light upon the practices taken but, as I mean, it starts to resemble the previous internal difficulties the project was facing. I am planning to conduct some interviews with former and current members of the trust to get more information on past quarrels to support the insights various ‘archival’ correspondence⁷ and conversations offer so far. At this stage we can identify three different though interrelating but not necessarily sequential but rather repeating dynamics of past relational grievances and conflicts. Type no. one embraces grievances and conflicts going out from what I should call the ‘field people’ (trustees, beneficiaries or employees) to the ‘office people’ (implementer or project manager). Type no. two are grievances and conflicts in exactly the opposite direction, namely from the ‘office people’ to the ‘field people’, and type no. three are internal conflicts and disputes amongst the ‘field people’ themselves. In the latter implications of witchcraft seemed to play an important role during the different dimensions of disputing.

Type no. one, ‘field people’ against ‘office people’ is configured as follows: There are voices today which say the management used to be well organised and functioning, but one can also hear some critical statements about the style of guidance of the former project manager *Mister S*.⁸ *Mister S* was a private consultant working for Mpumalanga Parks Board, which is today Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), and in charge of the whole project. In fact he kept Tinjojela alive by applying a tough and commanding approach. This approach has been compared to the style ‘White’ Afrikaans speakers have managed their private farms, often isolated entities scattered around the countryside. Why I say he kept the project running is simply because after his contract expired Tinjojela slowly but steadily went down until it totally collapsed. I will try to show why I think the project worked and what might be at the core of its current standstill (in the fields).⁹ These thoughts might also be applicable to numerous similar projects which mostly result from governmental land reform programmes. They need to be taken as preliminary and not fully developed interpretations hence probably treated with caution. But first I will provide some details about the issues that led to grievances and consequentially to conflicts between the ‘field people’ and the ‘office people’. It is difficult to categorise the issues, to say whether they used to be solely grievances which transformed into conflicts by stating the problems publicly or if they were to be called disputes since the former

⁷ Unfortunately little correspondence remained existent and accessible today due to wanton destruction, theft and vandalism.

⁸ Mister S died due to a heart attack some time ago and I had never met him.

⁹ I am thankful to Robert Thornton for supportive thoughts and discussions.

trust had been consulted as a third party but at the same time had been part of the 'field people'; which means the trust experienced the same problems with the management as the people in the fields. So, the trust theoretically functioned as an intermediary between the 'field people' and the management and at the same time practically as a litigant since the trust members were elected out of the beneficiaries and socially equal though legally different. They were to be held responsible in financial matters and also acting as a legal entity with all its positive and negative consequences. The boundaries between these categories are in other words fluid and temporarily or dynamic, that is, sometimes the trust acted in its intermediate role and sometimes it was part of one of the quarrelling parties.

But let me now give some ethnographic data to illustrate the first type of disputing dynamics and to develop some thoughts on it. I am citing here an internal correspondence from a 'field person' to the trust members:¹⁰

To trust members

I am writing this letter because I am not happy about the way [Mister S] treats me and the way he talks to me, most of the times he uses strong language. He always complains about my working standard which he never told me my exactly what I am entitled to do. There are a number of things I've listed which refers to the things he does.

[...]

Tinjojela Supervisor

On the [...] of September we started erecting fence, the fencing material was ordered from [...] and [...] was not delivering in time whatever material ordered. Due to that we did a number of times run out of material at the field, and when the was no material we were taking out medicinal plant wood and stones put it along the road, as [Mister S] told us to do so. But when he did come around the he always shouts at me why we don't have material while he knows exactly because he himself phoned [...] to complain about the late delivery of the material.

Medicinal plant that we took out of the land when he asked when the plants are I showed him, the plants are still on the field to today. I must remind him every day of the plants and now the plants are dead and now he wants the plants, but he shouts at me that I'm the reason the plants are dead because I didn't take care of the plants.

He always tells me that I must come over weekend and work overtime which he will never pay as I did work one weekend I would never get paid.

¹⁰ The correspondence was held in English and I give the original version without adjusting the grammatical style.

The wood we were taking out of the land he said we were going to sell it and I must not allow any person to take the wood but now he told me that I must get people to take the wood out of the site. Now I don't know what exactly what I must do with the wood because he will come later with another statement concerning the wood.

He always accuse me of employing my relatives and friends, which what I know all the labours are employed by the trust members.

All the medicinal plants germinated on the lands I must in person took them out of the lands again which I will always do that when the medicinal plants germinates.

The way I dress up doesn't satisfy or suits him his just not happy about the way I dress up, now I don't know what I must wear cause he never gave me a uniform or any material to dress.

Every time when he come across any rubbish lying on the ground it is me I bring around, actually it's not my rubbish I bring shit to the field.

I always screw and fuck things up on the site not knowing exactly what he is referring to.

On the [...] of October he demanded me that I pack razor wire on the container without having hand gloves on my hands.

He say I must be an example to the labours by lifting a 103kg roll of fence to the container which he never gave me the example himself.

I must see where I get water to irrigate the butternuts even if it take to carry a bucket of water on my head not knowing from where and how many times must I do that.

According to him I'm getting a fat cheque.

This and other internal correspondence led to a couple of letters from the trust to the management to inform *Mister S* about their discontent with his 'temper and language' as they called it. Though they acknowledged the fact that they would have to work at a rapid pace to catch up for the lost time – the issue *Mister S* was mainly complaining about – they asked him several times to 'control' himself while being at the project site. There is unfortunately no evidence for any reaction of the project manager concerning these allegations. However, what we can see here is that the 'field people' were working with the concept of 'commanding and putting into practice' (or not) which is conveyed in statements like '*when the was no material we were taking out medicinal plant wood and stones put it along the road, as [Mister S] told us to do so*' or the like. If there were no commands there was nothing to do. The same features are being displayed right now, that is, there is nobody to command, a project manager or the like, so nothing is actually being done. The whole project site is covered in vegetation and the office and storage build-

ings have been vandalised and are unusable now simply because nobody has taken responsibility, meaning the people in charge from the trust, which actually has never been dissolved and is hence still responsible and accountable for anything related to the project site.

This behaviour is similar to actions or rather non-actions sometimes applied by new land owners who have taken over commercial farms in the course of the land reform programme (restitution or redistribution). One striking example I heard in 2007 by a land consultant is worth citing here to back up my argument:

I remember one farm. When I got there I found people sitting under the tree and I asked them: ‘What’s wrong?’ They all said: ‘What do you mean what’s wrong?’ We are owners of the land.’ – ‘But no one is working?!’ – ‘We are still going to employ people to work.’ – ‘But you’ve been working on a farm. Why now do you want to employ someone who works on the farm?’ – ‘Because we are bosses now! We are owners of the land, we can’t work!’ – After some time they did realise what they were doing because the crops were dying while they were sitting under the tree still waiting for people to come looking for jobs.¹¹

What is behind it, I mean, is an understanding of always needing a person (or persons) who is leading and others who are just following. In most cases – probably due to the colonial and apartheid legacy – we can name that person *umlungu*, meaning a ‘White’ person. In fact it does not need to be a ‘White’ person but rather a person who commands, he/she might be ‘White’ but also ‘Black’ or of any other background. Actually it does not matter as long as this person is able to lead and give orders for others to obey. It is an understanding of power in the Weberian sense (cf. Weber 2006: 214ff; 975ff) which always comes together with the cultural concept of *ubuntu* the ‘(African) humanity’ or ‘African community’ (Thornton 2005: 27; 30); a notion which has especially been stressed by Desmond Tutu in conjunction with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But what does it mean? It comprises, inter alia, the value “that all members of the community are, in principle, *equivalent* as human beings and as brothers and sisters” (ibid. 25), and here especially men. According to this no one from one’s own ‘community’ is entitled to rule over others since then he/she would contravene this basic value. Therefore it needs a person from outside, the *umlungu*, to keep things going so that the local principles are not abrogated. This principal of equivalence is further upheld through concepts of jealousy, suffering, and respect (ibid.) which work in a regulative way, some kind of social control wherein witchcraft and especially witchcraft accusations take a prominent stance.

¹¹ Interview with male business and training consultant, eMjindini Township, March 20, 2007.

The same concept is to a certain degree applicable to type no. two of the conflict dynamics. Here, according to the scarce remnants of correspondence, the main complaints from the ‘office people’ about the ‘field people’ are relating to the working pace and working accuracy or the non-conformance that is improper behaviour of some trustees. The first can be attributed to the same or similar principles that are deployed in type no. one, just from an opposite perspective. As mentioned before the project manager was actually leading Tinjojela as if it was his own private commercial farm where he could issue his dictums and find most of the time consequential compliance. This kind of thinking amongst mainly ‘White’ Afrikaans speakers was shown to be true in a conversation I have led with an investigation officer at the Barberton police station recently. She wanted to give me some suggestions of how to survive with ‘our Blacks’. Apart from the gun she has always loaded and close at hand she advised me to be *dominant* otherwise I won’t get anywhere in this country because she learned how to deal with the ‘Blacks’ and all strangers (meaning Americans and Europeans) think they can come to the country and ignore the specific (‘White’) reality. This, too, displays itself in the common appellation of a ‘White’ person as ‘boss’.

However, secondly, the improper behaviour of trustees is mainly resulting from the very fact that, to put it in the words of the project manager, “they [*babe M* and *babe D*]¹² were very argumentative, probably because they were intoxicated”, or put in another way, *badlile kudla* (‘they have eaten food’) as one would respectfully say in siSwati. Today, alcohol still plays the same role as it used to do in earlier phases of the project. The attempted takeover of the ownership by the new chairperson, *babe M*, as mentioned further above, is also related to liquor abuse because the healers (mainly women) who are supposed to conduct the survey are intimidated by his regular drunken conditions. And as written in the previous report, several meetings have not been organised or carried out simply due to the fact of regular drunkenness of some of the leading characters. But the previous conflict between the project manager and some of the trustees because of intoxication had increased to such an extent that these two men had been relieved from the trust though only for a short-period of time. They were both still legally active trustees simply because the correspondence had never reached the High Court which would have been essential to dismiss or register anybody from the trust. But this did not matter, both were soon afterwards working again and ironically *babe M* is the chairperson today whereby *babe D* died in early 2007.

The last identified type of conflict dynamics happened (probably still happens) amongst the ‘field people’ themselves; conflicts between chairpersons

¹² *Babe D* was a highly respected but still young *sangoma* and member of Progressive Primary Healthy Healers Society. He committed suicide in early 2007 though there are occasional rumours saying he had been driven into it by another healer.

and ordinary workers as well as among workers themselves. In this regard, I would like to conduct further interviews with trust members or beneficiaries (the boundaries are fluid) to get a deeper understanding of the previous and current dynamics, especially the case of the former chairperson, *make M*¹³, who was dismissed last December by the newly reformed trust committee. What was at stake here was mainly the functioning of the whole project on a lower level. *Make M* was one of the healers who had been caught and arrested digging for herbs on preserved land surrounding Barberton, the actual initiation of the Tinjojela project (as already described in the first field report). According to numerous members of Tinjojela, of the municipality and other involved people, this woman with her unconditioned claim to leadership had been the central driving force of the projects' mismanagement and downfall. She has been blamed for various incidents such as theft of tools belonging to the project, usage of project money for private purposes like cell phone airtime, and she had been further blamed of practicing witchcraft. However, I won't find out whether she or anybody else had stolen tools or money, the latter did happen and presumably not only once as there is solely one scribbled note to be found in the correspondence, but I would rather like to focus on the conflicts and their particular modes. As I have said, I am planning to conduct a couple of interviews and can now only try to show through the stories I have heard how these conflicts were shaped or what their elements were.

What went wrong right from the beginning and could be interpreted as an omen of future events (for that time) is the neglect of performing rituals to protect the project from evil forces. When, for instance, cattle kraals or any other special places are built and opened a *sangoma* will be called to perform the crucial rituals to protect the place from evil forces. But ironically this has not happened until today at the premises of the Tinjojela project which has been set up and mainly led by traditional healers. At another fairly successful project in Barberton although – the Umjindi Jewellery Project – located next to the museum in a historic storehouse and has nothing to do with traditional healing or the like, these rituals were performed. So, why were the rituals not performed or why does one project succeed and another one just some kilometres further fail to such an extent? And there is also a similar but successful project to Tinjojela next to Badplaas about 60 kilometres to the West; they are producing essential oils like Tinjojela was supposed to do though they manage to export their products overseas and Tinjojela not even locally. I was wondering what the main factor might be until I have learned that both projects, the Umjindi Jewellery Project and the Essential Oils in Badplaas are being managed each by outside people. But this I have already discussed fur-

¹³ There is no consanguineous or affinal relationship between *babe M* and *make M*. The latter is a *sangoma* and member of the Progressive Primary Healthy Healers Society. The various Traditional Healers Organisations which had been active in Barberton are currently hardly functioning or even existing according to *babe M*.

ther above. At the 'community' level, however, we find different mechanisms working. Here the takeover of ownership through the former chairwoman *make M* was at the centre of grievances and conflicts. Minor issues occurred also between workers. Tractors were used and broken by untrained people like *babe D* and tools were pilfered by employees during the night. Another conflicting matter was the question of who is allowed to hold keys and if other persons not working for the project like relatives or friends were entitled to enter without a project member. However, the issue with the tractors had a further dimension that is a rivalry over the influence of the project. *Make M* was trying to rule without consultation neither with the remaining trustees nor the project manager. And this was perceived by the people as unfair and contravening the basic values of the 'community'. She shifted herself in a privileged position by insisting that she was the person the project had been established for (since she was arrested) and everybody had to follow her orders and not listen to *Mister S*. So, the drivers of the tractors were chosen by a person who received the orders from *Mister S* but *make M* insisted to put other people on the list. She was openly opposing the management's instructions by forcing the 'field people' to obey her orders. The 'field people' were and still are frightened of *make M* because she has been regarded to use *muti* and witchcraft to accomplish her goals. They sometimes even feared to talk about her and some had left the project because they were afraid that she had enchanted the site and people would get sick when entering the area. So, *make M* was accused of witchcraft by others who sought a way of responding to the situation by means of expressing the social strain and tensions in this manner. Witchcraft accusations sometimes have a functional characteristic and try to restore the principle values of the society, meaning here the equivalence of all its members. But I would like to stress that witchcraft is not solely a myth existing in the minds of certain people or solely a functional mechanism but rather a belief that has serious social, cultural, and psychological implications (cf. Chavunduka 2003). Witchcraft and witchcraft accusations in this context had a reciprocal component. *Make M* was using her powers deliberately against the 'field people' (as described in the first report). She threatened and intimidated them and started to hire and fire persons she regarded as needed (or not) like a qualified young agriculturalist who used to work successfully for the project. Witchcraft and witchcraft accusations were shaping the dynamics of conflict and conflict resolution to such an extent that the parties involved applied various modes of disputing to either *avoid* that woman and thus leave the project or *confronting* her by electing *babe M* to become their new chairperson while *make M* was still actively involved. She simply ignored the voting and kept on until the project totally collapsed. She then started to argue that through *babe M's* election and takeover the project had failed and if she would have been (officially) in charge, Tinjojela would have been successful.

It seems that the ‘new’ project resembles the ‘old’ project in many different aspects starting from the developing or empowering issues at the planning stage to the occurring problems regarding leadership and guidance. There will be further meetings concerning the re-establishment of Tinjojela in the following months and assumable further scenarios of internal conflicts, too.

EPILOGUE



Photo 16: The new nursery

(2011)



Photo 17: The new office building and a greenhouse construction

(2011)



Photo 18: Tinjojela workers

(2011)



Photo 19: The new greenhouse construction

(2011)



Photo 20: The new food gardens

(2011)



Photo 21: Ploughed soil

(2011)



Photo 22: The new storage containers

(2011)



Photo 23: A Tinjojela worker

(2011)

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