

Branding and the privatisation of public space: the Zulu Kingdom and global tourism¹

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Introduction

‘The development of mass tourism often requires cultures, cities, regions or countries to rethink their own unique identities and then package and promote them as products which hopefully will attract people from other cultures. This bringing together of the *local* and the *global* is not without its dangers’, write Cohen and Kennedy (2000:212).

The argument in this paper, illustrated primarily with reference to KwaZulu-Natal, is that new cultural entrepreneurs have firmly and with enthusiasm adopted the opportunities offered by ethnicity’s disentanglement from apartheid and the concomitant liberalisation of formerly brutally racialised public space. Whereas, in the struggle for inclusive South African democracy, ethnic particularism was viewed by progressives as threatening a unified national body (that is, of “the people”, “the masses”, “the oppressed”), the new conceptualisation of South Africa as a culturally diverse “rainbow nation” has not only re-valorised ethnicity as a secular (and therefore relatively benign) political quality but has opened the doors to its commodification on the global tourist market. Current local efforts to re-define regional spaces as tourism products and brands—for example through beachfront casinos and marine parks—are creating new kind of exclusions and spatial boundaries with new beneficiaries. A privileged few appear to have found a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow nation. Others live in the shadow of its glittering, Disneyland-like representations.

New opportunities for the commercial uses of ethnicity (and ethnicity in the local version is usually also racialised) and local public space are located within three processes. First,

¹ This is an initial ‘position paper’, motivated by my personal experience of the changing space along the Durban beachfront, as well as a long-term interest in uses made of ethnicity in the province and more extensively. Areas of further research should be obvious. My thanks to Thembisa Waetjen who has shaped this paper, and with whom previous incursions into the field have been made.

the era of apartheid came to an end. It is unsurprisingly that the transition should have been characterised by large areas of social uncertainty that have remained unresolved. Transition was not a simple shift in authority and social meaning; it created new questions that will continue to be contested for the foreseeable future—for example, the role of ‘traditional authority’ within a liberal democracy, and the new social consequences of a citizen’s culture, language, and geographical location. Second, the end of South Africa’s status as a “pariah” nation meant that its rapid introduction into world markets and the accelerating and multiple aspects of globalisation opened up significant opportunities for developing its tourism trade. Third, one particular path of post-apartheid redress – namely the route of black economic empowerment (BEE) – has quickly acquainted a growing new elite with the rewards of capitalist ownership, but is also part of the new discourse of what is *socially* at stake in programs for economic growth and development.²

There are many areas in which these three strands could be examined, but closest to home are the effects upon this stretch of coastline and on the eThekweni metropolitan area. The Sibaya casino, billed as a Zulu themed extravaganza, is to open up the coast, one of its principal capitalist being Dr. Oscar Dhlomo, the ex-education minister of the KwaZulu Bantustan whose brokerage of Zuluness has dramatically shifted over a decade from political mobilisation (under the banner of Inkatha) to the economic arena of the leisure industry. Durban’s ‘golden mile’ is being transformed to a ‘golden triangle’ with defining points being the ICC, the Suncoast Casino, and uShaka Marine World. This latter attraction boasts ‘free entry’ to a shopping mall constructed with an African village theme: one can now enjoy Kentucky Fried Chicken under a thatched roof! These developments have only just begun to impact the populations who are now officially labelled ‘undesirables’ and who are being cleared out to make room and security for investors, visitors, and – eventually – wealthy would-be residents.

² ‘Mr Million Mbatha, the human resources manager for the Suncoast Casino & Entertainment World, says that of the 8 500 jobs that had been created, 97% of the recruits were from KwaZulu-Natal and 95% from previously disadvantaged communities’ (*Daily News*, November 4, 2002; see Raghbir 2001).

In the celebration of South Africa's splash on the global front, it has been easy for politicians – and others – to view the marketing of place as representing an improvement in the lives of all. Job creation is perhaps the most commonly cited benefit to the poor. Yet, when 10,000 people line up for 300 jobs – as they did for the uShaka Marine World – and when re-gentrification and the development of 'must-see attractions' pushes the homeless and poor to areas where they will be invisible, it seems important to raise questions about how space is being partitioned in the new, post-apartheid era and how these are related to new conceptions of social diversity.

Global tourism and post-apartheid opportunities

Much has been written about tourism from a cultural studies point of view (for example, see Crouch and Lubbers 2003; Ringer 1998). These have generally focused on visual representations of space and culture, and tourist attractions as interpretable 'texts'. Yet, there is a broader material context that enables artefacts to find their way under the gaze of the travelling curious. Cohen and Kennedy (2000) point out that the 'sheer numbers of overseas holidaymakers have increased at a breathtaking pace since the 1950s [and that] ... international tourist arrivals grew by an astonishing 17 times between 1950 and 1990'. In 1996, this phenomenon generated \$423 billion, excluding airfares (2000:213).

There are important reasons why tourism and globalisation are connected: first, 'tourism is now big business' – it is no longer third after oil and car manufacture but is the most lucrative area for investment; second, 'international tourism involves assigning a market price to a hitherto free good, wrapped and sold to tourists in the shape of ancient sites, ritual ceremonies and folk customs' (as well as icons and history!);³ third, in sheer numbers, the contemporary movement of tourists surpasses any previous migrations; fourth, tourism 'encompasses virtually every country and penetrates most national regions and localities' – industrial sites and warehouses have been added to museums and ruins (and, in KZN, battle sites); and, fifth, unlike more removed and mediated forms of

³ An article on the renaming of Sandton Square, meeting place of the rich in Johannesburg, is headed 'Mandela: a name that inspires myth – and money: South Africa's greatest struggle hero has brand power that ranks with Coca-Cola' (*Sunday Times (Business Times)*, April 26, 04). In Durban, with less political effect, space is being renamed after the commercial venture: Suncoast Walk, and Suncoast Beach.

cultural, entertainment and sport consumption, tourism involves 'direct social exchange' (2000:213-4).

This is the world into which South Africa was excitedly welcomed in 1994, offering immediately the miracle of the transition and the attractions of political tourism, where 'the struggle' became a selling point – at the elite political level with world leaders pouring in, as well as through attractions more accessible to the less exalted travellers such as the (Winnie) Mandela house in Soweto and, of course, Robben Island.

In order successfully to compete, and competition is exactly what was described to be the goal by GEAR, 'governments and their agents need to give an account of what is special concerning their particular cultures and natural landscapes' (Cohen and Kennedy 2000:223).

In South Africa, tourism has indeed become big business. Post 9/11 South Africa bucked the international trend to become 'the world's fastest-growing tourist destination'. While global tourism shrank 1.3 percent last year to 694 million travellers (due to insecurities about the US war on Iraq) arrivals to South Africa grew 4.2 percent. Growth of 78% since 1996 means that some 6.5 million tourists visited, and the Tourism Business Council speaks of 13 million within ten years. SA Tourism revealed that since 1994 'foreign investment in the tourism industry in South Africa totalled over R9 billion'. A Marketing Council was appointed by President Mbeki to 'brand South Africa' (*Mercury (Business Report)*, March 24, 04; also *Mail & Guardian*, March 12, 04). Such 'branding', however, is stuck with 'the legacy of apartheid' in areas such as poverty, inequality, crime, but also in the area of post-apartheid 'must-see-attractions'. One of these is ethnicity.

As is well-known, Apartheid South Africa relied on ethnic divisions as much as on the underlying racial order for its maintenance of control. While the racialised order was a direct continuation of colonialism and post-1910 segregation, changing circumstances forced the National Party ideologues to find other justifications for white domination and other policy options more acceptable in the world they inherited. World War and post-

WW II political order, the Charter of the United Nations, anti-colonial struggles, and the consequent rapid process of decolonisation, all forced changes on the Afrikaner ethnic group that came to power in South Africa in 1948.

Separate development, homelands, self-governing and independent states, the rights of peoples to self-determination, were part of the language of domination. A glance at any of the government publications regarding this policy reveals the central place that culture and ethnicity played in that cynical celebration of ‘incommensurability’ that was central to apartheid. On the grounds of ‘ethno-linguistic’ divisions the Bantustans were created, giving spatial and political form to the local version of decolonisation, from ‘colonisation of a special type’. MDC de Wet Nel (then Minister of Bantu Administration and Development) told Parliament in 1959:

‘The Zulu is proud to be a Zulu and the Xhosa proud to be a Xhosa and the Venda is proud to be a Venda, just as proud as they were a hundred years ago. The lesson we have learnt from history during the past three hundred years is that these ethnic groups, the whites as well as the Bantu, sought their greatest fulfilment, their greatest happiness and the best mutual relations on the basis of separate and individual development ... the only basis on which peace, happiness and mutual confidence could be built up’. (quoted in Moodie 1975:266).

Apartheid did not simply create ethnicity. It also based itself on historical cultural differentiation and existing patterns of association. These had been maintained through the spatial separations enforced by years of segregation. In urban areas and in the workplace social familiarities and rural links created cultural patterns of interaction, but also of control. Posel, for example, draws attention to migrant associations (studied by Beinart and Bozzoli, for example), but also to the ‘stereotype of the “tribal” worker ...reinforced by employers’ experience of the so-called “raw Native” ...’ (1991:161-4). In the workplace, too, these stereotypes and the need for cultural ‘interpreters’ continued, with adaptation, into post-apartheid South Africa (see Maré 2001).

There were also willing participants in the apartheid version of multi-culturalism, some grossly opportunistic (such as Lucas Mangope and Patrick Mphephu) and others justifying their participation in arguments for change from within and creating spaces for

resistance politics (Mangosuthu Buthelezi and later Bantu Holomisa). Lucas Mangope was in some ways a visionary in the manner in which he made the benefits of 'independence' available to that gross entrepreneur of the exotic, Sol Kerzner, the creator of Sun City. In the KwaZulu bantustan, Zuluness was deployed to politically mobilise local people from 1970 into post-apartheid South Africa.⁴

The importance for this region of the local manifestation of apartheid ethnic separation was that Zuluness was not only preserved but that it remained at the forefront of the public image, nationally and internationally. Whether as warriors, preservers of tradition, supporters of capitalism against the threat of the 'terrorist' (PW Botha and Margaret Thatcher's description) and 'communist' ANC, 'The Zulu' continued as a very powerful image. The image also benefited from the repetition of a history in which Shaka featured centrally, and within which masculinist appearance and valour (as in 'The Zulu Warrior') came to stand for the exotic. Many millions, also internationally, recognised these attributes and this history (see, for example, discussions by Tomaselli and Shepperson 2002; Hamilton 1998:chapter 5; Guy 1998; Draper and Maré 2003; Waetjen and Maré forthcoming; Waetjen 2004, forthcoming).

Apartheid mobilised ethnicity in the service of political control and social separation, preserving cultural elements and distinctions between ethnic groups. This was an important background to the current packaging and promotion of unique identities as in the case of KwaZulu-Natal, and for the effects of such presentations and their consumption. The local commerce in blackness predates the sets of relationships and practices that we have come to call 'globalisation'. The mystique of Zuluness and of Shaka existed before South Africa's reintegration. However, globalisation has added the edge of profit to such commerce.

⁴ Several have previously written about this process, drawing the distinction between ethnicity as tool of mobilisation and ethnicity in everyday life. The latter flexible, adaptable, changing, and the latter presented as fixed, as obvious, as uncontestable, as located within boundaries that could be policed against assault and where crossing meant being labelled as 'traitor' (see, for example, Maré 1993).

‘Beehive huts with en-suite bathrooms’: tourism and the commerce in blackness

Paul Gilroy writes that the ‘pre-eminent place of black cultures in the glittering festivities that have been laid on to accompany recent phases in the globalization of capital and the entrenchment of consumerism is not for me either a surprise or a source of unalloyed joy’ (2000:6-7). For Gilroy it is rather a part of the uneven effects of globalization as well as a planetary commerce in blackness (2000:13). Although Gilroy was specifically writing about the black body (as in art, sport and fashion) and cultural aspects such as film and music in the US and UK, a branding and commerce in blackness as ‘tribal ethnicity’ has featured as a local tourist product.

A glance at any of the brochures advertising the Zulu Kingdom reveals a standard set of spectacles that are unique to this region: African wildlife, the coastal beauty of the Indian Ocean, the ancient slopes of the Drakensberg, and groups of smiling, posed black-skinned bodies clad in beads or skins. Such representations are so common as to be taken for granted. For example, Lion Matches has produced a series of kitchen matchboxes featuring South African national attractions: they depict portraits of the Big Five, distinctive landmarks like Table Mountain and, predictably, spear-wielding Zulu warriors. While ethnic mystique has long characterised the global fascination with this region, especially since the 19th century, current representations of blackness for the tourist market have qualitatively transformed along with the social conditions in which they are situated. The living dioramas and ‘cultural villages’ on show today display a lifestyle that is understood to belong to the region’s past: few believe that the picturesque people shown in the photographs live their lives outside the wage economy and the pressures of modern, post-apartheid society, even if continuities certainly exist.

The package that is advertised says much both about what is on offer and for whom. For example, the Protea Hotel Shakaland boasts ‘the greatest Zulu experience in Africa’:

Feel the pulsating rhythm of mysterious and magical Africa as you re-live the days of Shaka, King of the Zulu’s (sic) in this authentic re-creation of the Great Kraal overlooking the Umhlatuze Lake. Experience the sight of assegai-wielding warriors, share the fascinating secrets of the Sangomas

and witness traditional customs – tribal dancing, spear making and beer-drinking ceremonies. Stay in first-class accommodations in traditional beehive huts, with en-suite bathrooms. (ad appearing in *Independent on Saturday*, March 29, 03)

Some travellers want to feel that they have had an authentic encounter, even if they are aware that it is mediated, that it is a performance. The authenticity derives from the idea that ‘this is the way it was’ – that they are glimpsing a pure reconstruction of a historical reality, one that satisfies their idea of essential Africa. In 1998 historian Jeff Guy wrote an article on the ‘misrepresentations of the history of the British invasion of Zululand’ in 1879. The first section of the paper is entitled ‘Marketing tradition’ (1998:156).⁵ There is very little that even pretends to be authentic at the most ambitious of the tourism ventures to be launched in the province. Expecting to attract 1.4 million visitors during its first year of existence, the entertainment, recreation, educational and shopping space that started off as the ‘Point Waterfront Marine Theme Park’, dabbled with ‘uShaka Island’, and is now uShaka Marine World, dwarfs all other attempts to cash in what is still referred to as ‘ethnic’, a term stretched beyond belief in the marketing and fashion worlds.⁶ An investment that drew on taxpayers’ money, the ‘concept’ drew approval from Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini as well: this ‘... fantasy village incorporating elements of African culture, South Sea island paradises and shipwrecks’.⁷ In a contorted effort to link

⁵ In January, 1997, it was announced that King Goodwill Zwelithini was planning to ‘educate KwaZulu-Natal youth and promote Zulu culture to tourists’ at Nongoma – included would be the Reed dance, the First Fruits ceremony, and Shaka Day celebrations. A month later it was announced that the King was ‘backing moves to build a royal theme park, “on the scale of Disneyland”’, in northern KwaZulu-Natal. By 2002 there were reports of a new ‘Kingdom cultural venue’ as part of a ‘Zulu cultural route, which would stretch right up to Nongoma in Zululand’.

While not much has come of the King’s own plans, Zulu theme parks have proliferated: for example, Shakaland; the PheZulu Safari park incorporating a ‘traditional Zulu vilage’; the Rob Roy Hotel offers not only ‘superb service and scrumptious food in a picturesque setting’, but also the Izintaba Cultural Zulu Village which ‘will capture your imagination during a one-hour educational show’; DumaZulu Traditional Village and Lodge; the Zulu Legends restaurant and tourism center (which folded in 2004); while a proposed Tourist Junction would straddle the N3 highway link with the north, at Ladysmith, ‘with a distinct Zulu theme’ (see Waetjen and Maré forthcoming)

⁶ ‘Ethnic beauty is the vogue in the big business world of European fashion. That’s why Zululand locations ... will soon feature on Fashion TV and a leading Italian fashion magazine. [The plan is] ... to incorporate Zulu culture and Zululand’s natural beauty in the portfolio’ (*Mercury*, March 13, 02)

⁷ Fantasy featured again a few months later: ‘... what Durban will get for its money is a fantasy village with strong African themes in its design. A world of wonder that is being targeted at residents from the region every bit as much as at incoming tourists’. (*Mercury Network*, February 20, 02).

the uShaka spectacle to heritage, the King mused that ‘in African folklore and religious practices, the sea commanded great respect. Of marine creatures, the shark garnered the most respect and being representative and symbolic of King Shaka Zulu’ (*Mercury*, October 18, 01).⁸

At the end of April the uShaka venture opened. The eThekweni Municipality *Metro* magazine (April 30, 04) devoted much space to the event. Mayor Obed Mlaba gushed that “‘Thanks to our investment in uShaka, the entire Point is now firmly on track to becoming a premier tourist, commercial and residential area’”. ... Property values in the adjoining South Beach area have already climbed dramatically, thanks to their proximity to uShaka and the optimism created by the development’. In his own column, ‘From the Mayor’s Parlour’, Mayor Mlaba continues: ‘Sparkling upgrades in the Point area and skyrocketing property prices have led business experts to predict that this is the best thing that has happened to Durban since the International Convention Centre and they also say that uShaka is a catalyst that will open up the Point area’.

In this mix of ethnic branding and commercial development, public space is being transformed. Along what has been said ultimately to become ‘the Platinum 100 kilometres’ (Metro manager Mike Sutcliffe’s vision), public space is becoming inaccessible, entry is dependent on a fee, or is at the mercy of ‘Right of Admission Reserved’ signs. The Suncoast Casino and Entertainment complex was constructed on the site of paddling ponds, braai facilities, the Village Green concert area, and the Animal Farm. The same ‘development’ engaged in ‘dune rehabilitation’ by extending its lawns onto the actual beach, through a thin remaining strip of coastal bush, prompting journalist Peter Machen to comment:

⁸ Global cultural consumerism has opened up the way for royalty and local bourgeoisies to utilise their ‘insider knowledge’ in the local presentation of cultural attractions. Sol Kerzner was the unlikely first with Sun City in the Tswana ethnic enclave and independent state of BophuthaTswana, but he has certainly not been the last. But even Kerzner’s despised and boycotted legacy has been redeemed, and serves not only as a holiday and golf resort, but also as venue for African conflict resolution talks, as was recently the case with regard to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

But that's a lie if ever there was one. What has, in fact, been in progress is the complete removal of dune life from a fairly large strip of the beach in order to provide casino visitors with their own personal entrance to this delicate stretch of coastline. (*Independent on Saturday*, February 8, 03).

At the other end of the Golden Triangle 'opening up' the Point area has already meant closing it to many of the previous users and inhabitants. These include the homeless making use of the Ark shelter, its closure directly related to its proximity to uShaka; the many residents and users of the derelict buildings, side streets off Point Road, and doorways in the area; those who will no longer be able to afford rents because of the skyrocketing property prices; and social service buildings and their inhabitants, such as TAFTA. It is clear that the increasingly strident calls for making the area safe are directed not only as those listed as unwanted ('litter; street dwellers, petty criminals, drunkards and prostitutes', as Jabu Mabuza, CEO of Tsogo Sun and major shareholder in the Suncoast casino, named them, in proposing a 'not-for-profit Golden Mile management company' *Mercury Highroad*, May 2, 03), but also at any other threat to the 'theme' of the tourist attractions.

The easiest way to close access is through 'class apartheid' (as Patrick Bond puts it). Rebecca Solnit, writing in the context of San Francisco in the 1980s and the 1990s, notes that access is a more general urban concern: 'It may be that cities have, so to speak, raised their admission fees – ...' (2000:108). There are two ways that this can occur: first, through privatising public space, with the demands for admission fees where none previously existed; and, second, through specific routes to 'urban renewal' which raises the already-existing admission fees for access to specific space. Both of these are occurring in the Point area in Durban.

Conclusion

The contemporary 'Zulu Kingdom' does not refer to the claim for recognition and even secession of a Zulu kingdom that was made by King Goodwill Zwelithini in the bloody lead-up to the 1994 elections. Neither are we dealing with the 'Zulu Kingdom' as a

contemporary social institution – for then we would have to present poverty, lack of resources, schools without electricity, HIV/AIDS and its ravages on the social fabric, and so on. Instead we have a fragmented, ‘de-socialised’ construct (or, rather, constructs), employed in the service of commerce, the commodification of social practices, everyday life, memories and sites.⁹

In the world to which we were granted enthusiastic access from 1994, class relations shape social life, not only through the commodification of ethnicity and of culture more broadly, but also through rapid privatisation of what had been public space. Whether it be ‘sun, sex and sand’, or ‘beach, berg, and buzz’, the spaces through which people could freely move, where precarious livelihoods have been eked out, are being enclosed (literally fenced off) or remain open at the discretion of uShaka or Suncoast management.

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⁹ French sociologist Alain Touraine employs “desocialisation” to describe the disappearance of the social norms and values that were once used to construct the lifeworld. Desocialization is the direct result of the de-institutionalization of the economy, politics and religion’ (2000:39). He notes that ‘desocialization is also depoliticization’ (2000:41).

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