

The Introduction of Local Government in Mtubatuba: A Threat to the Local Traditional Authorities?

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Abstract

The events leading to the 1994 general elections marked a major turning point in the history of South Africa. The new dispensation saw the introduction of new legislation that would see traditional leaders 'losing' their powers to the newly established local government structures. The government's White Paper on Local Government 1998 offered a new vision of a post-apartheid society, embodied in the concept of developmental local government. As a result, territories previously controlled by the traditional leaders would be divided into municipalities, each governed by an elected municipal council. This paper uses a combination of archival sources such as newspapers, minutes of the committee meetings and other written documentary and oral sources drawn from in-depth interviews with local leaders, traditional leaders, and local people from the area. It argues that the incorporation of remote traditional areas under the jurisdiction of traditional leaders in the newly formed municipalities threatened the powers of traditional leaders and complicated the jobs of newly elected councillors, as they were expected to go through izinduna for any project to be successfully launched. This was the case mainly in instances where a local traditional leader and a councillor belong to different political parties.

Keywords: *Councillors, Democracy, Local Government, Municipal Council, Traditional Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

Mtubatuba local municipality is situated along the northern coastal belt of KwaZulu Natal, approximately 200 km north of Durban along the National Route (N2) in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. The town is ideally located as a base from which to explore the rich culture of the Zulu nation and a world-renowned game reserve and the Greater iSimangaliso Wetland Park, previously known as St. Lucia. Mtubatuba has developed from humble railway siding into a strong sub-regional, commercial, service, transport and administrative centre for the entire northeastern Zululand region (KZN 275, Mtubatuba Annual Report, 2011; Harrison, 1989). Mtubatuba town derived its name from Inkosi Mtubatuba Mkhwanazi, belonging to the Mkhwanazi clan of KwaMpukunyoni. Unlike other municipalities that span across multiple traditional authorities due to demarcation, the Mtubatuba Local Municipality solely falls under the jurisdiction of the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority. According to Buthelezi and Skosana, the province of KwaZulu Natal itself is:

... different and unique in that there is one recognized king of the whole province ... under whom all chiefs fall and in whose Ingonyama Trust is vested all land of the former apartheid-era KwaZulu homeland (Buthelezi and Skosana, 2018).

The events leading to the 1994 general elections in South Africa marked a major turning point in the history of South Africa. It brought about changes in governance and policies. Firstly, the political power had to change hands from whites to Africans. Secondly, soon after the elections new developments, such as the passage of the 'Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 32 of 2000), regulating planning, service delivery, performance monitoring and public participation; the Municipal Finance Act (Act No. 56 of 2003, regulating financial management, accounting, supply-chain management, reporting and budgeting); and the Traditional Leadership and

Governance Framework Act (Act No. 6 of 2004, providing for relations between municipalities and traditional leadership’) would see traditional leadership institution losing their power to the democratic structures only introduced in KwaZulu-Natal in 2000 and 2001 (Powell, 2012). The fading of the power of traditional leadership, however, did not come as a shock to *amakhosi* or traditional leaders. It was something they, together with the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) of Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi had been fighting against since the early 1990s. Inkosi Buthelezi, in the meeting of Amakhosi held on 5 May 2000, opened the meeting with the following remarks:

I have come to this meeting with a heavy heart but a clear conscience. My heart is heavy because today we can see how some of the worst fears, we have nourished for many years have unfortunately come to pass. What we feared could happen is about to happen, despite our having received innumerable assurances that it would not happen. We were told over and over again that the process of transformation which followed the liberation of South Africa would not deprive Amakhosi of their traditional role, powers and functions. We were regaled with the image of an African renaissance which suggested that the growth and development to which our country has finally committed itself, would be driven by the features, customs and traditions of our African culture. Against this background, traditional leaders enthusiastically embraced the process of transformation, accepting themselves as becoming an engine of renewal and change in the name of progress (Buthelezi, May 5, 2000).

These remarks imply that Buthelezi was disgruntled with the enactment of democratic local governance structures. This was the case because traditional leaders had anticipated that they would remain at the forefront and serve as drivers of local developments in areas under their jurisdiction, but the proposed local government structures elected by the rural people in KwaZulu-Natal was a ‘fatal blow’ to the institution of traditional leadership. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine how the local structures in KwaZulu Natal were established using Mtubatuba as a case study and look at how tensions manifested in Mtubatuba after the 2001 local government elections.

Tensions between traditional leaders and democratically elected officials had from time to time impacted negatively on service delivery; hence this paper investigates the manifestation of conflicts between these two forms of leadership and their impact on the society. In addition, it attempts to explain why traditional leaders in Mtubatuba still enjoy support. Finally, it attempts to reveal complementary relations, if any, between traditional leaders and municipal officials or councillors in Mtubatuba and show how the democratic system of governance and traditional leadership in Mtubatuba have dealt with conflicts over time and how they have addressed the issue of women’s emancipation. As a result of the introduction of democratic local government structures at the beginning of the 2000s, women came to play a more prominent role in governance in the countryside than they ever did before. I argue that despite the introduction of democratic local government structures in Mtubatuba, traditional leaders still enjoy some support from the people they are leading.

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative research employs methods such as observations, interviews, and document analysis to gather data and primarily presents findings through narrative or verbal means (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006). This approach to scholarly inquiry differs from quantitative research methods (Creswell, 2014). An interview, a key component of qualitative research, emphasizes minimal control by the interviewer and encourages respondents to freely express their subjective feelings. Participants should feel empowered to discuss the investigation subject

openly and guide the interview with a few predetermined questions. Moreover, interviews should delve into the topic, seeking clarity, rephrasing when necessary, and confirming understanding, particularly in complex or ambiguous situations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, pp. 356 – 358). Purposeful sampling is the most commonly used sampling procedure in qualitative research, focusing on selecting information-rich cases for study. Information-rich cases provide substantial insights into central research issues. Therefore, purposeful sampling involves identifying key informants with specific knowledge about the topic under investigation (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006, p. 140). As a result, the researcher identified and interviewed a diverse sample of seven participants, including traditional leaders, ward councillors, and ordinary citizens from Mtubatuba. This selection ensured representation across various demographics, capturing a comprehensive range of perspectives. In-depth interviews were conducted using open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses from each participant. Additionally, document analysis was employed, involving the review of relevant written sources such as newspaper articles, local records, historical documents, and official publications. Integrity and ethical guidelines were prioritized throughout the research process, with informed consent obtained from all participants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transitioning from National General Elections to Local Government Elections: 1994-2000

The Mandela government's White Paper on Local Government of 1998 offered a new vision of post-apartheid society, embodied in the concept of developmental local government (Powell, 2012, p. 11). Territories previously controlled by the traditional leaders would be divided into municipalities, each governed by an elected municipal council (Powell, 2012, p. 11). This move by the state was highly contested and fiercely opposed by the traditional leaders across the country, threatening not to participate in the local government elections. Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi argued that the institution of traditional leadership was faced with an 'imminent catastrophe' (M. G. Buthelezi, May 5, 2000). As a result, therefore, tensions would inevitably manifest between the newly elected ward councillors expected to deliver social services to the areas which traditional leaders had presided over for a long time.

Mtubatuba is in the former KwaZulu Bantustan, in which the traditional authority ruled the black population under customary law and has historically been considered Inkatha's stronghold (Buthelezi & Skosana, 2018; p. 113; Injobo Nebandla, 2005; p. 55). Ntombela (personal communication, July 01, 2018) pointed out, that there was nothing like ward councillors in rural areas before 2001 except in 'white South Africa' where, according to Buthelezi & Skosana, the people were governed by democratic institutions and European law. Homelands were structured along ethnic lines in which one dominant ethnic group rallied behind one homeland leader recognised and confirmed by the National Party (NP) government to govern the homeland on behalf of the state. The KwaZulu homeland, predominantly Zulu, was in the hands of *uNdunankulu KaZulu* (Prime Minister of the Zulu Nation), Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi who was also the president of IFP. These homelands were mainly one-party arrangements in which opposition parties were not permitted and liberation movements like the African National Congress (ANC) were violently suppressed. This was the case in KwaZulu, where Amakhosi under the banner of the IFP enjoyed supremacy and ruled tyrannically over their subjects. Buthelezi and Skosana observed that there were no effective accountability mechanisms governing chieftainship, thus leaving many chiefs to act in a despotic way (Buthelezi & Skosana, 2018, p. 113).

As anticipated by the revolutionaries, who felt that this institution was not relevant in the post-1994 era, the institution of traditional leadership nearly saw its demise following the new approach by the ANC-led government of national unity. The introduction of local government structures in rural areas under the jurisdiction of traditional leaders, to facilitate social development gave birth to a ‘new’ power struggle. The 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa guaranteed a place for traditional leaders in the new dispensation. However, their roles were not explicitly stipulated (Ntsebeza, 2004, 2005). The decline of powers and roles of traditional leaders followed the passage of the White Paper on Local Government and the promulgation of the 1998 Municipal Demarcation Act (Act No. 27 of 1998) and the Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 117 of 1998). The former created a demarcation board to determine the new boundaries and the latter provided for the structural, political and functional institutions for metropolitan, district and local municipalities. The latter two, i.e., the Municipal Demarcation Act of 1998 and the Municipal Structures Act of 1998, would operate in the areas under the jurisdiction of traditional authorities (Powell, 2012, p. 15).

Mtubatuba Local Municipality fell within the jurisdiction of the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority during the reign of Inkosi Mzondeni Mkhwanazi. In KwaZulu Natal, the IFP enjoyed popular support and thus played a bigger role in the opposition to the proposed local government elections. Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi fought tirelessly against these new developments, for he wanted to secure the interests of traditional leaders as he was inkosi himself (Ntombela, personal communication, July 01, 2018). In his own words:

I and my colleagues from KZN were alone in parliament in trying to stop what was done to Amakhosi anywhere throughout the country. I was alone in the Cabinet when I objected to the white paper on Local Government and its implementing legislation (M. G. Buthelezi, May 5, 2000).

Ntombela observes that this was the case because Inkosi Buthelezi was a traditional leader and most of the amakhosi in the province of KwaZulu Natal were affiliates of the IFP. He had an obligation to safeguard and protect the interests of *amakhosi* and to ensure the recognition of the Zulu Kingdom (Ntombela, personal communication, July 01, 2018). Without amakhosi's influence in the province, the Zulu Kingdom would go in vain. Most importantly, Ntombela recalls that the main cause of such objection to the establishment of Local Municipal councils was that the national government had failed to outline what would be the powers and functions of traditional leaders once municipal structures were established. It had not been stipulated how these structures would operate (Ntombela, July 01, 2018). In the end, elections are taking place without any legislation having been adopted or the Constitution having been amended to avoid the obliteration of the powers of traditional authorities (M. G. Buthelezi, December 03, 2000). These were the worst fears of amakhosi in the KwaZulu Natal province – to lose their powers to democratic structures. This did not bring tension, frustration, confusion and anger to the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority only in Mtubatuba, but across the country as the establishment of local government threatened traditional leaders in general. It is worth noting that Inkosi Mkhwanazi of the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority was a member of the IFP, so this factor undoubtedly played a key role in the manifestation of conflict as some accused him of bias. In 1998, for example, Inkosi Mkhwanazi used his powers to suppress the ANC members or supporters violently in Welani where their houses were burnt while some of these people were shot. The exact date of the attack is not clear, but it was on a Saturday. As Mthethwa recalled, “*sasinda ngokulambisa*” (we ran for our lives). The residents of Welani were attacked because they were seen as traitors who were members or supporters of the ANC, which was the enemy of the IFP. Mthethwa recalls that ‘you could not be ANC and live peacefully in Mtubatuba before the first local government elections’ (Mthethwa, personal communication, July 01, 2018). This concurs with the observation by Injobo Nebandla (2005) that the Mtubatuba Local Police (SAP)

and KwaZulu Police (KZP) played a key role in the conflicts, targeting, harassing and torturing individuals perceived to be supporters of either the United Democratic Front (UDF) or the ANC.

Just to provide some background and context for growing support for the liberation movement, especially the UDF and ANC in the region: During the 1980s and 1990s, the towns of Empangeni and Richard's Bay, which are located closer to Mtubatuba experienced a significant increase in trade union activism. It was during this period that many workers joined unions which were affiliates of the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU), which was formed in 1985. The growing presence of the youth and civic organisations in Richard's Bay and Empangeni resulted in the rise of significant opposition to Inkatha and the KwaZulu administration in the area (Injobo Nebandla, pp. 55-56). There was growing dissatisfaction among young people who saw Inkatha and KwaZulu administrations governing in a despotic way, creating no room for young people to grow politically. This growing politicisation may be linked to the nationwide attempts by the ANC to make the country ungovernable. However, Inkatha was prepared to protect its governance at all costs. As a result of this opposition, Inkatha took drastic and harsh measures to violently suppress the opposition.

In 1985, for instance, at the University of Zululand, Empangeni four UDF supporters were ruthlessly killed by Inkatha's *amabutho* (warriors). Although Mtubatuba did not experience the high levels of mobilisation witnessed in Empangeni and Richard's Bay, youth movements began to oppose Inkatha. Ntombela (personal communication, July 01, 2018) argued, however, that although there was friction, it was not as severe and widespread as was the case in other parts of the province. The only violence evident in Mtubatuba was targeted at specific individuals and organisations (Injobo Nebandla, 2005, p. 57). Because the area was dominated by Inkatha, there is little evidence to prove that Mtubatuba experienced the phenomenon of no-go areas as was the case in places like Nongoma, KwaMashu and others. However, it is said that some students had to drop out of secondary school because of their political associations. They did this to avoid torture and harassment by their political adversaries.

In Dukuduku during this period the struggle was quite different as the residents were facing forced removals from the state itself. Following the 1994 general elections and 1996 local government elections, Inkatha in Mtubatuba managed to successfully secure control of the municipality. The community living in Dukuduku Forest witnessed significant political violence when the area became divided into two sections – one section was occupied by the IFP supporters and the other section by ANC supporters. The government's plans to relocate the community from the Dukuduku Forest exacerbated the situation, creating two hostile groups (Injobo Nebandla, pp. 56 – 57). Some people cooperated with the government's plans while others fiercely resisted such relocations. It was argued that it was in the interests of nature conservation and the tourism industry, that people are moved to the nearby dry and less productive Khula village and later the infertile former cane farm in which Ezwenelisha Village was established, which Nustad & Sundnes (2013) call 'green grabbing'. Those who agreed to move were viewed as 'sell-outs' and thus experienced harassment from those who resisted.

The First Five Years of the Local Government in Mtubatuba, 2000/01 – 2006.

While the Constitution guarantees a place for traditional leaders in the new order, it fails to outline the precise nature of its authority and its relationship with other institutions (Williams, 2010, p. 89). It became evident however, that after the 1994 elections traditional leadership would no longer be the only institution in rural areas, and it had to coexist with the new local government structures voted for by the people (Williams, 2010, p. 89). Nonetheless, amakhosi were not prepared to share powers with local government structures. They threatened the ANC-led government of national unity, claiming that they would not participate in local government elections as this would result in the obliteration of the institution of traditional leadership and its powers. Inkosi Buthelezi told the *imbizo* (public gathering) of the Zulu nation that the

municipalities would exercise powers previously enjoyed by traditional authorities, and that traditional authorities would no longer have the power to exercise basic functions such as deciding which land to be planted and which one to be built upon (M. G. Buthelezi, December 3, 2000). This usurpation of the powers of traditional leadership seriously frustrated traditional leaders not only in KwaZulu-Natal but across the country.

Despite the fierce opposition to the first local government elections, the ANC-led government was keen to strengthen democracy in the rural areas falling under the jurisdiction of traditional leadership. It was on these grounds that the local government elections had to take place. As indicated earlier, Mtubatuba was the stronghold of Inkatha and most traditional leaders in the area were members of this political party. It was not surprising, therefore, that this party was able to secure most of the seats in the municipal council.

The main source of conflict in Mtubatuba was no different from that in other parts of the country. Ward councillors had now to deliver social services to the people controlled by traditional leaders, Inkosi Mkhwanazi and *izinduna zesizwe* (headmen of the clan). The conflict was inevitable as Inkosi Mkhwanazi was not prepared to lose control of the area. He took it to the extreme when he attempted to contest the local government elections in Ward 17. It is argued that Inkosi claimed that he was protecting his land, which the ANC wanted to take away from him through the establishment of the municipal council (Ntombela, personal communication, July 01, 2018; Williams, 2010). The conundrum he was faced with seemed to be beyond his control as local elections were not only designed for Mtubatuba but for the country at large. His frustration was beyond control.

Ntombela (personal communication, July 01, 2018) outlines that in the IFP, of which Inkosi Mkhwanazi(?) was a member, there was a traditional leadership structure. This structure argued that before elections, the Constitution should first clearly outline the powers of amakhosi in the new order. It can be argued that fear and frustration were primary factors yielding to a clash between traditional leaders and elected ward councillors. Arguably, amakhosi to a greater extent undermined the elected ward councillors, as one chief cited by Williams in the northern KwaZulu Natal claimed that he is in charge and ‘nothing happens without my permission. No project can just go without the approval of inkosi’ (Williams, 2010, p. 95). This has been the outcry of most ward councillors in the Mtubatuba Municipality, for one could not deliver or communicate with the community without the permission of *induna*. Mathe (personal communication, June 25, 2018) a young businessman who has participated in numerous community development programmes, working closely with elected ward councillors and *induna* in Ezwenelisha village, Dukuduku, observed that this process is unnecessary and delays service delivery, particularly when the ward councillor is not on good terms with *induna*. ‘This process negatively impacts on service delivery, it fails us because *induna* decides when the meeting will be held. Since 1998, this system has failed us. All that matters to [them] is self-enrichment’ (Interviewee X, June 26, 2018).

This practice appeared to be common during this period, 2000-2006. Ntombela, in Ward 13, had to report to Induna Mabuyakhulu of Ebaswazini while Mr Maphanga in Dukuduku had to report to Induna J.P. Buthelezi and Mr Zungu (a Ward 3 ANC ward councillor) had to seek permission and get approval from Induna M.P. Mkhwanazi of Khula Village. This made their work difficult. Ntombela (July 01, 2018) and Buthelezi (June 29, 2018) recall that you could not bypass *izinduna* because in the ANC policy documents, it is stipulated that ward councillors should observe and recognise traditional leadership in areas where they operate and in the IFP Ntombela recalls vividly that you would even risk your portfolio or face serious disciplinary actions should you bypass inkosi or *induna* in your ward. They were the first to know about proposed projects. To counter the establishment of municipal councils, in Umkhanyakude District under which Mtubatuba belongs, *amakhosi* formed the Umkhanyakude Regional

Traditional Council, through which they would be represented in the municipal council. However, this structure did not have executive powers. They would only observe with no powers to influence or change decisions made by the newly elected democratic government structures. In Mtubatuba, post-2001 elections there was a significant degree of tolerance although there were reported incidents of conflict. This was because, all ward councillors were IFP members and most, if not all, traditional leaders in Mtubatuba were IFP, including Inkosi Mkhwanazi. The ANC was able to secure only three seats in the first municipal council. Interviewees have observed that this factor largely minimised conflicts. They usually worked well, when belonging to one organisation. Friction would only be evident when leaders, both elected and traditional could not agree on a particular issue, when the traditional leader felt overlooked or bypassed by the ward councillors or when the ward councillors felt suppressed or sabotaged by the traditional leader. In Mtubatuba as most of them were IFP, *amakhosi*, *izinduna* and ward councillors took directives from Inkosi Mangosuthu, the president of the IFP and the Prime minister of the Zulu nation.

Fika Buthelezi, a founding chairman of the ANC branch in Dukuduku forest and Ezwenelisha, was also the secretary to his father's traditional council in Ezwenelisha village, pointed out that the government bought a farm for the resettlement of people removed from the Dukuduku forest. The location was termed Ezwenelisha village. From its inception, the development of Ezwenelisha was vested in the hands of the development trust, Ikhwezilokusa Development Trust. The main task of the Trust was to facilitate the development of the village. It was chaired by Mr PJ Buthelezi whom Inkosi immediately appointed *induna* and the secretary was Siphon Zungu. Among the members were Mrs Shandu, Mrs Khuzwayo, Mr Mbuyazi and others. There was a general dissatisfaction that the members of the trust were corrupt and self-serving. According to Interviewee X,

It was agreed when we left Dukuduku Forest that "a one-man one-site" principle would be applicable, but these people [trustees] have many sites and had utilized material which was supposed to build RDP houses to erect their mansions (Interviewee X, June 26, 2018).

Fika Buthelezi (personal communication, June 29, 2018) recalls that 'when we settled here we did not have an *induna*, [then] Inkosi Mzondeni Mkhwanazi appointed my father as *induna* of the village.' He explained passionately how he attempted to stop this from happening arguing that the newly established location was a state land which required the municipality to give residents title deeds and that it should be governed by the ward councillor and the municipal authorities, not by an *induna*. However, his interventions failed to sway those in power, and he was attacked by his brothers as a 'traitor' who had joined the ANC. He recalls how he launched the first ANC Khiphinkunzi Branch and had to face death threats, harassment, and humiliation from his blood brothers and other Inkatha supporters. Apart from that, he had observed that his father (*induna*) and Maphanga, a ward councillor, worked relatively well and there was a certain degree of tolerance and cooperation, although at times there would be instances of conflicts, for example, over major projects in the area. These conflicts also emanated from the fact that Ezwenelisha is a state land, falling out of Ingonyama Trust and therefore ought not to have been administered by a traditional leader. However, *induna* insisted that he was in charge and had been legitimately appointed by Inkosi Mkhwanazi and therefore demanded recognition. When asked whether the institution of traditional leadership, particularly in Mtubatuba, should be abolished, Fika Buthelezi (personal communication, June 29, 2018) argued that 'we need them as ceremonial agents. We are Africans, when we do traditional ceremonies, they become more relevant.' Mathe (personal communication, June 25, 2018) concurs with the latter proposition in that the constitution recognises customary law and therefore it cannot be done away with unless we want to be Europeans. Mathe (personal communication, June 25, 2018), however, was concerned about the legitimacy of decisions taken by traditional councils in traditional courts as

most of the council members were semi-literate, if not completely illiterate. In addition, they have no formal training in judicial matters.

It is difficult to decide who should be the sole leader of the rural communities, between *izinduna* and ward councillors because they play different roles which are of paramount importance. The ward councillor is expected to deliver services to the people and the *induna* is required to bring order and enhance unity in the area. Issues of land allocation and cattle grazing are easily resolved in the traditional courts. Many rural villagers perceive traditional courts as accessible and within easy reach, places that the residents can just walk to, and issues could be settled leaving two parties satisfied, without any party being arrested. They are seen as cheap and convenient for the poor, while the European courts are expensive and based in towns. However, Interviewee X had observed some degree of unfairness of this institution in dealing with cases in the area. In her own words: 'I am a woman and a widow, and the worst part is an active member of the ANC; I would never get justice from [them]' (Interviewee X, June 26, 2018). But Mathe argued that traditional courts despite the lack of proper training, are still best, effective and cheap in dealing with local issues related to customary law.

Mathe (personal communication, June 25, 2018) also highlighted that another source of conflict between the municipal council and the traditional leaders which resulted in serious tension was the 'by-laws' regulating cattle farming and burial grounds in Mtubatuba. However, this document was not available in the Mtubatuba municipality for public access, because it was rejected by the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Department (COGTA). He added that these 'by-laws' sought to regulate how many cattle one household may have and the use of municipal cemeteries for burials instead of the family burial grounds. This was fiercely resisted by traditional leaders who were backed up by COGTA. These by-laws were never applied. In the municipality, a copy was not available because the Municipal Council is in the process of re-drafting by-laws since they were rejected by COGTA. Ntombela (personal communication, July 01, 2018) argued that at times 'we passed by-laws and people were not happy about them, and they were never implemented. It is like it was for filing purposes and to keep the ball rolling.' Many of them were neither effective nor applicable to the rural setting but to avoid friction, they were not implemented.

The Influence of Floor Crossing Legislation

In the first local government elections, the IFP in Mtubatuba managed to secure many seats leaving only three for the ANC. Ntombela (personal communication, July 01, 2018) observed that there was a certain degree of political stability in the municipality and the council remained predominantly Inkatha, until floor crossing was promulgated, allowing council members to move from one party to another without losing their seats. In October 2002, the Constitutional Court permitted politicians to cross the floor without losing their seats (Smiles, 2011, p. 159). This phenomenon gave rise to a new form of a power struggle amongst political organisations and significantly contributed to the political tensions, not only in Mtubatuba but across the country, for it was applicable at the local, provincial and National Assembly levels. Smiles (2011) points out the saga of the National Democratic Convention (NADECO) of Ziba Jiyane which did not get a single seat in the National Assembly but due to the floor crossing gained four seats. This system proved detrimental to the stability and effectiveness of the political parties. Critics have argued that the promulgation of Floor-Crossing was a betrayal of the mandate given to politicians by the voters. In short, it undermined voters. This, according to Ntombela, is what brought tensions not only to the politicians themselves but supporters on the ground. It compromised the dominance of Inkatha in Mtubatuba and supporters of this political party could not accept that. Although tensions did not openly break out into public violence, it is speculated that many received threats and some were secretly attacked and killed, but very few cases were reported.

Although instances of political violence in Mtubatuba remained relatively limited, some interviewees reported allegations of intimidation and political intolerance. The violence typically took the form of threats and intimidation. Before the 2004 general elections and the 2006 local government elections, there were speculations about a 'hit list' aimed at targeting ANC officials in the area, although no concrete evidence was ever presented. This lack of evidence complicates efforts to gauge the extent of violence, particularly since it often targets individuals rather than entire groups or communities. The most notable incident of political violence involving a group of ANC supporters occurred in Welani in 1998, where houses were set on fire and people were shot due to their association with the ANC.

South Africans have overwhelmingly expressed a view that traditional leadership has an important role in deepening and enriching democratic governance at the local level (Department of Provincial and Local Government, July 2003). As a result, there was a dire need for the state to recognise the role of traditional leadership in local governance. It took the state nearly ten years to define and legislate the role and place of traditional leaders in a democratic dispensation. In 2003, 'the state finally validated the role of customary authorities in local government, they would be leaders of traditional councils in rural areas in South Africa' (cited in Beal, Mkhize & Wanda 2005: 763).

Minister Mafumadi, the then minister for the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG), felt that traditional leadership occupies an important place in African life, and, historically, in the body politic of South Africa (Department of Provincial and Local Government, July 2003). The fact that it embodies the preservation of culture, tradition, customs and values of African people, sees the need for the recognition of this institution in local governance and development of rural areas falling under the jurisdiction of traditional leaders. Arguably, this institution was recognised and given roles to prevent and end continued conflict and contestation of power between traditional leadership and elected council members. Sadly, this institution remained less influential hence it only plays advisory roles.

CONCLUSION

The primary source of conflict in Mtubatuba stemmed from the overwhelming dominance of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in the political landscape. Traditionally, leaders are expected to maintain neutrality and foster stability, cohesion, and peace within their jurisdictions. However, in Mtubatuba, this expectation was not met. Traditional leaders actively engaged in partisan politics, particularly aligning with the IFP (Williams, 2010; Ntombela, July 01; 2018; Buthelezi, June 29, 2018). During periods of political intolerance in KwaZulu-Natal, those not aligned with the IFP often faced compromise and intimidation (Taylor, 2002, Phakathi, 2019). While violence remained relatively subdued, ample evidence suggests that traditional leadership institutions in Mtubatuba played a significant role in stifling opposition parties. In 1995, the Ntuli family in KwaMsane Township endured an attack, humiliation, and torture by IFP supporters due to their affiliation with the ANC. Interviews revealed that ANC supporters often faced limitations in freely expressing themselves and were denied permission to hold political gatherings. Tensions escalated during the second round of local government elections in 2006, nearly resulting in political violence (Injobo Nebandla, 2005). The situation was exacerbated by key IFP leaders defecting to the ANC, while the IFP was adamant about retaining control of the municipality. This power struggle persisted until at least 2011 when, with the support of Zanele Magwaza's National Freedom Party (NFP), the ANC secured control of the municipality, albeit without an overwhelming majority. Young activists within the ANC expressed discontent with the failure of the IFP-led municipality to address the needs of the youth

and foster development in the area. The municipality itself acknowledged poverty, crime, and unemployment as pressing challenges in Mtubatuba, which remains predominantly rural. Lastly, the passing of Inkosi Mkhwanazi in 2007 marked the onset of the decline of the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority. His demise led to succession disputes within the royal family, resulting in factionalism and challenges in leadership continuity.

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