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the former KaNgwane homeland, South
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**Spaces of change:
Tribal authorities in the former KaNgwane homeland, South Africa**

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Abstract

An underreported consequence of the democratic transition is its impact upon localized governance systems in mediating development opportunities within the former homelands of South Africa. Colonialism and apartheid utilized traditional authorities to control landscapes and people, and while these systems continue to influence the livelihood opportunities available to rural households, their scope and influence are being renegotiated by the emergence of new governance structures. This paper uses a case study from the former KaNgwane homeland to evaluate the role of the Matsamo Tribal Authority in shaping access to land, wood and agricultural projects in the region. It is argued that the colonial and apartheid empowerment of the tribal authorities continues to have symbolic and material meaning within KaNgwane, which shapes the ways that rural households benefit from conservation and development. In the post-apartheid era, newly created democratic structures are challenging traditional governance systems by reworking household access to environmental resources. The intersection between these contrasting, and historically situated, systems suggests a dynamic renegotiation is occurring that will continue to impact rural households within the former places of apartheid.

Keywords: Development, KaNgwane, homelands, South Africa, tribal authorities

Introduction

Recent reports in the popular and academic press attest to the slow pace of land reform in rural South Africa (Levin and Weiner, 1997; Levin *et al.*, 1997; Star Business Report, 2001; McCusker, 2002) with a growing consensus that the lack of clarity about land rights remains the central impediment to effective planning and implementation (Levin and Mkhabela, 1997; Ntsebeza and Hendricks, 1998; Ntsebeza, 2000; Cousins, 2001). As Cousins (2001) suggests, potential investors are often unclear about whether they should negotiate with the central government, which owns the land, local government, which administers development projects, or traditional leaders who claim to represent communities. The consequence is that “local residents are often excluded from decisions about the land they occupy and depend on for their survival” (Cousins, 2001, p. 25). Additionally, a number of cases within the Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces demonstrate that traditional elites have been able to exploit the ambiguities surrounding land ownership and utilize new development

opportunities to further expand their influence within rural communities (Forrest, 2001; Land Reform, 2001; Yende, 2001).

The question of who has rights to land and environmental resources within rural South Africa reveals a deep history that continues to be negotiated in the post-apartheid era. Colonial and apartheid governments utilized traditional systems, including the tribal authorities, as a means of controlling society and space. Although these systems are undergoing change, they continue to shape the livelihood opportunities available to rural households. In light of the slow pace of redistributing land to previously disenfranchised communities, analyses of the tribal authorities in the former homelands are needed. This paper uses a case study of the Mzinti community in the former KaNgwane homeland to evaluate the scope and impact of the Matsamo Tribal Authority in controlling environmental resources in the region. Particular attention is directed towards how the tribal authority exerts control over communal space for wood for energy fuel, grazing space for livestock, and new agricultural projects offered through the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development Programme (LRAD). Although the Matsamo Tribal Authority contributes in shaping access to environmental resources and development opportunities in the region, it is being challenged by the emergence of new structures and agencies. The result is that rural households increasingly engage with a variety of systems to generate livelihood opportunities, which disadvantages the poorest members of the community who are less able to influence traditional and contemporary decision-making systems.

In the first section of the paper, an historical overview of colonial and apartheid systems of segregation is provided to explore the role of traditional structures in shaping access to land and other environmental resources in rural South Africa. This is followed by an analysis of the case study, which draws upon fieldwork completed in South Africa from May 2000 – July 2000 and August 2001 – August 2002. During that time, quantitative and qualitative methods were combined to evaluate livelihood production patterns, dependency upon environmental resources, and community views on the scope and impact of the Matsamo Tribal Authority within the Mzinti community. The paper concludes by considering the potential for land reform and development opportunities to reach the poorest members of the community in light of the continued presence of the tribal authorities within the former homelands.

The tribal authorities in colonial South Africa

The segregation and exclusion of South Africa's peoples and landscapes precedes the apartheid era. In fact, the apartheid government's use of the tribal authorities was a continuation of the British system of indirect rule, which was based on the belief that Europeans and Africans were culturally distinct and that the institutions of government most suited to Africans were those they had traditionally constructed¹. Colonial rule proceeded through governing through these local institutions, rather than completely replacing them with colonial inventions. Crowder (1968, p. 169) argues that indirect rule did not necessitate the use of chieftaincies, however "...in practice indirect rule laid heavy emphasis on the role of the chief in the government of African peoples, even for those peoples who traditionally did not have political as distinct religious leaders." The use of these institutions required some modification of existing organizational structure, particularly aspects of traditional government that was deemed repugnant by European ideals, or aspects that restricted the

effective exploitation of the country or people. To this end, the British deposed and marginalized rebellious chiefs, while rewarding those that did their bidding. In this way, the British were able to exploit traditional systems by fostering competition and uncertainty and sow the seeds of discontent for future generations.

Ntsebeza (2000) suggests that the use of traditional authorities by colonial powers enabled them to exploit an ambiguity in the relationship between chieftaincies and their people, particularly in terms of the accountability and legitimacy of traditional systems. Although cases exist where the community mediated the power of the chiefs (Tapscott, 1997), tribal structures were often autocratic and based on dominion, rather than benevolent rule (Peires 1981, Lambert 1995). The colonial appointment of traditional authorities marked a departure from existing African traditions, as the British freely appointed leaders without consulting councilors or elders, and sometimes chose leaders that were not in the direct line of lineage. Additionally, a series of rulings, including the Glen Grey Act of 1894 and the case of *Hermansberg Mission Society v. Commissioner of Native Affairs and Darius Mogale* of 1906, strengthened the power of traditional authorities at the local level. The Glen Grey Act was instrumental in shifting land ownership systems within the native areas from communal to individual tenure, while leaving the chief with control over unallocated land. Ntsebeza (2000, p. 285) reports that, in the latter ruling, the court held that “an African chief, as trustee of the community’s land, may alienate land with the consent of the chief’s council and without the direct participation of the community.” This reinforced the notion that the chief was the steward of tribal land, and that unallocated land could be accessed and utilized at the whim of the tribal authority.

The empowerment of the tribal authorities was linked to colonial understandings about the role of the chief in owning and managing the landscape. Although the colonial government provided clear restrictions upon tribal authority power, the right to control land allocation was vested in the chieftaincies. Levin and Mkhabela (1997) suggest that the notion of the chief as custodian or trustee of land was a colonial creation, produced by the need for creating a customary land tenure system. Traditional communal tenure and perceptions of “communalism,” therefore, were myths developed during early colonialism in southern Africa. Lestoalo (1987) argues that the chief traditionally controlled the land, but once it was allocated to individual households, his authority ended. Regardless, a “misunderstanding of the ‘functions’ of the chief and the cultural obligations of tribal people have led to the many allegations that the chief controlled the land of the tribesmen” (Lestoalo, 1987, p. 21). Similarly, Ntsebeza (2000, p. 287) concludes:

...it is not accurate to refer to rural areas that are controlled by traditional authorities as ‘communal’ areas. What could be referred to as ‘communal’ land is, in fact, land that has not been allocated for residential and/or arable purposes, for example, grazing land, forests, and so on. It is this category of land that will be dominating debates about ownership rights in the countryside in post-apartheid South Africa.

The 1920 Native Affairs Act was the first major legislative effort to bring consistency to rural local government and attempts were made to organize the Zululand and Transvaal reserves along the Transkei model. The new government moved towards a policy of

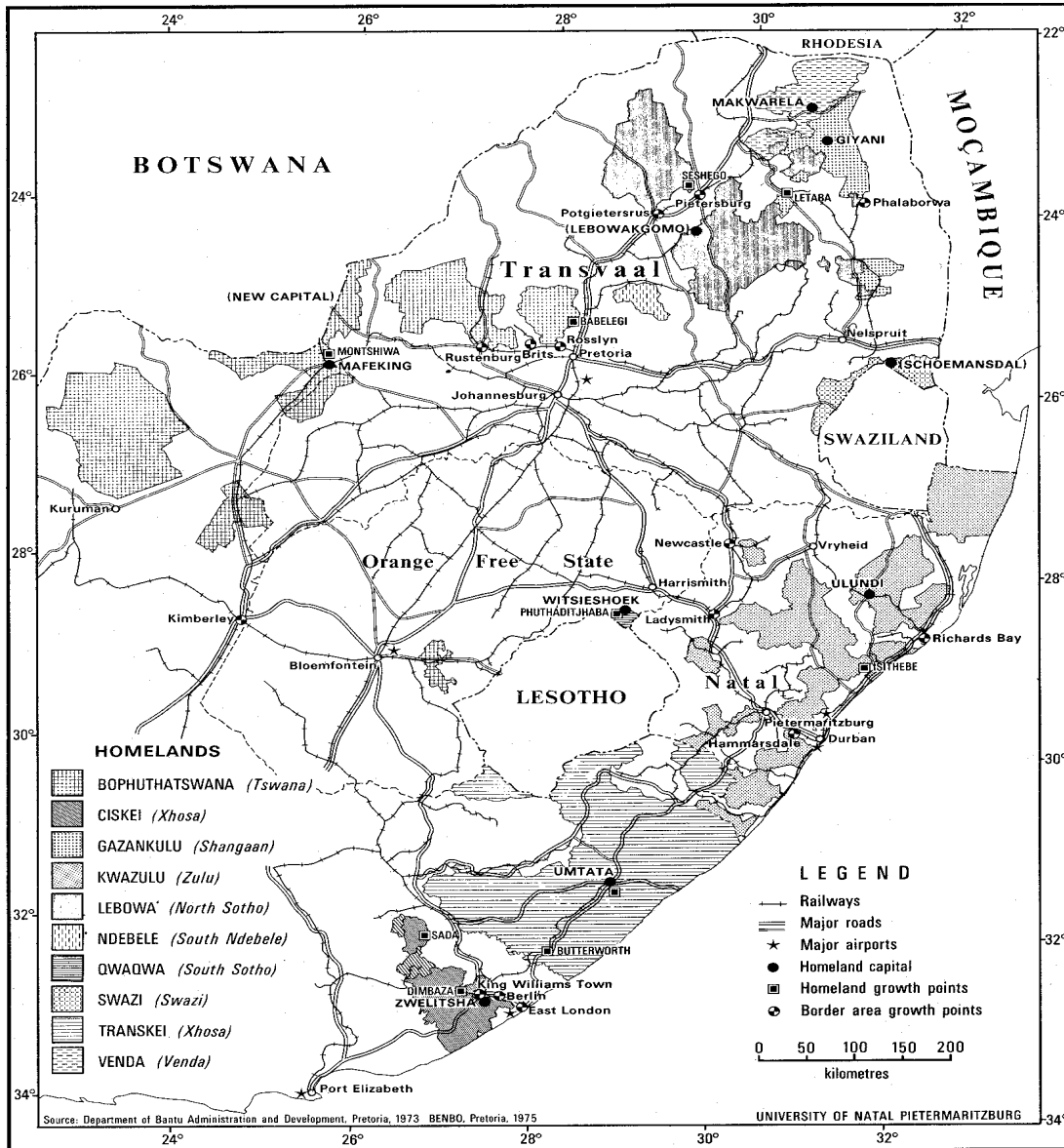
segregation, and as Beinart (1982, p. 6) explains, the “chieftaincy in a modified form came to be seen by segregationist ideologues as a means to defuse agrarian and industrial class conflict in the 1920s.” The passage of the Native Administration Act of 1927 was intended to “shore up the remains of the chieftaincy in a country-wide policy of indirect-rule, which would allow for the segregation of the administration of justice” (Ntsebeza and Hendricks, 1998, p. 5).

The 1936 Natives Act was the crowning achievement of pre-apartheid segregation, as it expanded the native reserve system and the role of the tribal authorities. One of the Acts, the 1936 Natives Land Act, was designed to purchase additional land, called “released areas,” for consolidation of the reserves. Rural people applying for land were granted a permission to occupy (PTO) to establish that the land had been allocated to them. As Ntsebeza (2000, p. 287) suggests, the Act empowered the local magistrate to grant permission “to any person domiciled in the district, who has been duly authorised thereto by the tribal authority, to occupy in a residential area for domestic purposes or in an arable area for agricultural purposes, a homestead allotment or an arable allotment, as the case may be.” Furthermore, the Act provided strict guidelines for Native control of land, and tenure rights would be forfeited if owners failed to take occupation of land fenced within one year of allocation or made decisions that resulted in non-beneficial use for two years. PTO holders could be forcibly removed when the government deemed it necessary, sometimes without payment, and PTOs were not recognized by financial institutions because they were seen as limiting investment opportunities, more productive use of the land, and prospects of getting housing subsidies. The PTO system effectively laid the groundwork for spatial patterns of control and exclusion by the state and tribal authorities and would be exploited by the apartheid government in the years to come.

The homelands in apartheid South Africa

The victory of the National Party in the 1948 general elections resulted in the emergence of apartheid policies that further reinforced spatial segregation, control of movement and production, and empowerment of traditional governance systems. Since the design of apartheid was to use space to separate racial groups, it resulted in specific geographies that continue to impact the organization and production capabilities in the post-apartheid era. A series of national policies resulted in the creation of the black “bantustans,” which were later renamed the “homelands” and then “national states” (Pickles and Woods 1992). The creation of the homelands was tied to a national classification of the black population into various categories and resulted in forced relocations from rural and urban areas. These territories constituted only 13.7 percent of the country but became central locations for large segments of the population. During apartheid, some 3.5 million people were relocated (Unterhalter, 1987) and between 1960 – 1980, the proportion of the total black population living in the homelands rose from 39 to 53 percent (Surplus People Project, 1985). Figure 1 is a map of the South African homelands after a period of consolidation of some of the separate territories:

**Figure 1: South African homelands
(Lemon 1976: 165)**



The apartheid government extended the British system of indirect rule by utilizing traditional structures to rule. The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 recognized the tribal authorities as the chief governing system and abolished the Native Representative Council that was created by one of the 1936 Natives Acts. Bantu authorities were organized into tribal, regional and territorial levels, and at all levels, the tribal authorities were dominant. Blacks in the urban areas were also expected to accede to the tribal authorities, and efforts were made to create urban representatives of tribal chiefs. The apartheid government's empowerment of traditional structures caused Mbeki (1984, p. 40-41) to state:

It is clear from the composition of these bodies that they represent merely the messengers of government will; the elected element is so small and so remote from the voters that it can hardly be held even to contribute to popular participation. The thesis of government policy is clear – Africans are still in the tribal stage, chiefs are the natural rulers, and the people – neither want nor should have elected representatives.

By applying the British strategy of indirect rule, the apartheid government created and empowered certain tribal leaders and oftentimes imbued them with greater authority than they historically possessed. Ntsebeza (2000) reports that the tribal authorities were affiliated with the central government through the Department of Native Affairs and the Minister of Native Affairs had the power to depose any chief, cancel the appointment of any councilor, appoint any officer he deemed necessary, control the treasury and spending, and authorize taxation. As Mamdani (1996) describes it, the tribal authority system relied upon the use of the native authority, or “clenched fist” of the tribal structure. As he (1996, p. 23) explains:

Not only did the chief have the right to pass rules (bylaws) governing persons under his domain, he also executed all laws and was the administrator in ‘his’ area, in which he settled all disputes. The authority of the chief thus fused in a single person all moments of power, judicial, legislative, executive, and administrative. This authority was like a clenched fist, necessary because the chief stood at the intersection of the market economy and the non-market one.

The power of the tribal authorities was expanded during apartheid because the chief was in control over land allocation, and with the establishment of the homeland system, these were the only locations where the majority of Africans could legitimately claim land and a home (Tapscott, 1997). Chiefs and their family members were often rewarded by their engagement with the apartheid system, either through salaried positions or educational opportunities. Additionally, ambiguities in traditional and contemporary tenure institutions enabled them to exploit villagers by charging for services or other needs such as state pensions, tribal courts, and migrant labor opportunities (Ntsebeza, 2000). Traditional authorities developed their power not from popular support, but from the fact that they were feared and that rural people did not have alternative ways of accessing their benefits (Ntsebeza, 2000). As Levin and Mkhabela (1997, p. 160) state:

...taken in conjunction with their control over land and the access to ‘reciprocal donations’ which this gave them, this enhanced their capacity to accumulate land and livestock and placed them at the center of processes of social differentiation. The chieftancy thus became a mechanism of accumulation, inaugurating a process of accumulation-from-above which has shaped rural social structure and the character of anti-democratic practice.

By employing indirect rule, tribal authorities became the primary lever of rural local government and played a central role in land allocation throughout the apartheid period.

In the late 1950s, the apartheid government shifted its focus to “separate development,” and emphasized that the homelands would eventually become independent from the rest of the country. The state transferred power away from the Department of Native Affairs to the bantustan governments, which were funded and managed by the apartheid government. Four homelands, Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei were eventually granted independence, and residents of these states, whether they lived there or not, lost their South African citizenship. Internal and external pressure upon the government in the 1980s resulted in the gradual lifting of some apartheid policies. Prime Minister P.W. Botha acknowledged that the homelands could never support more than 40 percent of the black population and stated that blacks living in white-controlled areas would have to be accepted. Urban blacks were allowed to acquire property in certain locations and South African citizenship was restored to the citizens of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei.

Traditional authorities in post-apartheid South Africa

There is near consensus in the South African literature that shortly before, and immediately following, the 1994 elections the African National Congress (ANC) maintained an ambivalence about the role of the tribal authorities in the rural areas (Levin and Mkhabela, 1997; Ntsebeza, 2000). The corrupt practices of traditional authorities were rigorously questioned in the 1980s, and some resistance leaders attempted to draw a distinction between “genuine” traditional authorities and “illegitimate” ones. Levin and Mkhabela (1997) assert that, in the interests of alliance building, the ANC’s hesitancy gave way to cautious support for “progressive chiefs,” as coalitions were formed with Intando Ysizwe of Kwandebele, Inyandza of KaNgwane, the UPP of Lebowa, and with the Bantustan regimes of Venda and Transkei. The perception that the ANC was a government in waiting in the late 1980s led a number of homeland leaders to visit the ANC at its headquarters in Lusaka. KaNgwane’s chief minister, Enos Mabuza, was the first bantustan leader to visit the ANC and pioneered a path for other leaders to ally themselves with the ANC (Niekerk, 1990). Generally speaking, the ANC attempted to court the traditional authorities, rather than create a strategy to establish alternative democratic structures that would replace them following the democratic elections.

Levin and Mkhabela (1997) argue that the ANC’s ambiguity towards the tribal authority allowed the institution to be formalized within the new Constitution. Additionally, there have been attempts within Mpumalanga Province to distinguish between “political functions” and “traditional functions,” with the belief that as long as tribal authorities commit themselves to the latter, there would not be problems. The issue, of course, is that no development issue is apolitical and the conflicting roles of the chieftaincy and new municipalities raise significant challenges for future land allocation processes within the country. The fact that colonial institutions of tenure rights combined a contradictory set of communal and individual land rights is a point not forgotten by land rights scholars. Ntsebeza (2000) suggests that the dismantling of the clenched fist of the tribal authority structure remains central to land tenure reform in the post-apartheid era. The emergence of democratically elected structures, such as the municipalities, suggests a remarkable departure from traditional rule. As Ntsebeza (2000, p. 281) states:

...recognizing unelected traditional authorities who, during the apartheid period in particular, were largely discredited and feared, while remaining vague about their precise role in land tenure and local government, means prospects of extending representative democracy to these areas, and implementing emerging policies and legislation become extremely doubtful.

The role of the tribal authorities within the homeland system remains central to understanding the meanings and impacts of the places of apartheid. The institutions of land ownership and allocation that were created during the colonial and apartheid periods haunt land tenure reform in the post-apartheid era, as tribal authorities continue to exert control over land and other environmental resources necessary for livelihood production. Additionally, tribal authorities are participating in shaping patterns of resource access that have material impacts upon rural households. The specific activities of traditional authorities are extremely localized, however, as some chiefs have engaged with the new governance structures, while others are feeling their power eroding. At the present time, the expectation is that the traditional authorities and post-apartheid systems can coexist, although the specific roles are not clearly articulated and are often conflicting and contradictory. Land reform activists and researchers have proven skeptical of this arrangement and assert that the tribal authorities are the chief impediment to the transfer of land to disenfranchised populations. In addition to the ambiguities and legitimacy of traditional authorities, the contradictions between traditional governance systems and the newly created democratic structures are contributing to misunderstandings as to the institutions of resource access in rural South Africa, patterns of livelihood production, and governance systems in the former apartheid homelands.

Livelihood and governance systems in the former KaNgwane homeland

In order to evaluate the role of the tribal authorities in the post-apartheid period, this paper draws upon fieldwork completed in South Africa from May – July 2000 and August 2001 – August 2002. During that time, a case study was undertaken of the Mzinti community located in the former KaNgwane homeland. The community was specifically chosen for its ongoing partnership with the Mpumalanga Parks Board in co-managing the Mahushe Shongwe Game Reserve, which is an ecotourist community conservation project initiated in 1986. The community is part of the Matsamo Tribal Authority, which has its main office in Schoemansdal although local representatives of the tribal authority live in Mzinti. In addition to evaluating the impacts of the Game Reserve, research collected quantitative and qualitative data on livelihood systems, dependency upon environmental resources, and the role of the Matsamo Tribal Authority in administering access within the region. Specifically, 50 semi-structured interviews with members of randomly selected households were combined with 478 structured surveys. It is difficult to locate accurate population figures for rural communities in South Africa, however, interviews with representatives from the Parks Board and other development agencies suggest a population of 20,000 dispersed across 4,000 households within Mzinti.

Households within the Mzinti community continue to depend upon environmental resources for livelihood production, as a majority report using environmental resources on a regular basis. Households primarily depend upon wood for cooking and heating, as 50% of households report using wood as their primary energy source². Additionally, 58% of

households report using wood for cooking at least once a month. In addition to energy fuel, households access the natural environment for a variety of resources and purposes, including the use of wood for construction, land for farming at the household stand, land for off-site farming, land for grazing of cattle and goats, sand collection for construction, thatch grass for construction, medicinal plants and fishing. Dependency is highest for three resources: the collection of wood for energy fuel, land at the home stand for farming, and sand which is purchased and used for construction purposes. Since the collection of certain resources continues to be managed by the tribal authority, the sets of rules need to be examined to understand how they have changed over time.

Wood and farming land

The collection of wood for energy fuel is one of the most common uses of environmental resources within the community, and the use pattern parallels wood collection within other regions of South Africa (Shackleton, 1994, 1998; Eberhard, 1999) and the developing world (Grundy *et al.*, 1993; Sundriyal *et al.*, 1994). 58% of households report cooking with wood at least once a month, and 50% use wood as their primary energy fuel. The majority of wood collectors gather wood using “head loads” or wheelbarrows and collect at least once a week, although some residents hire trucks or tractors to assist in resource collection. The particular household member collecting wood varies, ranging from young children to the elderly and collection occurs at various points around Mzinti. Within the region, the *induna* (head man) and chief work together to grant permits for wood collection with the understanding that communal land belongs to the tribal authority. The tribal authority issues permits for wood that is collected for construction, however, wood for energy fuel is not restricted. As the former *induna* explained³:

Those who want to cut trees and make houses, they must have a note. Once they come to me, I take them to the chief to get permission so that they can cut trees. But some people, they don't want to do that...Here at Mzinti it was not a problem to get wood but then came people with chainsaws from across the river, and they cut the trees...Now we are trying to stop people from cutting trees but they don't listen.

In addition to permits for resource collection, the tribal authority grants plots of land to new residents and decides which community members will benefit from agricultural projects, such as the LRAD sugar cane project. LRAD was initiated by the Department of Land Affairs and Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Environment and is designed to establish irrigation development for 1,828 hectares of farming land for the settlement of 241 small-scale commercial sugar farmers, 456 women's group members and 50 youth club members. As a promotional report attests, the Mzinti small-scale sugar cane project is one of seven projects in the region “aimed at helping previously disadvantaged South Africans, especially women, join more than 50,000 already established small sugar cane growers and tap into one of the country's biggest foreign exchange earners” (African Connexion 2002, p. 28).

Although LRAD is intended to distribute land to previously disenfranchised households, the participation of the tribal authority in determining ownership of the plots has

important implications for the effectiveness of these projects in reaching the poorest members of the community. Of the 35 plots demarcated for the Mzinti community, the majority belongs to households within the older section of the community who have stronger ties to the Matsamo Tribal Authority. In a number of cases, individual farmers pooled together as collectives and were effective in lobbying the tribal authority for land. In others, the tribal authority used the project to recognize existing power structures within the community, rather than alleviate poverty by granting title to the poorest members of the community. The induna, and members of his family, have sugar cane plots, and all of the households reporting plots had male owners. Additionally, political elites benefited from the distribution of plots, which suggests that the tribal authorities continue to use development projects to control resources and reward allies within KaNgwane.

The lack of transparency about land allocation only reaffirms the sense of mistrust of the tribal authority felt by households within the Mzinti community. As one respondent explained:

I don't see any changes [in Mzinti.] I can tell you that I have a farm and they said we must register as farmers and we would be the first people to plant sugar cane. But at the end, they went and took people from another location and put them in our places and we did not get anything. We complained a lot and even took the induna to the chief to fight this problem, but we did not get anything.

Another Mzinti resident, who is originally from Mozambique, said he was turned away because he did not belong in Mzinti and the farms were not intended for him. LRAD's stated objective to distribute farming plots to disenfranchised rural households is admirable, however, the distribution process needs to be carefully scrutinized. One of the brochures for the project uses a female farmer as a role model for LRAD's success in distributing land, however, it does not address the fact that she received her 20 hectare farm "as a reward for her loyal 18 years served as a clerk for the local chief" (African Connexion, 2002, p. 30). Within the community of Langelooop, a new chief submitted a different list and disrupted the selection process (Land Reform, 2001). As has been reported elsewhere (Forrest, 2001; Yende, 2001), land distribution remains an instrument for the tribal authority to reward elite members of the community and retain control over environmental resources in the post-apartheid period.

Cultural identities and environmental resource use

Community variation in livelihood production strategies and perceptions of the role of the tribal authority also link with the processes shaping cultural identity for local residents. Within Mzinti, there is a tension between traditional and modern representations of Swazi culture, which play out specifically in the realm of nature and production. One example is the ownership of livestock, which retains its cultural and material importance to residents. Livestock ownership, specifically of cattle and goats, is restricted to a minority of the population as 9% of community households reported owning either cattle or goats, of which 19% owned only goats. On average, livestock owners have 10 cattle, which can make a significant contribution to household economy. Households sell livestock in case of seasonal income fluctuations or to pay for specific items, including food, household goods and school

fees. Half of the households that reported owning cattle have sold a cow for a variety of purposes including school fees, household items and a funeral⁴. It is still customary to exchange *lebola* (bride price), although it is increasingly common to pay in currency, rather than cattle. Additionally, livestock serve a vital function for ceremonies, including weddings and funerals.

The overwhelming majority of livestock owners are older residents of the community. This is often due to the financial expense of attaining cattle, however, younger community members are uncertain about the viability of investing in livestock. The shift for some of these residents into informal and formal economic activities translates into a disinvestment in traditional forms of livelihood production. In addition to livelihood shifts, cattle retain their cultural importance as the *lebola* (bride price) is still practiced within the region, although it is increasingly exchanged as currency rather than cattle. Younger community members are also more likely to speak of livestock in material, rather than cultural, terms. As one resident explained:

This is too African. We can't separate our culture from the cow even if we want to Westernize. But the thing lives in us most because we want to have functions related to our ancestors. I don't do that as I have mentioned because I am Christian. Additionally, sometimes when you are in a bad financial situation they can bring a lot of money.

As the resident indicates, the interplay between traditional and modern understandings of cultural and religious identity has implications for livelihood strategies within KaNgwane. Although only a fraction of the community owns livestock, their cultural importance allowed certain residents to leverage the tribal authority to fence an area of communal land near Mzinti to protect grazing space from the influx of agriculture and conservation initiatives. The impact of this initiative upon the entire community could be significant, as only a fraction of the community depends upon communal land for grazing, while the majority needs wood for energy fuel. Although cattle owners have been successful in persuading the tribal authority to grant them land for a grazing project, wood collectors are not organized or empowered to make a similar demand. Of traditional resource collection, wood is being disproportionately impacted by the landscape change within the region and households that depend upon this resource will be increasingly constrained in the future. The tribal authority and various governmental agencies assert the importance of livestock to local livelihoods, however, the needs of resource collectors are not given the same consideration. The transformation of land cover and environmental resource access patterns, therefore, are necessitated on cultural grounds that have greater sway with the tribal authority. Because their livelihood strategies are tied to traditional cultural norms, livestock owners at an advantage to other types of resource collectors within the community and are more effective in accessing certain development opportunities in the region.

A second example of the links between livelihood production and cultural identity is the collection and use of traditional medicine. Community members are split on the use of traditional medicine and *sangomas* (traditional healers). Although sections of the community visit sangomas, others strongly resist because they identify themselves as Christian and believe in Western medicine and the power of prayer. As one woman explained:

I am a Christian and we don't believe in that. We believe in God. I have seen that some of my family members where I am married believe too much in sangomas. They sometimes go to sangomas and I still remember after the death of my husband they brought most of the sangomas and then I was very, very sick. Then my sister came here and called the Christians and they came and held prayers and after that I was well. That is why I never turn my face towards the sangomas.

The interplay between livelihood production strategies and cultural identity are significant within Mzinti and community members differ on the value of traditional practices such as livestock ownership and traditional medicine. Often these differences are tied to religious and cultural understandings that continue to be reworked within the former KaNgwane homeland while shaping the ways that residents interpret the benefits of conservation and development in the post-apartheid era.

Development and governance

While the Matsamo Tribal Authority continues to exert control over specific environmental resources, the institutional frameworks that shape household access are undergoing change as a result of the democratic elections and increased importance of newly created structures. The authority of the chieftaincy is questioned by some community members, and treated with disdain by others. In part, this is a consequence of the links between the tribal authorities and the apartheid government, which empowered, and sometimes created these structures to enforce order upon rural areas. In some cases, the tribal authorities expanded in power because of apartheid, a point that is not forgotten by local communities. The emergence of new governmental systems and environmental legislation are further challenging the role and legitimacy of the tribal authorities in the rural areas. KaNgwane is contained in the former Lowveld Escarpment District Council, which is now called the Ehlanzeni District Municipality. The ward system was finalized in 2000 and attempts to interface the councilors with village and land trusts, and the tribal authorities. Although the tribal authorities serve at the ward level within the municipality, community members view this as an erosion of traditional power.

A second example is the 1998 Mpumalanga Nature Conservation Act, which places clear restrictions upon the types of resources that can be collected from communal areas and limits the power of the tribal authority in managing territory to which it has historical claim. The Act has expanded the regulatory authority of governmental agencies and placed them at odds with the Matsamo Tribal Authority. With the passage of the Nature Conservation Act, the Wildlife Protection Service (WPS) of the Parks Board has been empowered to enforce new restrictions on wood collection, medicinal plant collection and fishing, which has increased tensions within the region by providing conflicting rules of use for specific resources⁵. One wood seller complained that the conflicting rules made it unclear for community members:

They [the Parks Board] say I am destroying the trees but the problem is that how is this so, since I am collecting dry wood? They say I am killing animals and they say they want paper for me, or a license. Since 1993, I had a license for cutting wood from the chief but the Parks Board claimed that the license was for cutting poles and not for [cooking] wood. I am surprised because the tribal authority did not tell me that so even now I have the letter at the Shongwe Tribal Authority, which cost me 10 Rand. What is surprising is that before they only took the load that I had and now they want money. Where will I get the money?

In the clearest example of the conflict between historical and contemporary systems, in 2001 the Parks Board sanctioned the chief for issuing permits for wood collection that violated the Act and met the following year with the chief to rework the system for wood permits. This suggests that the institutions of environmental resource-use, and the systems governing them, are being reworked in the post-apartheid era.

Since the Matsamo Tribal Authority continues to exert control over the allocation of land and access to various environmental resources, it remains an important institution shaping rural development in the former KaNgwane homeland. Community variation in dependence upon environmental resources, coupled with shifting demographic patterns and in-migration, result in differentiated views in the role of the Matsamo Tribal Authority. Additionally, residents perceive of its importance in relation to newly created governance systems in executing conservation and development projects. Views on the role of the tribal authority are linked to age, as older residents of Mzinti are more likely to view the tribal authority as an important structure in rural communities. Largely this results from the historical connections between traditional authorities and local cultural systems in the rural areas. As Cousins (1998a: 97) explains, “traditional leadership draws much of its legitimate authority from its embeddedness in the social and cultural life of rural communities, where discourses of ‘tradition’ associated with cultural identity are still persuasive for many.”

Unlike older residents, younger community members, particularly respondents who moved to Mzinti from other areas, are often dismissive of the role of the tribal authority and more likely to embrace the ANC and newly-created municipal structures, such as the Ehlanzeni District Municipality. As one younger Mzinti resident explained:

I don't like to stay in a place where it is governed by the induna or kings because you have to pay for almost everything. Like say you want a stand, a place to bring your loved one and many things in fact. I want it to be a *civilized* area [emphasis mine]...Recently, one of my brothers passed away and it was difficult for them to show us a place to dig a grave.

This resident was clearly frustrated with the tribal authority and concluded that their influence would have to end since people are not happy with their procedures. In his view, the tribal authority is an impediment to the effectiveness of local government in meeting the needs of the community.

The changing role of the tribal authority is linked to local understandings about which structures are appropriate for pursuing development within the rural areas. As mentioned

previously, the traditional role of the authority was to manage communal lands by granting title and access to resources, as well as settle disputes between residents. The democratic elections, however, have created new structures and opportunities for development through government that is impacting the ongoing role of the tribal authorities. As a Mzinti resident indicated:

[The tribal authority] is not as active as they were in the past. But their active role in the past, as we understood it, was to try to express the political views of their own people, to not go beyond tribal issues such as ‘why have you slaughtered my cow?’, ‘why has your dog stolen my eggs?’...something like that, minor issues, instead of what is happening to the country and the role of suppressing to make us not raise our heads and express our political opinions in open society. And now they would like to do it as they did in the past, but it is not possible.

The implication is that the future of local development rests upon the ANC government, rather than the tribal authority. In describing the role of the tribal authorities, the local ward councilor for Mzinti stated:

...they don’t have a lot of power. They don’t invest in the roads or in electricity. That’s the government. You go to the tribal authority for traditional problems. For discussion of the *lebola* (bride price), you go to the induna. If you are not satisfied, you go to the chief. South Africa decided to keep the tribal authority even as it went to a Republic. They didn’t in Mozambique. The tribal authority is not powerful, like in Swaziland.

The assertion that local government should be responsible for development has contributed to an empowerment of municipal structures at the expense of the tribal authority and other traditional institutions, which has subsequently impacted how Mzinti households access environmental resources through the creation of new rules governing resources.

Conclusion

The use of the tribal authorities to govern rural landscapes and people during colonialism and apartheid left lasting institutional frameworks that continue to impact how rural households access a variety of environmental resources and development opportunities. In the former KaNgwane homeland, the Matsamo Tribal Authority exerts control over land and specific resources and is able to reward elite community members through the LRAD sugar cane project. The emergence of new environmental legislation and the municipal system, however, has reduced the scope and influence of the tribal authority by reworking the sets of rules governing resources. Younger community members increasingly identify the ANC and other governmental agencies as the primary vehicle for development, which has challenged the tribal authority’s control over landscapes and people to which it has historical claim. Although land reform activists have proven skeptical, this could result in a transformation in land title systems that provide new opportunities for the poorest households in the post-apartheid era.

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¹ Although there are significant variations in traditional systems of rule, traditional authorities within South Africa were generally hierarchical, almost exclusively male, and comprised of the tribal authorities (the chief and his headmen), councilors (some appointed by the chief and elected), and a tribal secretary.

² The remaining households combine a variety of energy types, as 16.1% report using electricity as their main energy source, 31% report using paraffin and 2.9% use gas.

³ At the time of research, Mr. Thikuni Shongwe was in poor health and decided to resign so his son could assume responsibility as induna.

⁴ 48% of cattle owners reported selling a cow since 2000. The sale price fluctuated between 1,500 – 2,000 Rand.

⁵ The WPS is a division of the Parks Board and is responsible for maintaining the Mpumalanga Nature Conservation Act. Their role is largely the enforcement of the legislation, which results in conflicts with community members and between community members and other branches of the Parks Board. Community relations officers regularly complained that the WPS was making their job more difficult because of the anger within Mzinti over fines and arrests.

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