Original article

Mining and 'community' struggles on the platinum belt: A case of Sefikile village in the North West Province, South Africa

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A B S T R A C T

The rapid expansion of platinum mining into rural communal land in the former 'homeland' areas of South Africa has caused intensive intra-community struggles. To date, however, there has been limited empirical focus on the character of these struggles at the village level. In this article, I attempt to narrow this gap by drawing on a detailed ethnographic case study of Sefikile village in the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela traditional authority area, North West Province. The analysis illustrates how the post-apartheid mineral policy's reform has failed to grasp the complex character of rural communities found on lands where platinum mining has expanded. The findings drawn from Sefikile – a village that hosts one of the oldest platinum mines in South Africa – reveal intense struggles over land, mining revenues and public services. Such struggles are fought mainly through distinct group identities as social markers to exclusive group rights. The current mineral policy is incapable of adequately addressing the escalating disputes and marginalisation at the village level.

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1. Introduction

In post-apartheid South Africa, communal land which falls under the former 'homeland'[1] areas has increasingly become a focal point of mineral development strategy. This emanates from the country's geological advantage: specifically, the existence of the Bushveld Complex, an enormous multi-layered, ore-bearing, underground rock formation. It spreads over more than $65,000 \text{ km}^2$, spanning two of the country's most rural provinces—North West and Limpopo. Here, it is widely believed that "[t] here are enough [platinum] deposits in the Bushveld Complex . . . to supply world demands for many decades or even a century" (Cawthorn, 2010, p. 205).

With over 80% of the world's known PGM reserves, South Africa's Bushveld Complex has contributed significantly to the massive platinum boom over the past two decades, and has overtaken gold as the major player in the country's mining sector.[2] South Africa's platinum mining industry has recently drawn the

world's attention for being a hot spot for wage-related strikes. At the apex was the Marikana Massacre in August 2012: members of the South African Police Service opened fire on striking mine workers at the Lonmin Mine, North West Province, a massacre which left 44 people dead and many others injured (Chinguno, 2013). The growing concern is that the platinum mining industry in post-apartheid South Africa is characterised by fragmented and precarious work (Chinguno, 2013, p. 33). As such, like gold mining, it relies on a massive African migrant labour force, low wages, and poor working and living conditions to bolster its profits (Mnwana and Capps, 2015).

In South Africa, gold has fuelled the development of large urban industrial centres. But the increased attention paid to platinum post-apartheid has shifted the geographical focus to rural areas. The vast area spanned by the platinum-rich Bushveld Complex, often called 'the platinum belt', is overlaid by rural communal lands, which fall under the political jurisdiction of traditional – 'tribal' – authorities (Claassens, 2014). The densely populated, poverty-stricken communal areas have become a new focus for the rapid expansion of the platinum mining industry, particularly in the North West and Limpopo provinces, over the past two decades. Like all former 'homeland' areas in South Africa, these rural communities bear the legacy of apartheid, having fallen under the 'independent homelands' of Bophuthatswana and Lebowa, respectively. These labour-sending areas are characterised by, among other things, extreme poverty, massive unemployment, poor

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[1] The ten ethnically-defined semi-autonomous African 'states' that were created during apartheid for Africans/Blacks in South Africa in order to exclude them economically, socially and politically.

[2] The key investors in platinum group metals (PGMs) are Anglo American Platinum (Amplats), Impala Platinum, and Lonmin.

education standards, and a shortage of basic services (Mnwana and Capps, 2015).

The geographical shift coincides with post-apartheid legislation attempts to redefine residents in these communal areas as 'traditional communities' under chiefs. Several pieces of legislation that significantly enhance the powers of traditional leaders (chiefs) have emerged over the past decade. These include the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003 (Act 41 of 2003, or the TLGFA), the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004 (Act 11 of 2004) and the Traditional Courts Bill (B15—2008). Studies show that these laws and bills on traditional leadership tend to impose colonial ethnic identities on rural residents by establishing the current traditional authorities in exactly the same boundaries as the apartheid 'tribal' ('bantu') authorities (Claassens, 2014; Claassens and Matlala, 2014). These laws are criticised for fortifying the powers of local chiefs and tribal councils over communal property, particularly land and mining revenues, and making downward accountability impossible to realise (Claassens and Matlala, 2014; Claassens, 2014; Mnwana, 2014b). Chiefs have become the mediators of mineral-led development and mining deals. Local conflict has intensified over the past few years in communal areas on the platinum belt (Mnwana, 2012). Some scholars observe that the escalating conflict epitomises a resurgence of ethnic identities in post-apartheid South Africa (Manson, 2013).

In this article, I contribute to key arguments that deal with the issue of platinum mining, particularly its benefits for local rural communities. I argue that the expansion of platinum mining into rural communal land in the former 'homeland' areas of South Africa generates intense intra-community struggles over mining, land and revenues. There is still limited empirical focus on the actual character of these struggles at the village level. In this article, I attempt to narrow this gap. I draw on a detailed ethnographic case study of Sefikile village in the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela traditional authority area, North West Province, to illustrate how the post-apartheid government's mineral policy reform has failed to cater to the complex character of rural communities on whose land platinum mining expands. This, in turn, has fuelled inter-group disputes at the village level. The empirical findings drawn from Sefikile, a village that hosts one of the oldest platinum mines in South Africa, reveal intense struggles over land, mining revenues and public services. Such struggles are fought mainly through distinct group identities as social markers of exclusive group rights.

The article is structured as follows. After unpacking the argument presented in this introduction further, I review particular debates on mining and community relationships. Next I summarise the research methods adopted, and then report findings from the work undertaken in Sefikile village. The last two sections of the paper present some analytical discussion and a conclusion in which I argue, mainly, that the state's attempt to include 'traditional communities' in South Africa's post-apartheid mining industry has failed to grasp the complex group identities at the village level, therefore fuelling tension.

2. Mining and local communities: key concepts and arguments

Local communities who host large-scale mines tend to suffer adverse social and environmental impacts. Moreover, these settlements typically derive few benefits from the mineral wealth generated in their immediate environment (Mate, 2002; Cronjé and Chenga, 2009). One of the widely-reported challenges which renders large-scale mineral extraction intolerable to local communities is dislocation. Such a problem is well articulated by Hilson and Yakovleva (2007), who assert that mass extraction of minerals is responsible for local conflict and innumerable social problems, none more significant than community dislocation.

Moreover, the rapid mineral policy reform that has taken place in numerous developing countries, which has helped to attract significant investment, has largely excluded the interests of local communities. The tendency of the state to focus merely on promoting large-scale mining activities and neglecting the welfare of local communities in the area where these activities creates tension between management and local residents (Hilson and Yakovleva, 2007, p. 99). Banks (2005) examines at length these dynamics, drawing heavily on the effects of large-scale mining in Melanesia, contending that local community members who are also landowners complain that mining in their area brought about tremendous fear due to the rapid influx of migrants, referred to by the locals as people we do not know. For Banks (2005, p. 189), mining-induced migrant influx not only leads to extensive breakdown of social cohesion but can also deteriorate traditional forms of government.

In natural resource-rich sub-Saharan Africa, studies have shown that the absence of direct community control remains a major driver of communal resistance and socio-political conflict (Ikelegbe 2005; Obi, 2008; De Koning, 2008). Other reasons include: (1) environmental degradation (Lockie et al., 2009, p. 330); (2) poor communication between mine management and surrounding communities (Hilson, 2002, p. 65); (3) a lack of compensation for operating mining activities on indigenous lands (Clark and Clark, 1999, p. 193; Warden-Fernandez, 2001, p. 16; Crawley and Sinclair, 2003, p. 364); (4) mining companies that fail to secure social licences (Holden 2005:432); and (5) forced relocations of indigenous communities from their ancestral lands to make way for new activities (Clark and Clark, 1999, p. 193). Despite companies' championing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), corporate citizenship (CC), corporate social investment (CSI) and sustainable development, the situation remains tense. This impasse has earned the extractive industries a bad reputation and significantly diminished local communities' trust of mining companies (Harvey, 2013).

Although South Africa's mining companies, particularly those in the platinum industry, have reportedly demonstrated some commitment towards their CSR obligations, it has not been genuine towards the social well-being of the communities on whose land they operate. As such, the character of CSR, explains Hamann (2004, p. 288), traditionally manifested itself as philanthropic initiatives premised on competitive efforts at gaining improved image and reputation. Moreover, continues Hamann (2004, p. 288):

> Not only did this manifestation of CSR prevent a sincere, proactive engagement with the underlying causes of social problems in the area but the competitive element also helped to obstruct the establishment of improved collaboration between local actors.

Fig (2005, p. 601) also observes that the business community in South Africa generally prefers the concepts of CC and CSI rather than CSR. Though also important, CC and CSI pose a challenge of power imbalance and superficial policy implementation, since, as Fig (2005, p. 601) also asserts, they ask no questions about legacy, memory, history, justice, or moral and ethical responsibilities of the business. In fact, this very weakness in CSI and CC could be quite detrimental to indigenous communities who live close to the operations of the mining industry.

It is behind the backdrop of this impasse that the post-apartheid state in South Africa has introduced drastic minerals policy reforms. Such reforms not only did away with mineral rights as a form of private property, but introduced a range of measures through which rural communities can participate in the mining industry. Mnwana (2014a) argues that these 'new' policy measures have led to a significant control of mineral