

Introduction

COLONIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORIES, PAST AND PRESENT

In the decade or so since the formal unraveling of apartheid in South Africa, some of the nation's most persistent and intractable tensions have revolved around natural resources. In the territories formerly managed by successive white governments as African labor "reserves," "Bantustans," or "homelands," resource problems have been particularly acute. Decades of state-sponsored segregation, resource deprivation, economic impoverishment, and political disenfranchisement for the African majority have resulted in urgent demands by rural populations for more equitable, democratic, and sustained access to and control over vital livelihood resources. As the ANC-led regimes under Mandela and Mbeki have responded to such colonial and apartheid legacies, the state's prioritization of particular resource policies and development strategies has in turn helped generate new sources of frustration and tension among rural African communities, so-called traditional authorities (chiefs and headmen), and various branches and levels of government.

Within the boundaries of the former Transkei, once the largest homeland within the apartheid system but formally incorporated into the Eastern Cape Province since 1994, struggles and negotiations over resources have intensified in numerous spheres and in often dramatic ways. The redrawing of administrative boundaries and the installation of new local governmental structures have rankled many traditional leaders, who see such moves as threats to their

personal influence in local resource allocation and management.¹ In some cases, the resulting fractures in the political landscape have created new opportunities for environmental access for rural residents. Communities along the southern Wild Coast, for instance, made headlines in the early 1990s as they staged aggressive “invasions” of state-protected park areas and boldly exploited their reserved marine resources.² As these and other communities have asserted their resource rights through various formal and informal channels, they have participated in wider negotiations and debates with diverse government agencies, NGOs, and academics over intersecting and often competing interests in local and regional development, environmental conservation, and popular resource entitlements.³

Such developments in this period of untangling colonialism and apartheid have their parallels in what might at first glance seem an unlikely point of comparison: the original expansion of colonial rule in the late nineteenth century. In this earlier era, a tectonic shift in a political regime—the Cape Colony’s conquest of independent African societies between the Kei River and the southern limit of the Natal Colony, the “Transkei”—and the introduction of new state policies and institutions similarly resulted in critical transformations in how differently positioned actors used and negotiated natural resources in the region. The colonial process of selectively removing or incorporating chiefly power in different locales and installing new political hierarchies generated, as have the changes of recent years, new jockeying over how “traditional” authorities and government representatives should assume responsibilities for environmental control and management. Different arms of the colonial state likewise debated with each other and local authorities over how and for whom the Transkei’s resources should be “developed” or “conserved.” At the same time, rural residents similarly negotiated shifts in local political, economic, and biophysical landscapes to find new avenues of resource access and to assert their own perspectives on their changing livelihood needs and environmental entitlements.

More than just paralleling contemporary situations, however, the formative period of colonialism in the Transkei put in place particular structural relations of power and resource access that have continued to haunt the region’s environmental and developmental predicaments. Amid the many efforts and struggles in South African society to dismantle colonial legacies and “reincorporate” the populations of the former homelands into the body politic, it thus seems particularly crucial to understand such foundational moments in the making of the region’s deeply rooted problems. Looking at the early evolution of the Transkei can illuminate some of the colonial contradictions and constraints that have had such long-term and ongoing impacts on local people’s

lives, particularly by revealing the ways in which issues of environmental use and control originally became entangled in deeper colonial transformations and experiences.

This book takes on this challenge by exploring how changes in environmental access played a key role in colonial dynamics and everyday social interactions in the Transkei in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My primary focus here is on forests, for the colonial government's most intrusive environmental interventions and some of the most intense environmental negotiations of this period revolved around the Transkei's forest resources. The colonial reshaping of forest access from the 1880s onward was deeply interwoven into the larger development of a new colonial political and economic order. Shifts in environmental control and rights under the successive Cape Colony and Union governments were implemented, experienced, and negotiated amid the major forces transforming local political economies—the restructuring of African political authority, the establishment of colonial governance and law, and the gendered socioeconomic and ecological pressures transforming the Transkei into a labor “reserve” and driving the expanding out-migration of African men. At the same time, changes in forest access touched the lives and livelihoods of rural men and women across the region in more direct ways. The overwhelming majority of Africans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relied on wood sources for fuel, for building livestock kraals and huts on their homesteads, and for manufacturing implements used in producing and transporting agricultural goods, such as hoes and sledges. Many others utilized forest lands for crop cultivation and livestock grazing, hunted wildlife in local forests and woodlands, and exploited other forest resources for food, medicine, healing, and a host of other social and cultural purposes. Colonial restrictions on forest use represented varying constraints on these and other practices.

Such changes in the early colonial period also continue to resonate in the memories and personal narratives of many people in the former Transkei today. As I interviewed elders in the Umtata, Tsolo, and Engcobo districts in the late 1990s, the topic of colonial changes to forest access often elicited quite emotional responses, as many individuals linked their more recent experiences of environmental dispossession and subordination under apartheid and their ongoing daily struggles after 1994 with longer-term processes of colonial disempowerment rooted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Reflections on resource access in the past and present often critically invoked a history of colonialism setting in motion local people's loss of direct environmental control and constraints on their ability to employ a variety of meaningful forest resources in their everyday livelihoods and cultural practices,



Figure 0.1. Hut-building in the Engcobo district, Transkei, c. 1954. Photograph courtesy of University of Fort Hare Library, Piper Collection

from selecting desirable tree species for fuel or building materials to accessing certain ritually important landscapes.

Yet despite the significance of colonial-era shifts in resource access, in the lives and thoughts of Africans both then and today, scholars have given this topic relatively little attention. To be sure, various writers have generally abandoned the simplified and self-congratulatory versions of state resource management in the region spun by officials themselves in the colonial and apartheid eras, narratives which environmental specialists all too often perpetuated, sometimes verbatim. In such accounts, Africans' ecological "destruction" in the Transkei in the late nineteenth century necessitated the colonial "protection" of forests and trees from "extinction." Colonial foresters, driven solely by their commitment to environmental conservation and equipped with their unique expertise and farsightedness, fortunately rescued the situation and put resource management on a proper course in the succeeding decades.⁴ The dramatic changes in South Africa since the early 1990s have forced a major rethinking of such statist narratives and a retooling of the exclusionary and nondemocratic direction of past forestry policies. More participatory and development-linked forestry programs for the populations of the former homelands, and ongoing resource conflicts in the former Transkei, including land restitution claims involving state-controlled forests, have directed more researchers to consider the long-term historical roots of many contemporary



Figure 0.2. Woman weaving hut door made of saplings, c. 1930s. Photograph courtesy of Cape Town Archives Repository, Jeffreys Collection



Figure 0.3. Pulling a loaded sledge, c. 1930s. *Photograph courtesy of Cape Town Archives Repository, Jeffreys Collection*

problems of forest access and control. Primarily focusing on contemporary land reform, resource management, and development issues, such accounts generally treat the early Transkeian period as historical background.⁵

By contrast, historians have been relatively quiet when it comes to exploring environmental themes in the colonial Transkei. The overwhelming majority of writing on the environment has instead focused on the contending discourses, practices, and local experiences of socioeconomic “development” schemes in subsequent decades. As a host of writings has examined, from the late 1930s onward South African state authorities responded to severe soil erosion and other environmental problems in the Transkei and other African “reserves” by implementing “betterment” and “rehabilitation” measures—schemes ostensibly designed as ecological conservation strategies but integrally tied to state concerns over racial segregation, the continued supply of cheap African labor, and political stability. Particularly after the Nationalist Party came to power and the Bantustan system was erected, the state instituted a reengineering of the African countryside, uprooting and forcibly removing populations, reorganizing local livelihoods, and often spawning the violent response of rural communities against representatives and symbols of the apartheid state.⁶ While the drama and trauma of these tumultuous events of more recent decades has understandably drawn scholars’ attention, this

historiographical emphasis on the political struggles of the apartheid era has also helped obscure earlier experiences of state environmental intervention in the countryside.⁷ The following discussion reorients this vantage point, exploring the colonial antecedents of the Transkei's interwoven social and environmental problems and revealing that significant negotiations surrounding natural resource access have a much longer history in the region than previously recognized.⁸

Historical writing on the colonial Transkei itself, on the other hand, has only occasionally, and rather unevenly, investigated environmental themes directly. Like other South African radical scholars of the 1970s and 1980s, Colin Bundy and William Beinart, in their pathbreaking work on the social history of the Eastern Cape and Transkei, tended to treat environmental concerns as relatively minor players on the larger stage of political-economic dynamics.⁹ Certain ecological factors might make cameo appearances here and there, but the driving engines of their narratives were the structural forces of colonial expansion and settler capitalist accumulation, the capacities of African societies to weather the transformation of their economies into underdeveloped labor reservoirs for white farming and mining, socioeconomic differentiation within African societies, and the rural politics surrounding certain colonial policies.¹⁰ By contrast, more recent work by William Beinart, Lance van Sittert, Richard Grove, and others has more seriously investigated environmental concerns in important new ways—covering such diverse topics as forest conservation, invasive plant species, fauna preservation, “vermin” control, pasture degradation, and veterinary practice—but often the Transkei is relegated to the sidelines of the history of the Cape Colony.¹¹ Moreover, in a striking departure from the radical scholarship they followed, these studies have primarily focused on official, scientific, and settler communities’ thoughts and practices, providing little information on the historical transformations affecting the livelihoods and responses of the majority populations in the Eastern Cape and Transkei.¹²

This study injects environmental issues far deeper into the colonial past and the social-historical fabric of the Transkei. Various situated actors in rural communities negotiated important changes in resource access from the earliest days of colonial administration of the region, and these responses were tied to wider transformations and experiences in the making of the colonial Transkei. Exploring such themes can thus advance a much more thorough and critical process of interrogating and unpacking the reigning logics of state- and settler-centered histories of resource management in the Eastern Cape and South Africa.

SITUATING THE MEANING OF FOREST NEGOTIATIONS

The following chapters pursue a central question: how does looking at the various social interactions surrounding environmental access reshape our historical understanding of the Transkei? Put differently, what new insights does an exploration of environmental relations bring to the region's colonial history? In probing this question, I have intentionally shifted away from a conventional narrative of "European imposition and indigenous response," since changes in resource access in the colonial Transkei involved a much broader, more complex constellation of political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental dynamics than such a "symmetrical" story allows.¹³ Instead, the discussion here centers on the deeper social relations and processes implicated in forest access from the 1880s to the 1930s, as different groups of historical actors, African and non-African alike, brought the particular and myriad changes affecting their lives to bear on their negotiation of forest access. Forest access in the Transkei thus serves as a window onto differently situated people's historical perspectives on, and responses to, both their shifting biophysical environments and the changing nature of power relations and everyday life in the colonial period.

In framing the discussion around the notion of access, I draw from the theoretical insights of Jesse Ribot, Nancy Peluso, and Sara Berry. Ribot and Peluso have together recently charted a synthetic conceptual framework for what they term natural resource "access analysis," moving beyond past discussions of tenure rights and claims to resources to a broader perspective on "the multiplicity of ways people derive benefits from resources, including, but not limited to, property relations."¹⁴ Studying access thereby becomes a wider investigation into the many social "means, processes, and relations" by which actors are able to enjoy what Ribot and Peluso term the "benefit flow" from particular resources, all situated within the multiple webs of power and political-economic dynamics of particular historical contexts. Similarly, Berry's discussion of agrarian change in multiple African settings focuses on how different groups exploit and invest in various social relations in order to gain and control access to resources, extending the analysis beyond formal economic and legalistic interpretations of environmental regulation into deeper, more intricate social dynamics of power and culture.¹⁵

Understanding the many forces that shaped forest access in the colonial Transkei requires attention to such broader and deeper contours of change. The following chapters examine how people negotiated forest access from their various positions in the evolving colonial order and the diverse stakes they brought to these negotiations over time. Changes in forest access posed new and shifting opportunities, threats, and often ambiguous futures for dif-

ferently positioned magistrates, foresters, African chiefs, headmen, and male and female commoners. Besides pursuing particular material benefits from gaining, controlling, and/or maintaining forest access,¹⁶ actors in the colonial Transkei also strove to enhance their wider power, authority, influence, and legitimacy through such negotiations. When different men and women in particular locales responded to shifts in local forest management or constraints on their environmental practices, they thus drew from the multiple dimensions of their life circumstances.

I also employ the term “negotiation” throughout this book, borrowing and building from Nancy Rose Hunt’s usage in her recent study of birth medicalization in the Belgian Congo. Hunt employs a dual sense of the term: the more “classic sense of adversarial parties bargaining over contested ground, of mediation, arbitration, and sometimes even compromise,” and the more “processual, performative connotation for negotiating—as in traveling, making a turn, veering—as is appropriate for rendering a situation of everyday ‘making do.’”¹⁷ Bringing such definitions of social interaction to my historical interpretation of the Transkei purposely shifts away from a sole focus on environmental contestation.¹⁸ The colonial restructuring of forest access in the region not only involved conflicts between and within official circles and African communities—whether expressed in formal debates, public protests, or everyday interactions and acts of resistance—but also shifting alliances, compromises, and multidirectional decisions and practices which are difficult to fit into neat categories.¹⁹

Moreover, as Hunt’s second definition connotes, resource access negotiations moved in ways not fully anticipated, controlled, or predetermined by any of the various actors involved, as they each coped with their situations and relationships in a fluid colonial context. Examining negotiation intents and strategies not only allows us to see how shifting power dynamics structured and constrained the actions of differently positioned people in unequal ways, but also how individuals creatively responded to these conditions—from high-level colonial authorities jockeying for bureaucratic power, to forest guards and headmen exploiting their forest gatekeeper status for personal dividends, to men and women in particular locales hiding illegally harvested resources. Expanding on the everyday performative sense of negotiation, I also look at how individuals contended with the diverse and complex dimensions of their daily lives and how they then brought such particular yet multiple interests and meanings to their responses to changes in resource access. For example, when rural residents in some locales at the turn of the century violently attacked the bodies and property of African forest guards, they simultaneously performed dramatic acts of resistance against the colonial state’s domination

of local environments and exacted personal revenge on individuals with whom they were entangled in personal and financial disputes.

In approaching and exploring negotiations in such ways, this book offers new directions for scholars of South Africa and the wider continent to conceptualize both the interconnections between environmental and social histories and the dynamics of colonial interactions. My analysis intentionally engages with the vast amount of scholarship on colonialism in Africa and beyond concerned with how various “colonizing” and “colonized” groups “invented,” “imagined,” and “conversed” about “tradition” in the making of colonial legal and political institutions.²⁰ While prolific, this literature has tended to neglect the significant environmental dimensions of many such interactions in the early colonial era, with most Africanist writings focusing primarily on the contestation of “customary” land ownership and use and “traditional” authority during the “high” period of colonialism and anticolonial resistance.²¹ This is an unfortunate lacuna, since understanding the complex making and negotiation of diverse environmental “traditions” in the transition from precolonial life to colonial rule can potentially offer critical perspectives on the discourses employed in contemporary development debates, a point which I revisit for the South African context in this book’s conclusion.

The following discussion responds to this relative silence in two major directions. First, I explore how changes in African chiefs and headmen’s involvement in environmental control and their ambiguous and intercalary position in the evolving colonial order were at the center of complex power struggles from the earliest days of political-ecological restructuring in the Transkei.²² Within African communities, various actors brought a wide array of contending social, economic, and environmental stakes to their negotiations of local environmental authority. As I examine in detail for areas in the Tsolo, Umtata, and Engcobo districts at the turn of the century, such diverse factors as ethnic and religious politics, competition for local leadership positions, class differentiation, ecological change, and colonial administrative schemes all intersected and informed various individuals’ allegiances and alliances concerning chiefs and headmen’s influence over local resource access.

African authorities’ environmental power was also negotiated between and among colonial officials and chiefs and headmen. In the late nineteenth century, forest officials and magistrates deployed competing images of chiefs’ precolonial resource control as ways to legitimize their particular claims to the reins of colonial forest management.²³ Chiefs and headmen also asserted their own claims to “customary” legitimacy as environmental managers of community resource access, exploiting their indispensability to official schemes

and pursuing their particular political, economic, and ecological interests—whether it be strictly enforcing government forest restrictions, shielding local residents from interventions and local representatives of the colonial state, or using their position to derive personal benefits beyond official control. Although relegated to an increasingly subordinate role in resource management at the turn of the century, chiefs and headmen found formal and informal avenues for protecting their ability to interpret their environmental authority and prerogatives in their own localized ways, often at the expense of residents in their wards.²⁴

This book further examines another important yet underdeveloped field in African history writing—the negotiations around “customary” environmental practices and the meaning of environmental entitlements in the colonial era. In the last decade or so, scholars have more closely examined the societal institutions that have structured rights and access to natural resources in various African settings. Working from concepts originally employed in analyses of famine, these writings have opened up new ways of conceptualizing environmental entitlements and their location in complex social processes and relationships.²⁵ Anthropologists and geographers have made the most productive use of such insights, particularly by exploring the gendered dimensions of development and state environmental management schemes and their impact on local resource tenures, entitlements, and practices. Such writings have skillfully moved beyond simplistic and static renderings of gender and environmental relations—often employed by state, NGO, and local actors—to explore the political, economic, and ecological struggles surrounding men and women’s changing access to their natural surroundings.²⁶

Despite this flurry of scholarship and the increasing examination of gender in the history of human-environmental relations in Africa,²⁷ however, surprisingly little historical analysis has been devoted to questions of gender and environmental rights.²⁸ Southern Africanist scholars have scrutinized the gendered effects of state forestry policies in African communities, for instance, yet similar questioning has been neglected for the colonial antecedents of these dynamics.²⁹ And while some recent writing in South Africa’s growing environmental historiography begins to incorporate gender issues, many historians are still shying away from seriously investigating issues of gender and resource access.³⁰ Through such neglect many opportunities are lost to explore what light such themes might shed on gendered histories more generally in the South African past.

This study helps to fill such gaps by exploring the colonial restructuring of Africans’ popular forest rights in the Transkei and the role “custom” and gender played in negotiations over both state policies and the wider colonial

transformations in which these policies were embedded. As in other colonial spheres, different arms of the Transkeian administration at first bickered over the scope and pace of governmental interventions, as foresters' and magistrates' contending policy priorities—conservation versus “native policy”—often collided at the turn of the century.³¹ Yet in one respect, at least, officials increasingly reached consensus: the utility of environmental restructuring to driving African men into labor migrancy and tying African women to a “subsistence” economy in the “reserves.” Beginning in the 1880s and 1890s, officials transformed existing institutions—such as those tied to gender, class, age, and marital status—which structured men and women's access and entitlements to crucial natural resources, particularly wood.³² Through selective representations of Africans' “customary” gender roles and “subsistence” practices, officials attempted to legitimize their efforts to restrict and charge Africans for access to forest resources.

Yet differently situated men and women invoked their own understandings of “customary” practices and resource entitlements as they critically engaged with colonial restrictions.³³ In the earliest years of colonial forestry, amid the internal squabbling among officials, popular discontent with government restrictions and Africans' regular claims to and exercise of more expansive resource entitlements in fact helped shape the broader trajectory of government forest policies, belying officials' own retelling of this history.³⁴ People also contested the gendered orientation of forest regulations, particularly regarding fuelwood access, through formal protest and in daily practice, demonstrating their dissatisfaction with state interpretations of their “customary” gender roles and “subsistence” rights. Even as Africans in the Transkei faced an increasingly authoritarian and bureaucratic state in the early twentieth century—with greater influence over local environments, and growing interests in reducing popular forest rights and intervening in women's environmental practices in particular—men and women in many locales continued to negotiate and reshape the meaning of entitlements in ways they could most effectively control, whether selectively harvesting particular tree types or reorganizing their wood-collection practices. At the same time, in all of these negotiations, individuals contended with shifting forest rights in ways that best responded to their particular needs and experiences of deeper social, economic, and ecological changes. Negotiating colonial forest restrictions was often embedded in individualized experiences of wider transformations of the colonial era—impoverishment, increasing ecological scarcity, broadening state power, and the various pressures driving male out-migration and leaving women to carry the heaviest burdens of rural work.

While men and women negotiated the meaning of new forest rights policies in their livelihood practices, they also asserted alternative perspectives on the very meaning of forest resources themselves. In exploring this realm of resource negotiations, I am suggesting a more expansive definition of access than that theorized by Ribot, Peluso, and Berry. Although these writers point to the social processes by which people are able to derive benefits from resources, it is important to delve further into how different actors historically understood the specific meanings of their changing landscapes and how such perceptions then contributed to their particular ways of negotiating resource access. Ribot and Peluso's emphasis on "benefit flows," for instance, does not adequately grapple with the complex ways in which the nature of a resource "benefit" or value can be contested terrain itself. Building from expanding literatures on local ecological knowledge, "peasant science," and African landscapes, this book reflects critically on how our understandings of Transkeian environments and resources over time are fundamentally altered when we move beyond dominant state conceptualizations to recognize Africans' own historical perspectives on their social and natural surroundings.³⁵

As the colonial state demarcated the Transkei's environments according to its own definitions of nature, differently situated rural residents interpreted such actions according to the various social, economic, and cultural meanings of particular forest resources in their lives and livelihoods. The significance of specific forest species in an individual's agricultural repertoire (chapter 3) or in a group's ritual practice (chapters 4 and 5) often profoundly influenced how particular actors viewed and negotiated both state efforts to restructure access to these resources and the expansion of colonial influence more generally. In my research, information from oral interviews and such written sources as Africans' petitions to colonial officials, court testimonies, and Xhosa-English dictionaries compiled in the early twentieth century revealed how very specifically and selectively people interacted with their changing environments in different historical locales. People's use of language particularly reflected this reality. The Xhosa term *amahlathi* (forests, sing. *umhlathi*) repeatedly showed up in written and oral sources when people were asserting broader claims to wooded areas and all of the diverse resources available within them, such as trees, forest plants, potential grazing areas, cultivable lands, etc. Yet these sources also regularly used much more specific labels to identify the key types of trees, plants, roots, and grasses they routinely exploited and preferred in daily practice in particular historical settings.

Such selectivity has helped me recognize that local historical understandings of "valuable" forest resources not only diverged widely from official perceptions

but also varied quite markedly across space and time and from individual to individual. Exploring such details has thus led to ways of disaggregating and historicizing the “indigenous knowledge” differently situated Africans in the Transkei employed as they utilized their environments and responded to government interventions into them.³⁶ People in the colonial Transkei engaged their particular natural surroundings in highly differentiated ways, bringing their specific life circumstances and positions (in terms of gender, class, age, status, and ethnicity) to bear on their interests in resources and their availability.³⁷

Pursuing these themes has been especially helpful in interpreting the deeper social and cultural dimensions of everyday resource use in the colonial Transkei—a type of analysis generally absent in much of the South African literature, particularly environmental histories of the Cape in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁸ As Tamara Giles-Vernick has recently explored in her research among Mpiemu groups in central Africa, human-environmental interactions can play crucial roles in the definition and development of persons, not just environments.³⁹ In the Transkei, particular forest resources were similarly pivotal in social and ritual interactions of young males as they attained manhood, in the ceremonies surrounding the development of newborns, and in communications between the living and the dead. But beyond incorporating specific trees and plants into the rituals of such major life transitions, differently situated individuals further relied upon particular species to contend with their more mundane, everyday needs of healing and protection and to mediate everyday social interactions and tensions—to magically inflict harm on others or defend oneself, to charm a potential lover, or even to sway the mind of a colonial official when necessary. Such themes are not conventional in African environmental histories. Yet investigating such specific historical stakes in forest resources seems essential to understanding how different individuals approached and responded to local changes in species access within the wider contexts of their daily lives.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY

In probing such varied forest negotiations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, important contours in the Transkei’s social and environmental development in this period have shaped the particular spatial and temporal parameters of my analysis. The physical geography of the area eventually comprising the Transkeian Territories—some 40,000 square kilometers—was and continues to be extremely diverse.⁴⁰ The great escarpment, climbing up to

some 2,700 meters in the Drakensberg Range, today lines the western boundary between the former Transkei and Lesotho. Just below this escarpment is a highland zone, ranging from 1,300 to 2,000 meters and including areas from rolling grass-covered country to treeless mountains in the Mount Fletcher and Matatiele districts. In the central inland districts a minor escarpment running roughly parallel with the Indian Ocean coast separates the higher plateau and the lowland plateau extending from its eastern base. This lesser escarpment, historically often referred to as the Zuurberg, reaches its highest altitude at about 1,400 meters and serves as the catchment area for some of the largest rivers in the former Transkei, which eventually run their course to the sea. In the early colonial period, much larger afro-montane forests also stretched along the seaward side of this range.⁴¹

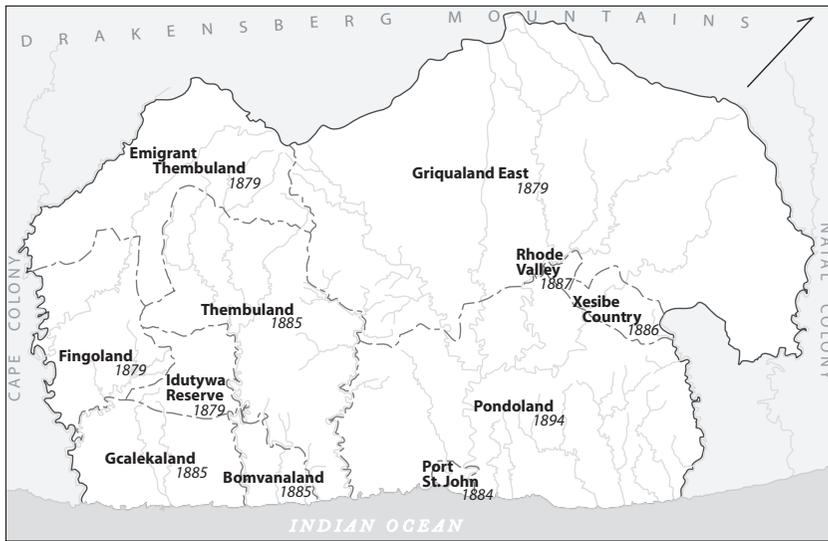
Below this escarpment lies an undulating lowland plateau stretching down to the beginning of the coastal belt at roughly 700 meters—generally flat, but occasionally dotted with hills and mesas in the southwest, becoming much more mountainous as one travels northward, and dissected by deep river valleys and streams in certain areas. This plateau receives much less precipitation than either the escarpments to its west or the coastal belt to its east, affecting the vegetation in the region at the onset of colonialism: deciduous woodland and scrub dotted the grasses of the flatlands, while denser clusters of various types of trees crowded river and stream banks. The coastal belt added even greater levels of complexity to the Transkei's vegetation in the late nineteenth century. From the lowland plateau to about 300 meters lay a strip of coastal scarp forest, which then transitioned into a series of lower coastal forest types, some quite extensive, becoming progressively more diverse and subtropical in the northern parts of the coast towards Natal.⁴²

When colonialism first expanded into the various settings of this complex ecological mosaic, multiple African societies inhabited the region.⁴³ Certain polities—such as the Bomvana, Mpondo, Mpondomise, Thembu, Xesibe, and Xhosa chiefdoms—had long histories in the Transkei, while the political tumult of the early decades of the nineteenth century brought new communities—including the Bhaca, Ntlangwini, and Hlubi—migrating southward from Zulu territory. Sotho, Kwena, Tlokoa, and Griqua groups who had traversed the Drakensberg later joined these polities, settling in the northern highland territory that would become known as East Griqualand. In the southern parts of the Transkei, some refugee communities had moved into Gcaleka Xhosa territory, negotiated opportunities for land acquisition in the neighboring eastern districts of the expanding Cape Colony, and eventually became known as the Mfengu.⁴⁴

The expansion of colonial influence in the broader region in the mid- to late nineteenth century had varied effects on these different polities and groups.

Mfengu and Xhosa communities living in closest proximity to the Cape experienced the forces of colonial expansion earlier and more immediately than other areas. A brutal series of Cape-Xhosa wars, their culmination in the late 1850s with the tragic Cattle-Killing episode, and the defeat of Gcaleka and Ngqika Xhosa chiefs and their followers led to the dispersal and then eventual resettlement of Xhosa communities in the southern coastal area of their former territory between the Kei and Mbashe rivers in the mid-1860s. In the meantime, thousands of Mfengu and Thembu people from the Eastern Cape were resettled in the now “vacant” lands of the northern and central parts of the former Gcaleka stronghold: a group of Thembu chiefs and their followers relocated in the Drakensberg foothills, in what became known as Emigrant Thembuland, and the Mfengu settled below them, in the territories renamed Fingoland (Mfenguland) and the Idutywa Reserve.⁴⁵ British government agents were appointed to reside in these territories, and diplomatic and trade relations were established with a few other chiefdoms in the Transkei. The majority of polities in the region, however, continued to live free of colonial control prior to the early 1870s.

In 1872, after the Cape Colony assumed responsibility for self-government, momentum increased for incorporating the various polities and populations between the Kei and the Natal border into the colonial fold.⁴⁶ Yet formal annexation was only really able to accelerate across the region following two tumultuous events: the Ninth Frontier War in 1877–78, pitting the Cape primarily against the Gcaleka, and the rebellion against the colonial government waged mostly by Mpondomise, Thembu, Qwathi, and Sotho groups in 1880–81. Colonial success in these wars not only enabled annexation to proceed but heightened official interests in securing political control over these populations. After defeating the Gcaleka in 1878, Cape authorities began consolidating the colonial administration of “native affairs,” establishing three chief magistracies: one for the “Transkei” proper, comprising Gcalekaland, Fingoland, and the Idutywa Reserve; one for “Thembuland,” comprising Thembuland, Emigrant Thembuland, and Bomvanaland; and one for East Griqualand.⁴⁷ In 1879, the formal annexation process began—incorporating Fingoland, the Idutywa Reserve, and East Griqualand—until the rebellion of 1880–81 slowed down the process, and Cape authorities responded with a more tentative and gradual approach to colonial expansion and its impact on political stability in the region. Only over the next several years were other territories successively annexed. By 1887 Pondoland was the only remaining region independent of colonial control; after a long period of negotiation, the Cape then finally annexed Pondoland in 1894 and completed the colonization of all African polities between its borders and those of Natal.⁴⁸ Adminis-



Map o.1. Colonial annexation of the Transkeian Territories in the late nineteenth century. Map by Conor Stinson

trative consolidation proceeded in 1902, when the chief magistracies of the various separate regions were amalgamated into the position of chief magistrate of the Transkeian Territories, based at Umtata.

While colonial authorities began establishing formal political control in these newly annexed territories, they also gradually put in place mechanisms for regulating local environments in the Transkei. As Richard Grove has described, forestry in the Eastern Cape and Transkei grew out of the broader development of British imperial conservationism in the Cape and beyond. As official interests in “scientific forestry,” the moral “salvation” of South African landscapes, and the sustainability of settler society all merged in the Cape, the formalization of forest administration accelerated, particularly in the 1880s.⁴⁹ Following the appointment of the first superintendent of woods and forests to oversee the entire colony and the expansion of conservation efforts in the Eastern Cape, colonial foresters then began to take a closer look at and deeper interest in the vast forest tracts beyond the Kei River, particularly along the coast and in the inland mountain ranges. As more territories in this region were brought under colonial influence, and particularly as this “opening” of the frontier enabled migrating sawyers and settlers from the Eastern Cape to exploit local forests, officials became increasingly concerned with regulating popular forest use, both African and non-African.⁵⁰ Some magistrates introduced and

attempted to enforce some minor restrictions on forest use on their own, but it was only with the formal establishment of the Transkeian Conservancy in the late 1880s that the state seriously expanded its intervention into the region's forests.⁵¹

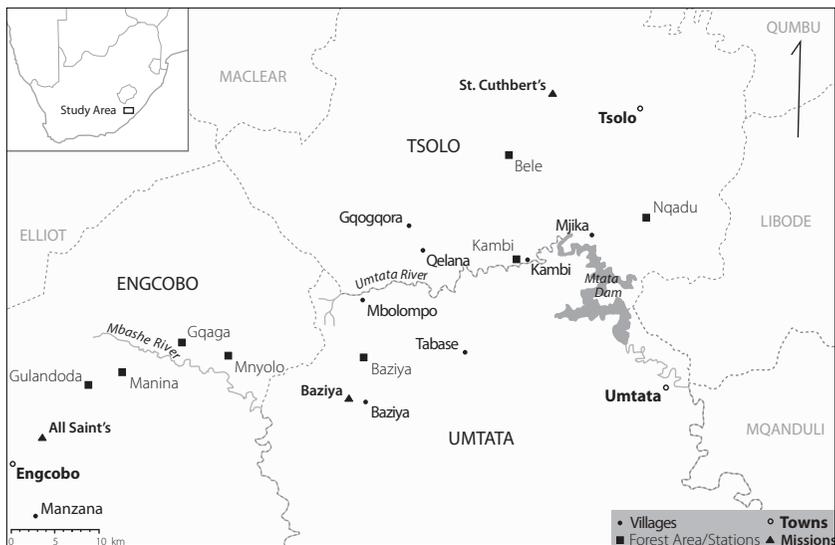
The interconnections between these various developments and timelines have influenced the periodization of this study. The book focuses most centrally on the years roughly between 1880 and 1915, the formative period of colonial environmental restructuring and negotiation in the Transkei. The 1880s were a crucial time when colonial political control and environmental interventions emerged and began merging in the region. It was only following the last major military confrontations between the Cape government and African chiefdoms during the late 1870s and early 1880s that magistrates were able to expand colonial rule and their interventions into African socioeconomic and environmental practices more seriously, negotiating such changes with local African authorities. Colonial conservation efforts also expanded in the 1880s, and, as forest officials began sharing the responsibilities of environmental management with magistrates, controlling African resource access became more heatedly contested both within and between official and popular circles. Through the next three decades of negotiation and conflict at various levels, the juridical, political, and economic foundations of state forestry were firmly established in local communities.

While the structural building blocks of state forestry were established in the period ending at about 1915, significant contestations and negotiations over their meaning extended well beyond this point. The book explores how different groups within the state and rural communities perceived, negotiated, and responded to the prior transformations affecting resource access as they continued to shape local experiences amid new changes in the 1920s and 1930s. I have ended the story roughly at 1940, for the late 1930s represented a turning point in the relationship between the state and rural Africans, particularly surrounding the willingness and capacity of the South African government to intervene in and transform rural livelihoods. In 1936 the Natives Trust and Land Act, as part of the culmination of the segregationist "Native bills" advanced by South African state leaders over the course of the previous decade, enabled the government to function as the "trustee" of African people more comprehensively than ever before. Three years later the first "betterment" proclamation was enacted, leading to the more systematic restructuring of local forest use in the Transkei from the 1940s onward, with officials utilizing key provisions in the new regulations to restrict popular access to forest tracts, expand fencing of these areas, and establish extensive afforestation operations.⁵²

While the broad temporal framework described above captures changes in the Transkei in an overall sense, it is also necessary to understand how forests were negotiated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in more specific historical settings. In the early stages of this project, I became particularly interested in focusing on the history of the Tsolo District. With its sizeable mountain forests and its perpetual reputation in official forestry reports as a “hotspot” of forest conflicts at the turn of the century, the district seemed to make a useful case study, bringing into relief in particular ways the broader colonial contestations of the Transkei. Learning much more about how Africans living in the Tsolo and neighboring districts perceived and utilized their forested mountain landscapes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, has reshaped my approach. Examining issues of forest access within the confines of district boundaries helps explain some of the political machinations surrounding natural resource use, yet it does not adequately capture the ways in which most historical actors perceived and manipulated their local environments.⁵³

Through the process of interviews and archival research it has become clearer that the afromontane forests straddling the Tsolo and the adjoining Umtata and Engcobo districts were the center of an interconnected ecological and socioeconomic zone of activity during this period, involving European, African, and some small “coloured” communities living both adjacent to the hills and in outlying lowlands.⁵⁴ For the purposes of this study, I have called this zone “KwaMatiwane,” derived from the KwaMatiwane Range situated roughly at its center (see map 0.2). Following Kate Crehan’s approach, I recognize that the notion of “KwaMatiwane” is in certain ways arbitrary and partial, that social and ecological dynamics of course continued beyond the imposed boundaries of this map.⁵⁵ However, like Crehan, I view this conceptual map as a means of illuminating “certain features and certain relationships but one that makes no claims to re-create that reality in its totality.”⁵⁶ Within this historical-geographical zone, the negotiation of divergent forest practices and interests shaped local experiences in important and visible ways during the formative colonial period.

KwaMatiwane’s geographical diversity had an important influence on this history.⁵⁷ The defining geologic formation of the region, the minor escarpment, is the catchment area for such significant rivers as the Umtata and the Mbashe. The region receives on average anywhere from 650 to 1,000 millimeters of rain, most of which falls during the summer months; in the winter, while the settlements and farms of the low-lying valleys experience the dry season, the highest peaks of the range are often covered in snow. Because of the moister environments of the mountains, during the winter months African



Map o.2 KwaMatiwane. Map by Conor Stinson



Figure o.4. View of some KwaMatiwane mountains, late 1990s. Photograph by Elizabeth Herrmann

stockowners living below the escarpment have historically exploited the more palatable grasses of the range. As colonialism began in the area, vast hardwood forests also existed in the mountains up to roughly 1,200 meters in altitude, particularly in zones along the southern and eastern edges of the plateau, where they retained moisture and were protected from frost and damaging “bergwinds.”

Because of the sizeable and dense forests in the region, colonial conservation efforts were particularly directed at local ecologies from the late nineteenth century onward. Soon after colonialism was expanded to local Mpondomise, Thembu, Qwathi, and Mfengu communities in the 1870s and 1880s, they began to feel some of the first colonial interventions into local environments in the Transkei, particularly following the 1880–81 rebellion that temporarily destabilized the region. In the rebellion’s immediate aftermath, official interventions into local environmental practices were bound up in colonial stabilization plans. Official interests in “conserving” local forests and restricting African access then quickly expanded, particularly as European settlement and economic demands for timber expanded locally and in neighboring areas of the Cape Colony. By the 1890s and early 1900s, KwaMatiwane experienced the establishment of some of the first government forest reserves in the Transkei and the expansion of forest patrols in local areas. Colonial forest consolidation proceeded in the late 1900s and early 1910s, finalizing the demarcation between state-controlled areas and forests under local African authority. In the following discussion, I look in detail at how these developments in KwaMatiwane, combined with other social, economic, and ecological changes particular in time and space, helped shape differently situated residents’ experience and negotiation of forest access over time.

SOURCES, METHODS, AND MEMORIES

I have utilized a variety of oral and written source materials as diverse entry points into the histories of such negotiations in the Transkei and KwaMatiwane. The South African government archive repositories in Cape Town, Pretoria, Umtata, and Pietermaritzburg hold a mine of detailed and previously neglected information on the workings of colonial forest administration. Archival correspondence and records of the Forest, Agriculture, Native Affairs and other departments in these centers as well as the Public Record Office in London offered valuable insights into the personal, political, economic, and cultural motivations for environmental restructuring in Transkeian

communities and the internal battles waged by administrators over such interventions. Prior to this project, researchers working on the Transkei's history have left the Forest Department files largely untouched, a sign of the broader, artificial segregation of environmental and social fields of inquiry in much South African historical scholarship until relatively recently.

Besides their value as windows onto the dynamics of official discourse and action, these documents also contain important descriptions of environmental conditions, contestations, and protests in specific locales. The magisterial archives—containing testimonies by African men and women in criminal and civil court records, minutes of public and private meetings, petitions, and correspondence—as well as such official publications as commissions of inquiry, annual reports on “native affairs,” and the minutes of the Transkeian Territories General Council and Pondoland General Council sessions, all provided unique insights into inter- and intracommunity struggles over political-ecological change and the local negotiation of colonial rule. Although the production and recording of such sources cannot be detached from their historical location in structures and relations of colonial power,⁵⁸ they offer details and perspectives on social and ecological change that are vital to recovering this period of the Transkei's past.

Several other types of written sources also provided unique historical insights. Private letters, diaries, and memoirs of prominent colonial officials—both published works and unpublished material at the government archives at Pietermaritzburg, the Manuscripts and Archives Library at the University of Cape Town, and the Cory Library at Rhodes University—offered important information on the personalities and relationships which affected the formulation and implementation of state policies, details often not visible in official correspondence now housed in archives. Contemporary travelers' accounts, English and Xhosa language newspapers, and missionary texts were also extremely helpful in documenting local historical changes and contestations and both European and African perspectives on them. Some of the missionary writings are particularly noteworthy. In my research into KwaMatiwane, I have explored two underutilized but extremely valuable sources for interpreting Transkeian history. The published accounts of Moravian missionaries, one of the earliest groups to be active in Thembuland in the late nineteenth century, include significant descriptions of Thembu and other KwaMatiwane communities from the 1860s onward. In addition, the manuscripts collection at the South African Library in Cape Town holds a wonderful ethnographic source—an unpublished Xhosa-English dictionary written by Robert Godfrey, a Free Church of Scotland missionary who was active in the Tsolo District and elsewhere in the Transkei in the early to mid-twentieth century. Godfrey

was a keen observer and recorder of natural history in the region, and much of his own research into local environments and cultural and environmental practices, as well as the insights of African assistants in the Tsolo District, are included in the text.⁵⁹ Moreover, unlike other dictionaries which historians of the Eastern Cape and Transkei often reference for cultural data,⁶⁰ Godfrey's manuscript provides clues to locating the information it holds more specifically in time and place, regularly noting the sources of his definitions and differentiating between the terms, expressions, and practices of various ethnic groups in the Transkei.⁶¹

In addition to exploring this cluster of written sources, I have also pursued an oral research program. Although my research includes Europeans' views on the restructuring of forest management, interviewing elders in KwaMatiwane offered an opportunity to move beyond the colonial categories and perspectives embedded in the archival record, to understand how differently situated Africans experienced and remembered this history in ways not reflected in written sources.⁶² In late 1997 and early 1998, with the aid of successive research assistants (Lwandlekazi de Klerk, Veliswa Tshabalala, and Tandi Somanana), I interviewed men and women in the KwaMatiwane region and some outlying areas for their memories of and perspectives on the meaning of forests and colonial forest interventions in the early twentieth century. Most of the interviews focused on elderly individuals who had grown up in the KwaMatiwane region, who could personally remember their own experiences in the formative years of colonialism, or at least could recall the stories about these times told by their elders. Rather than focusing on one particular locale, I spoke with people who had lived in various and diverse settings within KwaMatiwane—surrounded by mountain forests, in the flat and relatively treeless lowlands below, at varied distances from government-run forests and tree plantations, etc.—to get some sense of how local differences in environmental conditions and proximity to forest resources affected men and women's experiences during the early colonial period. I also made a concerted effort to talk with elderly women as well as the prominent men to whom most people led me, since women's experiences and perspectives were often particularly opaque in the archival sources. For the most part interviews were conducted in isiXhosa, although some informants wandered freely back and forth between English and isiXhosa, with Lwandlekazi, Veliswa, and Tandi successively and indispensably providing assistance in interpreting and subsequent translating and transcribing.

These oral sources were invaluable in providing unanticipated insights into various subjects, perspectives, and daily experiences, forcing me to critically reflect on both official viewpoints embedded in the archival record and

the limited categories I had brought to the interviews.⁶³ Much of my discussion of gender relations, social differentiation, and the deeper cultural dimensions of resource use—underreported or intentionally silenced in colonial accounts—would not have been possible without these personal narratives. At the same time, I have not viewed the combined pursuit of oral and written sources as merely an additive process of collecting complementary “facts” here and there. Historical patterns can become visible when different types of sources and the information they convey converge, but their collisions and divergences can also be revealing.⁶⁴ Particularly when exploring how colonial officials and African residents negotiated the meaning of the government’s expansion into certain ritually significant landscapes in KwaMatiwane (chapter 5), investigating the interplay of oral and written accounts became crucial.

Oral sources also presented their own challenges and limitations.⁶⁵ Given the time period of my study and the age of most informants, there were automatically gaps of memory. Only the oldest informants had personal memories which reached as far back as the 1910s and early 1920s, and although some individuals did recall their elder relatives’ reminiscences of the early colonial period, most men and women I interviewed spoke from their own experiences of the 1930s, 1940s, and onward. Having grown up when the state’s domination of local forests was already firmly established, many informants described forest relations at the turn of the century in ways which reflected the quite different environmental and social realities a generation or two later.⁶⁶

Interpreting these oral sources further required sensitivity to the contexts and processes through which informants represented the early colonial era. The identities, experiences, and situations of myself, research assistants, and informants, together with the relationships which developed through the interview process, shaped the production of historical narratives in the field.⁶⁷ Two brief examples can illustrate some of these dynamics. When Tandi Somana and I began interviewing one seventy-seven-year-old woman, she was hesitant and immediately called for her son to be present among these “strangers.” Despite my attempts to convince her that I was in no way connected with the South African government, nor even South African, she was naturally concerned that a white person had driven up to her home in a peri-urban location outside of Umtata, when historically such a rare event would usually mean trouble with the law or the arrival of unfortunate news. During our conversation, when I inquired about how she evaded colonial forest restrictions as a young woman, she interrupted my questioning to express her concerns about divulging too much information. After her son allayed her fears, she explained that she worried she might have to go to jail for admitting to illegally collecting firewood from a government forest several decades ago!⁶⁸ By contrast, in

another part of the Umtata District, one prominent man was very eager to share his own stories and connect me with elders in outlying areas, to talk about colonial forest interventions and a more recent dispute over state forest lands. As eventually became apparent, he wanted to utilize this dispute, and my research into it, as a way of contesting local community authorities and asserting his own political leadership and legitimacy.⁶⁹ In these and other instances, my identity, my work, and the research context directly influenced how individuals felt threatened or saw opportunity in my presence, and offered or withheld information, often in ways I could not fully anticipate or see.⁷⁰

For many of the men and women I interviewed, traumatic experiences of state environmental intervention in more recent decades—particularly intrusive “betterment” and “rehabilitation” schemes during the apartheid era—further influenced their historical narrations of the colonial period. This was especially the case for people who lived in the Gqogqora location of the Tsolo District in the early twentieth century. When I began my research, I pursued this and adjacent mountain forest areas in the district as one of the focal points of forest contestation in the early colonial period. Published reports and archival records had already revealed that forests in these locales were at the center of some of the most enduring and often violent conflicts over resource management between the colonial state and Transkeian communities at the turn of the century. Early on in my fieldwork, however, I soon learned how dramatically social and environmental landscapes in the Gqogqora location had been altered since then. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the apartheid state embarked on an aggressive afforestation program in the area, culminating in the complete removal of the entire population of the location—nearly 1,900 men, women, and children—to several peri-urban locations on the outskirts of Umtata, and its replacement with large-scale exotic tree plantations.⁷¹

As my research turned to interviewing men and women in these resettlement areas—physically removed from the “mnemonic surroundings” and “the topography that helps to uphold memory”⁷²—their accounts of the early colonial era presented unique challenges and opportunities for historical interpretation. In all cases, informants certainly perceived and represented their local landscapes “as saturated with power, meanings, and historical struggles for land rights.”⁷³ Many men and women were particularly sentimental when describing life in their former “home,”⁷⁴ and narrating the histories of their youth became ways to critique the state’s role in the subsequent decline of their landscapes, livelihoods, communities, and traditions. Such narratives idealized life and resource access before betterment or resettlement, which were

represented as the major turning points in the well-being of their social, spiritual, and natural worlds.⁷⁵ Yet within some of these very same interviews, and in conversations with others removed from the area, divergent representations of the past also emerged: the displacements of the apartheid era were only a continuation of processes of disempowerment and rural decline dating back to the earliest days of colonial expansion.⁷⁶

In the analysis that follows, I am less concerned with validating or denying the apparently contending historical truths embedded in these testimonies than with gleaned from them particular ways of reinterpreting dominant narratives of state environmental intervention in the Transkei's history.⁷⁷ While informants from Gqogqora and other areas remember and “deploy” the more remote past as a “resource” in varying ways, they also provide important correctives to state- and settler-centered narratives in which popular experiences of displacement and disempowerment have been silenced.⁷⁸ In certain cases, particularly in some informants' critiques of the colonial, apartheid, and even postapartheid governments' domination of forest control and their ability to extract payments from rural people for wood access, I have been able to find revealing continuities in oral sources and the written records of African protests in the early twentieth century (chapter 3). Moreover, in narrating their various histories, interviewees often offered important clues about the significance of particular forest sites and species in certain locales, insights I could then use to ask new questions of the written evidence for the earlier colonial period. Individuals' traumatic experiences and memories of state intervention in more recent decades might overshadow certain prior historical developments but could also bring into sharper focus the historical meanings of resources to which they no longer had access.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is organized into two parts. Part I examines forest negotiations through the lens of particular political and socioeconomic changes—shifts in environmental authority (chapter 1) and environmental entitlements (chapters 2 and 3)—combining a look at broader patterns in the Transkei with a focus on the unique historical trajectories in KwaMatiwane. Part II (chapters 4 and 5) explores in deeper relief the social and cultural meanings differently situated actors in KwaMatiwane gave to specific resources and how such stakes informed their negotiation of resource access over time. These two parts are meant to illuminate one another, to suggest how access to forests in-

volved diverse dimensions of changing power relations and everyday experiences in the colonial Transkei.

Chapter 1 explores the negotiated shifts in environmental authority accompanying the reshaping of political ecological landscapes in KwaMatiwane and the wider Transkei from the early 1880s to the mid-1910s. As officials stabilized colonial control by remapping the administration of local populations and environments over time, political negotiations over changing local power dynamics ensued at multiple levels—between and among demoted African chiefs, newly appointed headmen, and rural residents, and between these groups and representatives of the colonial state. With the expanded presence of colonial forest personnel and the shifting role of headmen in managing forest use, variously situated individuals played out contending political, economic, and environmental interests in the local shape of forest authority, often in very personalized ways.

Chapter 2 looks at the restructuring of Africans' environmental entitlements across the Transkei, from the launch of comprehensive restrictions for the region in the late 1880s to roughly the first few years of the twentieth century, when the consolidation of Forest Department control would begin to shift state impositions on popular forest rights. The chapter examines how popular protest and evasion, interdepartmental squabbling, and Africans' alternative invocations and pursuit of their entitlements complicated the course of colonial resource policies and their enforcement. The discussion particularly focuses on how differently positioned people critically responded to government restrictions on their "subsistence" and "customary" practices, their gendered orientation, and their implication in wider colonial transformations. In daily practice, African men claimed resource access entitlements through their tax participation in the broader colonial system, and women asserted their right to harvest and utilize fuelwood in the most self-beneficial economic ways possible.

Chapter 3 proceeds with the discussion of entitlements by looking at how the restructuring of forest access changed with the consolidation and expansion of colonial control over Transkeian forests beginning in 1903. I analyze how government interests in more systematically "weaning" Africans from indigenous forest use and inducing them to purchase their regular wood needs from the state contributed to and coincided with mounting socioeconomic stresses and problems of ecological scarcity in many areas in the early twentieth century. Men and women contended with constraints on wood access and availability as they also negotiated their local experiences of poverty, resource pressures, and the expanding out-migration of male workers. People responded

to their changing personal circumstances in multiple ways. Many protested their growing dependence on exotic tree plantations and the state's profit motives amid their own impoverishment. And as the state increasingly moved to restrict African women's resource rights in the late 1920s and 1930s, women coped by adapting their everyday forest practices.

In Chapter 4, the book then moves into a discussion of the meanings of particular forest resources in different people's changing lives and their implication for understanding the meaning of resource access over time. The chapter surveys the ways in which men and women in KwaMatiwane historically incorporated forest species into various social and cultural practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, very selectively pursuing certain local trees and plants as resources for healing, protection, rituals defining personhood and marking life cycle stages, and charms for dealing with everyday social interactions. In certain cases, the sources allow me to further explore how such particular interests shaped individuals' actual physical negotiation of the local forest restrictions they faced. Chapter 5 then looks in greater depth at the particular dynamics of power and culture surrounding access to one renowned tree at one Tsolo District site in the late nineteenth century. While colonial observers minimized the cultural nature of their interventions into this setting, local residents commented critically on the extension of government power into the resources and sites essential to rituals of public healing. These responses suggest the negotiations over the meaning of environments and environmental power surrounding European expansion in the Transkei more generally in the early colonial period. In the book's conclusion, I then point to the salience of many of the historical issues raised in the preceding chapters for grappling with the ongoing challenges of dismantling colonial legacies in South Africa today.