

Mining and Local Black Communities in the North-West Province, South Africa, c.1995-2010. Contestations Over. Land, Power and Assets.

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The mining of Platinum, Chrome and related metals began in earnest in South Africa's so-called Bushveld Complex in the late 1960's, when two major mining companies, Impala Prospecting and Anglo-American Platinum provided the huge capital outlay necessary for the successful extraction of platinum. Since then the Rustenburg region has seen a steady expansion of mining to the point that South Africa is now the largest producer of platinum in the world. An unusual loophole in South Africa's previous apartheid system allowed Africans ownership in land through a trustee system, and by sheer coincidence much of the mineral rich land is now in the hands of various indigenous communities. The most richly endowed and perhaps best known of these are the Bafokeng, who were aware of the potential of their land from the 1920's. In the 1990's the Bafokeng entered into a prolonged legal and political battle to obtain a fair share of royalties from mining and prospecting on their farms. Subsequently, the Royal Bafokeng Administration (RBA) has subsequently terminated the royalty agreements previously negotiated with the mining houses, and embarked on a policy of direct investment in them. Royalties were exchanged for shares worth R10.6 billion at the time, which made the RBH the largest single shareholder in the world's second largest platinum producing company [Impala Platinum Holdings Ltd]. They held investments worth R33.5 billion in 2007. Since then further mining developments have made the Bafokeng one of the most successful corporate bodies in the country.

However further prospecting has revealed the presence of more minerals on land owned by several other surrounding African communities, leading to massive windfalls as more ethnic groups have negotiated deals with mining companies in the region. This had been given further emphasis by South Africa's Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policy. Significantly, and perhaps anachronistically, it is the traditional leaders who, as formal trustees of the land, have been the major beneficiaries of these developments. The sudden profits paid into community coffers obviously have the potential to uplift these relatively poor and historically rural people. However the impact of mining has also led to intense internal political conflict on a scale never really witnessed before. There is hardly a ethnic community in the region that has been unaffected. This has taken the form of:

- Accusations being made against the dikgosi (chiefs) of misappropriation of funds, some cases being finalized and others being before the courts.
- Conflict over land ownership. Discrete syndicates and sub-ethnic groups are now challenging the sole rights to land that the dikgosi are presumed to hold.
- Challenges to leadership. Opponents of some of the dikgosi claim they are not legitimate and have put forward alternative candidates.

These issues are illustrated by way of reference to other communities residing on the platinum fields, such as the baKubung, the baKgatla ba ga Kgafela and the baPo.

The financial stakes underlying this dissent and in-fighting are understandably massive, and the contenders have taken the litigious route, involving some of the top law firms in the country. The paper thus outlines and analyses the genesis and nature of these conflicts and the rise of a form of mineral based ethnic assertion.