CHAPTER 4

Survey and Mediation in Fingoland

The dismal failure to impose individual landholding on the eastern banks of the Kei before 1884, even in places where the survey work took place, did not alter the convictions of survey authorities or the colonial officers who employed them. Spatial interventions, particularly individual tenure and the bounding of spaces on the basis of ‘one man, one lot,’ remained central to colonial efforts to render African societies legible in order to uproot their labor and diminish competitive potential.¹ This effort resumed in earnest with the Glen Grey Act (No. 25) of 1894, which was the brainchild of Cape Prime Minister and mining magnate Cecil John Rhodes. That Act, named after the first district to face its application, was a union of colonial legal, financial, and spatial prescriptions that attacked extended social networks by yoking survey and quitrent title to systems of separate local governance (location boards and councils) and by taxing landless men who did not labor outside the district.² At the same time, the Act hobbled any potential benefits to ownership of titles through legal conditions of use, restrictions on transfer, and their disqualification as assets towards the property test for voting, which transformed those costly titles into little more than glorified tickets of occupation.³ Regimented surveys under teams of government land surveyors were central to delimitation and control in this invasive new iteration of individual tenure, because it involved the detailed subdivision and reorganization of entire districts at a time. But surveyors also became agents of active mediation as their contact with African households and landscapes became more sustained under this new regime, as we shall see.

In the Act’s text, the first three parts deal with issues related to survey and land tenure, reflecting their centrality within the larger Glen Grey system. The first stipulates the creation of locations within the unalienated land of the district, and removes the headmen’s powers to allot land. In their place, the colonial state would survey blocks of small household agricultural allotments of about four morgen (8.5 acres) each, with a certain subjective allowance for common grazing land around the blocks. Married men, and young men about to marry, could apply for allotments prior to survey if they were taxpayers, but grantees had to pay survey and title expenses (£3 10s in Glen Grey, plus a 5s stamp) as well as a quitrent of 15 shillings or more annually. Rebellion, criminal conviction, a failure to cultivate, or a failure to pay costs and quitrent would lead to forfeiture. The locations’ common resources were to be under control of an appointed location board on the model of colonial village management boards, although there was no requirement that grantees move into villages.

Part II of the Act placed severe restrictions on transfer, and built upon decades of precedent by prohibiting sale without government approval, the accumulation of multiple lots, and any kind of subdivision or mortgage. Attorney General James Rose Innes (Junior), whose father had been the Under-Secretary for Native Affairs since 1881, characterized the condition in paternalistic terms in 1893: by forcing government approval of transfer, Rose Innes maintained, Africans would be safe from rapacious speculation and their own poor judgment, and the colony would retain a reliable labor reservoir in the locations. Some Thembu also saw danger in titles that were too freely transferable, but they did not care for the colonial solution, particularly at the five mission stations in Glen Grey that were surveyed in advance of the Act. An 1892 meeting of male householders at Agnes Mission Station in Glen Grey, for example, agreed that titles should require consent before transfer, but from the local community members, not government—a request that fell on deaf ears. The second portion of the Act also established male primogeniture as the means of inheritance, with contingencies falling on a broader hierarchy as

4 The inclusion of men who were soon to marry was an expedient in the field aimed at quelling dissent. See R.T. Ally, “The Development of the System of Individual Tenure for Africans, with Special Reference to the Glen Grey Act, c. 1894–1927” (master’s thesis, Rhodes University, 1985), 148–149.


7 “A Meeting of Natives of Glen Grey District, held at Agnes,” 29 Jun 1892, NA 215, KAB.