A social history of Guquka and Koloni: Settlement and resources

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Introduction

This chapter elucidates the history of the two villages and should be read against the historical background provided in chapter 2. Here we focus primarily on the dynamics of settlement and the social processes that, over time, have shaped these villages. Although there are some discrepancies in accounts, formal and informal, of when Koloni was first established it is thought that both villages have their origins around 1850, in the aftermath of the Frontier Wars between the colonising English and the Xhosa.

During and following the Frontier Wars the colonial state enabled and allowed settlement on conquered land by the fore fathers of the current villagers. Settlement and, more specifically, the allocation and arrangement of access to natural resources, was based on a neat, explicit and sometimes exclusionary distinction of land categories for settlement, arable purposes and livestock grazing. The colonial state saw this as a means of facilitating crop cultivation and livestock keeping as central elements of rural livelihoods. Yet, this settle-
ment pattern contrasted starkly with previously existing settlement patterns and use of the landscape. This chapter deals with the specifics of settlement, the introduction of various categories of land use and land tenure, the allocation of land, the dynamics of betterment planning as a government response to resource degradation, and related aspects of natural resource management.

Guquka and Koloni had rather contrasting experiences of betterment planning which is conventionally viewed in the literature (see chapter 2) as an attempt to socially and physically restructure and reorganise the so-called native reserves. Labour migration later shaped the patterns of resource utilisation and the expansion of the two settlements over the years. The pension and social grant systems played a crucial role in shifting the source of people’s livelihoods towards the use of resources located beyond the boundaries of the villages. Since the origin and social history of Guquka and Koloni differ, we start by describing these separately. Despite these differences, there are clear similarities, particularly in more recent times.

The data for this chapter are based primarily on oral accounts of villagers collected during the period 1997 to 2004. Some of the data and analysis have been written up in ARDRI Research Reports (Van Averbeke et al. 1998). Other data have been used in conferences and seminar papers (Hebinck and Smith 2001, Hebinck 2004), while some are only recorded and stored as field notes (Smith, 2000, field notes; Hebinck 2004, field notes).

The researchers, together with their assistants, purposefully selected informants who could provide historical accounts of the two villages. This was considered necessary, as written recordings of the history of the two villages are scant. The historical literature and travellers’ accounts only contain general references and descriptions relating to the larger area surrounding the two villages (e.g. the Tyume River Valley, Amatola Mountains and the Hogsback Plateau). The informants in the two villages, all elderly males, were interviewed in group sessions. In addition, Chief Mqalo, the traditional leader of Guquka, who resided in the neighbouring village of Gilton, and Mr. Ngxowa and Mr. Kama, respectively the former and present chairmen of the Residents’ Committee at Koloni, were interviewed on different occasions about the history of their villages. Unfortunately, the Chief of Koloni, Nkosi Zwelimjongile Siseko, who was residing in Qhibira, south of Koloni, was not available for an interview, due to illness.

The role of chiefs in South Africa has been changing over the years (chapter 6). In Guquka and Koloni their influence has substantially diminished in the past century, in comparison to other parts of South Africa. As the process of devolution of tribal authority is discussed extensively in chapter 6, our comments here are limited to a few observations that relate directly to the role of the chiefs in the historical changes that have taken place in the two villages. In the past the role of the chief was especially important for the (re)allocation of land for residential and arable purposes. This chapter elaborates on this and describes how this worked shortly after settlement. In the later half of the 20th Century