

TITLE

UNDERSTANDINGS OF LAND AND PLACE AMONG THE DISPLACED PEOPLE FROM THE GREAT LIMPOPO TRANSFRONTIER PARK, MASSINGIR – MOZAMBIQUE

by

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Abstract

Conservation measures while undeniably important have a significant negative impact on local people's lives., Little attention is given to human consequences of such initiatives. Even when such effects are considered, the focus is typically materialist: an analysis of the impact of certain initiatives on local livelihoods. While undeniably important, economic welfare is but one facet of people's lived experience.

Studies on the impact of development-induced displacement have shown that the number of people affected (displaced) by programs promoting national, regional and local development is substantial and usually they do not benefit from such development. Instead, they are more often impoverished, losing their cultural, economic and social resources, quite often provoking resistance.

This paper argues that material and ideational perspectives are obviously intertwined. There is the oft-expressed perspective that indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development.

This case study employed an integrated methodology consisting of participant observation, a semi-structured interview schedule for key informants and households, life history interviews, focus groups, and site visits. Generally, the information needed was related to the subjective and public perceptions of dimensions of land and place among the displaced people.

1. Introduction

Research on ecological preservation rarely focuses attention on the human consequences of conservation measures. When it does, the focus is typically materialist: an analysis of the impacts of certain initiatives on local livelihoods. While undeniably important, economic welfare is but one facet of people's lived experience.

Studies conducted on the impact of those affected by development-induced displacement have shown that the number of people affected (displaced) by programmes promoting national, regional and local development is substantial and usually they do not benefit from it. Instead, they are more often impoverished, losing cultural, economic and social resources, quite often provoking resistance.

In this regard, this study is aimed at:

- Identifying and analysing the people's subjective and collective perceptions of *land* and *place*;
- Identifying and analysing the belief systems, the cosmologies and their representation which determine a their refusal to leave the ancestral lands and resist to resettlement;
- Identifying and analysing the human consequences of ecological conservation initiatives on local communities.

By focusing on people's perceptions of land and home, this research aims at contributing to an additional understanding of the dimensions affecting those displaced by the creation of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

This paper is situated within this problematic and it addresses the gaps existing on the theory of socio-cultural consequences of those displaced. It pays a particular attention on the peoples' perception of the dimensions of *land* and *home*.

It argues that material and ideational perspectives are obviously intertwined. Therefore, there is the oft-expressed perspective that indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognise and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development.

In terms of rationale, the study draws on and attempts to contribute to two sets of academic literature. The first, as indicated, are the discussions of the human consequences of ecological initiatives. The second is discussions of migration. Although scholars working in this latter category have often concentrated on wars, ethnic conflicts, natural man-made-disasters, the literature nonetheless provides an analytical framework for understanding the dimensions of disruption brought by displacement. As such, I hope it can be significant for forced migration studies by adding an additional perspective on development-induced displacement.

With regard to the structure, section two presents and justifies the research design, methodology, and methods employed for the study on which this paper is based. Section three focuses on the process of the creation of the Park through the review of relevant literature. Drawing on the field findings and socio-cultural consequences theory of induced displacement programmes, section four makes a reflection on the people's perception of land and place. The following section reflects on the study's conclusions followed by references.

2. Research Design, Methodology, and Methods

Due to time and financial constraints, I decided to take a case study approach in exploring this topic. Therefore, it involves a detailed examination of a relatively small number of people of those displaced from the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. According to Hancock, the 'case study approach as a research design offers a 'richness of in-depth information not usually offered by other methods. It can identify how a complex set of circumstances come together to produce a particular manifestation, and also it is a highly versatile research method and employs any and all methods of data collection from testing to interviewing' (Hancock 1998:7). The fieldwork was carried out in two seasons: in September 2006 and in April 2007 and each one took about 15 days and covered two villages, namely Massingir Velho and Chimanguene.

There are criticisms about the limitations of the case study approach. In this regard Hancock stresses that, "one of the criticisms aimed at case study research is that the case under study is not necessarily representative of similar cases and therefore the results are not generalisable". This, according to Hancock (1998:7), is a "misunderstanding of the purpose of case study research which is to describe a particular case in detail. It is particularistic and contextual". Therefore he notes, "generalisation is not normally an issue for the researcher who is involved in studying a specific situation, it is an issue for the readers who want to know whether the findings can be applied elsewhere. It is the reader who must decide whether or not the case being described is sufficiently representative to their own local situation".

In the light of relevant scholarship and the conditions in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, the study attempted to address the following research questions:

- To what extent forced displacement affects people's dimensions (perceptions) of land and place?
- How do the displaced people cope with the change to a new environment? *What kind of coping mechanisms are they developing in order to overcome such a sudden spatial change?*

The study employed an integrated methodology consisting of participant observation, semi-structured interview schedule for key informants and households, life history interviews, focus groups, and site visits. Generally, the information needed was related to the perceptions of dimensions of land and place among those displaced and how the displacement process affects these dimensions.

The research employed mapping methods for contextual background through the use of Participatory Rural Appraisal namely :

a) Matrix of classification: it allowed a visualisation of the communities researched; the main social, economic, political and cultural groups, perceptions of their own problems; what they think should be the solutions for the new challenges brought by displacement and relocation.

b) Direct observation that allowed a clear identification of activities, social and cultural practices that helped in interpreting and analysing the data gathered. Also, it assisted in understanding the members' social status

on the socio-cultural context, their values, norms, cosmology and social organisation and comparing them with the new areas where the communities were resettled.

In this process, I privileged informal conversation. After gathering data, I made a sort of coding in order to identify patterns, processes, common and different aspects. The results were analysed according to conceptual categories that allowed proceeding with content analysis and its interpretation. This strategy was identical to the non-structured interviews along with the difficulties of coding as mentioned in page 3.

Methods

Qualitative and participatory methods are the best way to explore sensitive topics such as perceptions and claims of basic rights. On the other hand, these methods allow the researcher and the researched to have a permanent interaction, which creates a conducive atmosphere of confidence and reliability between the two sides.

The primary data collection instrument was a *semi-structured interview schedule*. I used this approach because, according to Mathers *et al* "it provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in detail and the interviewer has also the freedom to probe the interviewee to elaborate on the original response or to follow a line of inquiry introduced by the interviewee" (Mathers *et al* 2002:2). It involved the preparation of an interview schedule that listed pre-determined set of issues and questions that were later explored. The guide served as a checklist during the interview to ensure that the same information could be obtained from a number of people.

According to Hancock, this method of data collection tends to work well particularly when the interviewer has already identified a number of aspects that he wants to be sure of addressing. Also, it offers to the interviewer the possibility of deciding which areas to cover but also it is opened to unexpected information from interviewer (Hancock 1998:10). Due to limited time, this strategy worked well on key issues that I wanted to cover.

This instrument was applied for the following categories of respondents: households' members, key informants namely: local traditional leaders, community leaders, religious leaders, traditional doctors, and the elderly, local government and park management representatives.

The information needed from the households was on the people's perceptions of land and home and the local indigenous knowledge of access and land ownership, cosmologies, private symbolic systems and representations, and their level of adherence to resettlement programme.

From key informants the information needed was on public and private religious practices, cosmologies, public and private land's symbolic systems and representations, conceptions and contents of local rituals and their respective social status and processes of transmission, land tenure and inheritance.

The key informants were selected on the basis of their knowledge, and social status in the community with valuable information and insights about the functioning of their community, their problems and needs. It assisted me in understanding the contextual problem and clarified particular issues. However, I was aware that since the selection of key informants was not random, it would introduce bias.

Focus groups

With regard to this method, collective and individual experiences were debated in-group, generating some series of potential information. Participants were asked to reflect on the questions I asked, providing their own comments, listen to what the rest of the group had to say and reacting to their observations. The main purpose of using this method was to elicit ideas, insights and experiences in a social context where people were concerned about displacement and stimulate each other and consider their own views along with the views of others. These interviews were conducted with three different groups: women, men and mixed groups, in order to identify trends/patterns in the people's perceptions and opinions expressed.

This strategy was important for collecting certain types of information particularly in circumstances where I felt it would be difficult using other methods of data gathering. Generally, eight individuals composed the groups and my main role was facilitating, moderating, listening, observing and analysing.

Non-Structured Interviews

Using a checklist with few topics, I introduced questions and discussed them with people selected randomly. This is useful as Devereux and Hoddinott (1993) mention that 'instead of extracting identical bits of data from everyone, the interviewer encourages respondents to talk on topics about which they have most to say.

Using this method I was free to move the conversation any direction of interest that emerged which was important to broadly explore the topic. However, due to its lack of structure it was a little bit difficult to analyse data when I was attempting to synthesise across respondents.

Nevertheless, I found this method important, particularly during the early stages of the fieldwork, and particularly for the region's historical background from people's personal point of view and the concerns of the people. I also used this method when I was collecting life histories.

Life Histories

Particular attention was given to life histories in order to capture the core of the problem. The focus was more on human mobility in resident's lives and on how it affects their belief systems with regards to their attachment to ancestral land, and how relocation affects their private and public rituals, and land symbolic representations.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the language of respondent's choice normally in Shangaan, with the valuable help of a research assistant, an anthropologist. Although I am familiar with the language, the assistant's presence was necessary to avoid missing some particular discourse.

Sampling

In terms of sampling strategy, the study opted for an intentional sampling of the categories above mentioned as crucial for the study. This approach was complemented by the snowball sampling method, which seemed to be the more appropriate way to get people's perceptions of land and home. One of the advantages of this method is "once identified one respondent this can provide the researcher with an ever expanding set of potential contacts within the same target population". However, one of the disadvantages of this method is that "while it can dramatically lower costs, it comes at the expense of introducing bias because the technique itself reduces the likelihood that the sample will represent a good cross section from the population" (Hancock, 1998:8).

I am aware that snowball has its disadvantages when it comes to confidentiality as participants may in the end find out who is taking part in the study.

The informants were desegregated by sex and age in order to obtain differentiated perspectives of women, men, youth and elderly.

With regard to the sample size, this was distributed as the table below indicates:

TYPE OF INTERVIEW	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	TOTAL
Semi-structured interviews	- 8 Key informants - 25 households	33
Focus groups	- 1 men - 1 women - 1 mixed	3
Life histories	- 4 (2 women and 2 men)	4

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues in research (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000) should ensure that the interests of the participants in the research are safeguarded.

In this research, attention was given to maximizing the voluntary consent of the participants. Being a topic dealing with the people's social life, respondents were approached individually prior to interviewing them. The reason for getting in touch with them prior to the interview was in order to get their informed consent and give them the chance to refuse to participate in the study. Participants were given a non-technical explanation of the research, its objectives, what the role of the research was and what was expected from them in order not to raise expectations of the participants.

The issue of handling dual interests is highly problematic: from one side the respondents had their own expectations, emotions and, importantly, confidence that the work I was doing would help them to channel their voices to relevant entities so that the process could be stopped. This was a common aspect in almost all interviews conducted. In this regard I made an extra effort in order to explain that the work was for solely for academic purposes which did not fall within their expectations. Despite recurrent explanations people pledged that I should do something on their behalf though sincerely I knew that it was a difficult task.

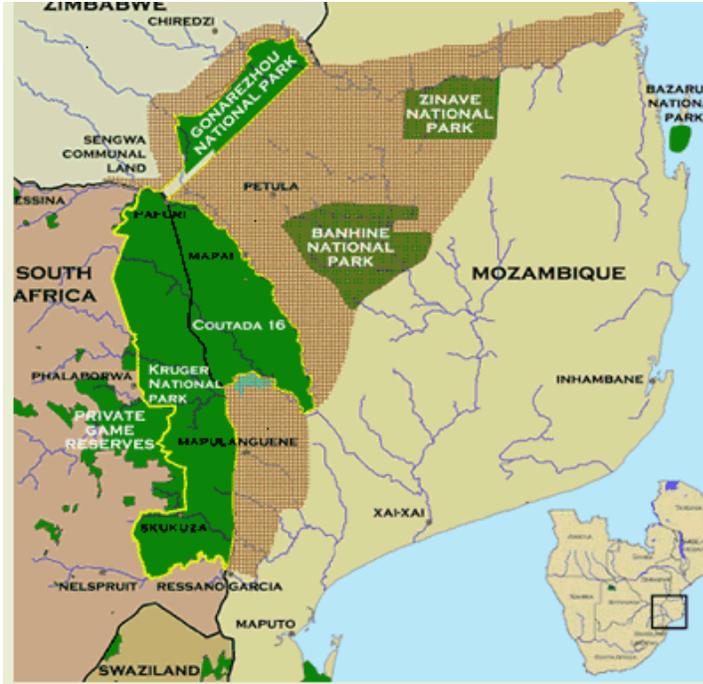
This environment raised other concerns: were people telling me the truth or was what they were saying coming out of anger due to a particular moment of distress?

I tried to handle this situation by asking my interviewees, particularly during the focus group sessions, to comment on preliminary interpretations I made on the field based on some responses I got in individual interviews.

Data analysis

I briefly summarise how I analysed the data collected. The first step was data review through reading the priority transcribed recorded interviews. After this, I started coding and classifying items of information that appeared in one interview so that it would allow me to compare with the data collected from other interviewees in search of similarities and differences between them. The first stage of this process, it was mainly descriptive, followed by its interpretation in an attempt to find out what the interviewee meant by his/her response or what was implied. The data was organised, and coded; I identified the main themes and categories. Through constant comparison between cases and attention to themes that cut across interviews I tried to decipher patterns. Finally, I explored the relationships between categories and I made an attempt of testing theory against the data.

3. Contextual background and theoretical considerations



The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park

Source: <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/geh01/geh03.htm>

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park was created in 2001 encompassing the Mozambique's Limpopo National Park, Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park, and South Africa's Kruger National Park and indigenous protected areas in both countries. It is the largest initiative on the continent, which combines conservation, environmental protection, tourism and economic development.

Ongoing discussions have revealed that Induced-Development projects often have negative impacts on people unless good planning is made always in consultation with the targeted communities. Historically, the majority of native populations around or within the parks have been disempowered, dislocated and relocated on the edge of parks boundaries or entirely outside the parks on soils less productive (e.g. Grime 2006).

Grimé (2006) asserts that initiatives behind conservation efforts around parks sound good on paper but have negative consequences for local people. She stresses that intentions of conservation effort are admirable. Nevertheless, failure in addressing the needs within this framework is serious. Additionally, the policy creators often fail to understand the local population's viewpoint. Further she asserts that, parks like the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park take ecological considerations into account first, leaving human populations as an afterthought most of the time, and that the creation of parks intended for worthy conservation issues, according is that these parks are in many cases created according to a "racist, western, white viewpoint, where the importance of nature forces deprivation of resources by the local population".

It is widely acknowledged that development-induced displacement is crisis-prone, even when necessary as part of broad and beneficial development programs. According to Cernea (1995; see also Koenig 2002) "dismantles existing modes of production, disrupts social networks, causes the impoverishment of many of those uprooted, and threatens their cultural identity, and so on", increasing, as Koenig (2002) mentions, vulnerability and dependence.

Planning and consultation of GLTP

Cernea (1995; 1999) asserts that good planning relies on participatory approaches. However, studies have indicated the problems in the GLTP planning process (RRP 2002). For example until 2003 it was not clear what would be done with the local people and communities concerned and how the project would ensure an

improvement in the socio-economic standing of the communities if removed. This situation resulted from lack of consultation and planning with the different sectors of the population and difficulties in bringing together all the parties concerned into the planning process.

From the very beginning, local communities that would be affected by the GLTP creation were not involved or it was unclear what would happen to them. The Refugee Research Programme's study points out that there was a lack of information about the park itself at the grassroots level and there was a "great deal of confusion among the communities in part due to contradictory information spread by different sources of information, including the Mozambican local government officials", and in the meantime, they have not been consulted about their views and options in relation to it (RRP 2002:2).

Interviews carried out in late 2006 and early 2007 confirmed the Refugee Research Programme findings:

"What I know about the park is that people have to move and I heard it from my relatives who said people have to move from this place" (Interview with Algina Valoi, Massingir, 29.04.2007)

Another interviewee, a migrant worker, said:

"I only heard about the park while in RSA. I have never heard about the park here in Massingir (Interview with Almon Maluleque, Massingir, 29.09.2006)

It seems Mozambican authorities' failed in involving local communities in development planning of 'Coutada 16'. This has cost the promoters much needed public support. People have also been critical and fear the prospect of large game animals living dangerously close to villages, crops, livestock, livestock, and water sources (<http://www.gutenberg-e.org/geh01/geh03.htm>)

4. Understandings of 'Land and Place'

Traditionally the land and the cultural and spiritual connections to it have been important for the local communities and their identities. Drawing on my preliminary findings, I find similarities with Nkosi's study (2006) when he argues that:

"The sacredness of land in Africa is linked to the fact that ancestors are buried in it: "Without land, we would not have a home for a dead body. That is why we kneel barefooted next to the grave when we want to communicate anything to our ancestors, showing a lot of respect for the land on which they lie. When death strikes in a family, no one is allowed to till the land. We mourn until that person is buried. After a funeral, in some cultures, we do not touch the soil with a hoe, do not plough or till the land until a ritual of cleansing the family is performed."

This is also evident but not recognised in the GLTP planning and creation process. In relation to the prospect of leaving their ancestral land some of my respondents made similar connections:

"I will not leave this place for them to bring animals. This place belonged to my forefather and their remains are buried here. What do you think I can do? I will rather fight the animals than leaving this place (...) This Park only came to add more suffering on the people not to improve our livelihoods" (Interview with Derito Mate, Massingir 29.09.2006)

This comes two years after the RRP study found that "relocation and removal do not take into account the communities' determination not to leave their land". According to this report, respondents said that they would prefer the danger of living with animals to being moved off their ancestral property (RRP 2002:3).

This aspect was and is widely neglected by the planners. They are/were more concerned with the material compensations regardless of the complaints and claims of the targeted communities. None of the reports or documents consulted seems to take into account this particular concern.

As the Refugee Research Programme's (2002) study mentions the "focus on accessing resources does not take into account that there is an inherent value in the land where people reside". Indeed, people revealed a

strong attachment to the villages and places where they were born, to the land where their ancestors farmed and were buried, and to sacred trees and idols” as a respondent said:

“I do not know why they want us to leave this place: I will not see any benefit from that. I have all my people buried around here, I was born here myself and now the government wants to take our land from us? Why did not they go to Swaziland? Our government is not protecting us, what kind of government is this?” (Interview with Fernando Chauque, Massingir, 23.04.2007)

The place where people live is a reference that relates to their identity, culture, habits, personal ties and expectations. Land, the place of burial of ancestors carries a great symbolic value that cannot be ignored when it comes to resettlement.

Oliver-Smith (2002) states that resettlement is considered the most acute loss of power of the people that constitutes the loss of control over the physical space.

The logic of settlements of displaced people, apart from being based on aspects related to local culture and tradition of design and use of physical space, bring in elements that deserve some consideration.

Studies show that resettlement of populations displaced by disasters and environmental change should be widely consulted and negotiated with the community and the same must be representative. The social values, cultural, self-esteem and self-respect should not be affected by the resettlement.

Cernea (1999) points out some factors¹ that must be taken into consideration in the face of a programme of resettlement of people. It is important to note that although some of the things you mention are applicable in situations of forced displacement caused by induced development, it is useful to be taken into account in the kind of displacement which is being discussed throughout this paper. Further he mentions that resettlement of displaced people if poorly planned can contribute to a rapid depletion of communities because, thus leading to social vulnerability.

In this perspective Cernea (1999) indicates five main factors that can contribute to the impoverishment and resistance to resettlement, namely: a) loss of land: the loss of land removes the main foundations on which the production systems are built, commercial activities and forms of survival b) Unemployment: agriculture in rural areas, crafts, etc., are affected by the loss of land. The creation of new work in the areas of resettlement is difficult c) Loss of housing, although it may be temporary, for many becomes a chronic condition d) marginalisation: the marginalisation occurs when the families lose their economic power and e) Loss of access to common property: for the poor, particularly those without property, the loss of access to common property in areas of resettlement, usually belonging to the populaces of those places, besides becoming a source of conflict, is a matter that is neglected.

Rather than looking at global forecasts this paper suggests that it is important to examine the strategies adopted by communities and governments in specific cases particularly with regard to coping strategies, which are crucial to the affected people. Cultural and traditional aspects when are not properly taken into account in resettlement programmes worsen affected people’s vulnerability and their coping mechanisms.

With regard to coping mechanisms, the traditional leaders of both villages (Massingir Velho and Chimanguene) stressed that they had identified a new place for community public traditional ceremonies. Before this was done, the traditional leaders performed ceremonies with their communities where spirits were informed about the process under way² and the need to move to a new location. This was done in order to get the spirits’ consent which according to them was given. After the place was identified a new ceremony was performed aimed at introducing the spirits to their new “home”.

However, the major concern remains with the individual ceremonies: despite the fact of having a “communal ceremonies”, each household has its own traditional practices. A significant number of people have familiar cemeteries on their compounds and in the current situation of resettlement in new areas it becomes problematic. My interviewees stressed that there is a generalised feeling of leaving behind and abandoning their loved ones (the dead) as they cannot exhume the bodies because where they are buried are ancestral lands, therefore sacred places. As a result, people keep going back to their old properties (ancestral land) in order to perform whatever ceremony they want to whenever it is needed despite the fact that it is becoming dangerous due to the growing number of wild animals in the area.

¹ I mention these factors below

² Resettlement

The park management showed its concern with the situation and currently is trying to accelerate the relocation of the remaining families as soon as possible. This process is due to be finalised in 2009. In total eight villages are located within the premises of the park namely: Mavodze, Massingir velho, Bingo, Machamba, Chimanguene, Macandezulo, Chinhanganhe e Panga.

This case study advocates that there is a need of improved capacity for management of conflicts between conservationists and local communities through honest and sincere dialogue. The frameworks adopted in addressing the negative impacts of displacement caused by induced development projects must take into account Historical, Anthropological, Sociological, and Ethnological data. It must be inclusive, bringing together all interested groups (e.g. ethnic). This is the possible way forward to build comprehensive and informed conflict management frameworks that can be more effective.

The logics of resettlement beyond the fact of being based on aspects linked to culture, tradition it brings along elements that require certain level of ponderation.

4. Conclusions

This paper summarises the main methodological approach and methods applied to the study on which this paper is based and a brief contextualisation of the problematic and the findings overview.

I have shown that conservationist approach adopted for the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park's region of Massingir is materialist by neglecting or minimising the human approach/issue within it.

It has demonstrated that expropriation of land removes the main foundation upon which people's productive systems, commercial activities, and livelihoods are constructed. Compensation packages will never rebuild lives as they were before, particularly in situation where people's perceptions and viewpoints are not taken into account and integrated within the plan/framework as such.

It stresses that Great Limpopo conservation initiative, though is good, must adopt a more humanised framework, because in the current form of implementation it violates the ancestral and cultural rights of the communities targeted.

There is a need for social researchers to work with conservation practitioners in order to include the local communities affected so as minimise negative effects and draw strategies/plans ensuring that those affected participate and benefit from it.

In sum, the idea of conservation, as Maddox points out, "has several important functions even today. They serve both African societies and internationally to sanction the appropriation of resources by the states from local communities" (Maddox 2002).

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