

ABSTRACT

Post-Apartheid South Africa has been plagued by recurrent and protracted provincial boundary disputes since the demarcation of new provinces in 1993. These conflicts have mainly opposed the Government and affected communities with high security, economic, social and political cost. In many respects, these disputes have threatened the very legitimacy of Local Government. However, existing literature exclusively focused on the early Bushbuckridge case. Besides, analysis of this first instance of post-apartheid provincial boundary, though very enlightening, overemphasized socio-economic factors to account for the border dispute, paying little attention to ideological and strategic underpinnings of the clashes. These deficiencies particularly came to light when there emerged in 2005 other provincial boundary disputes in Khutsong, Matatiele, and Moutse. In the face of such countrywide political phenomena, it became clear that early studies of the Bushbuckridge border dispute needed to be complemented in order to enrich our understanding of social, economic and political drivers of these territorial conflicts.

This PhD research distinctively uses a multiple case study approach in order to explain post-apartheid provincial boundary disputes. Drawing on interviews, observations and secondary materials on the three chosen case studies namely the Bushbuckridge, Khutsong, and Matatiele cases, this PhD thesis argues that post-apartheid provincial boundary disputes are complex socio-political phenomena which can best be accounted for by taking into account various socio-economic and political factors including the interplay between historically constituted material conditions of affected communities and their local notions of democracy and development, conflicting regional planning models, Government's democratic deficit, strategic political struggles and limits of judicial arbitration. Interpreting these cases with the proposed explanatory framework clearly demonstrates that under the veneer of provincial boundary disputes, disputants have actually been engaging in battles for socio-economic emancipation, in ideological contestations and strategic political struggles. Physical provincial frontiers are fought over not because of any inherent importance, but mainly because they are represented as proxies for socio-economic prosperity and political power. At a time when the current government is still grappling with at least two provincial boundary disputes and is contemplating reducing the number of provinces, this thesis highlights lessons which should inform future provincial demarcation decisions.