Chieftaincy, the State, and Democracy: Political Legitimacy in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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Overview:

Explores the relationship between the new South Africa's sources of mixed authority is examined through field research conducted in rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal around the turn of the Millennium. Focuses on how the chieftaincy seeks to establish and maintain its political legitimacy with the local population as well as with the state in the post apartheid era.

Method:

Through comparative case studies Williams analyzes specifically how chieftaincy and local populations have negotiated the introduction of specific norms, rules, processes, and institutions that are fundamental to the ANC's policies of transformation and democratization.

Framework:

The Multiple Legitimacy Framework: *There are multiple sources of legitimacy that all leaders, chiefs as well as elected officials, can use to justify their rule. Each of these different sources offer people a particular set of characteristics (symbols, values, political principles, institutions, rules, and processes). Currently, these sources are characterized as static, diametrically opposed categories (traditional vs modern). Williams uses the framework oppose that characterization and to focus attention on how chiefs promote and reproduce a preexisting set of governance norms and structures while simultaneously responding to the introduction of new norms, rules, and institutions at the local level.*

Explains how the chieftaincy has sought to establish and maintain its authority in the midst of these political changes. With chieftaincy still a central figure in the lives of rural communities in South Africa, the examination of the complexity of the chieftaincy-state and chieftaincy-society relationship that have formed and continue to evolve in the post-apartheid world.

Why care?
- Current assumptions about legitimacy conclude that power will eventually reside in the government as democracy and local government become more ingrained in society.
- If non-democratic institutions gain authority in the rural areas, how does the state consolidate democracy nationally?
- How do governments project legitimacy and authority in rural areas?
- How do governments deliver services when they lack the institutional capability to do so?

Keys to Understanding:
Traditional chieftaincy-society relationship in Zulu culture. This relationship is centered on the idea of unity, and the chieftaincy undertakes four primary tasks to maintain this idea:

> 1. *the maintenance of order*
> 2. *community consultation and participation in decision making*
> 3. *impartial and unbiased decision making rulers*
> 4. *promotion of community welfare before individual gain.*

How people view the chieftaincy:

> 1. *Many people think that their chiefs should not be involved in politics (a negative association was placed on 'politics')*
> 2. *Many people believe that their chiefs should be active in trying to attract development projects (with these projects being desirable and beneficial, they were not associated with 'politics')*
> 3. *Chiefs are considered the legitimate holders of power in rural areas, despite democracy taking hold*

Government incorporates chieftaincy because of the need for voter mobilization and implement development project. The Government doesn't have the power or infrastructure to reach rural citizens. Ceding partial authority to the chiefs to gain access, will eventually lead to, in the eyes of the government, gaining legitimacy in the eyes of rural people because of the delivery of services.
Instead chiefs use this to further ingrain themselves in the emerging political sphere and to carve out a role for themselves in the democratic state that the government cannot currently fulfill.

Positive

- Insightful anecdotes about a way of life that is underrepresented and not understood well
- Explanation for how and why the chieftaincy has maintained authority cuts through Western assumptions of traditional leaders and their (in)compatibility with democratic consolidation
- Provides a historical accounting how state-chief relationship creation that would be critical to formulating policy regrading rural service delivery and organizing the structure of local government
- Uses post-apartheid term versus other scholars who refer to it as post-liberation or democratic, thus making an assumption on the state before and after 1994
- Provides clear explanations of political processes without diving into theoretical discussions

Negative

- No examination of ANC's view and who was behind the desires to transform the chieftaincy. Williams doesn't 'call out' these individuals or factions. Review of their background might provide insight for understanding current political dichotomy.
- No exploration of how strengthening ties behind legitimacy and service delivery and current/future failure to deliver. Will the strong ties and failure lead to a *de*legitimization of the chieftaincy?
- Ambiguity on just how strong these ties were in the early 2000s, and whether the lens of traditional Zulu culture will continue to dominate.