

Sethunya Mokoko Gall

Geography: International Studies

## **Hydropolitics: Ecocide Causing Water Shortage and Harm to Lesotho's Human Security.**

### **Lesotho (Southern Africa)**

*Stolen Water That Left Mothers with Children Strapped to Their Backs, Collecting the Cow  
Pissed*

Lesotho is a country gated in South Africa, along with Swaziland. Coherently, the South African hemisphere has a low life expectancy. Among the two gated countries in South Africa, Lesotho makes the lowest in income. No one goes to Lesotho, in terms of migration, due to arduous living conditions. Lesotho holds the highest death rates in South Africa – there is a funeral every week. Through visiting and careful study, looking at the fact that Botswana is a country close to South Africa, but because it's not gated inside, it has more money than both gated countries. There is a significance connection to be made about the two countries in South Africa in terms of how the residues of Apartheid have left unbearable detriments to the inhabitants of those two nations. Water shortage is one of the biggest problems Lesotho faces. There are torturous droughts in Lesotho, so bad that animals often die and people drink polluted water and get ill.

From experience, I lost my family land in Lesotho. The land was taken by South Africa in promise to build dams and generate water, which was to benefit both my country, Lesotho, and South Africa. Large dams were built in Lesotho, land was taken from a lot of Basotho people; however, South Africa failed to follow through with reasonable pay back to the taken land. For large areas of land taken, the Basotho people are given very little bags of maize and

beans to compensate for their large land where they used to farm and feed their families comfortably. I am one of the people who suffered hunger and starvation, though I had land that was taken from me. This research is becoming personal. In the article I read, one of the names in there is a man whom I know closely and call a brother, Morebane Ramonotsi. He was very helpful with my process coming to America helping me translate paper work that I had to fill out and sign. Finding neighbors that I know in the article and reminiscing on how affected I was by the issue, made me appreciate it more.

Lesotho's LHWP – Lesotho Highlands Water Project and LHDA – Lesotho Highlands Development Authority are called a “collaboration” between Lesotho and South Africa, but South Africa benefits greatly on Lesotho's water. The people of Lesotho watch their water transported to South Africa, as their children die in thirst and the nation suffers greatly from water shortage. The South African project, to “collaborate” with Lesotho, takes about 2,200 million cubic meters per annum of water and transfers it to South African network. In return Lesotho is supposed to benefit from it in terms of ancillary developments and revenue from royalties. However, due to hydropolitics, the project has impacted negatively upon the human security in Lesotho. Because of hydro strategic interest of political elite, co-operations exists over the project. The strategic interest outweigh social and environmental consideration in Lesotho, thereby constituting a threat to human security. The construction of the project has resulted in ecocide and, as such, it has adverse environmental and social effects. It has contributed to chronic threats, while also disrupting the patterns of daily life of the affected districts of Lesotho. Ecocide results from externalities, such as pollution, which destroy the ecosystem or from less than adequate safety procedures utilized by corporations, governments, etc. Land was taken in Lesotho from people to build dams for the water project. As a result,

environmental refugees were initiated. Environmental refugees are those who have no choice but to leave their habitats for their very survival because of natural and human induced ecological disasters and environmental change; or those who are internally displaced or compelled to cross borders as a result of harmful development plans, government ecocide a government's rehabilitation or settlement plans which discriminate against the effected country's people. With land taken from Lesotho, most of the displaced are no longer able to enjoy their human security as they did prior to the construction of the project. Lesotho water resources are dominated by co-operations and South Africa. My research will look at the results of the exploration of hydropolitics in Lesotho and Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa.

The large dams build in Lesotho for the water transportation to South Africa, generally have extensive impacts on rivers, watersheds and aquatic ecosystems. According to World Commission on Dam's knowledge base, it's evident that the large dams have led to loss of forests and wildlife habitat, the loss of catchment areas due to inundation of the reservoir area as well as emissions of greenhouse gases from reservoirs due to decaying vegetation and carbon inflows from the basin. The large dams have had major effects; some have signifciantly altered local environmental conditions, impacting on the biological important floodplains and negatively impacted the means in which the inhabitants support themselves. Not all the dams are well managed and cared for; thus, some of them have become covered by aquatic weeds, and have become anaerobic as vegetation decayed, ultimately leading to wiping all the fish.

Through the constructions and operations of the large dams, serious long lasting effects are witnessed on the lives and health of the nearby communities and villages. This downfall has led to the loss of cultural resources and heritage, predominately because of the decision- making and organizing alienated and excluded Basotho and does not account for the adverse impacts

inherited by Lesotho. Several people were displaced from their homes due to the construction of large dams, and this has impacted the people tremendously as hundreds of homes were displaced, owners not recognized, resettled to other homes, not ethically compensated adequately. Those who were somewhat resettled at different areas did not have their livelihoods restored to familiar, comfortable conditions, since when they resettle people they merely focus on the physical relocation and not the economic and social development, which the displaced need most. People have lost their cultural heritage through the loss of their cultural resources of the local communities (villages) and the dilapidation of the plant and animal remains, and respected African burial sites. Due to some people having sacred connections to their culture and land, some were majorly hurt by simply choosing to stay firm and not wanting to relocate from the land that they called theirs. A chief or headman, in the name of Tonga, refused to leave his home, the only place where he has raised his children, grazed his cattle, and inherited much from his great grand parents. He would not leave his home; therefore, the government sent officers to force him to relocate, in which a gun was fired and other villagers rioted and protested, causing the officers to become brutal. Eventually harm was done to the innocent people of Lesotho, whose land was stripped from their legal rights. In his article, “Conserving Conflict? Transfrontier Conservation, Development Discourses and Local Conflict Between South Africa and Lesotho” Buscher Bram states, “Often than not local communities are still seen as a threat to bio diversity who seemingly need to be ‘dragged’ off the(ir) land.” Basotho people were forced to leave their homes as if they were mindless folks who needed to be transported from one place to other, disregarding their respect.

The large dams also constituted a threat to human security. This concept can be defined in two ways, initially, safety from detrimental threats such as hunger, disease and depression.

Secondly, protecting the daily patterns of life from hurtful disruptions from homes and villages. Additionally, the storing and the diversion of the water in the dams on trans boundary rivers has been a source of considerable tension between Lesotho and South Africa, as such intervention like diverting water, dams should require constructive co-operation and not the way South Africa bullied the tiny country and its territory. The one that has kept Lesotho cheated with its land and its people ill treated, is the notion that the values of the water in Lesotho center on the strategic interest of political leaders and the stages regarding water as a trans-boundary resource over human security consideration. The political leaders, as long as they can drive their fancy Mercedes Benz and BMW's, they are well paid by the money that's supposed to help the poor, and they sign documents that don't serve their people well; they don't care and are, in my opinion, not smart enough to have realized back then the major consequences up they were impending upon their people and future generations. Oscar Mwangi, in his article, "Hydropolitics, Ecocide and Human Security in Lesotho: A Case Study of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project," states, "Since the signing of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) treaty in October 1986, the nature of the symbolic relationship between political leaders of South Africa and Lesotho has resulted in co-operation rather than conflict with regard to the project." The political leaders are having their own, excuse my diction here professor, piss contest while the people suffer and are deprived of their natural resources and their land. Some of the people in Lesotho heavily relied on their traditional ways of surviving; they farmed on their big land and fed their families, their live stalk grazed on those big lands and they would sell the crops during harvest season and bring income in their families. However, with their land taken and being forced to live in mountainous areas where farming is harder, their way of living was dramatically altered in a way that burdened their survival.

The other big factor to this water problem in Lesotho is: in the 1950's Lesotho was still under the British rule, much like every nation that they tried to dominate. Lesotho, as a nation during that time had no control over its land nor its people. The British High Commissioner in Lesotho proposed the project in the 1950's when the country was still under British rule. British economist had noted that Basotholand's high average annual rainfall and recommended that it exploit this natural resource in exchange for valuable foreign currency. They were duplicitous and controlling enough that actually appointed a South African engineer to determine the viability of the project. With Lesotho gaining its independence in 1966, its government chief Leabua Jonathan and the other South African leader held negotiations over a project called "Oxbow-Malibamatso," which is Lesotho's largest water resource center. The goal of the negotiations was to transfer water to the Witwatersrand, the industrial hub of South Africa. However, their negotiations failed over the purchase price of water. The tension between South Africa and Lesotho over the project heightened in the 1970s, with the former considering developing instead the cheaper Tugela transfer scheme located inside the country. However, in 1977 the growing need for water in the Vaal river basin (a river crossing over from Lesotho through Bethlehem South Africa) motivated interest in the appointed South African engineer's proposal for supply of water from Lesotho.

The water dilemma didn't halt. In the 1980s, a drought in the southern African hemisphere seriously threatened the regional economy. The southern area, presently called Gauteng province, was in severe distress and large volumes of water were required both by the regional industries, particularly mining, and to support Johannesburg's growing metro-pole. Local water resources deteriorated and the high summer rainfalls in the mountains of Lesotho seemed to offer a panacea. Unfortunately, the prolonged thirty years of negotiations over South

Africa's access to Lesotho's water supply had made no progress, due to a combination of several political and environmental factors. Mwangi, in his article, states, "In terms of politics, Lesotho sought to retain its distance from the apartheid regime and felt no sense of urgency in concluding an agreement that would inevitably result in closer ties between the two states." In other terms, with regard to the environment, Lesotho's leaders were skeptical that the benefits of the colossal project would outweigh the cost. Coupled with the effects of the drought that drained reserves and South Africa's demand for water increasing. There was no resolution to water shortages in sight, and with increasing cross-border political violence, more conflicts settled. While the political leaders went back and forth on these water negotiations, the saddening factor is the inhumanity that they had. They carelessly watched as villagers lined up in early hours of the morning, around four o'clock in the morning, on village springs trying to collect drinking water.

The South African mines played a huge role in this, as well. Men like my father worked in South African mines in horrible working conditions, which were also over populated. Aligned by the mines, South Africa brought another scheme in Lesotho: The Transfontier Conservation and Development areas. They crossed international state borders and subsumed multiple land use forms, as "ambiguous projects in nature." Their story was to promote conservation as a land use option and "promotion" of peace and cooperation between nations. In seeking to involve Lesotho in biodiversity conservation, the Tranfontier Conservation Development promised Lesotho training, income possibilities mostly through ecotourism; however, ecotourism was a double edge sword. While it can provide income possibilities, it is also often criticized for generating unrealistic expectations, unevenly distributing benefits and exacerbating social differences. The land areas were simply later on turned into mining areas. Men from Lesotho were pulled from their homes and sent to work in harsh conditions, with very little pay. The building of those large

dams, as well, men were pulled from their homes to work. One of the most heart breaking aspect of this, is the notion that they take Basotho workers and hire them with unfair payment to work on water projects that eventually leave them in poverty and in need for water; they make them rob themselves of their natural resources, or help dismantle the existing ecosystems.

Extreme detriments were witnessed in the nations as this continued. In December 1985, cross border political violence occurred. Thirteen white South Africans were killed by landmines and bombs allegedly planted by Lesotho-based African National Congress (ANC) guerillas. They had finally had enough of watching their country get taken advantage of horribly. It was climaxed in South Africa, demanding that Lesotho hand over all the accused ANC activist by force or face severe pressure, and imposing an economic blockade that triggered a bloodless coup. The Lesotho leader backed the legitimate political refugees, and was inflexible on the water issue including being insistent that Lesotho be able to regulate the amount of water flowing to South Africa, which was claimed unacceptable to strategists in Pretoria, while South Africa threatened to also remove the Lesotho leader's government. The outcome, in negotiating over the water project, Lesotho succumbed to most of South Africa's demands. They didn't want South African troops, who outnumber Lesotho, to come in and abuse people over their stolen water. Lesotho agreed that South Africa be entitled to a large quantity of Lesotho's water resources. In return, this is where the empty promises began, Lesotho was to receive modest annual payments and assistance in constructing the immense project as well as hydroelectric stations. Mwangi states, "Nine months later, the new military authorities signed the Lesotho Highlands Water Project Treaty with South Africa. In essence, two 'illegitimate' governments, the Apartheid and military governments of South Africa and Lesotho respectively, signed an international treaty concerning a trans boundary resource. This is still evident and relevant today;



for example, when I drive through South Africa to Lesotho, on the five-hour highway, I witness large water pipes that take Lesotho's water to South Africa.

In order to address the problems and fatal environmental effects in Lesotho, the government of Lesotho and South Africa must meet and renegotiate their signed contracts. They should take advice of World Commissions on Dams regarding planning and decision making with respect to large dams. In particular, the LHDA should recognize the rights of the affected people, and address the risks and safeguard the entitlements of all groups of affected people. It should also address outstanding social issues and strengthen environmental mitigation and restoration measures to optimize benefits from the projects existing dams. Most importantly, the water treaty must be reviewed so as to address the unequal relationship it creates in favor of South Africa.

Works Cited

- Buscher, Bram and Wittmayer Julia. "*Conserving Conflict? Transfrontier Conservation, Development Discourses and Local Conflict Between South Africa and Lesotho.*" Springer. Human Ecology, Vol. 38, NO. 6 (December 2010), pp. 763-773. 29 September 2015. Web.
- Mwangi, Oscar. "*Hydropolitics, Ecocide and Human Security in Lesotho: A Case Study of Lesotho Highlands Water Project.*" Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Journal of African Studies, Vol. 33, NO. 1 (March, 2007), pp. 3-17. 29 September 2015. Web.
- Showers B. Kate. "*Soil Erosion in the Kingdom of Lesotho and Development of Historical Environmental Impact Assessment.*" Ecological Society of America. Vol. 6, NO. 2 (May, 1996), pp. 653-664. 29 September 2015. Web.