

Managing and Imagining Migrant Communities

Caitlin Blaser Mapitsa

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8189-8451>

University of the Witwatersrand

caitlin.blaser@wits.ac.za

Abstract

Integrated development planning processes are key mechanisms for engaging communities in local decision making, and legitimising the work of municipal governments. However, civil servants have held a longstanding series of assumptions about populations being fixed, of migration as a phenomenon that should be controlled, and of communities that are defined by ethnolinguistic and associated geographical boundaries. These assumptions are far removed from the current reality in South Africa, but remain firmly ensconced in the imagination and practice of local political officials. They hinder inclusive participation and adaptive planning, and are generating social frictions that prevent re-imagining inclusive communities, and developing participatory IDPs.

Keywords: development; local governance; migration; social cohesion

Introduction

This article looks at how both international and local migrants within South Africa are changing state practice at local government level. The article explores, through case studies of five South African municipalities, how local government officials and residents view participation in IDP processes. What has emerged calls into question the assumption that for state practices to be shaped by migration, a national boundary must be crossed. This article argues that both local and international migrants are shaping local government practice in important, yet distinct ways. In many places, bureaucrats are actually fueling social fragmentation through varied expectations around migrant access to services and other rights, and in other places, migrants are actively working to assert control over a currently state-dominated discourse around rights to services by changing the manner in which they participate in local government decision-making and service provision.



This article further seeks to explain how migrants and local government officials are co-creating definitions of communities within their municipal boundaries. They do this through negotiating the right and access to services, as well as establishing normative practices and discourses around the nature and periphery of “community” in local participatory governance processes. This article describes the phenomenon as observed in municipalities, as well as discuss the implications, informed by the findings of the research.

In order to shed some light on this phenomenon, the article has focused specifically on the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) processes, which have been designed to ensure that local government plays a role that is both developmental and inclusive. With local government having a history of driving social divisions, an integrated planning process has been largely unable to combat norms around participation and deeply entrenched social and political divisions. Since 1994, government in South Africa has endeavoured to create the “transformation of local government and the need to align boundary demarcation, institutional restructuring, financial and fiscal direction and resources, all with a view to building democratic and developmental institutions” (Pillay, Tomlinson, and du Toit 2006). This is a task that requires a paradigm shift, not only among institutions that have historically been predatory towards communities, but in the perceptions and patterns of behaviour as well. Furthermore, with changing geographical boundaries (and populations within them), institutional realignment, changing financial priorities and processes, local government has had to take root in shifting sands. In the context of limited state capacity and resources, as well as tremendous inequality, it is easy to notice some of the challenges local government has faced. Transformation and participation have been the vital ingredients in developmental local government.

Public participation is a critical element of legitimising governance by municipalities in South Africa, which have a high degree of autonomy. However, neither the institutions nor the incentives were designed to catalyse this participation. In fact, many of the barriers, which were designed expressly to prohibit participation during apartheid remain in place. However, mobility of the population adds another dimension to defining the community and understanding participation. It reinforces the perceptions of officials concerning what their community should look like, and how it is actually defined, drives municipal practice, and how this practice, in turn, shapes communities. It also uncovers some of the struggles that local government has faced in employing participation as a tool for transformation. Civil servants hold assumptions that the populations they serve are sedentary (Lems 2016; Malkki 1995). This informs who and how they think should participate in IDP processes. The manner in which these assumptions are expressed, and the form they take have been explored in detail below. The article also explores some of the consequences of these assumptions on state practice.

I start off by explaining the research process, from which the data were drawn. I then present the findings, first, on how government officials understand both migrants and migration, followed by migrants' participation in IDP processes. In the discussion section I look at the manner in which patterns of behaviour of both bureaucrats and migrants drive social fragmentation, as well as how the state is being shaped by its engagement with migrants.

Background and Relevant Literature

In order to understand better the nexus between local governance and migration, I drew from two primary areas of literature. The first is literature on social geography, and concerns itself with debating the role of migration in processes of community formation. While this literature generally, had a transnational focus, there has been increasing interest in recent years at a range of localised approaches. This literature sheds some light on the role migrant communities play in defining the state at local level. The second body of literature is that of public participation, which takes a different approach to understanding issues of community formation, through the manner in which participation is structured and legitimised. This literature sheds some light on how local state institutions define communities in relation to migrants.

Social geographers and scholars of migration have been grappling with the links between mobility and state practice. Foundational scholars of transnationalism posit that the expressions of local culture were a counterweight to homogenising forces of globalisation (Harvey 1989; Werbner 1996). Others questioned the conflation of culture and location, with urban, cosmopolitanism creating "global villages" in megacities (Appadurai 1996; Castells 2010; Massey 2010). Yet, another body of literature is examining how local state practices are being shaped by mobility (Benit-Gbaffou, Kihato, and Landau 2010; Landau and Monson 2008; Vigneswaran and Quirk 2015). What much of this literature has in common is the assumption that for migrants to shape the nation-state, they must move across the national borders. This study challenges that assumption, by specifically considering the categories and implications of localised migration. Not only has the study found that local government in fact, actively creates categories of migrants, it has also found that localised migration plays an important, and under-represented role in driving processes of defining the state practice at municipal level.

Equally important to understanding local governance is understanding the process of participation in municipal community consultation processes and service delivery expectations. In an early critique of structures of participation, Cooke and Kothari (2001) point out that without developing commonly-held ideals of participation, processes will fall back on silent habits of inclusion and exclusion. Without recognising the different, changing and multiple identities that motivate participation, decision-making driving participation remains poorly understood. This has been observed in South Africa's local government, where there has long been a recognition that local

power dynamics impact on participation (Hildyard et al., 2001; MirafTAB 2005; Lewis and Naidoo 2004).

At the same time, South Africa has been at the forefront of innovation in public participation processes (McLavery 2017). Municipalities in particular, acknowledge that public participation is key to solving historic spatial and social inequalities (Beall, Crankshaw, and Parnell 2014). Integrated Development Planning (IDP) became a mechanism for institutionalising public participation through the Municipal Structures Act (1998), but its implementation has varied. One of the biggest criticisms of IDP processes so far is that they “easily undermine and devalue the voices of (some) citizens by failing to acknowledge the temporal and spatial political geographies onto which they are projected” (Lemanski 2017). This underscores the importance of bringing together issues of participation and mobility. Using a lens of migration can bring a better understanding to some of the unique features of community formation and participation.

Methodology

Much of the existing literature on mobility and the state is drawn from the disciplines of transnationalism and urban governance. As a result, most research is done either in megacities, or around international border posts. This research aims specifically at challenging this departure point, and chose as sites, five small towns, and peri-urban areas, all with different kinds of demographic changes taking place. Municipalities first self-selected into a sample by reporting limited capacity to respond to migration effectively. Municipalities were then, purposively selected because they represented a wide spectrum of ways in which migration could affect communities. Additionally, they were chosen because they looked quite different from each site. The sample comprised of Hamaanskraal, Temba, Mamelodi, Lephalale, and Bushbuckridge. One site was a rural community, where land is entirely under traditional leadership and the municipality is mostly migrant-sending, but relatively close to an international border. Other sites included townships in northern Gauteng, quite far from the international border or Johannesburg, but at the former intersection of three different homelands, and experiencing internal migration from more rural areas nearby. Yet, another was a rural mining town experiencing a migration boom, as a result of a power station, where corporations were heavily shaping the municipal focus.

By examining a wide span of mobility dynamics and local government structures, the study was able to better explain some of the social and institutional dynamics that appeared across the diverse cases. As a result of the size of the sample, the study was able to pull out structural commonalities across places with different bureaucratic and migration dynamics. However, the number of cases were kept small enough to enable the researchers to examine the institutions at each site in nearly ethnographic detail, with data collected over a period of two months, with over 100 interviews conducted. This process gave a comprehensive picture of how the municipality works, and how the different segments of the community interact with it. Several different data collection

approaches were triangulated, in order for the research team to contextualise the interviews conducted with local government officials within the dynamics of the community and demographic information available.

I followed an analytical approach adapted from grounded theory, which combines inductive and deductive mixed-methods of data collection at all sites (Ralph, Birks, and Chapman 2014). Thus, this article is a synthesised analysis of five municipal case studies. The data collection for the case studies was done in a process of five-stages over a period of two years. The first stage was desktop research, where the researcher collated available information about each municipality with a particular emphasis on demographic makeup, migration trends, and local governance. Research teams, each consisting of three researchers, led by the author, were also composed with a balance of gender and migration status. Fieldwork was an iterative process, to allow for stronger, and more localised data collection instruments. The second stage of data collection was a scoping visit of two weeks, and included a participatory community mapping process (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007), followed to understand municipal dynamics, and triangulate the desktop data, which generated hypotheses around the most appropriate stakeholder groups for selection.

The third stage of data collection was an in-depth fieldwork, which involved more than 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders at each site, including municipal officials, migrants, and community leaders, as well as civic associations. Interviews were conducted with municipal officials to assess their attitudes and impressions of the state of migration in the municipality, as well as the migrant community itself, discussions on how migrants received municipal services, and specific examples of migrant issues of interactions. Interviews with migrant communities, on the other hand, looked at perceptions of municipal officials, reports on access to services and any barriers thereto, as well as specific situations that shaped their interactions with the municipality. Focus groups were also held that included political party committees, migrant association members, or other community groups. A participant observation process also took place, linked to community consultation activities held by the municipality. The precise target group for each data collection technique depended on the results of the initial community mapping, but was designed to best understand the local, social and political dynamics linked to migration and local governance.

Local Government Assumptions of Migrants and Community

It does not come as a surprise that most local government officials across all five sites studied held negative opinions about the phenomenon of migration, as well as its impact on their work. Many scholars in other contexts have noted the difficulties states encounter in responding to migration, as well as the negative opinions public sector officials tend to hold on migration (Baumann 2011; Sassen 1999). What was most interesting from this research was looking with more granularity at what the articulation

of attitudes around migration implies regarding how officials understand the role of the state, and what this then means, and how state practice is driving social dynamics. In the cases studied, officials were actually using mobility as a tool to reinforce certain categories of citizens, including strengthening existing systems of patronage. To advance this argument, I first look at the discourse of officials around the phenomenon of mobility. Then I consider the manner in which officials talk about migrants themselves. Finally, I discuss how mobility is used to articulate social fragmentations and reinforce certain categories of privilege.

I expected the research to reveal that officials articulated frustration about mobility in these South African municipalities. What is interesting is the manner in which this has been articulated, in relation to the state. Officials discussed their objections to mobility around three primary areas: The first was that they needed to define the manner in which residents participate in local government processes, and many suggested implementing various forms of movement restriction to remedy the problem. The second area discussed was the fact that mobility threatened clarity around rights and access, and bureaucrats felt that there should be no grey areas in terms of the relationships between citizens and the state. Finally, officials spoke of state capacity, and the strains migrants put on services that were already struggling to keep up. These strains were both in relation to volume, but also around appropriateness and efficiency, planning, and other functions. In the section below I have presented data from interviews with officials around each of the three areas outlined above.¹ I then discuss what migration has meant for state practice, as well as local government's role in identity formation.

Officials' Views on Mobility and Participation

Officials unanimously agreed that mobility shaped their communities and work. However, they did not have the same level of consensus on how migrants could best engage with local government decision-making processes. Some local officials bemoaned the lack of participation by migrants in planning processes:

People are coming every day, and we don't know who they are, or where they are staying. Then they will agitate because they don't have services. But how can we provide services to people if we don't know about them? We cannot be effective as government under these conditions.

A sentiment commonly expressed by local government officials was that they were operating with inadequate information at their disposal, and that mobility made their job even harder. While this perception became clear, it was equally true that local government officials were not using the available data in their planning as it was—this was an indication that this was as much an issue of imagined communities as it was an

1 Due to security concerns in several of the sites studied, sources of the quotations have not been provided.

issue of actual planning capacity. Of the five sites studied, only one had the capacity to engage with available demographic data, which was of good enough quality to support limited planning—however, the available data faced a range of limitations that went beyond being responsive enough to capture migration trends. Officials who attempted to define migration expressed a similar concern. On the one hand, the need to exert control over people coming into the community was acutely felt—on the other hand, the need to define who counts as “local” and who is a “migrant” was expressed:

Although some people from Mozambique have been in the country for as long as 20 years, some of them do not have identity books. Are they migrants, or not? They are not on the population roll, and when budgeting for the Bushbuckridge Municipality is discussed, they are not included. But when the Municipality provides services, it must provide for everybody that lives in a particular village. They cannot decide, “I will participate here, but not there, if they are turning on the tap here.”

Officials clearly stated that in order for them to function effectively, they needed to have some degree of participation from migrants. However, there was a disjuncture between the discourse of inclusivity and practices of exclusion. This includes not only engagement in planning processes, but also control over how migrants and local residents are defined. In discussing how migrants should participate in IDP processes, it became evident that officials were taking judgments on the basis of ethnolinguistic ties and socioeconomic status in determining how participation should take place. This points to practiced exclusion on the basis of officials’ imaginations of ideal communities, rather than inclusion on the basis of empirical evidence obtained about the community. This resonates with Gupta and Ferguson (1997), who founded a critique of the conflation of culture and location.

State Capacity to Respond to Mobility

The most common manner in which public officials discussed the topic of mobility is linked to state capacity. With less value judgment attached on the surface, officials correctly pointed out that when institutions are struggling with the capacity to carry out basic functions, more complex systems of planning and adaptive management that would ensure a more effective response to a mobile population, are far out of reach:

You plan for a big number of people in the outskirts rural areas, and when those services get supplied, it turns out that the number has reduced and the people have moved to the semi-urban residential areas. Then there is a problem of informal settlements.

Officials were acutely aware of local migration as a household coping strategy in particular sites in rural areas, which were historically underserved. However, they felt that their ability to respond to it was limited. This links local government’s response to mobility to state capacity, which was reiterated frequently by respondents. While substantial research has been conducted on the capacity of local government in South Africa, this research suggests that a lack of willingness or understanding on the part of

officials regarding the manner in which migration affects their work could easily direct existing state capacity in other directions. One official clearly summed up the importance of political incentives in service delivery:

When the need is so great everywhere, the place we start must be a political decision. Who will be motivated to provide services to migrants when they are not politically organized to protest, they are not our voter base, and our political principles are pointing us in other directions? Maybe migrants will get services if the queue is not long.

Another official also highlighted the politicisation of decision making around migrants, but in an area where the political dynamics around migrants was different; he concluded differently:

We don't have the resources to serve everyone. Most people living here, they don't have money. So how do we decide? It wouldn't be right to say, this one is from here, so they can have. Everyone has the same need, we are all human. Sometimes, you look at someone from Mozambique and you find they below more than someone from the Eastern Cape. Who's to say just because you don't have an ID, you don't deserve? We know honest people are coming here to work, and we must accommodate them.

Officials at all sites spoke to the myriad ways in which migration was shaping their economy, and service delivery plans. There was clearly frustration, owing to the difficulties migrants posed to the state, reinforcing the findings of Sassen (1999) and Malkki (1995):

It is fundamental, how people move. They cannot just come and go willy nilly. When the white paper is revised, we need to make sure there is a register, so when a person comes to our municipality, we see their ID document. We know who they are. They have an address. We know where to find them.

In spite of frustrations due to the limitations of the state to respond to migration, officials had a largely-nuanced view of the benefits that came with a population on the move. With regards to in particular the economies that were based heavily on remittances, views on migration as a phenomenon were generally positive, while the views of migrants themselves varied in ways that I have explored later:

The community is affected by migration; many migrant would come home to die. When they get sick they can't be employed so they return home. This in return affects the health system and the social structure which has a negative impact on the community. The positive side is that lot of remittance comes back.

In addition to local government officials articulating their own vision of the state through their opinions of migration as a process, they further clarified how they understand the role of government, informed by their opinions of migrants themselves. This separation between the phenomenon of migration and migrants themselves is

useful because it looks at how officials view the institutional components of the state—but also, how the state can define and form communities within the constituency it serves. In the sites studied, it was particularly interesting to note that positive or negative views on migrants were not universally held. Rather, they “outsider” migrants as problematic and contributing to all the negative associations with the process of migration, to a point where multi-generational residents, who shared certain traits with “outsider” migrant communities were categorised as migrants themselves. However, “insider” migrants were seen in a positive light, regardless of their association with the phenomenon of migration.

This calls on us to interrogate the arguments advanced by Castells (2010) and Soja (1998) that mobilising ethnic identity is a counterbalance to forces of globalisation and capitalism. While there may be contexts in which this is the case, in the context of local government in South Africa, identity-based patronage appears to be a driving force for localising identity. This is demonstrated by the division between the manner in which “outsider” migrants are portrayed, versus “insider” migrants, even when outsider migrants are in fact, citizens of South Africa, and insider migrants are from other countries.

One local government official experienced being labeled an “outsider” even though he was from a neighboring province. “The only thing here is that people don’t understand one another. They accommodate people from other countries, but not from other provinces. I am from Gauteng, and they ask me why I’m here.”

Another migrant shared the above sentiments by drawing a distinction between the primacy of ethnolinguistic ties and international boundaries: “People from here, they do not like people from outside. Like me, I’m from Gauteng province. They do not like me, but Mozambique is not outside.”

Similarly, respondents compared international migrants that were ethnolinguistically similar to those who were part of a different group with longstanding residents of the community, demonstrating the extent to which identity is being mobilised to reinforce existing systems of patronage within local government:

These people [from Zimbabwe] take jobs from everywhere, even the shops, they are paying them R30 per day, but me because I am from here, I will not work for R30 per day but they take those jobs. That’s why we chase them out of the shops. People from Mozambique are like us, they will also not work for amounts like that.

As much as “outsider” migrants were criticized, they were seen as an asset to the economy if they were part of the community. Some respondents pointed to the economic contribution migrants made to the community: “These are beautiful houses near the tar roads; they are built on migrant remittances.”

The research clearly showed that officials mostly expressed their opinion about the identity of residents, and not necessarily whether or not they were migrants. In fact, international migrants who shared ethnolinguistic heritage with privileged groups of residents were considered resident, whereas multigenerational residents in communities were considered migrants and associated with a common set of ills. Local government officials were functionally creating migrant communities of people who were not moving.

The research findings are interesting for two reasons: The first is that the state is actually generating migrants in a way that does not link to mobility. Instead, it is linked to how the state itself fulfills functions of control and patronage. The second reason is that the perception of officials of the links between identity and space are quite important because they are being used to create binary categories within the communities they serve. This fuels contestation around state power.

Drivers of Migrant Participation

In order to comprehend the manner in which the local state creates categories of people, through interacting with residents, it is also important to look at how residents are responding, and sometimes actively shaping state behaviour. In the sites we studied, residents, particularly those “othered” by state practice, were deliberately expanding grey areas of state control—contesting, not only the role of the state in controlling mobility, but also the ability of the state to categorise residents as insiders or outsiders.

To examine this idea more closely, in this section I first look at how migrants participate in municipal IDP processes, and what their motivations are for participation. I then look at how IDP processes are designed, and how this influences migrant participation. Finally, I look at how the relationship between the two aspects is changing the behaviour of local government in the sites studied. Several scholars have also explored migrants’ participation in local government processes, and how their lives are often spread across space in a way that local government cannot always effectively accommodate (Landau 2009; Polletta 2014). It is a fundamental part of the migrant experience for one person’s needs to be spread across different municipalities.

One migrant told a story that is typical of people’s realities across South Africa:

My aunt was born here, but she’s from Zim and that’s where she’s building a house for when she is old. Maybe she would build here, but there’s no water. She goes to Johannesburg to sell what she makes every week. She’s also in a union that side, so that street traders don’t get chased. When she goes there, she doesn’t have a place to stay. She’d like a place of her own, but for now, she stays with her cousin, until she can afford to look for something. Her children are young, and she can’t leave them, so they stay with her sister, who’s married in Louis Trichart. They go to school there.

This illustrates that the lives of current migrants require that different mechanisms be employed to engage with them than would be the case with sedentary residents. However, migrants also plan differently across space. Migration is often, fundamentally, a planning strategy, and the manner in which a migrants engage with local planning processes is very much shaped by what they are planning on doing, and where they see themselves in the future. A worker in Gauteng, who has left behind a family in the rural area and plans to return there soon after his/her working years have passed would interface with local government very differently than a student who has come to Polokwane with the intention of starting a family there after completing his/her studies.

In this way, a migrant's "imagined life" becomes very important, in much the same way that the "imagined communities" public sector officials serve as important driver of behaviour and decision making. Research has demonstrated (Landau, Segatti, and Misago 2011) that most migrants plan to spend only a few years in a city, but end up staying for decades. This may mean that residents do not have an incentive to engage with a place they would like to leave: "This is not my fight. I just came. Years ago, they were raising the issue of water, I wasn't here. Years after I go to Johannesburg, there will still be no water." This demonstrates that while migration primarily has a spatial dimension, there is also a temporal consideration. IDP plans span five years. However, these plans are often regarded as nothing but wishlists, as the actual implementation can take much longer. This constitutes a further disincentive for migrants to participate in IDP processes. Presumably, the time needed to gain the cultural capital and the relationships necessary to affect processes may not be offset by the planning cycle, as well as the time that a migrant anticipates to stay in a community, in order to see the benefits of the engagement.

Another fact that was raised by several migrants interviewed was that the absence of social and political support networks in their new community leads them to think that their participation was unlikely to be useful. Most residents, both migrants and non-migrants alluded to the usefulness of engagement in shaping their engagement with local political processes: "Here, I am nobody. Why would I go to these meetings when I cannot change anybody's mind? At home, maybe I am somebody, and I could convince people." This shows migrants communities may not have locally relevant forms of power and influence to bring about change in local government. This is in line with many scholars' criticism of the participation processes in South Africa's local government (Polletta 2014).

The above sentiments were shared by other migrants—one of them said:

This meeting is not for us. People who want to be involved in politics, they might be interested. But all I see are promises, and I know in 5 years, nothing will have happened. I'm not one to wait my whole life for people to talk, my children need to eat tomorrow.

IDP processes have been designed with an explicit aim of redressing past inequities. There is no doubt that this is what we need in South Africa. However, by framing planning processes around historically-excluded groups, these planning processes may incentivise looking backward at demographic trends. Many historically-excluded groups are using migration as a strategy for economic mobility, and are moving towards accessing better services and economic opportunities (de Brauw, Mueller, and Lee 2014). A municipality that plans to serve a population on the basis of where they are, rather than where they will be, will clearly struggle to respond to the needs of the community. This framing particularly excludes migrants, who are at the frontier of the demographic changes that are reshaping communities. For local government to respond effectively to the needs of residents, particularly those who have been historically marginalised, they need to plan for future communities and not past communities.

Migrant Identities Shaping State Practice

The section above demonstrates the inclination of local government officials to view their role as one of defining, not only the way migrants should participate in local government, but also the criterion used to categorise people as migrants. By looking at the manner in which residents are interacting with the state, it is clear that they are not passive recipients of state power, but have developed several mechanisms of responding to these assertions of state power, through both repositioning their own identity, and also re-articulating the role of the state.

One migrant highlighted on how he experienced crime in order to draw a distinction between himself and local residents, asserting moral authority as a differentiator:

My experiences as a migrant in South Africa were eye opening; things were a norm to others. Issues such as the young girl who was raped behind us, down the street someone had bought sand, however a dispute irrupted because of the payment, someone got a shovel and knocked the other over the head which split his skull and he died. I wish I could help people here understand that that is not normal.

The fact that migrants discuss their own experiences as separate from the experiences of other community members highlights the strategies used by migrants to navigate the complex bureaucratic system of accessing services:

Nobody wants to ignore the rules, but you find the rules weren't written for us. Even the people who live here, if they have to wait years for an ID, they'll look for another way. Our situation is complicated, and we know we won't get help from the government. So we're used to looking for another way.

Both migrants and sedentary residents who have been bequeathed honorary migrant status by local government officials are expanding grey areas of state control, as well as evading black and white categories of identity. "I always hate the question – where are

you from. Where am I from? I'll tell you where I was born. I'll tell you where I live. Anything else is politics.”

Similarly, one respondent gave a pragmatic response to the common struggles with bureaucracy:

At the end of the day, I need to get things done. If I need a letter saying I am from here to get a job, I will find that letter. If I need a rates bill from back home, I will get that. For every account and every office they want to put in you some box, I just get in the box they want, I will get what I need and then move on.

Discussion

Local government practice is actively shaping communities, through the manner in which officials interact with migrants and residents. While this is not a new phenomenon, it is important to explore this aspect in order to understand it better in different social and institutional contexts. One interesting finding that emerged out of the sites studied is that the migration status that local government ascribed to resident has to do with ethnolinguistic identity than with the actual mobility. On the one hand, this supports the already well-documented fact that identity-based politics are strongly shaping South African local government (Beresford 2015). At the same time, it makes it clear that intersecting challenges make it difficult for local government to plan. While some of these challenges are logistical, such as the pace of urbanisation in the region, others are about the manner in which communities are perceived.

Local government plays a role in creating and reinforcing community identities, including creating categories of insiders and outsiders that do not necessarily correspond with the actual mobility of people (Williams 2006). These same public sector actors are trying to create binary boxes into which residents can be placed, as part of the state's role in controlling the movement of residents. These binary categories are limiting, and limited in their ability to describe the actual experiences and needs of residents.

Migrants and residents have developed a number of effective responses to these efforts by the state to control residents, to minimise their need for state intervention, and curbing ways in which the state can exert control. Strategies have ranged from working to strengthen the role non-state actors can play in service delivery, to asserting forms of identity that hold moral suasion over discriminatory discourse by either local government, or members of the community itself.

While migrant communities are being reshaped by public officials, migrants are also making decisions, based not only on their immediate, tangible interests but on their imagined lives. This means that both migrants and local government authorities are planning to have communities that will never take shape.

Conclusion

Research conducted in five municipalities in South Africa has demonstrated that local government officials and migrants are in a dynamic process of co-creating the local state and community at municipal level. On the one hand, local government officials hold strong assumptions about migration, migrants, and the communities that they serve. They are acting on these views in ways that are sharpening the role of the state, but also actively reshape the manner in which communities articulate their identity. While international migrants play a role in shaping this discourse, in fact, national boundaries are not a significant driver of these politics of identity. Some non-citizens are “insiders” and some multigenerational residents are “outsiders” in the way both communities and public officials are articulating their aspirations for the community. This highlights the extent to which public officials’ understanding of the communities they serve is critical in shaping state practice. On the other hand, migrants themselves are unique, evidenced in the manner in which they define communities through their own interactions, and demand services and negotiate rights. This brings a shift in municipal practice.

For municipalities to plan effectively, and for public participation processes to truly play an inclusive role, IDP processes need to accurately reflect the community as it is and plan for the community that the municipality will serve in the future. As long as planning remains grounded in historical inequities, and communities are imagined as homogenous and sedentary, social fragmentation and frustrations due to service delivery will continue to grow.

On the one hand, the research presents a warning against continually basing practice on subjective notions of who the state “should” serve. On the other hand, it presents an opportunity: local governments have been struggling to keep up with huge service delivery backlogs, and frustrations from residents who feel excluded and unheard have been mounting (Pithouse 2009). Simply transforming the discourse around IDP processes to articulate goals of inclusion could change the degree of legitimacy of local governments. Much policy-focused research has been on the capacity constraints of local government. While the real budgets and skills constraints may remain, simply imagining communities differently may be an important first step to serving them more effectively.

Research should continue to bring literature on spatial geography, together with emerging research on the daily practices of the state. Scholars have already uncovered important dynamics around the interface between mobility and community formation. However, until we are certain of how local authorities are responding to these dynamics, it will be difficult for the state to achieve its role of governing efficiently and refraining from fueling exclusion and social fragmentation.

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