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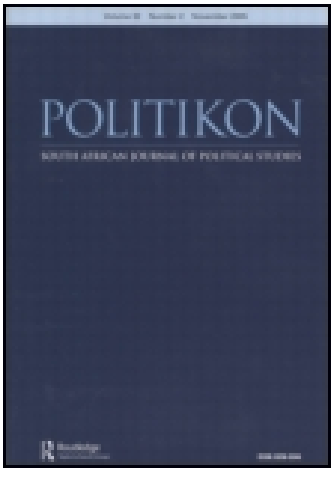

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Making Experience Legible: Spaces of Participation and the Construction of Knowledge in Khayelitsha

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Making Experience Legible: Spaces of Participation and the Construction of Knowledge in Khayelitsha

ANGELA STOREY*

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ABSTRACT *This paper examines how knowledge and accountability are framed and challenged within participatory spaces. I focus on an April 2013 case study from Khayelitsha, a township at the margins of the City of Cape Town. Over the course of one week, local members of a non-governmental organisation undertook a 'social audit', an attempt to dissect one of the city's many service provision contracts and to investigate local delivery of these services within several informal settlements. This paper argues that the audit inverts the city's existing spaces of governance by highlighting everyday forms of knowledge as paramount, creating legibility for non-expert forms of knowledge, and positioning government and private contractors as those who should be accountable to the community. Understanding the dynamics within community-led spaces of citizen participation can thus serve to identify and critique normative practices within neoliberal governance that further marginalise residents living within the urban periphery.*

Introduction

Scholarship on protest and participation in South Africa post-apartheid has highlighted the complexities of enacting forms of participatory governance, including the contentious and multiple relationships between civil society and community actors within formal spaces of participation. Reactions have included the creation of 'invented' spaces of participation by non-government actors, self-made and autonomous alternatives to the 'invited' spaces of participation that community members may feel will exclude, marginalise, or disempower them (Cornwall 2002; Cornwall and Coelho 2007; Thompson 2014). While the existence of such 'invented' spaces may send a message of a community's dissatisfaction with formal participatory processes, might the internal construction of these autonomous spaces also suggest how the format and processes of formal governance disengage and disempower these communities?

This paper examines how knowledge and accountability are framed within participatory spaces created by a community organisation, and argues that 'invented'

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spaces of citizen participation can offer important critiques of the internal processes of 'invited' spaces that they mirror and thus highlight the internal contradictions in neo-liberal participatory governance. I focus here on a case study that took place in April 2013 in Khayelitsha, a township at the geographic, economic, and sociopolitical margins of the City of Cape Town. Over the course of one week, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) undertook a 'social audit', a community effort to dissect one of the city's service provision contracts and to investigate local delivery of these services. In addition to a few staff from the NGO and international experts, the majority of the audit was performed by residents of local informal settlements—the recipients of the services under examination. This paper frames the audit as a single participatory space, one crafted as autonomous of government actors but intentionally reflecting some platforms for engagement that the city might initiate. I argue that the audit's intentional mirroring of current techniques of participatory governance serves to critique the ways that knowledge, legitimacy, and accountability are crafted in interactions between urban officials and residents of informal settlement communities who largely experience the city through its absence. The audit inverts the city's existing spaces of participatory governance by highlighting everyday forms of knowledge as paramount, creating validity for such non-expert forms of knowledge, and positioning government and private contractors as those who should be accountable to the community. Understanding the dynamics of such 'invented' spaces of citizen participation can serve to identify the normative assumptions of neo-liberal governance that are experienced as a further marginalisation by residents living within the urban periphery.

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Framing participation in the post-apartheid era

In the post-apartheid transition of the 1990s, South Africa embraced the ideology of participatory governance, a liberal framework for the supposed expansion of democratic citizenship that had come into vogue in international development and policy work in the 1980s (Gaventa and Valderrama 1999; Cornwall 2002; Mitlin and Sattherwaite 2004). The model subject of such governance practices is the active citizen, an individual whose engagement in democratic life is demonstrated through action within formal governance projects and civil society (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Post-apartheid South African policy enshrines these ideals in law, including in the new constitution's emphasis on participation and active citizenship (Enslin 2003) as well as in national housing policy (Smit 2001; Miraftab 2003).

While incredibly diverse in practice, at their core participatory governance policies and practices imagine that the direct engagement of citizens within governance processes will both empower individuals to adopt and expand their identity as a democratic citizen and, by extension, strengthen the development of that democracy (Gaventa and Valderrama 1999; Cornwall 2002, 2008). In South Africa, the active citizen is evoked as an ideal by government actors, by competing political parties, and, as well, by non-governmental and civil society actors. Framed by

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such various and oppositional actors as central to the development of a truly democratic South Africa, the active citizen of participatory governance has become a spectre of the post-apartheid era—set near-universally as the national goal, but intensely problematic and increasingly seen as disappointing.

Participatory governance itself has received widespread critique. Academic and applied critiques have identified how participatory projects may appropriate the voices of marginalised communities to support the agendas of local government, development projects, and outside actors (Beall, Crankshaw, and Parnell 2002; Graham 2006); that they may use the language of empowerment to 'serve the state's cost-cutting agenda' (Miraftab 2004, 240); and that they may delegitimise alternative forms of community expression and organising (Maina 1998). An increasing focus on participators as 'customers' also reveals the influence of the market and the limitations imposed on individual agency by neo-liberal governance (Cornwall 2002).

Despite such critiques, many community activists and organisations continue to use the language of empowerment and participation to craft counter-narratives about their life and frame calls for political action (Cornwall 2002; Ballard, Habib, and Valodia 2006; Miraftab 2009). One tool in the remaking of participatory governance can be the creation of autonomous, 'invented' spaces of participation constructed by non-governmental, civil society, and community actors (Cornwall 2002; Cornwall and Coelho 2007). Such spaces are intentionally set outside of the 'invited' spaces of formal participatory projects organised by government actors or civil society organisation working under their auspices. 'Invented' spaces may be constructed by civil society and social movement actors to make up for the absences of formal spaces, in protest to a group's exclusion from an 'invited' space, or in competition. Some of these alternatives have been created by social movements working within communities existing at the margins of society: informal settlements.

Over the last decade informal settlement and township residents in South Africa have coalesced into various social movements and civil society organisations framed by the service delivery failures of the post-apartheid state (Ballard, Habib, and Valodia 2006). They take as their goals improving housing; expanding access to water, sanitation, and electricity; opposing evictions; and fighting commercialisation of public services (van Heusden and Pointer 2006; Gibson 2008; Patel 2008; Pithouse 2008; Wafer 2008; Zikode 2008a, 2008b; Etzo 2010; Thompson and Nleya 2010). These groups often have complex relationships with the state and local governments, incorporating into their demands both rights-based, liberal solutions that work alongside government actors and counter-hegemonic, anti-neo-liberal resistance—a 'mixture of engagement and opposition' (Oldfield and Stokke 2007, 149). Movements may use the language of active citizenship and participation to frame their demands, but act out alternative definitions of membership in the state by drawing a political voice from their experiences of marginalisation (Holston 2009; Miraftab 2009; Dawson 2010). While extremely varied in their approaches and memberships, and not always allied to each other in their work, this broad category of service delivery-focused social movements and

organisations presents a base within which government and civil society face pressures for re-organisation.

Neo-liberal governance and depoliticised participation

South Africa's post-apartheid government inherited a system of public services reliant upon high municipal subsidies and which provided vastly unequal access, with infrastructure almost exclusively serving white urban communities or industry (Flynn and Chirwa 2005). Influenced by aid conditions and debt-repayment requirements (Johnston 2003), as well as national socio-economic and political constraints, the new government promptly began to adopt neo-liberal economic policies based around full cost recovery mechanisms, intent upon increasing competition, attracting global capital, and producing an efficient government (Siwisa 2008).

Here South Africa followed on the heels of a powerful new global economic trend. The debt crisis of the early 1980s ushered in the era of neo-liberalism, brought forcefully into the economies, politics, and everyday lives of communities in the global south through Structural Adjustment Policies, aid conditions, and the encroachment of the market. Neo-liberal policies dramatically change the face of public services at the national and municipal levels: the commercialisation, commodification, and privatisation of services shift the ownership, management, and regulation of systems away from public control (Swyngedouw 2004; Harvey 2005; McDonald and Ruiters 2005).

Within the broad context of financial constraints on governments, a variety of economic, social, and political logics have been used to justify the adoption of policies promoting commercialisation and privatisation. The rhetoric of 'state failure' in service delivery and economic competition has been widely used as an external explanation for moving to private control over service provisioning, an argument that depends on an underlying belief that the market provides better efficiency through competition (Bakker 2003; Swyngedouw 2004). For municipalities and national governments, privatisation is often explained by a need for capital (Johnstone and Wood 2001). As opposed to reducing regulatory requirements, however, privatisation often prompts proliferation of governing bodies (Swyngedouw 2004) and a re-regulation of services as the state becomes not the provider, but the site of regulation (Bakker 2003).

The privatisation and commodification of public services are brought into the everyday life of communities through shifts in service delivery, including the adoption of technologies—such as prepaid water metres—and policies that allow service providers to distance themselves from the management of individual access (Harvey 2005; von Schnitzler 2008; Dawson 2010). These changes signal a transition from national and municipal governments as service providers to government as the regulator of industry and custodian of citizen-customers (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000; Gandy 2004; von Schnitzler 2008).

Despite the concurrence of neo-liberal and participatory governance programmes, citizen engagement and neo-liberal policy sit at odds in practice.

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Privatised services are less beholden to community need, which can result in further service insecurity for vulnerable populations (Johnston 2003; Gandy 2004). The impacts of neo-liberal policy on citizenship can be seen clearly in South Africa, where decentralisation, participatory projects, and commercialisation of public goods have been embraced (Galvin and Habib 2003; McDonald and Ruiters 2005). The neo-liberal policy adopted post-apartheid includes corporatised water systems and prepaid water metres, with concurrent public education campaigns to re-educate citizens as responsible, paying consumers of a new commodity (von Schnitzler 2008; Dawson 2010).

Cornwall argues that participation has increasingly become what Foucault would call a 'political technology ... bounding the possibilities of popular engagement and producing new forms of surveillance and control' (2002, 54). Miraftab details the implementation of a community waste collection project in Cape Town from 1997 to 2001, arguing that 'empowerment and participatory discourses were marshalled to justify using the underpaid or unpaid labour of poor women and men in to townships, to serve the state's cost-cutting agenda' (2004, 240). Active citizenship holds an ideological position central to the post-apartheid democratic vision, but is put into practice for various ends.

Nevertheless, social movements in some South African informal settlements continue to draw on a highly politicised understanding of participation to mobilise local residents, at times explicitly framing their work as enactments of active citizenship (Miraftab and Wills 2005). Locally driven participatory work thus may seek to counter what is seen as depoliticised participation emerging from mainstream governance projects.

Background: Khayelitsha & basic services

Khayelitsha sits within the geographic periphery of Cape Town. Founded in the 1980s as a township for black workers segregated under apartheid's race-based residency laws, it sits far from the city centre but still near enough to provide ready labour. Thirty years later, Khayelitsha remains a predominantly black area—99% of the nearly 400,000 officially counted residents as of the 2011 national census (City of Cape Town 2013d). Although Khayelitsha includes neighbourhoods of bank- or government-financed formal housing, 55% of the dwellings here are informal shacks packed into the backyards of formal houses, or clustered in dense communities. This is significantly higher than for the city as a whole, where 21% of households are in informal dwellings (City of Cape Town 2013d).

Life in Khayelitsha's informal areas is characterised by absence—the absence of formal housing, the absence of employment, and the absence of infrastructure. While national law provides some protections to extant informal areas and requires municipalities to extend basic services, many informal areas suffer from non-existent or inadequate basic infrastructure. The City of Cape Town has set target ratios of one common tap shared by not more than 25 households and 1 toilet shared by not more than 5 households (City of Cape Town 2013e),

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but these standards are not always met and, even if met, they can translate into hundreds of people sharing a tap or dozens using the same toilet (ISN 2010). There remain, however, a large number of areas where the basic standards are not being met; officially, the city recognises 2011 census data which put 10% of the population of Khayelitsha with no access whatsoever to toilet facilities (City of Cape Town 2013d) and the actual numbers may be much higher when accounting for the prevalence of blocked or broken toilets as well as unofficial estimations that the area's population may greatly exceed census counts (SJC 2013).

Significant portions of the services to informal areas are provided under municipal contracts with private companies, both in Cape Town and in cities across the country. In Cape Town, informal areas may be provided with a variety of different sanitation services, ranging from rows of communal flush toilets to varieties of chemical toilets. Sanitation services are largely constructed, cleaned, and repaired as part of contracts with private companies. According to a public statement made in April 2013 by City officials, there are currently over 1000 separate contracts for provision of municipal services (Fieldnotes). One such contract is that which provides stand-alone, portable chemical toilets to over 100 informal settlements in Cape Town and which served as the basis for our case study's contestation over local service delivery.

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Case study: the Social Justice Coalition (SJC) and the 2013 Mshengu social audit

SJC is an NGO working primarily with residents of informal settlements in Khayelitsha. The organisation was founded in 2008 and, as of 2013, consisted of 14 community branches in Khayelitsha and nearby areas. SJC articulates their work as an extension of citizenship: in organisational outreach material, they identify the promotion of active citizenship as central to their community engagements and even their logo notes that they work to 'advance the constitution' (2011). As a non-partisan member of Cape Town's civil society, SJC has interacted with the current (2013) municipal and provincial democratic alliance governments in a variety of fashions, ranging from collaborative to antagonistic. In February 2013, City of Cape Town Mayor Patricia de Lille attended a march about street lighting in Khayelitsha and proclaimed her eagerness to work with SJC as an organisation that represented the community (Fieldnotes). Nevertheless, in September of the same year 20 SJC activists chained themselves to a plaza outside the Mayor's office to protest what they saw as her unwillingness to meet with the organisation over service delivery-related demands, at which time the Mayor dismissed SJC as 'more interested in publicity than they are in genuinely trying to improve service provision' (Washinyira 2013). Although more formalised than many of the other service delivery-focused social movement organisations, SJC has similarly utilised a range of activities to engage and oppose government actors—prompting both engagement and opposition in return—but delineate themselves by refusing to engage in street protest or

violence. SJC follows alongside the approach of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), the organisation in which SJC found many of its roots. TAC sees their relationship with the government as 'more complicated . . . in which co-operation and conflict are employed together' (Friedman and Mottair 2006, 27).

One of SJC's primary campaigns has been for the provision of safe, dignified sanitation to informal settlements. Identified by their members as a threat to the health of the community and an affront to human dignity, SJC also frames inadequate sanitation as an immediate danger. Long walks to sparse public toilets or to open spaces at the edge of communities can put residents at risk of crime, with members reporting being mugged, assaulted, and raped on their way to use the toilet (SJC 2013). At this intersection of health, safety, and dignity, SJC has campaigned for the City of Cape Town to improve the provision of toilet facilities to informal settlements around Khayelitsha.

The forms of sanitation provided by the City of Cape Town to informal settlements in Khayelitsha range widely, with some areas receiving no toilet facilities whatsoever and others with on-site flush toilets provided for each household. In between these two extremes are several forms of toilets provided to communities to be shared publicly or between specific households. A few communities retain bucket toilets (removable buckets with chemicals set inside another small, often permanent structure), some are given potha-pothas (small units with a seat above a detachable container, meant to be kept inside homes), others have public/shared flush toilets attached to sewerage systems, and yet others are provided with portable toilet units containing chemicals. In 2013, the City of Cape Town also unveiled new portable flush toilet (PFTs) systems, which are not connected to sewerage systems but utilise a water-flushing mechanism to bring wastes into a holding tank not visible to users. Community acceptance of different toilet types is highly contested: the City claims that thousands of residents have voluntarily accepted portable flush toilets (City of Cape Town 2013e), while some community organisations and residents say any form of portable or non-flush system remains unacceptable (Gontsana 2013).[1]

Broadly, SJC has campaigned for improved access to sanitation, emphasising the need for increased numbers of toilets, a move away from non-flush systems, and the adoption of City-funded janitorial services for public toilets. In the course of their work on sanitation, SJC has engaged multiple tactics, including direct lobbying of City officials and staff, public marches and events, media outreach, the creation of coalitions, and the production of reports.

In April 2013, SJC elected to use a new tactic to focus attention on sanitation issues in Khayelitsha: a social audit, where a group of informal settlement residents would examine the contract for one of the city's outsourced services and conduct surveys on service delivery. In this way residents would be informed about the services they should be provided and could hold accountable the city and companies if the contract was not being met. On the audit SJC worked with Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU; translated from isiXhosa, the name means 'I want to know' or, as NU translates it, 'Dare to know'), another NGO located in Cape Town. NU and SJC are not casual partners on this project; the organisations

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share several staff and board members in common, work together on their Safe Communities Campaign and Imali Yethu Project (from isiXhosa: 'Our Money'), and NU provides training opportunities for some SJC staff through their fellows programme (Fieldnotes).

In this endeavour SJC and NU were aided by the International Budget Partnership (IBP), an international organisation that has worked alongside local groups to conduct social audits in several countries. One of the IBP staff in attendance described audits as successful when they provide 'a dialogue between community and government' (Fieldnotes). In this framing, audits present a space for give and take between those providing and those using municipal services, an exchange across roles that might otherwise only take place privately in lobbying meetings or publicly at rallies or during elections. Although a space of participation 'invented' by the community, the audit intends to create a kind of idealised space for engagement between the community and their representatives.

The audit examined a three-year contract awarded by the city to a company called 'Mshengu Services' (or 'Imvusa Trading') for the provision of stand-alone portable chemical toilets to informal settlements. Extending from November 2010 to June 2013, the contract covers the provision of toilets to over 100 informal areas in the City, including 11 in Khayelitsha. In addition to the 77-page contract, the audit examined a resolution passed by the City Council to approve the contract and a 30-page letter from a City official. The letter included the current list of informal areas provided with these units, a few short notes on the contract, and the monitoring data from February 2013 for the contractor's service trucks emptying waste from the units at the City's wastewater treatment works (SJC 2013). Although these monitoring data are purportedly collected for every month of the contract, the City provided information for this one month in response to SJC's request for contract-related monitoring data (SJC 2013).

Over the course of a week, 60 people participated in collecting data for the audit. They learned about the contract over Monday and Tuesday, and on Wednesday and Thursday surveyed four areas in Khayelitsha with Mshengu toilets. On Friday the group reconvened to collect and assess their data for presentation at Saturday's public hearing, where representatives from the city, the province, and the contracted company, along with independent observers and the wider community, were invited to hear the audit's findings as presented by the participants.

It is not uncommon for community members to be called upon to testify to the poor service conditions of life in informal settlements. SJC and other community-based organisations often use the personal stories of members and other residents in their outreach and campaign material, in media stories, and to testify personally at hearings, events, and in lobbying work (SJC 2011, 2013). What sets the audit apart is not the inclusion of personal stories about the problems with Mshengu toilets. The poignant points about the audit are, first, that it was framed to prioritise everyday experience as the most legitimate information about the delivery of services, and, second, that residents were positioned as those who *should* collect and present data from the wider community. What resulted was the blending of

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personal stories with statistical data culled from community members' own field research and the creation of forms of knowledge legible to city monitoring and evaluation processes (statistical and objective) but imbued with personal narrative (experiential and subjective).

The audit was constructed to engage with residents of informal settlements not only as those able to testify about the situation of their lives within spaces of service inadequacies, but also as those who should be speaking about and gathering data on these conditions. As opposed to a public consultation process or a public hearing, in which individual opinions may be expressed and individual stories relayed, the audit presented residents as those who can and should gather, control, manage, and present knowledge about how services are provided within their communities. These distinctions of process and outcome are apparent in actions and reactions from community members and City staff throughout the week of the social audit.

The audit began on Monday, with the participants gathering at a community hall in Khayelitsha. Following a morning of introductions—of SJC, partner organisations, and the technique of social audits as they have been conducted by IBP with local groups in India and Kenya—the afternoon was dedicated to meeting with representatives from the City of Cape Town, including two City staff members and the City Council member tasked with utility services.

Before the City representatives arrived, the group brainstormed possible questions to ask. Questions revolved around monitoring and reporting, health and safety, engagement of and consultation with the community, the public availability of contract-related information, the cost of units, the use of units only in townships, and contract evaluation, among other topics. While IBP and SJC staff attempted at times to frame the community's questions into formats that they felt would not alienate the City representatives before the public hearing on Saturday where the audit findings would be revealed, the participants resisted these constraints. One person framed their need to ask hard-hitting questions as emerging from their long struggle with inadequate services, saying: 'We are in such terrible conditions, there's no time to beg these people, we've been begging for a long time. Stop asking us not to ask these questions, we are the ones struggling.'[2] Participants pushed back against even the limited constraints that staff attempted to impose upon the participatory space, grounding the claim for their right to engage the City within their everyday experiences of marginalisation.

When City representatives arrived, they presented information about contracted sanitation services, and specifically the Mshengu contract. Following the presentation, audience members challenged the City representatives to respond to their demands for increased access to the City's contract monitoring data and to explain why impermanent Mshengu units have been selected for their communities instead of other forms of sanitation. While the City representatives claimed Mshengu units were the best available option for areas serviced in the contract, community members resisted external assessments of their community's needs and wants. The ensuing conversation revolved around a debate over local

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service expertise, with both City and community situating themselves as experts on the services provided to informal settlements: one expertise based on engineering, policy, and costs, and the other expertise based on the daily experiences of living in a community serviced only by impermanent sanitation services.

On Tuesday, audit participants again gathered at the community hall and spent the day evaluating data provided by the City. Here, unlike in a public meeting, the participants were not given a summary of findings created by an expert or a central staff member, but rather were tasked with individually evaluating the contract and monitoring data themselves. While the information they assessed was selected and written by the City, the attendees produced their own evaluation of the data and cross-referenced it with the contract's guidelines, thus producing their own set of data points and gaining in the process a nuanced understanding of how the City writes contracts and conducts monitoring—as well as what information they choose to share with communities. Although in many ways a mundane and tedious exercise, the examination of the contract and the monitoring data gave a texture to the process of government operations and a more detailed understanding of internal city workings that community members are rarely provided. Further, the community members identified trends in the data provided, as well as what they saw to be inconsistencies between what the City had claimed the day before on monitoring and what they were seeing in the data itself. Participants noted that vagueness in the data made it difficult to assess what was actually being done by the contractor, and if they were fulfilling their obligations or not. The exercise offered participants a chance to see how the City's monitoring of the contract differed from their own local understanding of service provisioning; it provided a link between the statistical knowledge form that the City uses for tracking contracts, and the experiential knowledge form of the community's daily lives at the receiving end of the contract. Local expertise here approaches the municipal regulatory framework.

At the end of Tuesday, a participant noted their frustration at the City's insistence that the contract was being fulfilled adequately, despite the inconsistencies that the participants saw in the monitoring data. An individual commented to the group: 'The city is making us children—what they say isn't happening. They must take back this information and bring us correct information.' Another participant echoed this sentiment, saying: 'The city is making us fools. The information will become a problem for them.' Here their knowledge of the City's own contract and monitoring data becomes the tool with which community members feel they have the ability to confront the City. The repetition of being positioned as 'children' or 'fools' as a result of the City not sharing complete and accurate information about the contracted services suggests that the community's new knowledge of the contract will become the terrain of their struggle for the right to speak on this matter and begins to frame how the audit allows communities to make demands for accountability from the City.

For Wednesday and Thursday, the participants dispersed to four informal areas within Khayelitsha provided with toilet units under this contract. During this process of verification, as IBP calls it, three types of survey forms were filled

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out: one with questions for community members about the units they use, a second with questions about the physical state of the units found by the surveyors (what IBP calls 'physical verification'), and a third for cleaners working for the contractors or employed as Community Liaison Officers (CLOs). Participants spoke with 270 residents in 4 informal settlements, and inspected 256 Mshengu toilet units. However, SJC claims that no contract workers or CLOs were found in the communities during the audit (SJC 2013).

Sitting inside homes or standing outside near the toilets, participants asked residents about the units that they used, questioning how often they were cleaned, who cleans them, their interactions with the contractor's workers or CLOs, and about their knowledge of the contract itself—including the requirement to employ locals as workers and CLOs, and the price spent by the City on the contract (estimated by SJC on a per toilet basis) (SJC 2013). Residents often replied with stories about the units. In one community, 27 households were said to be using a single toilet. People spoke about how poorly the workers cleaned the toilets, and how the toilets themselves were rarely set on firm ground (Khayelitsha's substrate is sand) and thus often tipped over and spilled waste around the community. Others told how the toilets would fill up and sit for days, the stench filling the surrounding area and waste sometimes seeping out or overflowing into walkways (SJC 2013; Fieldnotes).

In surveying the toilets, units were found to be broken, unclean, tipped over, unsecured, vandalised, and sometimes entirely unusable. In dense communities, the only open space may be around the toilets, so children sometimes played nearby. Indeed, the cover of the report that SJC produced summarising the audit's findings shows a photograph of five young children sitting inside an Mshengu unit that has been tipped over. Throughout the audit, participants took notes of their observations, taking daily experiences and making them into points of data able to be coalesced into a presentable set of findings. The stories and experiences themselves did not evaporate in the process of data compilation, however, as many surveyors were residents of these or other informal areas. The power of these everyday experiences then retained their resonance; they were not only simply data points but also important ways for understanding what services actually mean to those who use them.

At the end of the day, the SJC surveyors were incensed at the state of the toilets they had found and the stories they had heard. Even for participants who also used these same units, to walk through other communities and engage directly with those residents about their shared circumstances produced a systemic understanding of this service as it is experienced across communities.

On Friday the group met again to collate their data for presentation the following day. At Saturday's public hearing, the high school gymnasium venue filled with SJC members and local residents, more than 200 people in the audience. They faced a stage atop which representatives from the City of Cape Town, the Province of the Western Cape, the contracted company, a major newspaper, a union, and partner organisations for the audit sat behind a long series of tables. In the morning, audit participants presented data gathered from each of the four

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surveyed areas, weaving together the audit's collated data, the gathered experiences of residents, and their own personal stories. In the afternoon, the City and contracting company representatives were given an opportunity to speak as well, followed by questions from the audience. Finally, the 'observers'—the journalist, union representative, provincial spokesperson, and other organisations—were also given the chance to provide comments about the audit. Before breaking, SJC's General-Secretary read a draft resolution about the audit that they intended to submit to the City, along with complete findings.

In comments from City representatives at the public meeting the involvement of community members was sought, but relegated to 'tak(ing) responsibility for the infrastructure they use'—articulated in terms of physical care of sanitation units—and informing the City about maintenance needs (Fieldnotes). As the City's representative at the public meeting explained to residents, the City does not have enough people to assist with monitoring, so it helps when information about services are brought to the City's attention so it can be revisited with project managers to ensure that the City gets 'value for money'. The defensive posture of the City in response to the audit may be a reflection of previous interactions with SJC, or a result of the high political visibility of sanitation issues within the City and nationally. Whether for these reasons or for others, at the meeting and in subsequent formal statements the focus of the City's response to the audit was to refute what they saw as statistical 'inaccuracies' in the findings, not to engage with the experiences of sanitation services as expressed by residents (City of Cape Town 2013b).[3]

The privatisation and commercialisation of services imbued the language of City representatives, as they referred to residents as 'customers' and repeatedly emphasised the need for the City to get 'value for money' in their service delivery work. The statements of City staff at the audit make obvious the contradictory logic of privatisation and commercialisation of public services: control over services is removed from the community, while residents are simultaneously blamed for problems in the resulting services.

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Participation and knowledge production

The audit constructed a space in which knowledge was presented in markedly different terms by local residents and by City representatives. For audit participants, knowledge became information produced by community members, determined to be valid based on its grounding in the paired everyday experiences of the audit participants and the residents using Mshengu toilets whom they interviewed. Knowledge within the audit was, then, that grounded within an expertise formed by everyday experiences of life within marginalised communities. Not only did the audit frame the lives of the community members as a legitimate foundation for knowledge, but it also presented community members as those with the authority to gather, create, and present such information. Thus, in the presentation of data at the Saturday public hearing, community members mixed stories of their

own lives with those of residents they interviewed, layered with statistical informal from the audit's findings.

As Epstein has argued in the context of AIDS activism in the USA, social movement organisations have sought to reframe the domain of their engagement in public policy discussions by challenging control over the production of knowledge (1996). As the recipients of the Mshengu services, residents in Khayelitsha repositioned themselves as legitimate voices in discussions over the contract by claiming their role in creating knowledge and their validity for engaging in policy-level discussion while retaining the foundation of their knowledge within everyday experience.

The production of knowledge has become central to the work of social movements internationally (Aparicio and Blaser 2008; Escobar 2008). Mundane events such as meetings, mapping, neighbourhood tours, and negotiations with government agencies can be recognised as sites where knowledge is produced about political change, development, and belonging, acknowledging movements 'as spaces for the production of situated knowledges of the political' (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008, 51). Seeing the social audit as a form of 'situated knowledge', as Haraway terms the necessarily partial but grounded knowledge emerging from within a particular social position (1991), acknowledges the community participants as simultaneously marginal to the city's internal workings but central to an understanding of the politics of governance for service delivery: the audit highlights the de-valuing of community experiences of services within neo-liberal governance decisions and monitoring.

The audit challenges the positioning of community members as inert consumers, acknowledging instead that their daily experiences form a legitimate knowledge of not only service inadequacies but also the wider structural factors that reproduce their marginality. This form of community response challenges the increasing emphasis on citizens as consumers of services and not participants in a democratic exchange. The social audit seeks to create a space for community–city interaction that mirrors in many ways a public hearing or open forum—an implied call to re-engage the community as rights-bearing citizens.

Scholars have examined the inefficacy of participatory spaces in which radically different backgrounds, forms of knowledge, and communicatory repertoires prevent participants from communicating with each other (Barnes 2007). This has been understood as a deficit in the preparation of marginalised communities to engage with experts and professionals. As Cornwall and Coelho write: 'Mobilization may bring marginalized actors into participatory spaces, but not necessarily equip them with the skills to communicate effectively with the others that they meet there' (2007, 13). Inversely, in the social audit residents of marginalised communities were prepared and able to communicate their needs in a way that should be understandable to government actors. Instead it is the staff of the City, functioning under the pressures imposed by neo-liberal policies, who are unable to accept the knowledge produced by audit participants as legitimate. One result of the privatisation and commercialisation of municipal services is thus the de-valuing of citizen experiences of these services, and the City's

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apparent transition to protecting their relationship with the contractor and not with its citizens.

Participatory development practitioners have long recognised the importance of incorporating local knowledge into their work, with, as Mosse writes, 'the supposition that the articulation of people's knowledge can transform top-down bureaucratic planning systems' (2001, 16). Mosse continues, however, to note that local knowledge reflects local structures of power and that development project staff shape the framing of local needs. Certainly in the audit the staff of coordinating NGOs attempted to channel residents' comments and questions towards the organisationally determined focus of the activity. The vociferous participants often refused to be contained, however, and comments from audience members at the public meeting included commentary on their broader experiences of services and governance. The creation of participatory spaces—in development or governance—necessarily reflects both the prior experiences of the individuals and communities engaged, as well as the wider set of power dynamics within that social world (Kothari 2001; Cornwall and Coelho 2007).

Conclusion: invented spaces as critique

In press releases and public forums following the social audit, City staff and elected officials questioned the findings of the community, claiming that the statistics the audit had produced were incorrect (City of Cape Town 2013b). As the City attempted to delegitimise SJC and the social audit based on the same sort of data that they were used to dealing with, they widely ignored the subtext of the audit as an exercise in community–City engagement and a reworking of political knowledge. By reinforcing the importance of the statistical findings of the audit, the City response highlights the juxtaposition between the community's self-produced, grounded knowledge of service provisions and the City's technocratic emphasis on the numeric, fiscal imperatives of neo-liberal governance.

In the following months, the City of Cape Town offered a revised approach to community engagement on contracted service delivery, with the roll-out of a campaign entitled 'Know your Community, Know your Contractor' in May 2013 (City of Cape Town 2013a). Central to the campaign were to be a series of eight public meetings held in communities across the City, in which the mayor would attend and 'educate people living in informal settlements about the services they are entitled to and their rights regarding them', including how to identify contractors, which services are provided by the City's contractors, and how to report complaints (City of Cape Town 2013a). In short, the outreach campaign was not a success. For the public hearings that did occur, attendees shouted down the mayor and prevented her from speaking; at some she was escorted out, apparently with concerns for her safety, and others were cancelled. To the media, the City blamed the failure of the public meetings on political agitators (City of Cape Town 2013c).

As potential spaces of community participation, the framing of the 'Know your Community, Know your Contractor' public meetings offers a stark contrast to the

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social audit. The City events were meant to be spaces for the City to tell the community about the services they are provided with, and for people to ask questions or voice opinions. Even if the intent of the meetings was an expansion of community engagement and interaction with the City, in these spaces knowledge remained under the control of the City and contractors, with the public positioned as those providing commentary—commentary ultimately given in the form of shouts and threats of violence (City of Cape Town 2013c).

Participatory spaces are not blank canvases for engagements between government officials and community members, but are imbued with the previous experiences and expectations of all who fill them. As Cornwall and Coelho note, drawing on Bourdieu,

> Professionals valued for their expertise in one context may be unwilling to countenance the validity or value of alternative knowledges and practices on another; and citizens who have been on the receiving end of paternalism or prejudice in everyday encounters with state institutions may bring these expectations with them into the participatory sphere. (2007, 12)

Indeed, it was not only the City representatives who entered the audit with anticipation for the interactions and outcome, but also the community members and NGO staff. Governance around service delivery has become imbued with the language and actions of neo-liberalism, including a mistrust and provisionality of government–citizen relationships (von Schnitzler 2008).

Invented spaces of participation emerge as a domain offering space for community members and activists to produce alternative knowledge about their lives as a grounded politics. While participatory governance often focuses on empowering the 'squatter citizen' (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2004), community action such as that found in 'invented' spaces can redefine citizenship within everyday experiences and offer critiques of participation itself as practiced within the neoliberal city.

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Notes

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1. Contention over PFTs erupted in May 2013 into the 'poo wars,' in which activists linked to the ruling national party, the African National Congress, dumped containers of human waste on the steps of the Provincial offices and in other public areas to protest the use of portable toilet systems for informal settlements (City of Cape Town 2013b; Gontsana 2013).
2. Quotes from social audit events are taken from the author's ethnographic fieldnotes made at the time and represent as close to direct quotes as possible. Attribution to specific individuals is not made to protect their privacy under the ethical clearance for this research project.
3. Although research included conversations with individual City of Cape Town staff about sanitation provisioning and community engagement, this article draws only from statements of City staff made at public meetings or via press releases. This is done to ensure that only official and public statements about the City's position on the audit are represented, as the perspectives of individual staff may vary.

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