

# Implications of Municipal Boundary Determination on Social Integration of Diverse Communities in South Africa

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## Abstract

This article scrutinises social integration from a local government perspective. It argues that the determinations and re-determinations of municipal areas compromise the inclusion and social boundaries that communities set for themselves. This article seeks to prove this claim through a comparative look at two case studies, namely, the Collins Chabane and the JB Marks local municipalities. Whereas the former resulted from the merger of two rural areas that belonged to separate municipal areas, *viz* Malamulele and Vuwani, the latter came to exist following an amalgamation of the then relatively more urban local municipalities of Tlokwe and Ventersdorp. Empirical evidence shows that the determination of municipal boundaries has disrupted communities' social settings and their sense of belonging to their municipal area. It has become clear that there are still people who feel excluded from socio-economic development in their local areas. Primarily, the central proposition of this article is that municipal boundaries should consider the interests of groups of individuals who share cultural, ethnic or social ties within close proximity of each other.

**Keywords:** Municipal demarcation, Municipal boundary determination, Re-determination, Social reintegration, Diverse communities



## Introduction

Section 2 of the Local Government: Municipal Demarcation Act (Act 27 of 1998) states that, in South Africa, the Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB) is an independent authority responsible for the determination of municipal boundaries. The objective of the entity is to establish areas that would enable municipalities to fulfil their constitutional obligations. Section 25 of the Act goes on to state that municipal demarcation requires careful consideration of factors such as the interdependence of people, communities and economics. This is indicated by existing and expected patterns of human settlement and migration, employment, commuting and dominant transport movements, spending, the use of amenities, recreational facilities and infrastructure, and commercial and industrial linkages. Every five years, municipal boundaries are reviewed in line with the election cycle, either to determine new boundaries or to review existing boundaries. At times, populations shift across boundaries and they grow in specific areas (Napier, 2007). So, re-determinations are necessary for assigning proportional voters to various geographic areas. Similarly, reasons for setting municipal boundaries around the world, cited by authors such as Fox and Gurley (2006), Cameron (2006), Ramutsindela and Simon (1999), Idelman (2010) and Shale (2005), include geo-political accommodation of regionally distinct ethnic communities, social control, expansion of public participation and facilitation of national development of the state.

Chang (2010:3) found that territorial studies have been the subject of increased interest from a number of perspectives, especially in the fields of political science and public administration. Shale (2005) also highlighted that one of the key trends that have emerged involved the implications of municipal boundaries for people's social life, including their sense of attachment to their ethnic group, language and culture. The author's paper that looked at the municipal boundary demarcation process in Lesotho, in the late 1990s, revealed that while municipal boundaries had been drawn as a prerequisite for holding local government elections, the process interfered with people's culture, values, peace and stability (Shale, 2005). Another classic example is that of the Limpopo Province in South Africa. Some members of communities belonging to different ethnic groups (Vendas and Tsongas) have been at loggerheads with the government since the dawn of non-racial democracy in South Africa in 1994. These confrontations stem from their inclusion in the administration of one local municipality that is dominated by a certain ethnic group; members of other ethnic groups fear discrimination in terms of service delivery, ethnic dominance and access to opportunities (Hornby, 2004; Mukwevho, 2016). On the one hand, the government aims to promote social cohesion by bringing together the majority of homeland people who were divided along ethnic lines by the apartheid government (MDB, 2015). On the other hand, these ethnic groups had become accustomed to separate systems of government administration. Therefore, these boundaries were not just apartheid boundaries, but they also became cultural, social and local boundaries.



Historically, ethnic groups always organised themselves. They lived in groups and communities under chieftaincy institutions (South African History Online, 2019; Amtaika, 2013).

The re-determination of municipal boundaries, in preparation for the 2016 local government elections in South Africa, included the two case studies under review. The case of the Collins Chabane Local Municipality in the Limpopo Province is complex. Here, the MDB took a decision to incorporate two rural areas, namely, Malamulele (a portion of the Thulamela Local Municipality dominated by the Xitsonga people) and Vuwani (a portion of the Makhado Local Municipality dominated by the Tshivenda people) to form a new municipality, namely, Collins Chabane. The incorporation was a victory for the Tsongas of the Malamulele area, who have been demanding a separate municipality through violent demonstrations since the dawn of democracy in 1994. Since 2000, Malamulele residents have been demanding a municipality that is separate from Thulamela. Fueling the demand was the claim that Thulamela Local Municipality was channeling services to Tshivenda-speaking areas (especially Thohoyandou, where the municipal council is located) to the detriment of the Malamulele community. These perceptions are further reflected in a study carried out in the Malamulele area (Mdumela, 2016). In response to the new establishment, there were violent protests by Vuwani community members who did not want to be part of the Xitsonga-dominated municipality. The Tshivenda-speaking community of Vuwani felt that the MDB was trying to solve the Malamulele demarcation problem by imposing new boundaries on them (Mukwevho, 2016; Nicolson, 2017).

The JB Marks Local Municipality in the North West Province (second case study) was established following the amalgamation of the erstwhile municipalities of Tlokwe and Ventersdorp. Objection to this merger was widespread across political parties, civil society, and communities at large. Thousands of community members participated in violent protests against the merger that took to the streets of Tlokwe and Ventersdorp. Ventersdorp residents were opposed to the merger for fear of losing jobs and business opportunities under the new administration, with its headquarters in Tlokwe. In contrast, residents of Tlokwe thought they would be disadvantaged when it came to the provision of municipal services. They described Ventersdorp as poor and rural with little to offer (McGluwa, 2015; Africa News Agency, 2015). Objections over shifts in municipal boundaries, in these two cases, seem to share common grievances, including that new boundaries have serious implications, otherwise, there would be no hostilities of this scale.

### **Municipal Boundary Determination and Social Integration Defined**

A boundary, from the state territory point of view, is an imaginary line that shows where one country ends and another begins. Sometimes, a boundary can be a natural or physical feature such as a river, a mountain range or a fence (Merriam Webster Dictionary, n.d.). Boundaries also serve as markers within existing states to create the spatial definition



within which government performs certain functions (Weber, 2012). According to Finn (2008), the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government requires the establishment of easily identifiable municipal boundaries. These boundaries enable the population to identify with its local government, while also being able to assess its performance. The concepts demarcation and determination are often used interchangeably. In South Africa, the demarcation of municipal boundaries is referred to as determination and for voting purposes, wards are delimited (Parliamentary Monitoring Group [PMG], 2019).

Social integration is a term used widely in contemporary policy development to describe conceptions that aim to foster societies that are stable, safe and just. Just societies are based on the promotion and protection of human rights, which involves tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity and security (Ferguson, 2008; Jeannotte, 2008). Terms often used interchangeably with social integration aimed at making societies more equitable are:

- a) Social cohesion – willingness of individuals to cooperate and work together at all levels of society to achieve collective goals
- b) Social inclusion – a process encouraging social interaction among people with different socially relevant attributes, or an impersonal institutional mechanism of opening up access to participation in all spheres of social life
- c) Social capital – networks of social relations that may provide individuals and groups with access to resources and support (Jeannotte, 2008; Silver, 2015).

Ferguson (2008) and De Alcántara (1994) view social integration as a broad concept that is synonymous with social justice, equality, material wellbeing and democratic freedom. Further to this, Ferguson (2008) contends that societies should promote social integration through the redistribution of socio-economic resources, representation of political voice, and recognition of cultural and social identities, among others. De Alcántara (1994) adds that social integration implies equal opportunities and rights for all human beings. In the local context, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, entrenches the principle of equality before the law, albeit without using the concept social integration directly. In terms of Section 9(2), “Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.” Section 9(3) of the constitution further states: “The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.”



## **Social Integration Theoretical Framework in the Context of Municipal Boundary Determination**

It appears that the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions, from the central government to regional and local levels, requires the geographical delineation of a country into several manageable spheres of operation (Shale, 2005). Section 153 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa stipulates that one of the developmental duties of municipalities is to promote the social and economic development of the community. From the social theory point of view, municipalities are social entities based on collective solidarity and collective consciousness. The collective sentiment relies on social norms, beliefs and values that shape communities (Little & McGivern, 2013). According to the founding sociologist, Emile Durkheim, collective consciousness is crucial in explaining how individuals are bound together into cooperatives that work together to achieve functional societies. The sociologist argues that societies exist because individuals feel a sense of oneness and solidarity with each other (Cole, 2019).

In defining local government boundaries, the notion of a feeling of oneness or a community of interest becomes a major consideration. A working definition of the notion of community of interest, in the context of local government, needs to include one or more of the following three dimensions (Finn, 2008):

- a) A sense of belonging to a clearly defined locality
- b) The ability to meet, with reasonable economy, the community's requirements for comprehensive physical and human services
- c) The ability of the elected body to represent the interests and reconcile the conflicts of all of its members.

Once more, contemporary social theorists argue that societies are better off if social integration is promoted through inclusive policies. Such integration should enable persons, regardless of their attributes (socio-economic class, age, gender, sexual preference, political ideas, ethnicity and cultural traits, religion, citizenship and geographical region of origin), to enjoy equal opportunities, rights and services that are available through economic, social and political relationships (Cruz-Saco, 2008; Jeannotte, 2008). To promote an equal society, requires attention to three different but interlinked processes that shape the extent to which people are able to live and work together on an equal basis (Ferguson, 2008):

- a) recognition of diverse social and ethnic groups, cultural traits and identity in order to promote respect, dignity and cooperation
- b) representation of political voice in order to ensure that the interests of different groups are considered in decision-making and resource allocation



- c) redistribution of socio-economic resources among individuals and groups in order to prevent deep disparities and fragmentation on the basis of wealth, ethnicity, region, gender, age or any other aspect of social identity.

It is vital that municipalities develop robust community indicators for measuring whether people get on well together, share a common vision and sense of belonging, appreciate diversity and have strong, positive relationships. (Holdsworth & Hartman, 2009). These indicators are measurements that provide information about past and current trends, and assist policy makers in decisions that affect future outcomes. They can incorporate citizen involvement and participation. Basically, they reflect the relationship between social, environmental and economic factors affecting a community's wellbeing (Phillips, 2003). In Australia, for instance, social integration indicators at local government encompass various elements of community wellbeing, such as a sense of pride in the cultural diversity of the area, feeling safe and valued, a sense of trust and meaningful involvement in broader community affairs (Holdsworth & Hartman, 2009).

Jeannotte (2008) goes further and puts forward a multi-dimensional social integration model that brings together elements that foster societies that are just. These elements are physical (food, personal security), natural (clean air and water), democratic (economic, social and cultural rights), economic (employment, adequate income), human (education), social (community connections, civic engagement) and cultural (acceptance and celebration of cultural diversity). For the purpose of this paper, democratic, social and cultural matters are tested.

## **Presentation and Discussion of Empirical Findings**

In this dual case study, empirical findings were sought through the administration of 200 household questionnaires. Data was gathered from responses to questions that were asked, in an attempt to reach an understanding of the philosophies that underpin social integration. Primarily, the research addressed the question of social ties among diverse communities, by gauging participants' knowledge of their political leaders and their interactions with them, their knowledge of municipal offices, their co-existence with one another, irrespective of ethnicity and their feelings of belonging to their municipal jurisdictions.

### **Demographic Profile of Participants (households)**

The participative population consisted of household representatives (N = 200) from 17 villages and townships in both local municipalities. Ten of these villages and townships belonged to the Collins Chabane Municipality and seven to the JB Marks Municipality. There was an even spread in the number of participants from Collins Chabane, with an average of five per village. Five percent each came from the villages of Hamasia, Ramukhuba, Tshino, Basani, Tshigalo and Malamulele. The remainder was spread out as

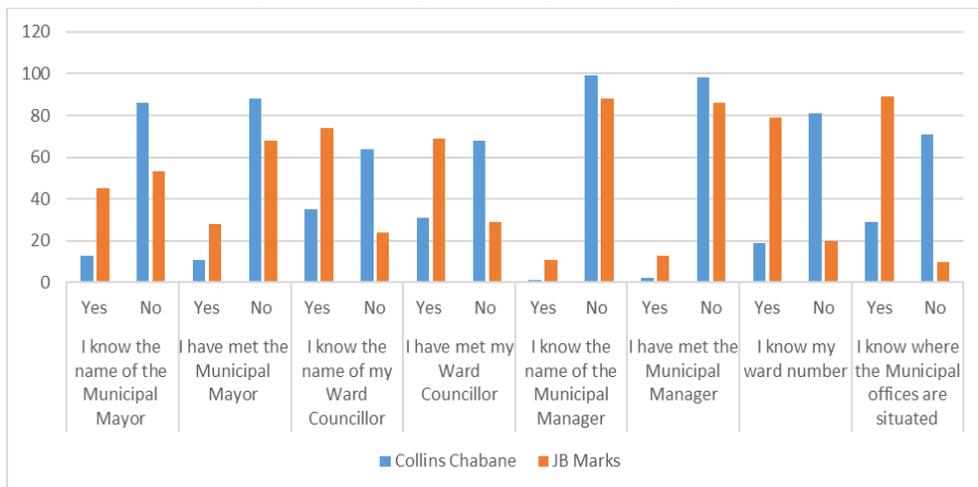


follows: Hamashau-Mukhoro (5.5%), Hamashau-Misebe B (4.5%), Hatshikonelo (7.5%) and Mukhoni (2.5%). Higher concentrations of participants from the JB Marks Municipality came from the three townships of Ikageng (16%), Tshing (10.5%) and Promosa (7%). The remainder of participants were spread out as follows: Toevlug (5%), Boikhutso (4%), Tsetse (3%) and Sonderwater (4.5%). Since the research addressed the question of social ties among diverse communities, home language data were vital. Tswana (31.5%) and Venda (30%) had the first and second highest proportions of participants, followed by Tsonga (19.5%) and Afrikaans (10.5%). The rest of the language distribution went to Xhosa (4.5%), Southern Sotho (3%), Zulu (0.5%) and Shona (0.5%).

### Knowledge of Municipal Leadership and Offices

One way to assess participants' sense of attachment to the municipality was to assess their sense of the general accessibility of municipal leaders and offices. Figure 1 below summarises participants' familiarity with their municipal mayor, municipal manager, ward councillor, ward number and municipal offices:

Figure 1: Knowledge of Municipal Leadership and Offices



Responses received indicate participants' low levels of knowledge of their municipal leadership as well as minimal awareness of where the municipal offices are located, yet, 68% of participants in JB Marks knew the name of the ward councillor. A further 65% of participants had met the ward councillor in person and a further 85% knew where the municipal offices were situated. Awareness of the ward number in which participants resided (79%) was also observed in JB Marks. In contrast, there were low levels of knowledge of municipal leaders and offices in Collins Chabane. A correlation of data between language and knowledge of municipal leaders shed some light into this low level of knowledge response. A high percentage of those who did not know the names of their

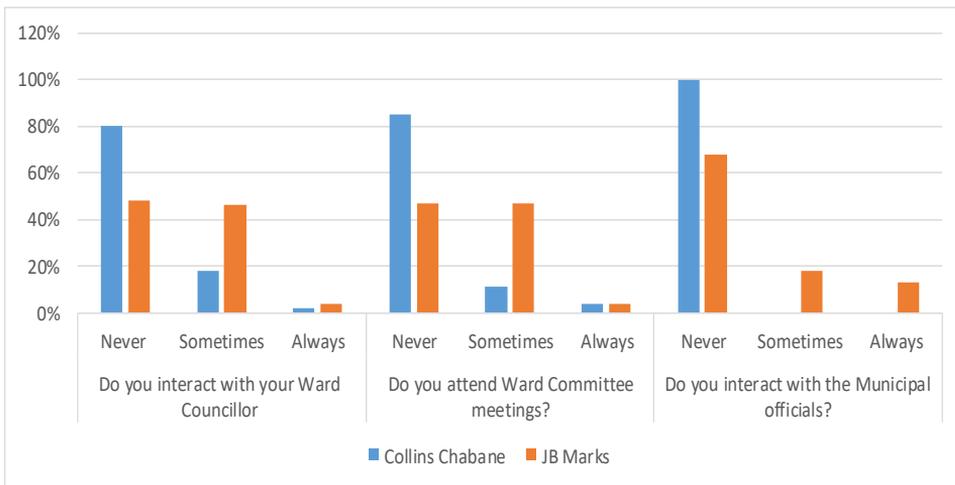


municipal leaders and had never met them before were Tshivenda-speaking participants. This was not surprising as there was strong opposition through protests to the incorporation of the Vuwani area (Vendas) into Malamulele (Tsongas), to form a new municipality.

## Participants’ interactions with municipal leadership

To determine the extent of interaction between residents and their municipal leaders, participants were asked whether they have never, sometimes or always interacted with their ward councillors and their municipal officials, and what kind of issues they raised with these councillors and officials. They were also asked to indicate how often they attended ward committee meetings. Local government legislation provides for different mechanisms to foster public participation, including the ward committee system. These committees exist to facilitate effective interaction between local government leaders and their local communities.

**Figure 2: Interaction with Municipal Leadership**



There seemed to be significantly low levels of interaction between residents, their ward councillors and municipal officials in both municipalities. Eighty percent of participants residing in Collins Chabane claimed that they had never interacted with their ward councillor and none of them had interacted with their municipal officials. In JB Marks, more than 40% of participants sometimes interacted with their ward councillors. Attendance of ward committee meetings was higher in JB Marks (42%) than in Collins Chabane (10%), that is if the ‘sometimes’ category is meaningful. In both cases, a insignificant number of participants (less than 5%) attended ward committee meetings all the time. This outcome

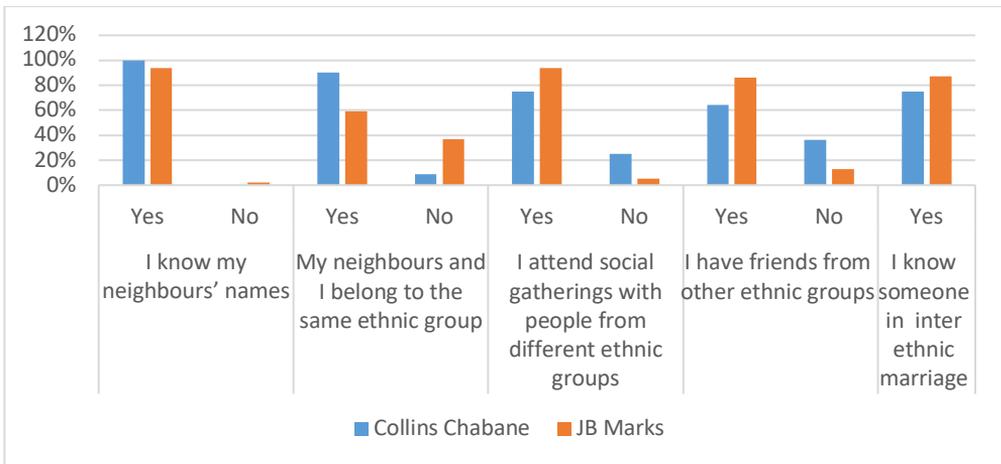
attests to the poor implementation of the ward committee model in South Africa (PMG, 2021). A countrywide assessment of the state of local government several years ago found that the system was poorly resourced. It was further revealed that issues raised and discussed in ward committee meetings were neither prioritised during council meetings, nor reflected in the Integrated Development Plans (Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs [COGTA], 2009).

The size of the average South African municipality, practically, is considered a challenge for effective community participation, especially in rural areas. In the quest for efficiency, it is standard practice to combine a number of small towns and their rural hinterlands into one larger municipality (MDB, 2016). The geographic space becomes very extensive and often diverse in character. Therefore, the long distances that people need to travel to attend ward committee meetings often deter them from doing so. In other words, citizens’ access to local authorities through public meetings, elections or direct contact is difficult when local government structures are so large (De Visser, 2009; Mzakwe, 2016).

**Participants’ Co-existence with One Another, Irrespective of Ethnicity**

Eight statements were formulated and participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The statements dealt with a range of issues, from whether participants’ interests were well represented in the local municipality to which ethnic group participants wanted to run the municipality.

**Figure 3: Participants’ Coexistence with One Another Irrespective of Ethnicity**



In both cases, there was a high level of co-existence among participants, regardless of their ethnicities. All participants from Collins Chabane knew their neighbours’ names and a further 85% of them said they belonged to the same ethnic group as their neighbours.



More than 75% attended social gatherings with people from different ethnic groups, while the same proportion knew someone in an interethnic marriage. Similarly, just above 60% of participants had friends from other ethnic groups. In the case of JB Marks, the same patterns were observed. More than 85% of participants attended social gatherings with people from different ethnic groups and 80% had friends from other ethnic groups and knew someone in an interethnic marriage. Thus, there was no significant variance between these two municipalities vis-à-vis co-existence with people from another tribal or ethnic group.

### Participants' Feelings of Belonging to the Local Municipality

Participants' feelings of belonging to their municipalities were tested through a set of statements on different matters related to whether they shared a common sense of belonging or whether they got along well with one another, irrespective of their ethnicity

**Table 1: Participants' Feelings of Belonging to the Local Municipality**

Statement	Local municipality	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Don't know %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Pearson $\chi^2$
My interests are represented in the municipality.	Collins	2.0	20.0	5.0	41.0	32.0	.655
	Chabane						
	JB Marks	2.0	22.0	6.0	47.0	22.0	
All ethnic groups are represented in the municipal workforce.	Collins	27.0	20.0	15.0	14.0	23.0	.000
	Chabane						
	JB Marks	56.0	28.0	8.0	4.0	3.0	
I feel that I belong to this municipality.	Collins	22.0	16.0	1.0	16.0	45.0	.000
	Chabane						
	JB Marks	11.0	32.0	7.0	35.0	15.0	
I feel culturally connected to the area.	Collins	69.0	28.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	.028
	Chabane						
	JB Marks	60.0	32.0	2.0	6.0	0.0	
I speak other major languages	Collins	42.0	37.0	1.0	16.0	3.0	.065
	Chabane						



Statement	Local municipality	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Don't know %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Pearson $\chi^2$
in the community.	JB Marks	57.0	30.0	0.0	9.0	0.0	
I don't mind sharing resources with different ethnic groups in the municipality.	Collins Chabane	46.0	49.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	.008
	JB Marks	49.0	38.0	3.0	2.0	8.0	
I interact with municipal officials about services in own language.	Collins Chabane	23.0	30.0	9.0	17.0	21.0	.000
	JB Marks	52.0	28.0	6.0	10.0	2.0	
I prefer people from my ethnic group to control the municipality.	Collins Chabane	17.0	4.0	1.0	7.0	69.0	.000
	JB Marks	2.0	5.0	0.0	22.0	71.0	

Approximately 69% of participants from JB Marks and 60% from Collins Chabane disagreed or strongly disagreed that their interests were represented well in their local municipalities. A further 61% of participants from Collins Chabane felt that they did not belong to the municipality. On a positive note, an overwhelming majority (95%) did not mind sharing municipal resources with people from different ethnic groups. In JB Marks, levels of agreement were higher on the matters of representation of all ethnic groups in the municipal workforce and feeling culturally connected to the area. A significant proportion of participants in both cases disagreed that people from their ethnic group should control the municipality.

The findings yielded statistically significant differences between the two municipalities. There were statistically significant differences of 0.00 with a considerable number (37%) of Collins Chabane participants disagreeing with the claim that there was ethnic group representation in the municipal workforce. There was also a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 0.00$ ) between the two sets of participants regarding the feeling of belonging to the municipality. A more than significant proportion (45%) of the Collins Chabane participants disagreed strongly with the notion that they belonged, while almost a third (35%) of JB Marks participants merely disagreed that they belonged. Almost a third (32%) of the JB Marks participants agreed that they belonged, compared to nearly a quarter (22%) of Collins Chabane participants who strongly agreed that they belonged in their municipality.



Cultural connection to a local municipality is an important demarcation-determining variable. As far as this variable is concerned, there was a significant difference ( $X^2 = 0.02$ ) between participants from the two local municipalities. More than two thirds (69%) of Collins Chabane participants and more than half (60%) of JB Marks agreed strongly that they felt culturally connected to the municipality. Although there were significant differences ( $X^2 = 0.008$ ) between participants from the different municipalities, the difference was marginal, since it only involved the extent to which participants agreed or strongly agreed.

Significant differences ( $X^2 = 0.00$ ) appeared between participants from the different municipalities with regard to the statement “*I interact with the municipal officials in my own language whenever I need services from the municipality*”. More than a third (38%) of Collins Chabane participants felt that they could not agree with the given statement. While there were statistically significant differences ( $X^2 = 0.00$ ) between participants from the two municipalities, the differences were marginal, since both disagreed with the notion that they wanted people from their ethnic group to control the municipality. Less than a quarter of participants (21%) from Collins Chabane disagreed with this statement.

Other aspects of the feeling of belonging, reflected in Table 2, included language of interaction with municipal officials and the ability to speak other languages in the community.

**Table 2: Feeling of Belonging to Municipality by Home Language and Number of Years Living in the Settlement**

(Number)		I feel that I belong to this municipality					Total
		Strongly agree (N)	Agree (N)	Don't know (N)	Disagree (N)	Strongly disagree (N)	
Home language spoken by participants	Afrikaans	2	6	1	8	4	21
	Southern Sotho	1	3	1	1	0	6
	Tsonga	18	12	1	5	3	39
	Tswana	7	21	3	21	11	63
	Venda	4	4	0	10	42	60
	Xhosa	1	2	2	4	0	9
	Zulu	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Shona	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>33</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>200</b>

(Number)		I feel that I belong to this municipality					Total
		Strongly agree (N)	Agree (N)	Don't know (N)	Disagree (N)	Strongly disagree (N)	
Number of years living in the settlement	< 1 year	0	0	1	0	1	2
	1–5 years	1	4	0	7	4	16
	6–9 years	1	2	0	3	1	7
	> 10 years	13	28	5	11	12	69
	Born in the area	18	14	2	30	42	106
<b>Total</b>		<b>33</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>200</b>

Among the nine languages spoken by participants, those who speak Tsonga and those who speak Tswana were most likely to feel that they belonged to their municipalities. In contrast, the majority of Venda and Afrikaans-speaking participants did not feel that they belonged to their municipalities. Again, it appears people's feelings of belonging to their local area depend on how long they have been residing in the area. In these two case studies, the majority of participants born and living in the area for more than ten years confirmed their sense of belonging to the local municipality. However, data also revealed that the majority of participants born in the area felt that their interests were not adequately represented in both cases.

### Acceptance of New Municipal Areas by Home Language

Table 3 below depicts insignificant acceptance of new municipal areas by home language. Approximately 71% of participants preferred their old municipalities over the newly established ones.

**Table 3: Acceptance of Municipality by Home Language**

Municipal name		Are you in favour of the new municipality?		Total
		Yes	No	
Collins Chabane	Tsonga	28	11	39
		71.8%	28.2%	100.0%
	Venda	7	53	60
		11.7%	88.3%	100.0%



Municipal name		Are you in favour of the new municipality?		Total
		Yes	No	
	Shona	0	1	<b>1</b>
		0.0%	100.0%	<b>100.0%</b>
	Total	35	65	<b>100</b>
		35.0%	65.0%	<b>100.0%</b>
JB Marks	Afrikaans	4	17	<b>21</b>
		19.0%	81.0%	<b>100.0%</b>
	Southern Sotho	2	3	<b>5</b>
		40.0%	60.0%	<b>100.0%</b>
	Tswana	19	41	<b>60</b>
		31.7%	68.3%	<b>100.0%</b>
	Xhosa	1	8	<b>9</b>
		11.1%	88.9%	<b>100.0%</b>
	Zulu	1	0	<b>1</b>
		100.0%	0.0%	<b>100.0%</b>
	Total	<b>27</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>96</b>
		<b>28.1%</b>	<b>71.9%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Statistically speaking, there were differences ( $\chi^2 = 0.03$ ) among the levels of acceptance reported by participants from the different municipalities. While the majority of participants in both cases preferred the old municipality, a third (35%) from Collins Chabane preferred the new municipality. When acceptance of old and new was computed by ethnic group, it became clearer that there were significant ( $\chi^2 = 0.00$ ) differences, specifically in Collins Chabane, between the Vendas' preference for the old (81%) and the Tsonga's preference for the new (71%) municipality.

### Main Concerns About Municipal Boundary Changes

Changes in municipal boundaries have good intentions. Section 24 of the Municipal Demarcation Act specifies that when the MDB considers determining or re-determining a municipal boundary, its objective must be to establish an area that will enable the municipality for that area to fulfil its constitutional obligations. These changes must also enable effective local governance and integrated development. Section 26 of the Act maps

out a consultative process, which is of fundamental importance, because it allows affected parties to consider the implications of the proposed boundary change. Still, in reality, evidence from other sources reveals that changes in an environment are always accompanied by fear of the unknown and concerns about competition for government positions, a loss of ethnic dominance and poor service delivery (Mdumela, 2016; Nicolson, 2017). To verify these suggestions, participants were asked the following open-ended question: *What are your main concerns about municipal boundary changes?*

Participants from both municipalities raised a high number of concerns about the poor delivery of municipal services. Almost 70% of participants from Collins Chabane were concerned that changes in municipal boundaries would have a negative effect on access to basic services. A lower percentage of participants from JB Marks felt the same way. A sizable number of participants in Collins Chabane further felt that the municipal offices were far away. Tshivenda-speaking people in Collins Chabane did not feel that they belonged. The correlation of home language data and main concerns about changed municipal boundaries proved this point. The majority of participants who were concerned about the long distance they had to travel to their municipal offices in Malamulele, a distance of roughly 40 kilometres, were Tshivenda-speaking.

In the other case study, participants from Ventersdorp felt that the distance to the municipal headquarters in Tlokwe (about 50 km) was too far. The Afrikaans-speaking people of Coloured descent in JB Marks appeared to be frustrated with the deterioration of their socio-economic conditions over time. A sample of participants from Toevlug Township had the following to say when asked what their main concerns about municipal boundary re-determination were:

*"It does not matter in which municipality we fall under, we are forgotten people in this new democracy [sic]."*

*"White areas are far much better [sic]."*

*"There is no development here."*

*"No toilets in our area."*

*"No RDP houses and lack of jobs."*

*"Changing the name of the municipality to JB Marks does not mean anything."*

Social housing development in Toevlug has not improved over the last few years. The JB Marks local municipality is named after Mr John Beaver Marks, a trade unionist who was born in Toevlug, a small Coloured township whose historical buildings are four-roomed, red brick houses built during the apartheid era. The old houses are surrounded by several



formal extension sites and some informal settlements with no basic services. Informal settlements, which are squatter settlements, slums or shantytowns, are unplanned settlements on land that has been neither surveyed nor proclaimed as residential areas. The majority of participants in this research resided in rural areas (52%), followed by those who lived in urban townships (37.5%). The proportion of participants residing in informal settlements was 10.5%. Several sources, such as JB Marks Local Municipality (2017); COGTA (2013) and Nkhahle (2015) identify citizens' deteriorating economic conditions and their unhappiness with the lack of public service provision as the main drivers of community protest actions in South Africa.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Theoretical literature, reviewed prior to the research, affirms the consequences of municipal boundaries for people's social life. The empirical findings made it clear that the determination of municipal boundaries had some negative effects on participants' feelings of belonging to their local municipality, more so in the Collins Chabane Municipality. Those who felt that they did not belong were motivated by fear of losing their ethnic dominance. Municipal leadership, along with the location of municipal offices, were barely known to the majority of participants. Nonetheless, most participants agreed that they got along well with one another, irrespective of their ethnicity. It became clear that those who spoke the minority languages felt that their socio-economic interests were not represented well in their respective local municipalities. This is disheartening in a vibrant democracy like South Africa. In terms of policy recommendation, this paper proposes demarcation legislative review to promote the interests of groupings of individuals who share cultural, ethnic or social ties within close proximity of one another. This is necessary to preserve the idea of communities of interest, based on a subjective feeling of truly belonging to a community. In practice, it is equally vital that municipalities develop robust quality indicators to measure whether there is an equal and just distribution of socio-economic resources among individuals and groups, in order to prevent deep disparities and fragmentation owing to ethnicity or any other aspects of social identity. Further research is proposed to explore the following basic questions: a) What are citizens' perceptions relative to municipal amalgamations? The actual empirical findings revealed how the mergers, in the two case studies, have affected promotion of social integration among the different groups. This question deserves further exploration in all amalgamated municipalities. b) Further research may look at boundary changes, which are motivated by the political aspirations of those who are in power. This matter was not elaborated in detail in this research and further research may offer a valuable contribution to enhance South African literature in the subject field.



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