Together apart: Migration, integration and spatialised identities in South African border villages

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**Abstract**

This article explores spatialised identity construction as part of the process of refugee and migrant integration. It uses an empirical case study – of villages in a rural border area of South Africa – to argue that identity groups can be constructed in relation to micro-spaces within a single village, refer to identity characteristics which are largely independent of cross-border mobility or territorial origin, and be negotiated through micro-mobilities within different segments of a ‘local’ space. This stands in contrast to debates opposing sedentary ‘roots’ or transnational or transient ‘routes’ as identity forming spaces. Establishing the relevant spatial aspects of identity construction is an empirical matter, rather than an ideological one.

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**1. Introduction**

This article explores spatialised identity construction as part of the process of refugee integration. It uses an empirical case study – of villages in a rural border area of South Africa – to make several connected arguments. Firstly, the spatiality of interactions between refugees and hosts is crucial to understanding the integration process. Indeed the construction of who is included in the identities ‘refugee’ and ‘host’ has fundamentally spatial elements. Second, the spatial element of refugee/migrant/host identity construction is not limited to contrasting ideas about sedentary ‘roots’ or transnational or transient ‘routes’, as the academic debate is sometimes essentialised (Cresswell, 2002; Kibrae, 1999; Massey, 2004; Sassen, 1991). Identity groups – in this case ‘Mozambicans’ and ‘South Africans’ – can be constructed in relation to micro-spaces within a single village, refer to identity characteristics which are largely independent of cross-border mobility or territorial origin, and be negotiated through micro-mobilities within different segments of a ‘local’ space. This illustrates, thirdly, the necessity of establishing the relevant spatial aspects of identity construction as an empirical matter, rather than an ideological one.

Finally, the empirical project involves three elements: how physical space is divided in relation to identity groupings and what this means for access to material resources; how spaces and identity groups are discursively constructed in relation to each other; and how individuals and groups continually negotiate and contest these discursive constructions of space and identity, including through everyday and strategic claims to, uses of and trajectories across spaces.

I present a case study of three villages in Bushbuckridge, a border district of South Africa abutting Mozambique. In these villages, people who fled the Mozambican civil war in the mid–1980s have lived alongside co-ethnic Shangaan-speaking South Africans for over 25 years. There are seeming ambivalences and contradictions concerning the relationship between group identification and space in these villages. A key contradiction is between material spatialised difference and the discursive elision of difference. On the one hand, many villages in the area have sections which are infrastructurally and socially distinct from the ‘main’ village. These sections are generally referred to as ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods, illustrating a recognition and labeling of difference. On the surface, therefore, spatially-defined and national origin-defined identity divisions in the village seem to map easily onto each other. On the other hand, less than half of Mozambican-born village residents actually live in the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods. Significantly, there is a strong discourse of unity across national and spatial boundaries. People of Mozambican birth both practice and narrate a strong emplacement in South Africa generally and their villages specifically, and both Mozambican- and South African-born residents recognise and validate their racial, cultural and linguistic

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commonality (Polzer, 2004, 2008). Evidence for these contradictions is presented in detail in the paper below. To understand these contradictions, I argue that rather than being a ‘natural’ unity between nationality of origin and place of residence within a village, there are complex, socially constructed local concepts of ‘Mozambicaness’ and ‘South African-ness,’ and that these concepts adhere largely to the social characteristics of the respective spaces, and not necessarily to an individual’s place of birth. Rather than group identity being the basis for spatial relegation, the spatially defined field continually reconstitutes relational group identities – where we live (and do not live) defines and reflects who we are (and who we are not). Furthermore, the spatially defined social markers of difference and commonality in these villages do not directly reference migration history or nationality. These markers, I argue, refer to, reflect and reaffirm three constituent elements of the nature of the ‘good community’: legibility to and incorporation into the state (Scott, 1998), the tensions between tradition and modernity, and questions of social class and hierarchy (see discussion in Sections 6–8). Since these social markers are acquired practices and relationships rather than observable differences in terms of race, physiognomy, language or culture, individuals who move out of the socially defined space also leave behind them, to a large extent, the social characteristics and the identity allocated to that space. The status of a social minority, in this sense, adheres to the locality rather than to the individual, who can change status through a physical move in space. Significantly, both residents of the ‘Mozambican’ and ‘core’ village sections agree on the relevance of these dimensions of the ‘good community’ even though they at times disagree on the values attached to specific practices within each dimension (e.g. whether it is ‘good’ to be modern or traditional).

Social identity is therefore navigated and negotiated at two levels: by residents of ‘peripheral’ areas through moving into ‘core’ social spaces and identities, and between ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ residents regarding the social meanings of their respective spaces. These negotiation processes mean that the social nature of spatial divisions in these villages illuminates identity construction among all residents of these villages, not just identity among the Mozambican-born or among residents of the ‘Mozambican neighbourhood.’ The spatialised ‘migrant integration’ process becomes a process of ongoing collective identity negotiation which also impacts on and incorporates the identity construction of ‘hosts’.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: after presenting various theoretical approaches to the spatiality of migrant integration, I briefly outline my methodology. I then describe the history and context of spatial divisions and migration in my case study. I show how spatial divisions within villages, specifically the division between ‘main’ village sections and ‘Mozambican’ sections, are correlated with material differences of resource access, including spatialised resources such as physical infrastructure but also non-spatially fixed resources such as identity documents and education. This then brings me to a discussion of the social construction of spaces in the villages and how these are associated with the constructed characteristics of ‘being Mozambican’ or ‘being South African’. In the process, I look at different individual and collective strategies adopted by village residents to negotiate, uphold and/or break through the spatialised social boundaries within the village.

2. Spatial integration and identity formation

In analyzing migrant and refugee integration in a particular locality, I draw on conceptions of space as “actively produced by and productive of social relations and discourses” (White, 2002:74) in the tradition of Lefebvre (1991). Rather than being assumed, the specific relationship between group identification and space must be described on a case by case basis, with attention to context-specific, historical and continually negotiated processes through which meanings are ascribed to spaces by the multiple actors in that space. Furthermore, just as identity groups are today generally understood to be constructed relationally (rather than being historically immutable or natural social artifacts tied to objective differences or similarities) (Anderson, 1991; Barth, 1969; Cohen, 2000; Eriksen, 1993; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997), so the meanings of space must also be seen as relational (Massey, 2004). Finally, relationality does not necessarily mean binary contrast. As Massey puts it, places are “not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations… their ‘identities’ are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than counterposition to them.” (Massey, 1994: 121).

Authors in geography and anthropology have presented the conception of relational and negotiated space and identity as a ‘middle way’ between an essentialised isomorphism of identity and space (e.g. you are who you are because of where you come from or where you ‘belong’) and a ‘postmodern’ wholesale rejection of the relationship between place and identity (e.g. there is a ‘generalised condition of homelessness’ [Said, 1979: 18] or ‘we are all refugees’ [Warner, 1992, quoted in Kibreab, 1999:385]). Tim Cresswell (2002) opposes a ‘sedentary metaphysics’ (Malikki, 1992) with a ‘nomadic metaphysics’ in debates on the relevance of place in identity construction, and argues for a “new focus on place [which] simultaneously [brings] into question both a sedentary metaphysics of roots and authenticity and a nomadic metaphysics of hypermobile identity. Places and boundaries do matter – just not in the ways we once thought.” (Cresswell, 2002:20). The middle road, in Cresswell’s view, is a perspective where “places are never complete, finished or bounded but are always becoming – in process.” He suggests Soja’s “trialectic of spatiality” as a useful corrective, where everyday practices constitute a “Thirdspace” in addition to the more commonly debated binary oppositions between material, mappable “Firstspace” and representational, imagined “Secondspace.” (Soja, 1989, 1996 as cited in Cresswell, 2002:20f). Cresswell acknowledges, however, that apart from saying that it is practiced and lived, “it is far from clear what Thirdspace actually is” (Cresswell, 2002:21) and how one might empirically operationalise its study.

Doreen Massey (2004), sets up a related opposition between theorizations of place and space, where place is portrayed as evoking “an atmosphere of earthiness, authenticity and meaning” while space is “understood as somehow abstract” (Massey, 2004:7). For Massey, the “lived reality of our daily lives” (which she places in ‘scare-quotes’) is part of the sedentarised dominant conception of the place, rather than a corrective to that sedentarism. She suggests that a recognition of “place” as a site of negotiation” beyond the binary of local and global is “a first move away from the universalising/essentialising propositions implicit in some of the evocations of the meaningfulness of place.” (Massey, 2004:7). Even though she applies her approach of negotiated place to the case of London, her discussion remains largely conceptual rather than empirical.

These geographers use conceptions of identity formation to reflect on and shift binary debates on space/place. In contrast, Gupta and Ferguson (2001), coming from an anthropological perspective, seek to challenge simple conceptions of either “primordial” or “strategic” identity by discussing “the specific relationship between place making and identity.” They, and other authors in their edited volume, “emphasize that identity neither ‘grows out’ of rooted communities nor is a thing that can be possessed or owned by individual or collective social actors. It is, instead, a mobile, often unstable relation of difference”, and that “identity and alterity are therefore produced simultaneously in the formation of ‘locality’.”
(Gupta and Ferguson, 2001:13). They furthermore “draw attention to the crucial role played by resistance” in showing how ‘identities are not ‘freely’ chosen but overdetermined by structural location” and how “their durability and stability are not to be taken for granted but open to contestation and reformulation.” (Gupta and Ferguson, 2001:17f).

Within the fields of refugee and migration studies, debates on the relationships between space and identity also tend to either reify or categorically deny links between space and identity. Malik’s (1992) critique of “refugee studies” as contributing to constructing refugees (and indeed ‘locals’) as “sedentarised” objects is routinely referenced, while authors like Kibreab (1999) have fought back by stating that “territory still remains the major repository of rights and membership” (Kibreab, 1999:387). Many accounts of refugee integration simply ignore spatial aspects of identity formation and focus on characteristics of migrant individuals and groups which are seen to inhere in the body or the person – such as race, religion, language, culture, education level, and skill level. These characteristics are assumed to move with those bodies no matter where in the host space they find themselves (see Mestheneos and Ioannidi, 2002; Franz, 2003; Hieronymi, 2005; Jasso and Rosenzweig, 1995; and discussions of acculturation and assimilation theory in Alba and Nee, 1997). Alternatively, the spatial segregation of migrants from hosts is understood simply as an indicator of missing social and economic integration. As Baily and Miguez describe the debate in Latin American migration studies, there is a tendency to “identify spatial segregation with the concept of Cultural Pluralism and the absence of… spatial segregation with the Melting Pot theory” (2003:82), without further consideration of whether actual interactions between segregated spaces or within unsegregated spaces reflect pluralistic or assimilationist identity formations. In this understanding, the space in which migrants and hosts find themselves has no social value in itself apart from as a location for potential interactions between individuals and groups.

Another common assumption in accounts of migrant and refugee integration is that it is possible to tell who is part of minority and majority groups before studying how these groups then interact in space. The temptation to simply divide village residents into ‘refugee’ and ‘host’ or ‘Mozambican’ and ‘South African’ is great, and one to which I have succumbed at times (Polzer, 2004; see also Golooaba-Mutebi, 2004; Rodgers, 2002). A constructed and negotiated approach to spatialised identity, however, requires that all personal and group characteristics, including place of birth or family origin, be considered as only potentially relevant relational identity factors, rather than as a priori structuring factors (Bakwell, 2008; Robins and Aksoy, 2001). Attention to representations of identity and space as well as to everyday practices of negotiation means treating the factors chosen to structure group and space identity as internal rather than external to the relational processes being analyzed. Where group identification is claimed or allocated in the description of space – such as calling an area the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood – this labeling process is part of the social interaction to be studied, rather than an objective social reality to be taken at face value.

This brings me to a few notes on methodology. As noted above, an empirical position on the social construction of space requires finding ways of capturing the materiality of space, its representations, and the negotiations of both through everyday practices. An analysis of space is facilitated by visual abstractions such as maps and mapping. Comparing material and discursive characteristics of space requires quantitative measurements that can be disaggregated by location as well as narratives from people in those spaces and about those spaces. Finally, a focus on negotiation, e.g. a process orientation, requires information over a period of time, or a means of collecting information about change over time. Fig. 1 provides an overview of the different methods I employed to collect information on each of these elements.

Apart from the Agincourt Health and Socio-Demographic Surveillance System census data (further referred to as Agincourt data),2 I collected all other data myself between March 2002 and October 2006, during which time I was resident in Bushbuckridge District as a researcher with the Refugee Research Programme (now part of the African Centre for Migration and Society) at the University of the Witwatersrand.

3. History and context of village ‘community’ and space in Bushbuckridge

The social meaning of space in the villages of Bushbuckridge is a product of a specific history of shifting national politics, labour migration and forced migration, and rural engagements with the state. The local politics of spatialised identity group construction within villages cannot be understood without this larger canvas (see Fig. 2).

From 1972 until 1994, today’s district of Bushbuckridge was part of Gazankulu ‘homeland’ for Tsonga/Shangaan-speakers within in the context of South Africa’s Apartheid political system. The homelands were created by the white minority government between the 1940s and 1970s to concentrate South Africa’s black population onto marginal land and create ethnic enclaves and labour reserves (Thompson, 1995). All villages in Bushbuckridge are therefore relatively recent creations of forced removals and dispossession. Such recent forced villageisation means that, in contrast to the common image of rural communities, South African village residents do not have long-established claims to the particular space occupied by their current villages.

The eastern border area of South Africa has also experienced several waves of migration from Mozambique and by Mozambicans since the early 1800s. Large-scale labour migration from southern Mozambique to South African mines and farms was common from the late 1800s into the mid-1980s (Katzenellenbogen, 1982), linking with early 1800s movements of Shangaan/Tsonga-speakers who had already settled in what was to become South Africa from the eastern seaboard which is now Mozambique (Ritchken, 1995). When mine-employment of Mozambicans dropped dramatically in the mid-1980s (Davies and Head, 1995), many retrenched miners, often married to South African women, settled in Gazankulu (Rodgers, 2002). In fact, one of my case study villages – Clare A – was established in 1958 by a Mozambican miner, whose son is now the chairman of the village’s elected Community Development Forum. When the Mozambican civil war’s excesses in southern Mozambique pushed tens of thousands of largely Shangaan-speaking people across the border from 1985 (Anderson, 1992), they found a combination of recently displaced, forcibly villageised South African co-ethnic ‘hosts’ and kinship connections through settled Mozambican labour migrants (Golooba-Mutebi, 2004, 2005; Polzer, 2004, 2007, 2008; Ritchken, 1995; Rodgers, 2002).

Two quotes illustrate a common scenario in the mid-1980s. A young woman from Mozambique in Clare village recounts: “When we came here, we came through the bushes. Our parents were still in Mozambique. We, the children, were the first ones to come here, before our parents. When we came here, we were staying at the hospital [in Acomrnhoe town]. We stayed there until we found

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2 For background information on this census see Tollman et al. (1999). The Agincourt census site covers only one of the three villages in which my own research took place – Justicia (see Fig. 2). However, the basic spatial and social structure of the villages in the demographic surveillance site is similar enough to warrant using this large-scale data source as a means of understanding the same intra-village spatial dynamics observed in my case study villages.
our relatives. The people [we stayed with] in Kwinya Mahembe just had the same surname. We stayed there and they took care of us. At Mkhuhlu we stayed at my father’s younger wife’s family. She was South African. Even when we were there in Mozambique, our younger mother would send us things.\(^3\) An older woman, also in Clare, remembers: “When we ran away from the shooting [in Mozambique], I was planning to stay at Bushbuckridge, because my children were there. I came to Clare because my daughter and her husband were here.”\(^4\)

This phased migration history had a direct impact on the spatial patterns of villages and the distribution of different groups of people in these spaces. A significant number of the civil war refugees

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\(^1\) Interview with GM, Clare, 26 May 2005.
\(^2\) Interview with E, Clare, 31 May 2005.
were taken in by relatives and 'people with the same surname' (Dolan, 1997) and so were immediately integrated into the existing village structures. However, the numbers of refugees soon became too large to be hosted by existing families. The South African government provided neither legal recognition nor humanitarian assistance, viewing the refugees as illegal immigrants, but allowed the homeland governments to shelter them (Polzer, 2007). By 1989, the Gazankulu Department of Health and Welfare estimated that 32,000 refugees had been added to the homeland's population, admitting that this was probably a significant undercount (Gazankulu Department of Health and Welfare, 1989–1990). Homeland and village leaders agreed from 1985 onward to allocate land adjoining existing villages to the refugees (Gazankulu Legislative Assembly, 1985). These new areas still fell under the existing local governance system of village headmen (ndunas) and chiefs, although most 'Mozambican' settlements had their own nduna who reported to the overall village nduna. My case study village Justicia B was created in this way in 1987 next to the established Justicia village (now known as Justicia A), and continues to exclusively house people of first and second-generation Mozambican heritage. A 'Mozambican' section of Clare A was also established around the same time.

After the end of the Mozambican civil war in 1992 and the transition of South Africa to majority rule in 1994, over 80% of people who had come from Mozambique and settled in the border areas remained in South Africa rather than returning to Mozambique (Dolan, 1999). A slow process of legal status regularization started in 1995 with a series of amnesties and legal regularization programmes (Crush and Williams, 1999), adding to a variety of informal social-network-based methods through which Mozambicans attained South African identity documents (IDs) (Polzer, 2007). Today, over 80% of those who remained in Bushbuckridge either have South African permanent residence or citizenship status (Polzer, 2007).

Historical shifts in the involvement of the central state, through identity documentation and land demarcation, were a further key shaper of village space. At the same time as Mozambicans were gaining legal status in the mid-1990s, South African-born residents of Bushbuckridge were also registering for IDs, which (in the form of 'passes') had previously been denied to black South Africans or which had been resisted as mechanisms of Apartheid state control (Greenberg, 1987:43). With the change of regime, however, IDs enabled the new right to vote and access to the expanding governmental social welfare net. In parallel, the state became involved in processes of demarcating and allocating land in the villages (previously land allocation was exclusively managed by local chiefs), along with the state's increasing role in providing infrastructure like piped water and electricity to rural areas. An ID was required to access these new land parcels (known as 'stands') and services. Formal land allocation was therefore generally not extended into the peripheral 'Mozambican' village sections established in the mid 1980s. My case study village Thangine on the outskirts of Acornhoek town was established in 1990 as a grid of formally demarcated stands, while other villages expanded and rearranged stands later in the 1990s and early 2000s around widened roads and electricity poles. Thangine and Clare received electricity in the early 2000s, bypassing the 'Mozambican' sections, while Justicia B still had no electricity in 2006 (although the 'main' sister village Justicia A was electrified in 1997).

While the influence of the national state tended to create exclusionary pressures for the Mozambican-born, local governance systems remained largely inclusive. When after 1996 the 'traditional' governance system of ndunas and chiefs was augmented by a system of Community Development Forums and ward councillors, as the lowest level of elected local government, these structures covered, in practice, all residents of the villages, independent of nationality, legal status, or residential area.

By 2002, at the start of my field work, it was therefore generally understood by all local actors that 'the Mozambicans' were in Bushbuckridge to stay, mostly had identity documents, and were permanently settled in the villages. While many things had therefore changed since their arrival as destitute and illegal newcomers 25 years earlier, the spatial organisation of most villages in the eastern half of Bushbuckridge still reflected the historical division between the 'main' village and a 'Mozambican' peripheral neighbourhood. These settlements were still clearly identifiable through a less structured settlement pattern (i.e. no straight roads or paths between houses), denser settlement, a predominance of traditional buildings (round mud huts with thatched roof rather than square breeze block houses with tin roofs) and less municipal infrastructure such as piped water or electricity.

4. Divided space and material difference

The rest of this paper will discuss how this continued spatial division of villages relates to the construction and negotiation of social difference and similarity within the villages. The first step in understanding the spatial construction and negotiation of identity groupings is to look at the material differences between people living in the spatially segregated areas versus those in 'main' village sections.

As noted in the introduction, the correlation of national origin and spatial segregation is not actually very high in the district. GIS data by the Agincourt Health and Socio-Demographic Surveillance System shows that less than half (42%) of all households headed by people either born in Mozambique or born to two Mozambican parents live in neighbourhoods where all adjacent households are also headed by Mozambicans.5 Forty-nine percent live in mixed neighbourhoods where at least one adjacent household is South African-headed, while 9% live entirely surrounded by South African households. Yet it is the spatially segregated neighbourhoods, I argue, and not the spatially integrated individuals and households, which define the social meaning of what is called 'Mozambican.' Concomitantly, the residents of the 'main' village sections are not necessarily only or predominantly of South African origin, yet these areas are used by villagers to describe the nature of 'South Africanness.'

The Agincourt census data allows us to look at broad village-level differences in physical infrastructure. Four 'Mozambican' settlements in the census area are so large and distant from their respective 'main' villages that they are counted as separate villages in the census. In all four, over 75% of their populations are Mozambican-born (italicised in Table 1). I have created two infrastructure indicators which aggregate measures such as the percentage of households with access to electricity for lighting; households with access to piped water through a tap in house, yard or road; and numbers of clinics and schools in the village. The 'Mozambican' villages are significantly worse off in terms of these kinds of physical infrastructure compared with the other villages.

The effect can be seen even more powerfully if disaggregated by 'neighbourhood' within villages. Even where 'Mozambican' areas are not large enough to be considered separate villages, the more 'Mozambican' your neighbourhood, the worse your infrastructure access, with purely Mozambican neighbourhoods significantly the worst off (Table 2).

5 These percentages are calculated from 2003 data on 11,649 households. Each household, coded by the place of birth of the household head, is marked by GIS and the ‘neighbourhood’ measure is calculated by the percentage of immediately abutting households with either Mozambian or South African-born household heads. Thanks goes to Benjamin Clark for developing this measure.
71% of adults in all neighborhood types were not currently working in 2004, and no court census site shows that the strongest effect on child (1–5 years old) mortality came from living in a ‘Mozambican’ settlement rather than from other factors such as nationality of the mother, health care utilisation or other measured household or maternal characteristics (Hargreaves et al., 2004). Child survival is therefore not directly tied to physical characteristics of a space, such as the availability of public health care, nor is it reducible to individual characteristics of mothers in that space, such as nationality, but is still strongly correlated with residing in that space (see also Sampson et al., 2002; Kaplan, 1996) on neighbourhood health effects). Another non-spatialised resource which is highly correlated with neighbourhood is education level (Table 4). For both the total adult population (including all South African-born and Mozambican-born persons over the age of 17) and the Mozambican-born adult population, neighbourhood is strongly correlated with whether a person is likely to have completed the high-school leaving ‘matric’ diploma or have no formal education at all.

Finally, people of Mozambican origin living in an entirely Mozambican neighbourhood are much less likely to have any kind of South African identity document, including a citizenship ID, permanent resident ID or birth certificate (21%), than those living in mixed neighbourhoods (14.8% for largely Mozambican

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Table 1
Infrastructure at village level comparing ‘Mozambican villages’ with mixed villages. Agincourt data (2003), N = 11,649 households.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>% of ‘Refugee’ households in village</th>
<th>Electricity % of households</th>
<th>Water tap % of households</th>
<th>Clinic in village</th>
<th>High schools</th>
<th>Primary schools</th>
<th>Preschools</th>
<th>Infrastructure indicator cumulative</th>
<th>Infrastructure indicator basic</th>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>86</td>
<td>97</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillydale B</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rholane</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kildare C</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice B</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset B</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Percentage of households with infrastructure access per neighbourhood type. Agincourt data (2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>100% SA n’hood</th>
<th>51–99% SA n’hood</th>
<th>50–99% Moz n’hood</th>
<th>100% Moz n’hood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>92.4%</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water taps</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total HH</td>
<td>N = 5710</td>
<td>N = 2235</td>
<td>N = 1163</td>
<td>N = 1397</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100% Mozambican neighbourhood</td>
<td>-1.733***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambican-born household head</td>
<td>-1.448***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household head without ID</td>
<td>-0.764***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** Significant at the 0.01 level.

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neighbourhoods, 14.5% for largely South African neighbourhoods, and 11.3% for entirely South African neighbourhoods. The data also shows that while the effect of living in different levels of mixed settlements (e.g. anything less than complete ghettos) is relatively low, there is a significant jump in documentationlessness with residence in a completely ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood. The role of identity documents as a key to material resources but also as a symbolic resource is discussed further below.

In summary we can therefore say that the residents of spatially separate ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods not only have access to less physical infrastructure, but their children are less healthy, and they are less educated and less likely to have South African identity documents than residents (including Mozambican-born residents) of other village sections. The correlate is that Mozambican-born people with an ID and education tend to live in the central village section. Many analyses stop here, and conclude that such discrepancies are due to discrimination by local South African residents or by the state (Johnston, 1999; De Jongh, 1994). Yet these objective spatialised differences in material resources do not map clearly or easily onto identity group construction or service eligibility criteria for services such as IDs. The following sections discuss how local social constructions of identity groups explain, incorporate or obfuscate these objective differences in resource access in different spaces within a village, and how residents both within and outside the ‘Mozambican’ village sections negotiate both a relationship with these spaces and the meanings of those spaces.

### 5. Constructing and negotiating spatialised identities

As noted in the introduction, on the one hand the differences between the materially distinct village sections are recognised and labeled by calling the peripheral areas ‘Mozambican’, but on the other hand the distinctions are elided by protestations of social unity. After giving evidence of this discursive tension, I argue that it can be understood as reflecting efforts by residents of both ‘Mozambican’ and ‘core’ village sections to relate their own group identities to an idealised ‘good community’, to locate that ‘good community’ in their respective spaces, and to define the ‘goodness’ of these spaces relationally, either against the neighbouring ‘other’ space or in some cases, through selective linkage with some of the characteristics of the ‘other’ space.

The first notable characteristic of discourses around the spatial division of these case study villages is the continuous tension between, on the one hand, an every-day awareness of and reference to the presence of ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods, and on the other hand, a strong narrative avoidance of mentioning or validating the social difference inherent in the divided space. Various interactions during the research process illustrated the reluctance by both South African and Mozambican-born residents to point out explicitly that some areas are populated by Mozambicans. When I first started working with research assistants in Clare, they were unwilling to point out the part of their hand-drawn maps which was the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood, although it was clearly visible when driving through the village and from the shape of the map. Hargreaves documented a similar reluctance during a participatory village typology exercise in 2000 with experienced local field workers of the Agincourt census site. When asked to describe census villages with similar characteristics, field workers mentioned that ‘refugee villages’ were places where “a person from a South African village wouldn't choose to go. ... No, it just wouldn't happen.” (Hargreaves, 2000:22). However, when it came to developing formal groupings of villages for a report, both teams of field workers independently grouped the five villages which had over 70% Mozambican populations along with other villages according to criteria like ‘under-development’ or ‘tradition.’ Only when Hargreaves intervened to construct a final typology which reflected both locally perceived differences and village characteristics arising from analysis of Agincourt census data, were the five villages grouped as “refugee settlements.” It seems a significant indicator of narrative conventions that the local field workers did not immediately group them as such themselves, but seemed to agree that they should rather be grouped along with other poor villages.

Maria, an old Mozambican-born woman whose homestead is in the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood of Clare, expressed the tension and ambivalence between recognising different ‘groups’ and not wanting to validate these differences:

| Tara: | In general what would you say about the relationship between this part of the village and the old part of the village? |
| Maria: | We are together. Just like when you have a child at home. Your child is maybe not behaving well at home. You tell him that he is not behaving well, but you cannot say: you are not my child. They are supporting us until we feel free to be here. When we started to be here, it was great. We can’t say there is no unity between us. There is unity. Even when we have a meeting, we are together. If there is a problem in our group, we go to tell them, to help the other group. Even the other group, they like to know about the relationship in our group. If we don’t know what we are going to do, we go there for help. When we go there, we tell them, do this and do this and do this, it will be OK. I say we are together with them. There is a relationship between us. We are not separated. If they didn’t like us, they would be doing things separately for our group, but because they like us, we get anything from those people. We even get water from those people. There is no problem |
| Tara: | What about electricity? In other parts of the village there is electricity |
| Esther: | About electricity, it is different because we did not build our houses at the same time. Some people built their houses and have electricity; others don’t have electricity because they built their houses late. There is no-one who is discriminating against us.4 |

The CDF Chairman of Clare village, whose Mozambican miner father established Clare village, describes his own approach to labeling:

Where there is a child born here, as long as we know your parents are from Mozambique, automatically you are called Mozambican. They don’t like that but the most despised name to be called is mapoti. They don’t like that stuff. ... At school [when I was a teacher] I discouraged that, and at school we don’t call the students Mozambicans. ... It is only when you are going to their place (in the village) you say, I’m going to Mozambique, but when we are in the middle of people or in the church you don’t say that. We don’t speak in such terms of Mozambicans; it is only when you want to get into their place.9

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4 Interview in Clare, 10 May 2005.

8 All names are pseudonyms.

9 Interview in Clare, 21 April 2004.

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7 This is based on 2005 Agincourt data of 10,567 Mozambican-headed households.
The prohibition on and avoidance of validating difference clearly does not mean there is no generally recognised social boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’, or that there is a boundary but both sides are of equal value; the discourse is constructed around a boundary between mutually recognised groups of unequal status. Furthermore, the status is primarily attached to the fact of residing in a ‘Mozambican’ enclave rather than to being of Mozambican origin per se.

In addition to the fact of a social boundary tied to spatial divisions, and a clear tension concerning the validation of that boundary, there are three ways in which the space of the ‘Mozambican’ and ‘core’ neighbourhoods are imagined which serve to illustrate and confirm the nature of the ‘good community’. These are narratives about legibility to and incorporation into the state (Scott, 1998) versus sociability, the relation to tradition and modernity, and questions of social class and hierarchy. Each of these narratives is interpreted and practiced differently by people from the perspective of the village ‘core’ and from within the ‘Mozambican’ enclave. This brings us back to Massey’s point about how spatial ‘identities’ are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than counterposition to them,” (Massey, 1994: 121) and to Soja’s lived and practiced “Thirdspace”. The forms of negotiation from within the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood include individual exit through permanent movement from the ‘periphery’ to the ‘core’, individual circular movement between the two spaces, and collective claims about the nature of a ‘good community’ which challenge ‘core’ value judgments about the ‘periphery.’ These strategies are most evident in relation to the narrative of legibility, which I discuss more extensively, but are also used to adopt and contest claims regarding modernity/tradition and status.

6. Legibility versus sociability

In his seminal work Seeing like a State, Scott argues that one of the key characteristics of the modern state is the ability to legitimise populations and territories by simplifying and standardising the measurement and documentation of people and spaces (Scott, 1998). The South African state, to a greater extent than most African states, has ‘captured’ both population and territory through the nearly ubiquitous presence of ID documents and formally demarcated land parcels (‘stands’). While the processes through which these are allocated do not always conform to the precepts of a bureaucratic legal system (Polzer, 2007), nonetheless the value of ‘being formalised’ has become entrenched in the rural leadership as well as, to some extent, in the general population. This is not least because of the real material benefits and services available from the state for people with IDs and formal stands (such as social grants and electricity), but goes beyond a rational minimum logic of exchange to a broader value judgment about people and spaces.

A conversation with a young Mozambican-born man in Clare illustrates the power of the ID in gaining basic respect. He told me that South Africans “look down on people from Mozambique.”

Tara: so if you have an ID, it’s fine?
C: if you have an ID, yes.10

There are two forms of illegibility in ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods which make it difficult for leaders of the village core to engage with and value them: firstly, the illegibility of persons in a space, and secondly the illegibility of the physical space itself. The common narrative is that people were moved into the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods because they did not have ID documents, e.g. were not legitimate as people. This narrative is reflected in the explanation given by the CDF Chairman of Clare about why Mozambicans were settled in a separate area when they first arrived.

When they came, they were given a special section (of the village) … especially those who did not have ID books and were not paying a tribute to the tribal authority. Because they believed that in no time they would be going back to Mozambique they built in their own place. So now we are mixed with them, but not that much. We are especially mixed with those who have ID books. Then … we believed they would be getting back home soon. Seemingly whenever a refugee comes to rural areas they are given special treatment, except in urban areas where you can’t find that. They are just mixed there but in rural places they are given a place because you find that when they came there were no vacant stands around. In other words they couldn’t mix with others so they had to be given a special place. They were many, per week you would find that 100 people arrived. Sometimes the children came alone and for identification sake, because they were getting food from the Red Cross, they were supposed to be placed where they could be easily managed.11

The nduna of Justicia was equally explicit:

The problem at the time [in 1987] was that then people did not have an ID. You have to pay for a stand. Now we have new stands in the place where the Mozambicans were living. We are not grouping those people there because they are from Mozambique. They were living there because they don’t have IDs.12

The CDF Chairman of Justicia, when asked about this story, however, gave a different account about local social governance structures rather than abstract documentation:

The issue of IDs was not central by then. [Mozambicans] were clustered according to… xibonda, that is under the guidance of the headman. Because we did not know them, they did this by themselves to decide who is going to lead them. Then, because some were living over there and some on that side there had to be someone who was looking and knowing their affairs. So it was not because of IDs because back then they could not be expected to have IDs. There were no IDs then.13

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10 Interview in Clare, 31 May 2005.
11 Interview in Clare, 21 April 2004.
12 Interview in Justicia, 27 March 2006.
13 Interview in Justicia, 27 March 2006.
Today’s narrative about IDs as a reason for spatial segregation is therefore more a reflection of current identity boundaries than of historical fact. It is a powerful narrative which not only rewrites the past but is used to justify differences of infrastructure access and public services in the present. For example, a lack of electrification of ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods is explained by the technical requirements of payment meters which are keyed to a specific ID number, even though other means of paying for electricity also exist.

The second mantra used to explain the lack of infrastructure in ‘Mozambican neighbourhoods’ relates to the illegibility of the space itself. The physical space is triply illegible in that it is (a) often not marked on municipal or service provider maps (such as the national electricity provider Eskom’s maps); (b) not divided into formal stands, so that residents do not pay stand-tax to the chiefs and so are not included in the chief’s maps; and (c) so densely and organically settled that services requiring thoroughfares and straight lines cannot fit. These forms of illegibility do pose real technical problems in providing services, but they are also used as an excuse not to provide water and electricity. Furthermore, prefiguring the discussion on tradition and modernity below, the physical illegibility confirms the ‘backwardness’ of the space and its (and its inhabitants’) inability to modernise.

It is significant that official village and councilor narratives to explain the lack of services in ‘Mozambican’ village sections are always about such technical issues as maps and straight roads, and never that Mozambicans have no rights to services due to their foreign nationality. This stands in contrast to the dominant discourses about nationality and access to public services in South Africa, which are often xenophobic (Crush, 2000; Landau, 2004; Misago et al., 2010), and illustrates the importance of carefully analyzing local logics of relational identity formation, e.g. what is relevant about being ‘South African’ versus being ‘Mozambican’, in a specific context and not assuming that there is a ‘natural’ line of division between groups on the basis of nationality or any other characteristic.

Examples of the spatial legibilisation discourse abound. The late 1990s water scheme implemented in Justicia A was not extended to Justicia B, according to the CDF Chairman, because the area “was informal so there were no places to put a trench. If you want to put the trench, sometimes you have to go through someone’s hut, so it was not possible.” Similarly, concerning Justicia A’s electrification in 1997, “it is unfortunate now that the population has exploded and those people will again not be energised because of that informal settlement. You know, the regulations are that it is not possible. Sometimes they would have to plant a pole in someone’s house so to move it would be an extra cost.” In Clare A, when the village was electrified in 1999, the original settlement of Mozambicans was not included. When asked why this section was not electrified, the CDF Chairman explained that Eskom was not given a map for that section “because it is far away.”

How do residents of the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods respond to and negotiate this discourse of illegibility? As noted above, there are three options: make a permanent physical move from one (illegible) space to another (legible) space, thereby accepting or even embodying the concomitant shift in identity; engage in circular movement between the spaces, through everyday practices recognising but not necessarily validating the values attached to them; or challenge the discourses which invalidate the ‘Mozambican’ spaces as lesser because they are illegible, and putting forward alternative indicators of a ‘good community.’

Many young people, especially those who acquire an ID, decide to leave the neighbourhood and move to a formal stand in the ‘core’ villages, either because they accept the value judgments that legible people and legible spaces are ‘better’ and so seek to ‘improve’ themselves by moving, or because they instrumentally seek better access to existing services such as electricity, water, and schools. This is discussed further in the section on status, below. The second strategy for negotiating spatialised identity divisions is to make use of the dominant space, and its resources, without necessarily moving into it fully. A mapping exercise tracing respondents’ movements and social connections within the village (summarised in Table 5) shows generally low levels of interaction between village sections (see also Golooba-Mutebi, 2004), but significantly higher interaction from the ‘Mozambican’ to the ‘core’ section than the other way around.

Residents of the village core rarely even passed through the ‘Mozambican’ village sections (see Agincourt field worker comment above that South Africans would “never” go to a Mozambican village), while ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood residents more regularly transited the ‘core’ on their way to use public infrastructure such as water taps, shops, schools or churches. Those ‘core’ residents who did visit the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood were all of Mozambican heritage themselves, having previously settled in the core, or were tied to Mozambicans by marriage. Other core residents of Mozambican heritage, however, did not visit the ‘Mozambican’ section any more often than their South African neighbours. While for residents of the ‘Mozambican’ section the village ‘core’ is therefore a relatively known and accessible space, the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood remains largely unknown and closed off in the perception of South African ‘core’ residents, completing the image of spatial illegibility. This strategy by ‘Mozambican’ section residents is obviously facilitated by the convention against explicitly discriminating or mentioning difference, as outlined above. Superior knowledge of the dominant group’s space is a common strategy through which marginalised groups maintain some, however limited, room for maneuver (Scott, 1990).

Finally, the third strategy for negotiating spatialised identities is to contest the relevance or value of ascribed characteristics such as legibility. Residents of the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods generally wish for better water and electricity services and often recognise the technical difficulties of installing these in a dense settlement. However, they draw different conclusions from leaders of the ‘core’ village about whether personal and spatial illegibility constitute the key characteristics of a ‘good community.’ Village leaders, in keeping with their legibilisation focus and the belief that more legible ways of living are necessarily better, have offered ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood residents opportunities to move out of their existing areas and take up newly demarcated stands in other parts of the village. In both Clare and Justicia, new village sections have been established in order to reduce crowding in the original Mozambican sections and to enable easier infrastructure provision. In both cases, mainly young people moved into the new areas. Older residents preferred to remain and to lobby the village leadership to find ways of bringing services to them. This collective response suggests that residents of the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods do not merely see themselves in terms of a ‘lack’ of legitimacy, of services, or of connection to the village ‘core’ — but also in terms of a positive sociality which they do not want to break up by dispersing out of their shared space. Golooba-Mutebi describes the high levels of mutual support and assistance in the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood he studied, contrasting it with high levels of mistrust among South African residents of the same village (2004). This sociality is independent of personal or spatial legibility and links to ideas of ‘cultural’ (rather than bureaucratic and documentation-based) tradition and modernity.

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14 Interview in Justicia, 24 March 2006.
15 Interview in Clare, 21 April 2004.
7. Modernity versus tradition

A similar discrepancy of perception concerns the value judgment attached to ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhoods in terms of the dichotomy modernity versus tradition. There is general agreement among all village residents on the characteristics of ‘Mozambicans’ living in the enclaves. This includes characteristics mentioned above like less formal education and lack of ID documents, but also that Mozambicans ‘like to plough’ (cultivate fields to support themselves) while South Africans prefer working for wages, that Mozambicans have more children, dress more conservatively, are more likely to respect the ancestors, drum through the night, and have stronger muti (traditional medicine). Such sentiments were captured in responses to an open-ended question in my survey, and come out strongly in informal conversations where the same phrases about ploughing, money, education and muti are regularly repeated.

The disagreement lies in the valuation of tradition versus modernity. As Golooba-Mutebi and Rodgers also discuss, many Mozambicans in the segregated neighbourhoods value the connection and identification with tradition and disapprove of the modern South African ways, which are perceived to include disrespecting elders and ancestors, violent jealousies and spreading illnesses (Golooba-Mutebi, 2004, 2005; Rodgers, 2002). Traditionalism can be seen not only as backwardness but also as authenticity. Furthermore, there are South Africans who also value and respect tradition as authenticity, especially since it is seen as a shared ‘Shangaan’ tradition. This dimension of identity construction therefore illustrates how spatialised divisions do not need to reflect dichotomous oppositions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ community but may be more ambivalent, even as the division itself is maintained (Massey, 1994: 121).

These stereotypes are reflected in space. In all three villages, the ‘Mozambican’ section is the farthest from the road and the closest to the fields and communal wilds. Yet the value of the space is different for each group. While the residents of the ‘core’ village see the ‘Mozambican’ section as being on the periphery and far from amenities, at least some of the residents of the Mozambican section see themselves well-placed close to their fields, or the fields they work in for the South African owners, and to the communal areas for collecting medicinal and edible wild herbs and roots.

8. Status

Finally, village neighbourhoods in Bushbuckridge, as elsewhere around the world, reflect images of socio-economic class and status. The image of spatially-defined poverty, furthermore, is strengthened by the spatially frozen memory of the destitute state in which Mozambicans arrived in the villages in the 1980s. In spite of the many Mozambican-born people with IDs, education and jobs living among South Africans in the village ‘core’, ‘Mozambicanness’ as an identity descriptor remains associated with a subordinate class which is tied to space. The CDF Chairman of Clare (whose own father was Mozambican) expresses the class consciousness explicitly:

You know those people, the Mozambicans, if you try to move into their neighborhood with them, it will seem you are not wise enough. When we can class ourselves, like in America, we belong to the first class and they belong to the second class, ja like that. I can’t remember any one from South Africa who has ever done that [gone to live in the Mozambican section of the village].

In reverse, young people, particularly young men who complete an education and have a job, often opt to express their status gain by moving out of the ‘Mozambican’ neighbourhood in which they grew up, and by implication, divest themselves of the second class status. This was the case with three young men with whom I worked during my research, one in each of the case study villages. In Thangine, Mozambican-born Amos had been living with a South African family who shared his surname while he completed his secondary education, and when he got a job he immediately started building a house on a vacant stand in the middle of the village rather than close to his birth-family on the ‘Mozambican’ side of the village. In Clare, my research assistant Denis worked as a photographer, so he soon moved out of his mother’s homestead in the ‘Mozambican’ section to stay with his South African photography business partner, although he continued to regularly visit and assist his mother and siblings. Finally, in Justicia, Phinious wanted to start a small business fixing cell phones with the money he had earned from the research, but he felt he first had to move out of Justicia B into Justicia A or neighbouring mixed Lillydale before such a business would be viable.

9. Conclusion

This case study of divided villages in the border region of South Africa shows how a spatial analysis can add a crucial dimension to understanding migrant–host relationships and the integration process, specifically how both ‘migrant’ and ‘host’ group identities can be constructed in relation to each other and in relation to the spaces they respectively (are seen to) occupy. Without considering and carefully deconstructing the ways in which ideas of ‘being Mozambican’, ‘being South African’ and the ‘good community’ more generally are tied to and negotiated in relation to spatial divisions in the village, it would be difficult to understand the simultaneous far-reaching social, spatial and discursive integration between people of Mozambican and South African origin, and the maintenance of narratives about distinct identities and spaces.

Such an analysis of relational identity construction associated with distinct spaces must be empirical and not assume the relevance or valuation of potential boundary markers such as nationality or migration history. While this case confirms that “places and boundaries do matter” (Cresswell, 2002:20) to identity construction, including the identities of people who have moved across national borders, it shows how identity boundaries may in fact be constructed around issues such as legibility to the state, tradition/modernity and status, without any direct reference to national origin or migration history. Furthermore, the relevant spaces for identity construction may not be the space of origin versus the new space of settlement, or an interaction between a ‘global’ and a ‘local’, but may be divisions within the micro-spaces of the ‘local.’ This applies in a rural African village and not only in cosmopolitan

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a The movement and social connections mapping exercise was conducted with a total of 82 individuals in 41 households. However, only 74 individuals are analysed here, since four households (eight persons) were located in a new, small, ‘mixed’ section of Clare village where almost all interviewed residents had all their interactions and movements outside the village and so cannot be analysed in terms of intra-village spatial dynamics.

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cities or modern spaces of transit (Soguk and Whitehall, 1999). Finally, documenting the ways in which identity and space are linked is far from claiming any essential or natural link between the two. All of the (personal and spatial) identity boundary markers described here are inherently changeable and negotiable: legibility is conferred by the state and may be acquired from 1 day to the next, tradition and modernity are shifting ascribed values, and status is relative. While there are clearly contexts where migrant individuals carry status and identity markers with them through space—as differences of race, physiognomy, language or visible cultural behaviour in relation to the dominant group in the new space—one cannot assume that there will always be such visible markers or what social meaning these markers will have.

Understanding the integration of migrants therefore also means understanding how social marginality is invested into a specific space, and the extent to which individuals can move out of that space and therefore move out of social marginality. The social value of such spaces is, however, rarely uncontested, and so it is important to document not only the ways in which individuals negotiate their identities and status by shifting in space, but also how individuals and groups negotiate to shift the status meanings attributed to their space.

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