

Abstract

This paper considers struggles of legitimation by the South African government over the first ten years of the country's democracy, by focusing on its engagement with policy-making processes in relation to land tenure reform in the former 'homelands' of the country. During such periods of upheaval and change, the achievement of legitimacy by the state will only be achieved through deeply political processes. In exploring the strategies adopted by policy-makers and bureaucrats to legitimise contested political change, it considers how they were influenced by wider ideals of participatory policy-making and consultation. However, in the process, the paper also demonstrates how they were further shaped by the everyday realities determining the practices of governing, as well as the changing extent to which government officials were constrained in their own ability to influence policy. In this context, it is argued, claims of participatory policy-making largely came to constitute strategies of legitimation for policies that had already been formulated.

Keywords: South Africa; Land reform; Government; Legitimation strategies; Participatory policy-making

Elizabeth Fortin is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for Development Policy and Management at The University of Manchester.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Barbara Oomen, Ian Scoones, Mathias Vom Hau, Lynda Waldman and Philip Woodhouse for their generous time and comments on earlier versions of this paper. Funding for this research was provided by the ESRC.