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**Topic: Deceptive Lenses: A shared misrepresentation of local realities in eThekweni's water and sanitation services**

**Prof Mary Galvin, Department of Anthropology and Development Studies, University of Johannesburg**

Abstract:

eThekweni Water and Sanitation in Durban, South Africa, is reflected through two lenses: an award-winning utility that is internationally recognized for its innovation and achievement and a sinister arm of the state that is disconnecting poor people and is the target of protest. This paper argues that bureaucrats who focus on technical delivery issues, particularly payment for services, are forced to find ways of maneuvering through political realities and multiple accountabilities. There is a deliberate “will not to know”, which is expressed by their not acknowledging the non-payment for services in Ingonyama Trust land. However, activists, who are aware that people in a number of poor areas are not billed and do not pay for water, find it efficient to pretend as if it was not the case, and to fight the municipality on its payment requirements. The paper, based on individual interviews, focus groups, and observation over the past ten years in Mzinyathi (a peripheral settlement in eThekweni struggling with services), analyses people’s engagement with the local councilor and the inkosi (chief), and their link with the African National Congress and the Council. The paper then considers the approach of responsible municipal officials to delivery and payment in a range of areas, including Mzinyathi. It fills an important space in examining the intersection and interaction of residents and activists, local political leaders and party, and utility officials— and their self-deceptions and misrepresentations of what is happening in the municipality in terms of payment for water services.