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# Feminist Africa 13

## Gendered Body

## Politics and Crafting

## Citizenship

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# Editorial: Body Politics and the Gendered Crafting of Citizenship

Sophie Oldfield, Elaine Salo and Ann Schlyter

In post-colonial Zambia and post-apartheid South Africa, citizenship is assumed to be universal and to carry rights. Yet, in practice, in the everyday context in which ordinary women and men live out their lives, its meanings and values are differentiated in bodies and their politics, reflecting the social, spatial, gendered, and racial nature of inequality. Framed by global processes and national discourses, the crafting of citizenship and the substantiation of rights in urban Southern Africa remain fraught. In this issue of *Feminist Africa*, we elaborate on contesting body politics and the gendered crafting of urban citizenship in Lusaka and Cape Town. The notion of ‘crafting’ citizenship is central to our analysis. The lived negotiation of citizenship and the ways it is made meaningful in everyday peripheral parts of Southern African cities are neither static nor decreed through law. Instead, citizenship and its meanings are negotiated in mutually constitutive processes that interlink individuals, communities and representatives of the state. Through such processes, agency is progressively nurtured in relationships within homes and through the quotidian activities that constitute everyday life. At times it is fought for in the public sphere, in open opposition to the state. The meanings of citizenship and the manner in which it is contested or embodied through oppositional action, are thus not the predictable outcomes of structural configurations of power, or a romantic reflection of agency-through-revolt. The flows and processes of power cannot be read in formulaic fashion from a model of asymmetrical social geometry where the powerless are simply dominated by the powerful. The notion of ‘crafting’ allows us to analyze the processes of negotiation and lived substantiation of citizenship in local contexts – places and times – saturated with gender relations, where meanings are found in and fought for through embodied everyday practices

and discourses.

Our contributors focus on the gendered meanings of the everyday lived spaces – of homes and neighbourhoods in townships and peri-urban peripheries of Cape Town and Lusaka. The individual authors reflect on the creation of socio-spatial meanings and gendered agency generated in the everyday negotiation of body politics and citizenship in these contexts. Through grounded research and finely grained ethnography, the papers frame body politics and citizenship as gendered, contingent and reproduced at multiple scales, and built through the everyday use of material and cultural resources. Peri-urban contexts are conceptualised as physical, material as well as social places in which socio-political processes inform and shape citizenship, negotiated in gendered and generationally specific ways.

The conversation interlinking the papers travels between Lusaka and Cape Town, framed by Zambian and South African national debates, as well as broader regional flows, histories and politics, particularly the geopolitics of South Africa's regional presence. This comparative discussion offers in-depth, qualitative work that engages carefully with particular places and times to examine the micro-relations and politics of women's, and in one case, men's everyday lives. Ethnographic theorisation across these borders draws together a regional Southern African experience. Through this rich analysis, we speak back to often de-contextualised and a-temporal global development narratives about gender, body politics and citizenship. The politics and discursive strategies of these development and globalization narratives write out and efface the gendered negotiations that generate agency through lived experiences. In other words, the varied tactics and strategies that women and men in poor families – so-called marginal bodies in marginal places – enact and perform in everyday lives in peripheral urban places are occluded in these grandiose analytical tales. Consequently, people appear only as passive bystanders – the support cast to the all-agentive structural social processes that inform neo-liberal capital. By focusing on these margins, we bring a critical gendered analysis of body politics to the examination of the crafting of citizenship in contemporary urban Southern Africa.

There are, of course, limits to this comparison: in its depth it is narrow, focused on particular Southern African urban contexts and experiences. It is thus also framed in the specificities of Southern African colonial legacies and post-colonial conditions of segregation, its histories and persistence in the contemporary era (Myers, 2006; Oldfield, 2005; Salo, 2004). At the same



time, Lusaka and Cape Town are bound up in powerful logics of modernity, shaping politics, and an almost obsessive developmental focus on order and formality, linking, in often surprising ways, the colonial and post-colonial urban condition. Collectively, this volume places gender and everyday body politics at the forefront, a layer of analysis often silent in much Southern African scholarship on citizenship (McEwan, 2005) and questions of urban space. More specifically, it builds on a long and rich tradition of scholarship in *Feminist Africa*, which reflects on the situated positions from which we speak, act and from which we ultimately create knowledge.

### **Gender, body politics and crafting citizenship**

Linzi Manicom (2005) demonstrates that modernist rights-based citizenship projects equivocally position and construct women as subjects in citizenship projects and processes. In doing so, they mask the differences that divide and thus privilege some women over others. Her analysis of power and its constitution in the political and social construction of citizenship provides an argument for “a fragmented and contingent subject, enabl[ing] appreciation of the different forms of agency and moral grounds for participation that are available within different constructions of citizenship” (2005: 24). Gender mainstreaming, notions of empowerment, supposedly neutral individual socio-economic rights, or national narratives of ‘mothers of the nation’ for instance, draw on universalized notions of women as citizens with circumscribed agency.

Compellingly she argues that:

“the onus is therefore on feminists relentlessly to render visible and contestable the different makings of gendered political subjects, and the ways these inform and are integrated within policy, rights and political practices.” (2005: 47)

In this spirit, we explore the body politics of citizenship as it is informed by the contested interplay between women and men as they imagine and inhabit gender space, strive to access scarce material resources, and negotiate relationships within households and communities located in broader political and social urban and national economies.

We conceptualise ‘body politics’ as the negotiation of power via the body, processes that operate sometimes directly (for instance, violently), but also processes that work at a symbolic and representational scale. At the same time, we analyse body politics in its materiality, played out in homes and

neighbourhoods, in the types of tenure families negotiate, in the depravity of material conditions on the margins and peri-urban edges of our cities. Body politics are also constituted relationally: within households and families, community processes and in neighbourhood and civic politics, through access or a lack thereof to state resources, or through interventions by the state. In these processes, power relations are constantly negotiated through everyday acts on and through the body (Baines, 2003; Moffett, 2006; Sangtin Writers, 2006).

At the same time and central to our analysis is the notion that body politics are negotiated and performed in place and in time and that they are not generic. Our analysis thus gives serious consideration to time and temporalities as well as their gendering, examining how temporalities shape and shift the material and political experiences of crafting citizenship in critical realms of the home, household, and in reference to struggles for shelter. We understand these processes not in relation to an amorphous 'public sphere', but in relation to critical everyday needs, resources, and practices from which women (and in one instance, men) build and negotiate their citizenship intimately, publically and politically. Here we highlight the abilities of those apparently powerless to craft state policy; to in some instances demand resources and a voice from the state and in state processes; in other instances to get on, to make do, despite the state or in the absence of the state (Corbridge *et al.*, 2005; Manicom, 2005; Gouws, 2005, Das and Poole, 2004; Scott, 1998).

### **Ethnography, the everyday and the politics of knowledge production**

Feminist critiques of globalisation and post-colonial readings of modernity direct us to record and understand the everyday and to theorise from this base, opening up a theoretical terrain that is embodied, gendered, and placed. This in itself is not new, but reflective of a long humanist tradition in social sciences. The French urbanist Henri Lefebvre (1982) for instance, was concerned with the aesthetics of everyday life and saw it as built up by daily routines. In contrast to scholars who saw alienation and estrangement in the city, Lefebvre had a positive vision of the city and explored how the city could be appropriated by people creatively. He noted, long before we paid attention to globalisation, that the modern bourgeoisie lived everywhere and nowhere, owned the nature and the means of production, but were not embedded in everyday life. In the same line of argument, Dorothy Smith (1987) argued for

a contrast between the local and situated everyday life and the world of those in power. She suggested that agenda setting for research should take its point of departure, not in scientific discourses and texts, but in the concrete and material of everyday life. This thread in the development of the concept of everyday life has its origin in the feminist movement and the parole from the 1960s and 1970s that the 'private is political'.

In more recent literature on globalisation, McDowell (1997) brought feminist theory and arguments about space to explain global fragmentation and the displacements and discontinuities that characterise the contemporary global era. Nagar et al. (2002) draw on feminist critiques of development to critically engage globalisation. In the latter case, they:

"reject [...] simplistic generalizations that cast globalization as either totally victimizing or completely liberatory and [...] illuminate [...] the subtle ways in which power relations, interdependencies, negotiated constructions of femininity and masculinity, and multi-layered politics of difference constitute the everyday politics and realities of globalization."

(Nagar et al., 2002: 275)

We build on this foundation, drawing upon ethnography of everyday life in Lusaka and Cape Town to consider the interplay of identity and power operating between women and men, across generations, within households, in neighbourhoods, in community work, and in relation to as well as in conflict with the state, that is sometimes painfully absent and at other times forcefully present.

This type of research places the politics of knowledge production at the centre of our work, not solely as a question of rigorous methodology, but as an issue that frames research, its purpose and its politics: who produces it and for what purposes. In 'Researching for Life' (Issue 11) and in earlier *Feminist Africa* issues, Bennett (2008), Pereira (2005), Macfadden (2002) and Ratele (2002), amongst others, consider the ways in which feminist intellectual work, research and activism break down hierarchies of knowledge that reinforce traditional binaries between formal academic knowledge and power vis-à-vis informal activist knowledge and, in doing so, validate collaborative knowledge creation across the academic-community divide. In *Playing with Fire*, Richa Nagar (2002) and Sangtin Writers and Nagar (2006) collectively ask why, despite all the soul-searching, gut-wrenching examination of researcher-self positioning vis-à-vis poor women in Southern contexts, such self-reflexivity has not led to the translatability of much feminist academic and non-governmental

research into these contexts.

In order to turn our research and theoretical work into more effective tools for change, feminist work challenges us to consider our motives in our writing and research, as well as the organizational cultures embedded in the academy that constrain recognition of other products of research which are often more useful to poor women in Southern contexts. In doing so, the Sangtin Writers and Nagar (2006) methodologically and politically position collaboration between activists and academics as practices central to the process of building and informing relevant theory and knowledge. In precise ways, their own research activism interrogates whose discourses we consider to be politically and socially relevant, questioning particularly for whom we write for and why, as well as how we write. Inspired to think critically about our purpose and the politics of our research practice, we build on these debates in this issue.

Specifically *Feminist Africa* 13 draws together research from the Body Politics Project which we have coordinated, nurturing and supporting young scholars to encourage critical work and reflection. This issue thus includes articles by South African and Swedish senior scholars and junior scholars from South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe based at the University of Cape Town. In the dialogues on methodologies especially, we reflect on our institutional and personal positionalities and the ways in which they shape our research and the partnerships upon which they build.

In '*Coconuts don't live in townships: Cosmopolitanism and its Failure in Post-Apartheid Urban South Africa*', Elaine Salo challenges us to reflect on the relationship between gender and temporality as these intersect with the meanings of space constituted in everyday relations. In her case study on adolescent women's negotiations of friendship across ethnic divides and bodily safety on the Cape Flats, Cape Town, she questions what post-Apartheid substantive citizenship means for poor women living on the peripheries of the city.

Drawing on forty years of research in Lusaka, in '*Body Politics and the Crafting of Citizenship in Peri-urban Lusaka*', Ann Schlyter demonstrates that in increasingly impoverished peri-urban areas, negotiations for citizenship start with women's bodies and in the private sphere in homes, where women struggle for agency through everyday negotiations within their families. A gradual decrease in living standards, aggravated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, imposes conflicts over control of scarce resources in the home and in the community. Women negotiate their body politics with their husbands in order

to create space for engagement in community issues. They develop a strong sense of citizenship based on contributing to the common good, rather than claims on the state. Generalised theories of global citizenship and of women's empowerment however write over these harsh and challenging realities.

Through comparative research, Sian Butcher and Sophie Oldfield suggest in *'De facto vs de jure Home Ownership: Women's everyday negotiations in Lusaka and Cape Town'*, that women's tenure security and claims to ownership in neighbourhoods are not straightforward functions of legal title, customary approval or economic liquidity in a household. Yet, across the Southern African region, low-income housing policies almost exclusively prioritise an "ownership model", which sees progress and development as intrinsically bound up in the production of individual, legally-sanctioned, supposedly secure and economically empowered, property owners. In contrast to individual, disembodied legalistic notions of ownership, they argue that comparative explorations of women's everyday access to homes demonstrate that ownership is an ambiguous and contested terrain, one that is deeply gendered and relationally negotiated.

In *'Marabot neMawaya – Traffic Lights and Wire: Crafting Zimbabwean Migrant Masculinities in Cape Town'*, Netsai Sarah Matshaka brings young Zimbabwean migrants' experiences of street trade in Cape Town into view. She considers the ways in which young men conceive, negotiate, and create gendered identities, particularly through the assertion of craftsmanship of wire and bead art and street trading at traffic lights as an innovative Zimbabwean domain. This domain becomes key to how they construct themselves in this context, presenting their manhood as innovative, creative and skilful, in a context of high local male unemployment. She argues that research on masculinities in particular places and moments of migration is important for informing future 'careful' concerted efforts to bring newer positive constructions of masculinity the esteem they deserve.

Four Profiles on methodology collectively reflect on the production and politics of our research, through research, collaborative projects, and the Body Politics Project itself. Sophie Oldfield and Elaine Salo document the Body Politics Project in *'Nurturing Researchers, Building Local Knowledge'*, highlighting the project commitments to support young researchers and to nurture critical ethnographic work on body politics in urban peripheries and the project's methodology, as well as recording comparative conversations of the researchers in Lusaka and Cape Town.

In *'Fieldwork Stories: Negotiating positionality, power and purpose'*,

Lynsey Bourke, Sian Butcher, Nixon Chisonga, Jumani Clarke, Frances Davies and Jessica Thorn reflect together on how national, gender, class, and race identities fed into their individual and collective post-graduate research experience. They critically and creatively think through fieldwork in urban peripheries in Lusaka and Cape Town, and places between, acknowledging the messy and insightful tensions that arise between insiders and outsiders, centers and peripheries, and process and purpose.

In *'Collaborative Research in Conversation'*, Koni Benson poses a methodological challenge for feminist research, as she reflects on the situated collaborations between women activists on the one hand and relatively better resourced NGO activist scholars on the other, as they work together to secure land and shelter for homeless communities across the city. She also maps out the validity of feminist knowledge creation about gendered agency and power through activism in her portrayal of women activists as they negotiate and create new sites of power and as they draw on both diplomatic negotiations as well as outright protestations against the state in their efforts to gain secure shelter.

In *'A Regional Conversation on Southern African Cities and Towns: The Gender, Urbanization and Everyday Life Research Project, 1992–2005'*, Matšelisó 'Ma-Tlali Mapetla and Ann Schlyter profile the experiences of the research network GRUPHEL – Gender Research on Urbanisation, Planning, Housing and Everyday Life. The Sida/SAREC supported programme enhanced research capacity and produced knowledge within this multi-disciplinary field. Over thirteen years, a series of empirical studies using qualitative methods were produced and published on Southern Africa by researchers across the region, providing a rich basis for further studies on urban Southern African.

These contributions are complemented by Elaine Salo's *In Conversation with Sindiwe Magona*, an internationally renowned and celebrated author and poet who writes about the realities of gender and contemporary urban life. Two book reviews focus on recent writing on the intersections of gender activism and knowledge production and teaching in India and South Africa. Salma Ismail reviews *Playing with Fire: Feminist thought and Activism through Seven lives in India* by the Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar (2006) and Relebohile Moletsane reviews Greg Ruiters' (2008) edited collection *Gender Activism: Perspectives on the South African Transition, Institutional Culture and Everyday Life*.

In sum, we bring together this unique and rich collection of research to

reflect carefully on the contestation of body politics in the gendered crafting of citizenship in Lusaka and Cape Town. In doing so, we build on a body of work in *Feminist Africa* that, from the unique vantage points that the continent offers the world, furthers feminist theoretical and methodological interventions in research and activism.

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# Coconuts do not live in Townships: Cosmopolitanism and its Failures in the Urban Peripheries of Cape Town

Elaine Salo

"Until recently (anthropological) Social Theory has failed to account for time as lived, (through space); not synchronically or diachronically but in its multiplicity and simultaneities, its presence and absences. The 'peculiar historicity' of African societies are rooted in a multiplicity of times, trajectories, and rationalities that although particular and sometimes local, cannot be conceptualised outside a world that is globalized." (Mbembe, 2001: 8).

The issue of temporality and gender – time as lived differently by diverse gendered bodies – has for the most part, not been a central concern of mainstream feminist theorists, particularly living and working in African contexts. Feminist geographers such as Gillian Rose (1993) and Doreen Massey (1994) have considered the meanings of time as lived by women through space as a means to interrogate the received notions of place as settled, timeless and occupied by people sharing a homogenous identity. Anthropologists in the South such as Antonadia Borges (2006) and cultural geographers, Oldfield and Boulton (2005) have considered a fine-grained analyses of time progression through the everyday activities in a particular place as a means to understand the complex negotiation of identity in space. Borges, writing about women's struggles for housing in Brazil, has provided an ethnographic analysis that examines how women's quotidian engagements with the state in their struggle to find housing shape and inform the gendered notions of citizenship in Brasilia province, Brazil. Oldfield and Boulton, writing on young people's negotiations to secure shelter in the context of Old Crossroads, Cape Town, South Africa, consider how these youth's gendered and embodied experiences of the housing crisis, inform their expectations

of partners, relationships and their interpretation of gendered citizenship in post-Apartheid South Africa.

These researchers who foreground the ethnographic method assume that the cultural meanings of space are contingent, produced relationally and cannot be assumed as given, passive and settled, or that it is produced inexorably from national or regional governmental policies. They ask whether the reception of national and local government planning policies are realised in the local place, and received by passive local inhabitants in as simple a manner as intended. Furthermore they focus centrally on the tensions about and negotiation over the meanings of these identities through the gendered everyday relations in the local context. In doing so, they question whether the identities of those who live in a local place are homogenous, anchored in that space. Their analyses raise broader questions that point to the importance of examining whether and how the presence of the global, national or regional forms of governance are received, engaged with and reproduced in the local place. Like Mbembe's critique of anthropology's homogenising, linear narration of identity anchored in place and time, they too, are critical of mainstream geography's tendency to assume space as neutral, passive and uncomplicated. Instead they muddy the ready tendency to map identity as 'timeless authenticity' onto place, by focussing on the tensions, the fractures, refusals and silences that occur in the progression of the everyday acts and relations that inform the meanings of place. In addition, unlike Mbembe, they examine how the meanings of time and place are experienced differently, as the gendered identities of individuals are brought to bear upon the progression of time through quotidian acts and relations, so that the experience of temporality, within specific locations is deeply gendered.

Anthropologists' ability to provide a sustained gendered account of time as lived in 'its multiplicity', from within and across a number of locations, still seems to have eluded all but a few ethnographers (for exceptions see Tsing, 2001; Abu-Lughod, 1999). Instead, often ethnographers tend to provide an account of people's activities through time, as told from the masculine perspective, which then serves as the disembodied, gender-neutral narration of 'the community's experience' or 'the community's identity'. The ability to provide nuanced accounts of the multiple temporal locations which researchers and research informants embody, and from which they give meaning to place, to reflect gendered subjectivities of place that, whilst also accounting for

the specific contexts that researcher and research informant simultaneously occupy and from which they speak, is indeed difficult to represent.

However in this paper, I argue that two critical methodological interventions need to be made in order to surface the gendered aspect of temporality. First, attention needs to be paid to finely grained ethnographic details about the tensions, silences and fractures represented in everyday relations and quotidian activities in local places, and how these are gendered and informed by generation. Secondly, methodological attention needs to be paid to the location from which individuals speak (positionality as per feminist methodologies), which can provide one with some means to represent ‘time as lived in its (gendered) multiplicity, its presence and its absences’. I draw on ethnographic research conducted in a racially homogenous neighbourhood, Manenberg in Cape Town South Africa during the transition from Apartheid to post-Apartheid, to show how the gendered meanings of post-Apartheid cosmopolitanism in South Africa, so often celebrated as the non-violent peaceful achievement of harmonious relations across socio-economic and racial divides, are differently reflected in younger women’s local experiences due to vulnerability to sexual violence, especially in the urban peripheries.

### **A sense of place on the urban margins of Cape Town**

Manenberg is situated on the grey, sandy Cape Flats, north-east of the green belt of leafy suburbs that runs along the perimeter of Table Mountain. The suburb is one of numerous identical housing projects that were constructed in the 1960s and '70s for those classified coloured, who were forcibly removed from areas proclaimed white by the Group Areas Act<sup>1</sup>. In order to reach this suburb, one has to journey north-east from the city centre and Table Mountain along the N2 highway. As I proceed on my journey along this road, I am overcome with a deepening sense of historic and economic separation from the vibrant, cosmopolitan city centre that is etched into the landscape even now, fifteen years after the formal end of Apartheid. The physical boundaries that Apartheid architecture set in place to anchor and constrain artificially created racial communities in the urban landscape still endure in the post-Apartheid context.

Yet it is situated in the inner urban periphery, unlike areas like Khayelitsha, Happy Valley, Delft and New Crossroads. It is a site of forced resettlement; but some of its residents still recall a time when they lived and worked in the city centre. And indeed these people, who define themselves as “bruinmense”

(brown people) were the last to be forcibly removed from the city, unlike the inhabitants of Happy Valley and Browns Farm; who are perceived to be 'raw' – newcomers to the city from the far flung rural areas 'Out There'. They were still allowed to remain on the edges of the white city, and consider themselves as part of the Apartheid narration of modernity. In this racist scheme, coloureds were ideologically located midway on the linear chart of progress, not quite as high on the scale as whites, but not quite as low as other black ethnic groups either.

In the post-Apartheid, neo-liberal narrative of modernity, with its emphasis on non-racism, non-sexism and legislated equal access to the economic market, the 'New South Africans' are constructed as the brave new, 'non-racial' entrepreneurs with equal opportunity in the marketplace, who are 'free' to explore relations across erstwhile constraining racial and spatial divides. Yet what happens when this linear narration of neo-liberal economic progress comes up against the continued material constraints of economic deprivation and spatial marginality? Most residents on the Cape Flats, regardless of racial or ethnic classification, have experienced a deepening impoverishment, due to growing socio-economic inequity that is reflected in terms of spatial marginality, as the local state imposed a neo-liberal economic programme entitled Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), similar to structural adjustment programmes employed elsewhere in African contexts, e.g. Ghana and Zimbabwe.

In the Apartheid moment, the Manenberg inhabitants have created a moral story about themselves, using the trope of *Gendered Respectability* to assert themselves as modern, as civilized. This moral narrative was based upon Manenberg's marginal location to the white city centre of Cape Town, and the inhabitants' racist exclusion from nationhood and citizenship. During the time of racist exclusion, this moral story relied upon coloured women's privileged knowledge of the Apartheid bureaucratic management of coloureds, built during their everyday experiences as social security recipients, as applicants for public housing and as employees of the textile industry reliant upon feminised labour, to construct a powerful ideology of *Gendered Respectability*, embodied in the performance and efflorescence of motherhood. Such *Gendered Respectability* also sets the boundaries of local communities and dictates the gendered norms of behaviour. In the post-Apartheid moment, the moral story of gendered personhood and respectability continues, except this time it is being contested by specifically younger women's innovative,

gendered norms of local cosmopolitanism, as they attempt to dislodge accent and aesthetics of the body from the locally constructed racialised, gendered and spatialised essentialisms.

I define the younger women's attempts to dislodge these essentialised, mutually recursive categories as the making of a newer *Coconut* identity that is fluid, and actively reworks the meaning of space. These younger women actively acquire material goods such as fashionable, sexily risqué dress, and cultural capital such as the ability to speak English, and/or isiXhosa and be seen to traverse the otherwise unfamiliar cosmopolitan spaces of the city such the touristy Waterfront or the more homely discotheques and shebeens in the surrounding though unfamiliar Xhosa-speaking suburbs. I attempt to map out the contestations between these two moral tropes, at least as it pertains to young women in the vignette that follows.

What I want to argue, is that these poor young women's experiences of material deprivation and social violence place them in a 'time' that cannot be considered to be modern in terms of the linear narration of modernisation. For if we are to equate the quintessential modern moment with peace and stability, then how can we be living in the African modern paradise that most in the West perceive South Africa to be, at least by economic standards? How then do these young women, and other members of their community, make sense of this location, at once within the 'modern' and yet forever not a part of it; forever yearning for it? I argue that the solution of this paradox for the brave young women, whom Kopano Matlwa dubbed *Coconuts* in her fictionalised account of gendered cosmopolitanism (2007), is ultimately only in doing violence to themselves; in this way I suggest they are able to resolve the apparent contradiction that they embody.

### *Onnosel en onbeskof*<sup>2</sup>: young rebels challenging the boundaries of *ordentlikheid*

In a township like Manenberg, young women's morality is judged especially by the older generation of women, the *Respectable Mothers*, by the spaces they are seen to be occupying in the local area. 'Good Girls' attend school, dress modestly and occupy the domestic space exclusively during the day, doing house chores or running errands accompanied by friends. 'Slegte dogters' or 'slatternly/spoiled girls' were the ones displaying too much flesh in tight fitting clothes, who wore make-up, heels, were willing to cross social and physical boundaries of the community and sought out spaces of leisure

on their own. These 'slatternly girls' pushed the envelope of *ordentlikheid*, or respectability, and deliberately transgressed its norms rather discreetly manipulating them. They were contemptuously regarded as *onnosel*, or foolish, by the older generation of women and their more acquiescent peers. Yet, these new norms that these 'slatternly girls' now strive to adhere to, such as their increasing familiarity with previously unknown, more glamorous spaces such as the touristy Waterfront, or with suburbs where the 'Other' resided (such as residents who were English or Xhosa speaking, or from a different socio-economic class) and with the appropriate dress and linguistic codes acceptable in these spaces, were considered to be undesirable in the local context of Manenberg. As Lindsey's case illustrates, young women who dared to cross the boundaries of the old Apartheid social and racial spaces are defined as slatternly and blamed for their own misfortune if they were the victims of assault.

Sixteen-year-old Lindsey was cast out from the circle of friends in Rio Street in this fashion, after she was raped while she was returning home from Nyanga one Saturday evening after she had visited some friends. Lindsey lived with her mother, forty-six-year-old Monica and her infant brother in a second-floor apartment located above the unit occupied by Morieda and her family. Monica was the second wife of a Xhosa-speaking man, known as "Huisbaas" (Household Head), who ran the local shebeen. Unlike most Rio Street and Manenberg residents, Monica and Lindsey were trilingual and able to converse in English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa. However, they rarely took pride in this ability, choosing to conceal this unique skill instead, as they feared the questions it would raise about their diverse ethnic origins. Despite the fact that most residents in Manenberg were from creolised religious, cultural and linguistic origins, the Afrikaans language and the Christian ideal of monogamous marriage and the nuclear family were considered to be the codes, *sine qua non* of respectability and belonging. Monica feared and resented the malicious gossip about her Xhosa ancestry. In order to mitigate the street gossip and to prove her own and her household's respectability, she regulated Lindsey's behaviour very severely.

While Lindsey's peers were given some freedom to explore spaces such as the *hok* in Rio Street during the day, she was forbidden to hang out with them there. She was expected to spend most of her free time indoors, assisting her mother to care for her baby brother, with assorted household chores. When she was allowed outdoors, she had to provide Monica with a detailed plan

of where and how she would spend her time. Monica gained a reputation among Lindsey's peers for being an unduly severe parent who restrained Lindsey's mobility severely. They rarely invited Lindsey to accompany them on errands to Nyanga Junction or on visits to friends who lived in other local communities within Manenberg. When Lindsey implored her friends to request Monica to allow her to accompany them beyond the bounds of Rio Street, even bold young women like Janap refused, claiming that "your mother is too severe. She scolds one without any reason to do so. She'll only refuse". Lindsey often found herself on the outskirts of her peer group, frequently unable to participate in conversations about a recent afternoon spent dancing in the *hok*, listening to music, or the last netball game that the Rio Rangers had played on the nearby netball field. As a result she appeared diffident and unsure of her status in the group.

At school however, she was a popular friend amongst the Xhosa-speaking girls who were newcomers to Manenberg high school – the previously coloureds-only school. A handful of coloured girls like Lindsey, who were capable of crossing linguistic boundaries with ease, befriended them and helped them settle into the new school environment. One of these young women, Xoliswa had invited Lindsey to visit her at her home in Nyanga. When Lindsey confided in me about being raped, she said that she knew that Monica would not permit her to visit her friend. Xoliswa lived across the line, in the area considered 'beyond the respectable boundaries of the local Rio community'. So, on the first few visits, Lindsey told her mother that she was going to spend the afternoon with Nazli and Nadia in their home. She was able to visit Xoliswa on a few occasions in this fashion without being detected.

On the fateful Saturday, she had spent that afternoon walking with Xoliswa in Nyanga and then at her house, chatting with some friends. When it grew dark, Xoliswa and another friend accompanied Lindsey to the pedestrian bridge at Nyanga Junction, which linked Nyanga and Manenberg across busy Duinefontein road. She said that they did not realize that they were being followed by three men until they were halfway across the pedestrian bridge, which by this time of the evening was quite deserted by the usual stream of busy shoppers. She said that she and her friends became extremely fearful and increased their pace, as they glanced over their shoulders frequently to assess whether they were gaining ground against their pursuers. At that moment, the men ran after them and held onto Lindsey and Xoliswa by their shirts, while

they struggled to break free. Their friend Zola was able to run away and call for help, while Xoliswa bit her attacker so severely on the hand that he let her go. She too ran off to find help. By this time the enraged men turned on the still-captive Lindsey and dragged her to a deserted spot at the end of the bridge. There they brutally raped her. They were disturbed by Xoliswa and Zola, who had returned with a few police officers. The rapists escaped, leaving a severely traumatized Lindsey lying half-naked in the dark. The police officers assisted her home to inform her mother. They then drove the weeping girl, her friends and her mother to the police station, where they took a statement from the young victims in turn. Lindsey said that it was not easy for her to provide the police officers with a statement because her mother constantly intervened, scolding her and reminding her about the numerous times she had been told not to leave the confines of Rio Street. She said that she felt ashamed because her mother repeatedly asked her, "What will the people say about me now? You don't listen to me! Now look what has come of your own disobedience!"

Lindsey confided in me at least three days after the rape had occurred. I was visiting the home with a friend who happened to be a health professional and who had agreed to counsel the girl briefly about HIV/AIDS. Lindsey had disobeyed the police officer's injunction not wash and to go to the district surgeon immediately. She went to the local clinic to be examined, because she feared that she would contract HIV/AIDS. The nurses there had conducted a cervical examination and had then given her a number of plastic sachets, each containing different coloured tablets that they said would prevent HIV/AIDS. Lindsey's mother Monica welcomed us into her home that afternoon, and showed us to the only two chairs in the room. She called Lindsey, whom she said spent most of her time in her bedroom. Lindsey entered the room with downcast eyes. I introduced Monica and Lindsey to Anne and told them that she had agreed to talk to Lindsey about HIV and AIDS. Monica then began telling us how the rape had occurred. As she spoke, she began weeping, repeating that "I told her repeatedly that she shouldn't go Nyanga. She doesn't know the place and the people there don't know her. Now what will people here say about me and about her? She's brought this thing upon herself". Lindsey stood against the wall silently, nervously twisting her fingers. I tried telling Monica that Lindsey should not be blamed for the rape, but she shook her head despairingly at me. She repeated adamantly that Lindsey had not obeyed her warnings and so she was to blame for her plight. Anne



and I left the despairing mother and daughter, feeling helpless about offering further advice.

Monica's concern about what the people in Rio Street would say was not unfounded. A few days later, I met Aunty Aisha sitting in her usual spot outside her gate on her upturned milk crate. After the usual exchange of greetings, we began talking about the young people in the road. This issue preoccupied most of the older people at the time, because two youths had been at the root of recent crises in the street. One incident concerned Lindsey's visit to Nyanga and the rape that had ensued. Aunty Aisha then said contemptuously, "these days they do as they please. They have no respect any longer. But when they find themselves in trouble, then they want to cry. This Lindsey of Monica's – she went to Nyanga looking for a man, and now she claims that she's been raped. Does she think that we're all so stupid? What does she want there? She knows 'we' don't go there. They will kill us there. She's just a bad one that one".

In the myth-making of the new South Africa, communities that remain separated by racial and socio-economic chasms are being sutured together in a heady mix, through powerful imagery of beer advertisements and locally-produced soap operas that reflect bodies now unmarked by race, accent and gender. These '*Coconuts*' can be seen in cosmopolitan spaces such as the Waterfront, the township shebeen or the glamorous Cape Town City centre clubs. One would expect that the bold boundary crossings of Lindsey and her attempts to reflect the practices of the cosmopolitan new South African, even in the urban periphery, would be looked upon with pride, indeed applauded. Yet in the local community of Rio Street, such boundary crossings are frowned upon, looked on with fear and considered to be the means that will unravel the moral and social wellbeing of the local communities. It seems as though such boundary crossings, as the "Stranger/Other" is sought out and now becomes the friend and neighbour, the people of Rio community will also undo the social, moral and physical boundaries through which they define themselves.

In truth it seems as though, paradoxically here in this periphery, these impoverished residents remain written into the Apartheid story of modernisation as they are unable to acquire the more substantive material aspects promised by the new South Africa, such as fixed employment, better social security, secure shelter, and as I have attempted to show in this paper, safety from gender-based violence. Poor young women's location in the new South Africa

as fully participating citizens remains tenuous, because they remain defined through 'lack'. This time however, the racial 'lack' of whiteness has become the cultural and economic lack of the ability to be empowered as consumers. They have therefore looked to their local, gendered narrative of morality with *Respectable Motherhood* at its core to sustain their self-perceptions as worthy persons. At the same time, the Rio inhabitants are also troubled by the presence of "the Other" in their midst; masquerading as the friend, the neighbour and the relative. The vocal criticisms of Monica and Auntie Aisha resonate loudly here. If they are modern and yet not modern, how do they resolve the conundrum? To look inward for the contaminating "Other" (in this case, Lindsey and her mother Monica) and to sniff them out, shame them, and ostracise them from the community. And what of young Lindsey (who so courageously tried to live the new South Africa) and of Monica? What of them, except to point out that in their pain, they did violence to themselves – Lindsey by acquiescing in self-blame and giving up on her search for justice through the legal system; and Monica, by holding her beloved, courageous daughter responsible for the shame suffered on the household.

### **And a last note from the native feminist *Coconut* anthropologist**

The production of knowledge about "Us" and "Them" in the local context, through the construction of gendered personhood and the tropes of civility indeed, must be linked to wider systems of history, of place and of discourse, through exposing implicit assumptions, and the meanings of the lacks, absences. The aim of the feminist anthropologist is to unravel the textures and the threads of these local narratives, through fine ethnography, to indicate exactly *how* these links are made to wider, universal histories as well as the diverse localities. This requires us to ask questions about the locales and the audiences for whom the knowledge is being produced as well as to interrogate our own place as 'gendered researchers' in the local context. For we too are a situated audience for whom knowledge about the local is selectively presented and we are read, quite rightly so, as mediators between spaces and can be used as unwitting agents.

Social theories are as much located in time and place as so-called emic knowledge. Put in a different way, academic narratives about gender in local contexts are emic knowledge as well. Consequently, anthropologists need to take account of the diverse and multiple contexts in which knowledge in the North and the South are produced, who produces it and to figure out

exactly whom the knowledge is about, and for which audiences it is being produced.

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## Endnotes

1. The Group Areas Act legislated race-based residential segregation in 1950 and caused the forced removal of approximately 750 000 people in urban areas between the 1960s and 1980s.
2. Foolish and uncivilised.



# Body Politics and the Crafting of Citizenship in Peri-urban Lusaka

Ann Schlyter

## Introduction

Full and active citizenship continues to be a conditional and elusive right for women in many African contexts. Globalisation, structural adjustment, and weakened states have threatened the rights that women acquired after centuries of struggle. The effects of neo-liberalism combined with policies of privatisation have proved to affect African women negatively. However, women have also taken advantage of the new political openings that occurred in the 1990s (Schlyter, 2002; Tripp, 2003). In theorising de-nationalised citizenship in our globalised context, Sassen (2002) suggests that these processes might create new spaces for women who, albeit with little power, can establish a presence in the public sphere, and through these arenas, direct claims on the state and other institutions. In Africa however, this debate appears increasingly problematic in the context of the unequal conditions not only between women and men, but also across society, between the rich and poor, and in the Southern African urban context, between residents of the formal city and those persisting in poverty in peripheral peri-urban areas.

This paper focuses on women's crafting of citizenship in George, a peri-urban area of Lusaka<sup>1</sup>, drawing from longitudinal research undertaken there over forty years, from 1968 to the present. Over this long period, I have witnessed increasing poverty. In parallel, Zambia's economy has faced a dramatic decline in living standards<sup>2</sup>. Strikingly, in recent years, improvement of the national economy has not made any tangible changes to the lives of my informants in George. At the same time, despite a discourse of rights and citizenship, residents of George are in a concrete and political sense, further from the state and access to politics than in the past. In this paper, I explore this disjuncture, focusing on its gendered dimensions. While my original studies explored everyday life in relation to housing and urban policies, for this paper I have undertaken a revised analysis of my interviews and field note

observations using the concept body politics to better understand individual women's crafting of citizenship in their homes and neighbourhood<sup>3</sup>. A handful of families among which, the families of Mrs Mwanza and Mrs Nyangu, have been long-term informants throughout my research which involved more than twenty periods of fieldwork, lasting from two weeks to two months.

In line with feminist tradition, the concept of body politics implies taking the body as an entry point for political engagement. For the purpose of this study, the analysis focuses on Zambian women's agency in the everyday negotiation of their rights and political participation in George. The concept is also useful to analyse the ways in which political discourses construct individual and collective women's bodies and how state policies create, or do not create, space for women's agency (Harcourt, 2005). The first section of the paper shows how over time, both at national and local levels, policies have restricted rather than strengthened women's citizenship and how women in the community and at national level have struggled for access to the public sphere and the political world. The second section explores the insights provided by the employment of the concept of body politics in the everyday-life negotiations through which women in George have crafted their citizenship.

### **Citizenship and gendered body politics in African contexts**

Classic liberal notions of citizenship place emphasis on the rights of individuals in relation to the state, as well as freedom from state involvement in the economy and in the family. Feminist scholars have criticised the universal notion of citizenship which, according to them, is built on a view of an abstract, disembodied individual. The assumption of equal opportunities for all citizens is blind to the gendered conditions created by the division between public and private. Women's participation in the public sphere has indeed been restricted. Equal treatment in the form of gender-neutral reforms seldom has the same impact on women as on men. Theories on citizenship therefore need to acknowledge the ways gender dynamics affect individual political participation and the impact of state policies on citizens (Philips, 1991; Lister, 1997; Gouws 2004). In this context, Miraftab (2006) suggests that the move is from an analysis of citizenship as a product of abstract rights to an understanding of citizenship "from below".

Until the last decade, research on citizenship in Africa focused on colonial legacy and post-colonial tensions between modernists with a largely liberal

notion of citizenship, and communitarians who define the ethnic group – not the individual – as the carrier of rights (Mamdani, 1996). In these debates, feminist scholars have pointed to the violation of individual women's rights that is built into communitarian citizenship through rights accruing to groups and the maintenance of customary law (Mahdi, 2006). However, modernist arguments about citizenship have been critiqued for having a masculinist and class-privileged normative subject that results in the exclusion of women on a variety of grounds, with sex being only one (Manicom, 2005).

In poor and donor-dependent countries like Zambia, debates about citizenship are often bound up in a language of 'development'. In these contexts, women's presence in the public sphere is supported through the terms of participation and empowerment. Yet, feminists have not only concluded that women and their concerns tend to disappear in the implementation of development programmes, but they have also warned that participatory development may actually silence women's voices, and confining women's political activities at community-level can be disempowering if it lacks involvement with the state (Jaquette and Staudt, 2006; McEwan, 2004). A feminist perspective indeed reminds us that definitions of citizenship need to pay close attention to the relationship between the public sphere and the everyday lived experiences in the private. Many women are restricted from entering the public sphere, and when they do, their activities tend to be classified as semi-private. In this context, Lewis (1999) notes that women's leadership tends to be conflated with family duties in ways that lead to the denial of women's public role.

Citizenship is crafted in a variety of ways; it is always gendered and situated in places and bodies (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Its body politics then is negotiated in homes and local settings as well as in relation to states and international agencies. Harcourt (2005) uses the concept of body politics in two ways. First, she refers to the feminist tradition of taking the female body as the entry point for political engagement. Second, she uses the concept body politics in her analysis of development discourses as they construct and produce women's bodies through discourse on 'women in development', 'gender and development', and women's empowerment.

I use the concept of body politics in this piece to reflect critically on the impact policies, reforms and interventions executed at various levels by institutions of the Zambian state have had on women's bodies in peri-urban areas such as George. While the concept body politics most often refers to the

power and control over women's sexuality and health, I also consider other issues which determine the most bodily qualities: a secure place to sleep, clean water, and sanitary conditions. Central to the lived experience of body politics are family politics which frame a woman's position in marriage, the control she has over her own sexuality and fertility, and over her home. This paper thus draws together two critical debates on gendered body politics and citizenship in peri-urban areas. The significance of place and local context is widely acknowledged in theory and the paper offers an empirically-grounded analysis of women's everyday negotiations of citizenship over a long period of time.

### **Women in Zambian national and local politics**

The rules and practices which determine Zambian politics – particularly which bodies have access to which political contexts and resources – have changed quite dramatically, not only with decolonisation, but also with the change from a one-party to a multi-party system with the introduction of neoliberal policies under structural adjustment, and with the ever-increasing involvement of NGOs in urban development. This section traces the ways in which the Zambian state has organised the political scene, and thereby dictated the forms in which women have crafted their citizenship. In this shifting context, I reflect on how Zambian women have struggled for a presence in the public sphere and for representation in public office. While the middle-class women's movement flourished, illiterate women in poor urban areas like George had to find new forms for their agency.

### *Colonial resistance and nation-building*

The anti-colonial movement in Zambia was successful in pursuing a peaceful transformation to independence. Women supported their men in the struggle, but the movement maintained patriarchal structures. Women who wanted to join, not just by giving support service to the men but in a public role, were only accepted by the movement if they had their husbands' consent. There were, however, exceptional women who fought for both national and bodily independence (Geisler, 2004). The colonial labour policy in Zambia, as in other countries in the region, was designed to supply mines and cities with male working bodies and to keep women's bodies in the rural areas to take care of the reproduction of the labour force. Customary law, as it developed in a dialogue between colonial power and traditional male leaders, determined the



position of women as perpetual dependents (Chanock, 1982). Since the 1950s, women were accepted in town as wives of permanently employed workers, but not as workers themselves. Criminalisation of informal shelters, beer brewing, petty trading without licence, and demonization of single women's sexuality – all contributed to keep women's bodies out of town. Many of the women who came to town found the alternative to live with a man, cook and clean for him, better than prostitution and beer-brewing (Epstein, 1981). The mutual dependency within a family group was for women in town exchanged with dependency on one man (Munachunga, 1989).

Independence in 1964 came with great expectations. People moved to cities freely and informal settlements grew rapidly. George expanded from a few construction workers' huts to a settlement of about 50,000 inhabitants in the mid-1970s. Women became citizens according to the constitution. However, customary law continued to be applied as family law, which meant that women lived with a restricted kind of citizenship. Women were allowed to vote, but once married they were not recognized as legally major persons. Women were symbolically represented as mothers of the nation and the Women's Brigade of the ruling United Independence Party (UNIP) urged women to fulfil their destiny of motherhood and condemned abortions, unmarried pregnancies and contraceptives. Uncontrolled, unmarried women were construed as a threat to society. In the early seventies the Brigade supported a campaign against unaccompanied women in public, making it difficult for women to work in the cities (Schuster, 1976). Moral codes on women's behaviour thus proved to be a major obstacle to women's full and active citizenship. The number of women leaders in party politics was too small to make an impact (Schuster, 1976; Nalumango and Sifuniso, 1998). In practice, the Women's Brigade was dominated by the wives of UNIP leaders. They mobilised market women to act as supporters of their husbands. Schuster (1976) describes the Women's Brigade as very coercive to women in the peri-urban markets. Lorries came to transport the women to demonstrations, with party organisers threatening those who did not join.

Many years later I asked Mrs Mwanza, who had been a UNIP party member, about moral campaigns and compulsory participation in dancing demonstrations. She did not remember any moral campaigns and claimed that she had always been happy to participate in demonstrations. Only to leave her compound for some hours was for her an adventure and she enjoyed the dancing and singing. She did not admit that there had been any threats, only

that some marketeers might have been reluctant to participate as they needed to attend to their stalls.

### *The one-party state and women's local organisation*

In the 1960s, Mrs Mwanza and her husband – both members of UNIP – built a small mud house in George compound. The party organised people in sections of twenty houses and each section elected a chairman, a chairlady and a youth leader. While the chairmanship enhanced the status of men, for women however, there were double messages. A chairlady was elected to represent women and she had to stand up in meetings and argue, in spite of the ruling tradition that required a moral woman to lower her eyes and be silent in front of men. Although the common men in George accepted women's participation in principle, they nonetheless wanted their wives to stay at home. Consequently, women who were heads of households were over-represented among the chairladies. They had the double burden of being breadwinners and mothers, but they were relieved from the duties of a wife to serve and obey her husband.

Mrs Mwanza attended the meetings in the party section, but she accepted the position as chairlady only after her husband had left her. As such Mrs Mwanza engaged in a variety of social activities, helping to arrange burials, organising support from the community for individual households in need, and giving advice in domestic conflicts. In the late seventies, George was legalised and upgraded in a participatory process in which the party played an important role and which enhanced its legitimacy in the area. Male leaders worked in the road planning group for instance, while the women were ascribed a mobilising role. Mrs Mwanza recalled that “we chairladies participated in mobilising people to come to the project meetings”. Women participated in the meetings and were allowed to voice their concerns, but in no record or project report have gender differences in priorities been recorded. Among my informants it was clear that women wanted water and a clinic whereas men wanted roads and street lighting.

The 1980s was a decade in which structural adjustment programmes were implemented rigorously. There was a decline in household income and access to urban services (World Bank, 1994). The removal of food subsidies and introduction of fees on school and medical services had dramatic effects in the poor urban areas. Prices rocketed, the nutritional state of children declined significantly and many people could not afford medical costs. Nationally, more

than forty per cent of children under five years suffered from malnutrition (Malatsi, 1995). In George, according to the 1990 census, one girl in five and one boy in eight had never attended school because parents could not afford the formal and informal school fees. The urban services provided during the upgrading of George were also not maintained.

UNIP lost support, as would any party that fails to deliver wealth or services. Mrs Mwanza resigned from her post as chairlady. She explained her decision: "People do not take time to go to meetings. They say that there is just talk and talk and nothing ever happens. And they are right". Nevertheless, she and many other former chairladies continued the social work they were previously undertaking, but this time on an informal basis without the support of the party. During the campaign ahead of the 1991 national election, Mrs Mwanza withdrew from all activities that could be related to the party for fear of violence (which never occurred) but also because she, albeit still loyal to UNIP, could understand that people wanted a change. The Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) won a landslide victory.

### *Women in multi-party politics*

During the years of the one party UNIP state, non-governmental organisations could not prosper, but a few such as Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD) managed to organise professional women. Although there were not many members, they were very active (Ferguson, 1995). With the promise of a democratic election in 1991, the number of women's organisations increased rapidly and in the liberal climate after the election, their numbers continued to rise. Although the women's groups lost the struggle for the legal applicability of customary law to be repealed in the new constitution in 1992, they nevertheless managed to set up and consolidate the Non-Governmental Organisation Coordinating Council (NGOCC) (Sifuniso, 2005).

While the new party, MMD initially supported women's rights, its leaders soon continued the tradition of praising caring mothers and obedient wives. Ahead of the 1991 election, under pressure from the National Women's Lobby Group, all parties declared that they supported women candidates, but in practice women candidates were badly treated. In the end, few women stood for election to parliament (Geisler, 2004). Furthermore, in the local and national elections in 1992 and 1998, women candidates were asked for the consent of their husbands and some were sexually harassed and given a variety

of labels from 'frustrated spinsters' to 'whores' (NWLG, not dated). The result was a mere five per cent women in the new multi-party parliament. Women's representation remained low in local government. Following the 2002 local government elections, only four per cent of the councillors were women. The figure increased slowly to 14 per cent in the 2004 national elections (GIDD, 2008). A proposal to reserve thirty per cent of all seats at all levels for women was rejected by the parliament (ZARD/NGOCC, 2004).

Women's difficulties were amplified as ministers, MPs or councillors in local government (Kapwepwe, 1992; Kimberly and Ferguson, 1995). A study of women in local government shows that women councillors felt that they were not treated as equals by the men in the council and as many as three-quarters reported sexual harassment. An additional problem was that women councillors reported that their spouses were not supportive of their position. A woman councillor suggested that "men support men and women also support men" (Kimberly and Ferguson, 1995:12). Women candidates were lacking support, not only from spouses and the men in their parties, but also from the public – at least it was so in George. Few men or women in this locality would vote for a woman to represent their interests at city or national level. Mrs Mwanza argued for instance, that "we poor people need a strong man to talk for us; no one listens to a woman". Nonetheless, I found a difference in attitudes between men and women in George: women informants were more positive towards women's representation than the men were.

After a massive lobbying campaign, a National Gender Policy was adopted in 1997. Continued advocacy by the women's movement with support from development agencies led to a Strategic Plan for Action for the National Gender Policy which was adopted in 2004 (SARDC/WIDSA and ZARD, 2005). All of these activities and policy discussions were however unknown to the women in George.

### *Community work and NGO involvement*

In George, people initially expected the new party to fill the local party posts of branch and section leaders. However, two years after the election, they appeared resigned to the fact that MMD did not intend to sustain neighbourhood-level community organisations. Mrs Mwanza complained: "Today there is nowhere to go and discuss our problems. Our councillor – I do not think he lives in George". There were women's groups in churches, "but no organisation for all of us around here. I miss our meetings although I still have

many good friends among the neighbours". During the one-party period, the local party organisation had functioned as the lowest level of local government – a structure in which women participated. To fill the gap that the closure of the party local branches left and to create a local partner for dialogue, the Lusaka City Council established Resident Development Committees (RDCs), which were non-party political bodies designed to coordinate development activities at neighbourhood level. Just like in the previous party organisations, men and women were elected in approximately equal numbers. The lack of trust in women's political strength and fitness for involvement in national and local government politics was obviously not evident at the community level. This can be explained by the view that work in RDCs was unpaid community work and such activities were considered to be elderly men's or women's work. For women, the RDCs provided a space in which they could participate. Yet, relatively few women were engaged. Although the one-party structure can be regarded as over-organised, with elections of leaders from every group of twenty houses, the RDC covered a huge area with many inhabitants<sup>4</sup>.

In the late 1990s, the Zambian state withdrew from responsibility for delivering services in peri-urban areas such as George. International agencies were invited to support urban services and the RDCs were supposed to help to coordinate all the NGOs within their area. When the water system in George was upgraded by the water company with support from Japanese aid, a new opportunity as tap leaders opened up for women. A tap leader had the responsibility to turn the water on and off and to collect water fees. They were allowed to keep 20 per cent of the collected sum. Hence, the work was rewarded, although the sum was too small to live on. Tap leaders are organised by the RDC – but not within the political structures – and they play a central role in the community (Carlsson and Erlandsson, 2006). In other projects, NGOs organised women to maintain urban services, to support AIDS victims and home-based carers, and to improve environmental conditions. A multitude of non-governmental organisations – both national and international – offered support to and sought support from women in peri-urban areas like George. In practice, the mainly illiterate women in George participated actively in community work organised by a variety of development organisations. In contrast, the large number of new women's rights organisations that increased in the 1990s, have been dominated by educated women resident in more affluent urban areas.

Two issues of concern to women of all classes are inheritance rights and

domestic violence. Through these issues, the middle-class women's movement managed to connect with women in George where the destitution of widows continued in spite of an inheritance law of 1989, which granted the widow twenty per cent of the matrimonial property and life-long occupancy rights of her home as long as she did not re-marry. Ten years later this law had not been applied in the Matero local courts where people in George turned to. Another five years later, thanks to campaigns by the national women's movement, the law was applied and women in George were informed about the law and their rights.

### **Body politics and the everyday negotiation of citizenship in peri-urban Lusaka**

The body is an important resource around which women strategise their life course. The first challenge is to stay healthy and alive and to do so, they have to negotiate their sexuality, fertility and family relationships. With the common view of a decent woman as submissive to her husband, a woman has to negotiate space for agency. She works for an income and for the community. Her citizenship emerges as firmly grounded in these bodily negotiations and in everyday life experience. This section draws on the re-analysis of the narratives of women in George, focussing on different aspects of these women's body politics and revealing new layers of their embodied struggle for citizenship.

#### *The living body*

In 1995, at the age of thirty-five, Mrs Nyangu separated from her husband and moved to a rented room with her three children. She took the step to leave him and an economically secure life when she found out that he was having relationships with other women. "According to custom, a wife should not complain if her husband looks for a second wife". She said, "I was angry and jealous, but should have endured if not for the risks. I want to live, to see my children grow up". Few women can negotiate safe sex within marriage. Some years later Mrs Nyangu revealed that her husband had also been violent when she refused sex without a condom as she was aware of his "playing around". She moved because she feared for her life not only because of HIV/AIDS, but also because of his brutal violence.

The most basic condition for a woman's continued agency is to stay alive, and the price for this is often sexual abstinence. However, HIV/AIDS is not the only threat to life. There are many different threats to life imposed by

the extreme poverty in which almost two-thirds of the population in George are living. Undernourished, many women are tired and have little energy to engage as active citizens. How burdensome a situation becomes depends on one's body and its health. Nonetheless, most women in George are actively engaged in household and community.

### *The sexual body*

Women's sexuality is acknowledged in the public discourse. In the early 1990s, in the files at the Matero local courts I discovered that a wife's lack of sexual satisfaction was regarded as a valid reason to divorce. At the same time the protocols revealed strong expectations on a woman, that she should endure practices like "dry sex" in order to "please the man". Girls were informed about sexuality in initiation ceremonies according to custom, although adapted to urban conditions. Mrs Mwanza confided that they were a group of women who arranged the ceremonies. "The girls are secluded in a room. Ideally the seclusion shall continue for one month; we here in town, we do it in a week. One or two of us elderly women are always with the girls teaching them how to behave and how to please a man". Girls were not supposed to ever talk about this, but some women did later in life, often critical of the message of submission in this 'training'. At forty years of age Mrs Nyangu recalled that "we learned how to move in bed and how to use herbs for dry sex, but most importantly we were told to endure pain, be patient, not to complain and above all, to show respect for our mother-in-law. Now when looking back, I can see that I learned submission and obedience which has restricted my life". A wife is not supposed to deny her husband sex; there is no legal provision for spousal rape or wilful infection with HIV/AIDS (World Bank, 2004). Until now, the law supports the view of a wife's body as the husband's property.

In the mid-1990s, when I conducted a study specifically of youth, sexual pleasure had become a life-threatening activity. But propaganda for abstinence from schools, clinics and churches did not stop youth from being sexually active, especially as young men's ideas of masculinity were strongly connected to sexual activity. While the boys boasted about "moving around", the girls in contrast denied that they were sexually active, but admitted that if they wanted to keep a boyfriend, they were often put under pressure to engage in sexual relations. Girls were restricted from moving in public space and attending meetings, especially after dark; they were not allowed by parents, or they stayed home by their own choice or, some explained, because

of fear of sexual violence. Adult women faced parallel restrictions in public either by their own choice grounded in fear or due to their husband's decree. The risk of sexual violence works to seclude women and makes many public commitments difficult to undertake.

### *The fertile body*

An urban Zambian woman in her late forties had, in the 1990s, given birth on average to seven children. More recent figures indicate a decreasing fertility rate in urban areas (CSO, 1996; ZARD/NGOCC, 2004)<sup>5</sup>. Demographers have linked high under-five-mortality rates with high fertility. In the year 2000, the under-five-mortality in Lusaka was as high as 139 in 1000 births (UNDP, 2007). Until recently in George, frequent pregnancies were neither planned nor talked about as a problem. In a marriage, a woman could not say no; children were bound to come, they were understood as given by God. The most serious problem some women entrusted in me was childlessness. Motherhood was empowering, in contrast, infertility almost always led to divorce. The clinic offered no help, so childless women were left to consult traditional healers.

Recently, after reading a report about illegal abortions, I have had to rethink my impression that in George children were always welcome. Now I suspect that abortion has been an issue withheld from me by my informants, although they discussed many other sensitive issues with me. More than 200 cases are received daily in the gynaecological department at the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka, and a third of the beds are occupied by patients with abortion-related problems (Chiwama, 2009). In general, women in George did not know that Zambia has liberal legislation that allows abortion for socio-economic reasons. When I told a nurse aid at the George clinic, she did not believe me. "We were blessed with many children", Mrs Mwanza recalled in 2006. Only during the last decade I have heard women in George speak about the benefits of spacing births. Family planning has been offered at the George clinic since 1972. However, during my visits there in 1996 there was only one NGO working with family counselling at the clinic. The organisation had no contraceptives but propagated a system of identifying "safe days". Only married women were welcome and they told me, until early 1990, only with a husband's consent.

In 2006, a nurse estimated that sixty per cent of the women in George compound used the service (Brolin and Johansson, 2006)<sup>6</sup>. Many women went to the clinic on their own initiative without a husband's knowledge, but they



feared their husband's anger if they took the contraceptive injection without his permission. Interestingly, Brolin and Johansson (2006) found no changes in power relations between husband and wife where couples used family planning. On the contrary, they suggest the reverse: husbands could make their wives take the injection and thereby retain power over childbearing.

Long periods of breastfeeding are common in George. If a sibling does not arrive, mothers may sustain feeding for up to three years. Breastfeeding without proper food however makes many mothers weak and tired. Yet, they acknowledge that it is the best way to keep their child alive. Since having fewer children would have a positive effect on women's health and free up some of their time, this could increase the possibilities for women to engage in neighbourhood and public issues. However, husbands, and not children, were singled out as the main obstacle to women's participation in the public sphere.

### *The disciplined body*

Many men in George claimed that a wife's body belonged to her husband. They did so with reference to tradition, payment of bride price and the Bible. For these men, household headship meant they were the owners of all property and in charge of all decision-making. In the 1980s, I learnt that many married women in George challenged men's interpretation of family and household headship. They saw themselves as major persons and wanted joint ownership and decision-making. At the same time, both women and men believed that violence within families increased when and because women claimed the right to share power. However, among the young men I interviewed in the mid-1990s, there were other trends of thinking as well. Some boys argued that their future wife should be their best friend and they should discuss everything and decide jointly. Most boys wanted a wife who they could consult before taking decisions, and nobody defended domestic violence in serious interviews. In informal group interviews however, boys humorously said "of course, a wife needs to be disciplined".

Young girls in George with little or no education did not openly challenge men's demand for control. However, girls in secondary school like Mrs Nyangu's daughter, had a very different attitude: "If I do not find a man who treats me as an equal, I will not marry at all". Sadly, a more recent national study found that as many as two-thirds of all women felt that a husband was justified beating his wife if she went out without telling him, argued with him, cooked

bad or late food, or refused to have sex with him (World Bank, 2004). During 2002, more than half of all Zambian women reported being beaten – most often by a husband, a former husband or partner (SARDC/WIDSA and ZARD, 2005). It is difficult to directly compare these figures, but they both reflect an ongoing gender struggle in which many women have claimed rights and many men have resorted to violence in response. “Women are getting cheeky” said a man in the early 2000s, allocating ‘blame’ to poverty that forces men to allow women to work outside the home, and to international organisations which he suggested, “put ideas in the heads of women”.

Even when a wife finds domestic violence unjustified, she has learnt to endure and never to openly complain; wives should never talk about being battered (Brolin and Johansson, 2006). “As a chairwoman it happened that battered neighbours came to me for refuge, but what could I do? Clean their bruises, and if the couple had a marriage councillor in town, I could ask him or her to talk to the husband”, reflected Mrs Mwanza. Many women have internalised the view that violence can be justified. It is not only people in George who understand domestic violence as a private issue. The Zambian penal code also does not provide for protection against domestic violence (World Bank, 2004). Under threat of violence if they are not able to combine wifely duties with engagements outside the home, the limited engagement of married women in community issues and politics thus becomes understandable.

### *The working body*

Although most married women in George are dependent on their husbands, they also work hard to generate an income. In fact, less than one in five Zambian households are headed by women, but women are the main breadwinners in a much larger number of households. The dominant view posits that a good husband earns money and takes decisions, whereas if a wife is earning, this should never be admitted in public. Incomes are seldom pooled. None of the women I interviewed in George had any notion of their husband’s salary. Most wives received an allowance from their husbands. This was however largely insufficient to properly feed the family, which was the main and symbolically important responsibility of wives.

Forty years ago, women cultivated food crops everywhere in and around the settlement. Now that land is no longer accessible because of urban growth and densification, self-grown crops have become marginal. Still, some

elderly women like Mrs Nyangu's mother, take a bus out of town and pay rent to cultivate some land. More women work long hours retailing foodstuff at the market and others like Mrs Mwanza, have a stall outside their home. Some, like Mrs Nyangu, make a better income by trading in used clothing. "Food for work" is a concept that has been used by some non-governmental organisations. A road in George for instance, was blocked with a sign "Caution – women at work". About twenty women were improving the road and digging storm-water ditches while just as many men stood around watching them. They were husbands waiting for the food delivery. When I asked one of them why he was not working, he said that "women work for food – men work for money". The problem was that there was no work for money to be found. Men's reluctance to do community work relates to their identification of unpaid work as 'women's work', and therefore as a threat to their masculine identity.

Uneducated women in George have a weak position at the labour market, but an early urban study also blames husbands for women's unemployment. "Many wives are unemployed because their husbands would not allow them to go to work for money" (Munachunga, 1989: 150). In 2006, Mrs Nyangu believed that the situation had changed somewhat, but not much since her husband still refused to allow her to seek wage employment. He had reluctantly approved of the home-based enterprise she had developed, where she bought used clothes, fixed them up and sold them. Sometimes organisations recruited volunteers and people joined in order to contribute to the community, but also with a faint hope that their work would give them a chance to find paid work. The water project, implemented in the late 1990s was one such example. For some – mostly men – the voluntary work resulted in proper employment at the water company, whereas others – mostly women – were recruited as tap leaders, which required their daily presence at the taps for a low reward (Carlsson and Erlandsson, 2006).

In spite of unsupportive husbands and the demands of housework, particularly the never-ending struggle against mud and vermin, many women found time to engage in community issues. They did not expect future jobs or money, they were just proud to do something for their community (Wiechowska, 2007). At the same time, these choices may be understood as a risk management strategy; in the absence of public social security systems, the friendships created among workmates in voluntary work complemented active networking with relatives and neighbours for mutual support in times

of crisis. Indeed, whether paid or unpaid, women work long hours for the benefit of their families and time constraints restrict their possibility to engage in community work. Nonetheless, many women still give their time for the joy of working with friends and for the good of their community. Unpaid engagement in community work is in reality a practice that constitutes women's citizenship in George.

### *The propertied body*

In their modern interpretation of custom, men in George largely consider married women to be in their custody and by default, themselves as the sole owners of matrimonial property. The only property having some value in George is people's houses. A man in a household is seen as the owner of the house regardless of how much a wife may have contributed to its construction and the sustenance of the family. Although he never contributed to the upbringing of their seven children, Mrs Mwanza was nevertheless grateful to her husband because he left his family in the house and moved to start a new family elsewhere. Mrs Nyangu had contributed to the house she and her husband had built, but had never considered claiming half of its value when she left her husband and moved to rented rooms. In 2006, she said that if her business was continuously successful, she hoped to be able to buy a house in the next two years. With ownership follows a permanence that is important for consolidating networks both among customers and neighbours. With extra rooms, she would employ someone to help wash and mend the clothes before selling them. She could also earn an additional income by renting rooms, instead of paying rent. Other women who owned houses emphasised the ensuing security in old age – they were able to offer space to a son, daughter or relative in exchange for food and some service.

Women's weak position in relation to property becomes most obvious in the destitution of widows, a phenomenon that is quite prevalent in George. Married women face insecurity because of the possibility of losing their home in cases of separation, divorce or widowhood. This could be an explanatory factor of married women's relatively low participation in community work; women living with security of tenure can be assumed to be more likely to engage work for neighbourhood improvements. However, women tap leaders in the water project contradict this assumption – most of them were heading their households, but they were renters as well as owners (Carlsson and Erlandsson, 2006). Overall, the degree to which women are active citizens

seems to be shaped primarily by husbands and not by women's status as homeowners or tenants.

### *The ageing body*

Old people are usually described as dependent and in need of care. Ultimately, people who live until a very high age reach a stage when they find themselves in need of nursing. However in George, elderly women are the providers of care. In 2006, Mrs Mwanza shared her house with her daughter-in-law and six grandchildren. Over a period of fifteen years, she had nursed her six HIV-infected daughters and had witnessed their passing away one by one. Two of the daughters had been married, but they moved back home when they needed care. In contrast, her son who also passed away, had been nursed by his wife. NGOs active in HIV/Aids care reported that "husbands do not normally look after their wives, but bring her mother or other female relatives to look after the wife. On the other hand, when the husband is ill the woman is expected to nurse him until he dies" (ZARD, 1996: 46). Mothers and wives provide care with rudimentary assistance from the clinic and from non-governmental organisations.

Many widowed women faced destitution and were forced to leave their home upon the death of their husband. Although they knew that modern law gave them the right to remain in the house, they nevertheless gave in to the claims of relatives of their husbands because they wanted to maintain good relations for the sake of the children or were afraid of being accused of witchcraft. Indeed, to be the surviving spouse or just to be old, were grounds for suspicion. In their old age women in George hoped to be served, to "sit and eat", but instead many elderly find themselves as the main breadwinners of large families that often include able-bodied sons. Like Mrs Mwanza, many old women are responsible for nursing sick family members and taking care of grandchildren. With such demands it is almost impossible to take on public responsibilities. Yet, many elderly people are active in community work. Elderly women beyond child-bearing age have more liberty to speak and move around in public, and they face much lower risks of being sexually harassed. Although elderly women often complain of a lack of respect from young people, they are listened to in structures such as the Residential Development Committees, and they are the pillars in churches and civil society organisations. Although continuously facing many demands, older women continue to participate in everyday activities as citizens.

## Conclusion

Zambian women have been made symbols of the nation, but are denied full access to national agency. They have been offered a limited form of citizenship constitutionally as well as in practice. Women who have tried to penetrate the political arena have, in many fierce ways, been reminded that their bodies are inappropriate. Although the political analysis of the first part of the paper is read through a gendered lens, a deeper understanding of women's agency and its restrictions is offered in the second part, in the reflection on women's body politics in poverty-stricken homes in George on Lusaka's peri-urban edge. Drawing on women's own reflections on their body politics and agency, I argue that many restrictions to women's active citizenship are rooted in the private sphere, shaped by patriarchal household relations, and the practical ways in which neighbourhood, city and national politics are organised. Although women's unpaid work and social networking cements community, it is not recognized as political work, neither by the state nor by women themselves. At local level the one-party system of chairladies as developed in the 1970s provided women with a space in the public sphere, although their work hardly empowered their decision-making powers beyond very local social issues. This space for agency was however lost with the introduction of a multi-party system in the 1990s, which moved politics even further from most women. Only the few peri-urban residents (men and women) elected to the Residential Development Committee maintain direct contact with the city and national state.

Today there are numerous organisations that Zambian women can join and many women undertake voluntary community work in churches and non-governmental organisations. Nevertheless, in light of women's long-term experiences in George, Sassen's (2002) argument that globalisation produces spaces with new possibilities for women appears surreal. The experiences of these women do not meet her optimistic expectation that women's "presence" in the public sphere makes possible a politics shaped by claims that are increasingly directed at institutions other than weakened national states. Rather, the middle-class women's movements have been emboldened. Their objects are both non-state institutions such as donors and international organisations and the Zambian state, to which they continuously and sometimes successfully make claims. In contrast, women in George have found space to participate in the building of their community. Through community work, they have developed a strong sense of citizenship that emphasises

contribution to the common good rather than claims on the state.

Although a woman's right to her body should be the absolute foundation on which citizenship is built, it has so far seldom been included in analyses of citizenship. In increasingly impoverished peri-urban areas, negotiations for citizenship start with women's bodies and in the private sphere in homes, where women struggle for agency through everyday negotiations within their families. With poverty, a heavy workload and duties of nurturing and nursing, women's citizenship is constrained. These realities are shaped by and reflected in men's attitudes and their power to restrict women's public engagement and active citizenship. Generalised theories of global citizenship and of women's empowerment, however, write over these harsh and challenging realities.

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## Endnotes

1. The studies have been published in a number of books, reports and articles. For a selection see Schlyter (1988, 1993, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2006).
2. The Human Development Index was lower in 1995 than in 1975. Zambia is the only country in the world to experience such a reversal of living standards (UNDP 2007).
3. When no reference is given to quotations or statements, these materials are taken from, or based on, my own field notes.
4. I do not have data of the boundaries of the RDC, but it approximately covers at least 50,000 inhabitants.
5. There are not any statistics for George specifically.
6. This figure seems high to me as so few of my informants used it, but times change fast.



# *De facto v/s de jure* Home Ownership: Women's Everyday Negotiations in Lusaka and Cape Town

Sian Butcher and Sophie Oldfield

## Introduction

Across the Southern African region, low-income housing policies almost exclusively prioritise an “ownership model”, which sees progress and development as intrinsically bound up in the production of individual, legally-sanctioned, supposedly secure and economically empowered, property owners (Blomley, 2004: xiv). Evident in its almost uniform inclusion in national housing policies and practice in many states, including Zambia (Schlyter, 1998) and South Africa (Pillay, 2008), an ownership model discursively normalizes this form of tenure (Gurney, 1999). Yet, in contrast to individualised, disembodied, legalistic notions of ownership, we argue that comparative explorations of women's everyday access to homes in two working class neighbourhoods – one in Lusaka and one in Cape Town – demonstrate that ownership is an ambiguous and contested terrain, one that is deeply gendered and relationally negotiated.

Despite very different policy and governance contexts in Lusaka and Cape Town, legal home ownership is only one of a host of factors that shape experiences, senses of security and insecurity, and perceptions and practices of home ‘ownership’. Claims to homes are asserted instead, through everyday practices, reflected in household dynamics and family sanction, as well as interactions with the state. Shaped by housing histories and memories of these experiences, access to and maintenance of homes reflect everyday economic struggles, and the negotiation of the day-to-day tasks of making ends meet.

These multi-faceted negotiations complicate any simple reading of home ownership in impoverished neighbourhoods in Southern Africa. Deceptively clear binaries that separate owners and non-owners become blurred,

challenging arguments that suggest that legal ownership is a straightforward policy and political empowerment, and exclusion from ownership its polar opposite. The following section contextualises these debates in the literature on home ownership and tenure security. The paper then turns to a rich contextual and comparative reading of the de facto practices of home ownership evident in women's everyday negotiations in Matero, Lusaka and Valhalla Park, Cape Town.

### **“Shelter or Burden?”<sup>1</sup> – The debate about home ownership**

Individually-held property rights are a key facet of Western liberal conceptions of citizenship. In an increasingly urban global context, home ownership is the main site for achieving this. The liberal values attached to home ownership are both economic and social (World Bank, 1993; Dupuis and Thorns, 1998; De Soto, 2000). A recent article in the *Economist* (2009) sums up these values concisely:

“Owning your own roof, walls and fireplace, it is thought, is good for householders because it helps them accumulate wealth. It is good for the economy because it encourages people to save. And it is good for society because homeowners invest more in their neighbourhoods, engage more in civic activities and encourage their children to do better at school than do renters. Home ownership, in short, benefits everyone – not just the homeowner – and the more there is of it, the better. Which is why it is usually encouraged by the government.”

Empirical work on ownership and tenure security critiques these simplistic popular and policy readings of ownership, illustrating how such notions fail to capture actual experiences of ownership (Gilbert, 2002; Payne, 2002; Fernandes, 2002; Home and Lim, 2004; Cousins *et al.*, 2005; Royston, 2002, 2006; Musembi, 2007; Payne *et al.*, 2008). Their findings illustrate that formalising tenure through title does not necessarily bring a sense of security or economic prosperity as title pundits like de Soto (2000) suggest. Rather, economic benefits and tenure security are much more ambiguous, and linked not only to title, but also to other more informal and neighbourhood-level factors, as well as individual perceptions of security. Building on this, Nicholas Blomley's (2004) post-colonial critique of urban regeneration uses local contestations and claims around property to think carefully about people's relationships to land, and in doing so, challenges narrow conceptualisations of legal and individual ownership.

### *Exploding easy readings of ownership*

Blomley's (2004) post-colonial discussion of the "politics of property" helps articulate this notion of relational and material claims to land and property. His aim is to challenge the hegemony of the legalistic, individualistic "ownership model" (xv) through "unsettling" ideas of property and ownership as private or public, stable, immutable, "zero-sum", and uncontested (2004: 14). Blomley illuminates the multiple, heterogeneous, and often invisible claims to land that exist in the grey space between public and private property, in his case in downtown Vancouver, Canada (2004: xv-xvi). Conceptually, he stresses the need to approach property as not only legal and material, but also relational and political (Blomley, 2004: xv). As such, "property is not a static, pre-given entity, but depends on the continual, active 'doing'" – property and its relations are actively maintained by citizens and state (Blomley, 2004: vi). These "ongoing enactments that sustain property" include both discursive practices, such as persuasive narrative-building and storytelling, and material practices, which are tangible spatial and physical interventions in and on the landscape of property (2004: 50-53). Blomley argues that these alternative claims to property are enacted, narratively and materially, by both the state and property dwellers in formal and informal ways (2004; 50-53). Finally, in relation to its political nature and the state, he regards property as a site of conflict and contestation both with the state and/or other citizens: "property is a frequent basis for political claim-making in the city, and a site of contestation" (2004: 24). Ultimately, he argues that property's relational and political landscapes are "locally *produced*" (his emphasis – 2004: 56) through material and discursive enactments and struggles.

Blomley's (re)conceptualisations of property relations and ownership resonate with resident experiences, perceptions, and performances in Matero and Valhalla Park. A heterogeneity of tenure arrangements, some within and others outside legal norms, in the hazy middle ground between public and private, are evident in both cases. Owners and tenants in these neighbourhoods constitute a diverse group, with heterogeneous relationships to property, despite shared histories of residence and tenancy in state housing, as well as broader socio-economic commonalities as 'working class' households, increasingly marginalised by economic crises, belt-tightening, and shifts in state presence. This heterogeneity of tenure experience challenges uniform readings of ownership and tenancy. We draw on these arguments to analyse women's experiences in Matero and Valhalla Park around their housing, in

relation to their tenure and economic strategies, as well as their family and neighbourhood networks.

### **Ownership in Matero and Valhalla Park: policy, perceptions and practices**

In Zambia, post-colonial housing policy has privileged individual ownership through freehold tenure in response to massive urban housing shortages in a context of high levels of urbanisation and a historically exclusive colonial housing market (Mashamba, 1997; Schlyter, 1998; Myers, 2006). Privatisation of colonial and post-colonial state housing stock by presidential decree in 1996 is one example of this drive to create home owners<sup>2</sup>. Forty years after Matero's colonial construction of housing for married, male Council workers or private employees and their families, the Zambian President's decree placed all Zambian council housing up for sale. Those Matero residents who could afford, purchased their homes at bargain prices. Tenants had no option as to whether or not they wanted to buy; ownership was assumed an *a priori* positive development for all, and no alternatives were offered. However, the deadline for purchase had to be postponed several times because many residents were not able to buy their homes.

Schlyter's (2002) work soon after the sale noted that men, the better off and the elderly disproportionately benefited from the ownership drive. Interestingly though, she notes that privatisation also made room for new residents, and better off women within these, to access housing in Matero. Houses became available, both for purchase and for rent, when original tenants either moved out to let their place for market-related rents, or sold their homes to make some money. Many residents who had rental arrears could not settle these debts to buy the house. But some found a buyer, who willingly paid enough to cover the arrears and some profit for the seller. In practice, it seems that most residents avoided eviction.

Like Matero, Valhalla Park was a neighbourhood constructed by an oppressive regime in order to control 'coloured' families' movements and lives within the city. Now with some 12,000 residents (Statistics South Africa, 2001), large swathes of rental housing define its streets and skyline, with many informal dwellings interspersed between. Also similar to Matero, Valhalla Park was a traditionally working-class neighbourhood, with residents, especially women, working in the city's textile industry or in other factories. Many women have lost these jobs as the sector opened up to global competition

in the 1990s. However, in contrast to Matero, only a minority of the state rental stock has been sold to sitting tenants in the last two decades. As part of the City of Cape Town's substantial rental stock of some 43,000 units (Hetherington, 2005: 42), Valhalla Park rental housing is technically still on sale under the terms of the Extended and Enhanced Discount Benefit Scheme (EEDBS)<sup>3</sup>. The core of EEDBS, like many of the national housing policy's other programmes (Khan and Ambert, 2003), is "secure individual ownership" (National Department of Housing, 2005: 3) through individual freehold tenure for pre-1994 tenants with a once-off capital subsidy<sup>4</sup>.

In contrast to the Zambian presidential decree, in the South African case, purchase of homes is *incentivised* through these campaigns, not enforced: tenants are given the 'choice' to purchase their homes or to remain tenants of the state. As such, the City of Cape Town (Council) remains responsible for some 1608 rental units in Valhalla Park; only 914 units have been sold off (Valhalla Park Housing Manager, 2005). The neighbourhood thus remains a predominantly Council-owned and managed area, with privately owned homes interspersed between rental stock.

As such, women's tenure experiences in Valhalla Park provide an interesting point of comparison with those in a wholly privately 'owned' neighbourhood such as Matero. To explore and compare women's negotiation of home ownership, ten women home 'owners' living in one area were interviewed in Matero<sup>5</sup>. Reflecting the mix of owners and tenants, in Valhalla Park three women home owners and seven tenants of the state were interviewed<sup>6</sup>. Structured interviews in both neighbourhoods focused on the resident women's housing and family histories, their economic experiences, and perceptions of ownership.

### *Titled owners: security of tenure and livelihood through title?*

Speaking with resident women a decade after privatisation in Matero, and 25 years since the Great Sale began in 1983 in Valhalla Park, our conversations revealed multiple and varied experiences of ownership in everyday life. For one thing, we quickly learnt that 'ownership' had not been a straightforward process for Matero residents. Namwene<sup>7</sup>, a woman in her late 20s, explained that although houses were 'sold' for almost nothing (K10,500<sup>8</sup>) in 1996, this did not include the transfer of title to the new owner. To become the titled owner, an additional and much greater sum of money had to be handed – around K300,000<sup>9</sup> – mainly for the surveying of the plot. As such, receiving

the title is financially out of reach for the majority of Matero households and only available to those economically well off. In consequence, many 'owners' do not have the legal title to their houses.

This conversation with Namwene introduced the idea of a far more qualified ownership through privatisation in Matero. Despite sharing the name 'private owner', residents' actual legal and practiced ownerships are experienced and negotiated very differently. We met only two elderly women homeowners who had the legal title to their properties, Mrs Mlozi and Mrs Chama. Both were long-term residents who had accessed their houses in the 1960s and 1970s through their husbands' tenancy and employment in the city. The two households had bought their homes during the sale of 1996 and paid for their title deeds. Both women had also been widowed and had negotiated their continued claims to the house in terms of customary and statutory law. For each, customary sanction was perhaps even more important than statutory rights, which required them to place their names on the title deed documents and to lodge their ownership with the Lusaka Council. Mrs Chama explained:

"Because this house used to be for my late husband, when my husband died [...] relatives asked me, 'what do you want from this house?' I said, 'no, I just want to raise my children here! That was it [...] They said I should keep this house to raise my children [...] I even went to court and I signed the papers saying this house is for my children, it's for me [...] I was blessed."

Security of tenure for Leticia Chama was less reliant on a state-produced document than the outcome of customary negotiations with her late husband's family. However, despite having customary and legal rights to the house, livelihoods and access to services are much more tenuous for the Chama household than the Mlozis. Even when owners have access to title, rights to the property and economic prosperity are not automatic or straightforward.

In Valhalla Park, women legal owners were in even greater the minority. In the research process we met three, all of whom had gained ownership through different schemes at different times. Aunty Lorain had bought the house first with her husband through a purchase scheme in the early 1980s and had just finished paying off the house at the end of 2007. The second owner was Aunty Theresa, who lived alone in a large house that her husband bought in a rent-to-buy scheme in the late 1980s; she inherited the house when he died. Aunty Marlene, the third owner, bought her house with her husband in 1997



under the Discount Benefit Scheme: she has been the sole owner since his death, and continues to reside there alone.

All these women were over 60 years old and had gained ownership of their homes either jointly or solely through their husbands. As in Zambia, ownership of, as well as access to, state public housing has often been limited to a particular generation. To purchase a home required a steady income. Owner households were thus more economically secure than the tenants interviewed – not necessarily because of their home ownership, but because of their, or their husband's history of formal, secure employment. However, with the death of their husbands and retirement, some of the owner households have faced greater income insecurity, although mitigated to some extent through state pensions, small home businesses (such as Aunty Theresa's tuck shop) and help from their children. Women home owners all reiterated the stress of maintaining the house as private owners. Nonetheless, owning the home also had positive associations for each of them: a sense of accomplishment, freedom from rent, and independence from the rules of others. Here there are distinct differences in attitude across generations: Aunty Theresa placed a high premium on knowing that the house is "your place" when one owns, while her daughter saw owning a house as a useful economic asset that can benefit the family through re-sale. Generally though, ownership was seen as useful in that one does not have to pay rent or live under someone else's thumb<sup>10</sup>.

As such, means to ownership, as well as experiences of it, are differentiated in Valhalla Park. Similarly in Matero, legal ownership is not a homogenous experience, nor a widespread one. The vast majority of women we met in both neighbourhoods were not legal owners of their homes. However, the narratives shared by these non-owner women demonstrate that it is not only legal owners who experience tenure and economic security: *de facto* experiences are far more blurred across *de jure* relationships to property.

### *Untitled and tenant narratives: challenging notions of title as singular route to security*

In Matero, six out of ten women explicitly told us they did not yet have the title deeds in their possession; others were concerned about security and did not want to commit one way or the other. This group included long-term residents and newcomers, old and young owners, better off and poor households. Some of the untitled 'owners' however, were very secure in their

tenure, such as the long-term resident and relatively well-off matriarch Mrs Bwaanga. Although she had purchased her house under the privatisation scheme as the named sitting tenant at the time, she did not have title to the house. She has nonetheless applied. As a receptionist for 20 years, she was able to afford the expensive titling process. Although she is still waiting for these official markers of her ownership to come through, Mrs Bwaanga seemed content. She is a true matriarch even if she is no longer a breadwinner; she told us she was “the head of the house, and the decision maker”. Mrs Bwaanga did not see herself leaving that house, certainly not to return to the rural areas. She was proud of all that her family had accomplished on the property and has plans for the future.

In contrast, her daughter-in-law Sarah, also residing in the house, expressed none of the same security, despite being the wife of the oldest son, the ‘man of the house’, who has a good job. Rather, her insecurity relates to her customary position as daughter-in-law. According to the custom of their clan, inheritance follows the ‘womb’: matrilineal property and possessions are passed down to daughters, not sons, and certainly not daughter-in-laws. As such, Sarah’s future in the household is tenuous. Despite the relative prosperity of the house, there are definite inter-generational tensions over inheritance of the ‘family house’. Economic security does not necessarily lead to legal or perceived security of tenure for everyone in the house, especially in relation to customary law. In this case, even though the Bwaangas had enough money to purchase the title deeds, Council had not produced the documents.

Some of the other untitled owners we met were far more economically insecure than the Bwaangas. However, this did not necessarily mean they were insecure in their tenure. For example, Natasha and her grandmother were faced with such great everyday needs that their legal tenure security was the last thing on their mind. Natasha’s grandmother explained:

“At least now life has become much lighter, since we now have a house, so we have no problems. I just suffer with other things not housing, now I don’t have to pay rent [...] I just had other problems like livelihood and how I am going to live my day to day life [...] My son is dead and the younger son of mine is also dead: they have taken away my children who could look after me [...] That’s life right there.”

Similarly, Margaret Chimuka, a widow responsible for some 15 dependants, does not have title to their relatively newly and informally purchased house. Since the death of her husband, concerns about her legal tenure status are

secondary to the pressing economic and service demands of the enormous household, in the face of very little state support.

In Valhalla Park, legal owners are also a minority; most families (women and men-headed) continue to rent their homes from the Council. Many residents cannot afford to buy, even under the current subsidy regime, because of their unsettled rental and service arrears. A local activist, Nadia, explained:

"They didn't encourage us to buy these houses in the first place when we first moved in here, otherwise it shouldn't have been where it is today. We are so in arrears that we couldn't get out of it [...] I'm talking about each and everybody in Valhalla Park – the people are so in arrears that they couldn't move out of it [...] you can try now for life, but you won't get out of it, unless the council take it away, and there you start a new beginning – that's how it is."

Reasons for these amassed arrears range from politically-motivated rent boycotts against the apartheid regime in the 1980s (Swilling *et al.*, 1991; Oldfield, 2002); to the economic squeeze most households find themselves in thanks to deepening unemployment. Accrued arrears render the purchase of a home through the state's subsidy impossible for many. It is only the more affluent in the neighbourhood, those with multiple breadwinners and stable incomes (and husbands!), who have been able to gain ownership through the state's scheme.

Despite high-levels of arrears, evictions by the City Council from Valhalla Park's rental stock are currently few and far behind thanks to strong local mobilisation and civic organising since the 1990s (Oldfield and Stokke, 2006). In consequence, despite their arrears, many tenants feel relatively secure in their tenure for the time being, at least in relation to *Council* eviction. This is not to say that Council has lost its *de jure* rights of eviction, it still exercises these powers in other areas. Rather, the frequency of eviction in Valhalla Park has decreased over the last decade, as the community has mobilised increasingly to engage council and to oppose evictions (Oldfield and Stokke, 2007). Instead, Council has found other, less inflammatory ways of encouraging rental payment from tenants.

The women tenants we met made claims to their homes in various ways. Some were very secure in their tenure, and viewed themselves as *de facto* 'owners', such as Aunty Joanie and Sharifa. As a poor pensioner, Aunty Joanie was not economically stable, but still felt relatively secure in her tenancy. Having lived in Valhalla Park for 33 years, she believes she has a strong claim

to this place. Despite her arrears and lack of income to pay rent in the future, she was clear: she would be in Valhalla Park until the end of her days. On the other hand, Sharifa is a prosperous entrepreneur with a booming house shop, who only recently started renting her house. Although she is reasonably secure in terms of both livelihood and perceptions of tenure presently, these developments are quite recent. Sharifa and her family have been evicted multiple times in the past and struggled economically after she lost her job in a textile factory. Tenure security as a tenant can thus quite easily change over time. While Sharifa may be technically able to buy her house, purchase is not a priority at present because ownership would not necessarily improve their tenure situation, and could just be an unnecessary burden in terms of maintenance.

Other women tenants did not have such secure experiences, for example Gadija and Rose, both recently widowed and now without livelihoods. Interestingly however, Gadija and Rose's income insecurities do not necessarily translate into tenure insecurities: they are worried about how to meet their daily needs but not about being thrown out of their houses. Since losing her husband's disability grant which was her sole source of income, Gadija is concerned about paying for services and food but not about rent. She does not foresee having to leave her council-owned home for non-payment. Another long-term Valhalla Park resident, Rose relies on an employed daughter since her artisan husband passed away the previous year; they have not paid the rent since his death. There is a possibility that her late husband's debts will be scrapped by Council, making purchase an option. When asked if she would buy the house if that happened, she replied: "it is useless to buy the place, because if something broke then you have to pay someone to come and fix it". Thanks to strong community structures and mobilisation, these women may not be dependent on men for their tenure security, but because they have to meet day-to-day costs for food, services and maintenance of homes, their loss of jobs in the textile industry and their status as widows has affected them and their families keenly.

In some cases, women tenants experienced both income and tenure insecurity: Yolanda, a community activist who lives in a small council house with ten other people, was very vulnerable. Following her mother's death, she has been embroiled in a family dispute over the tenancy. She also has little regular income, which means she is unable to settle the arrears which have accrued due to non-payment of rent, and buy the house herself. The

household has been protected from eviction and service cut-offs by the community organisation, the Civic, for the last decade. Combined with perpetual income insecurity, these factors meant that Yolanda did not perceive herself as an 'owner' of her home as some of the other tenants.

Overall, the diversity of tenancy experiences challenges us to move beyond the generalising category of 'tenant'. Women shared different histories of accessing home and making it their 'own' and of relating to men in their lives, and their means to providing for their families in formal and informal ways. Through Sharifa's, Aunty Joanie's, and Rose's narratives, we also leave behind the dominant representation of tenants as always tenure insecure and eviction-threatened, although at certain junctures they have faced these problems. Rather, issues of tenure, livelihood, and relationships become intertwined, mutually constituting and complicated in the re-telling of these women tenants' narratives. We cannot speak easily of in/security of tenure without thinking about in/security of livelihood and the complexities of households and their histories.

### *Claims to ownership beyond title: customary sanction and solidarity narratives*

In both contexts there are other factors beyond legal title which affect lived experiences of ownership and challenge modern bureaucratic definitions of property ownership. Local understandings and claims to ownership and property are articulated through a variety of means, of which title deed is only one particular claim. In Zambia, customary sanction of one's relationship to property is very important, as mentioned earlier in relation to Mrs Mlozi and Mrs Chama, as well as the Bwaangas. Women we met used the notion of the 'family house' to protect their and their children's claims to the home when negotiating with the deceased husband's extended family. Some women were determined to put the house on the names of all of their children to prevent relatives from taking over the house. Others wanted to put it on their daughter's name instead of their sons' to prevent daughters-in-laws from evicting them or their other children in the future. Thus, the 'family house' was an important strategy in women's property 'work' in Matero. For some, this was the case even if they already had statutory rights through title to the property. In a number of instances, customary permission and the approval of relatives outweighed state and legal endorsement of residence<sup>11</sup>. Negotiating inheritance was also a source of real concern for young people, regardless

of their statutory claims to housing. As they occupy lower positions in the family status chain, young people in Matero are often heavily dependent on the ‘family house’ for shelter, and thus reliant on older relatives’ goodwill in sharing their housing with them. Generational tensions over scarce urban housing have also been exacerbated by the realisation that through privatisation, elderly residents – now owners – have no plans to return to the rural areas as was often the practice in the past (Musonda, 1996).

In Valhalla Park, in contrast, customary rights to land and housing were not an issue. Rather, *perceptions* and narration of perceived entitlements to housing play a similar role in destabilising legal rights to property. Many tenants (and owners as well) spoke of how they had paid for their houses many times over through rental payments during the last three decades, such that they consider themselves the rightful ‘owners’ with or without title. Aunt Gerty explained this:

“We [are] paying rent and paying rent [...] and we [have] been living in the house for so long, and when’s it going to be ours, and why must we still buy it? We’ve already paid for our houses!”

Residents also draw on history and memory to explain their entitlement. Valhalla Park’s origins as an Apartheid dumping ground for forcibly removed coloured families in the 1970s feature prominently in these narratives. The women residents explained how they arrived in this “raw” place and built it into the neighbourhood and community<sup>12</sup> it is today. Through new formal and informal construction and investment, setting up businesses and social structures, residents have made Valhalla Park home. The collective memory of creating the neighbourhood from nothing, combined with decades of rent payments, reinforce local attitudes of entitlement to what are technically Council-owned houses. Women’s statements about never leaving Valhalla Park – ‘staying put’, or wishing to be carried out from their homes in coffins – appeal to their strong discursive and collective, if not legal, right to their houses.

### *Enacting ownership: home investment and community mobilising*

Titled and untitled owners as well as non-arreared and heavily-arreared tenants in both neighbourhoods also act on their (perceived) ownership in everyday practice, physically investing in their homes and mobilising around their rights to different degrees. Home investments in Matero and Valhalla Park act as one particularly tangible gauge of how residents assert their security of tenure.

Home investments are evident across tenure types and even economic groups to some extent. In both neighbourhoods, home investments are not so much contingent on official approval as they are on available economic means. Official approval is a costly and time-consuming undertaking in both settings and nearly impossible for tenants in Valhalla Park who are not supposed to alter Council property. Authorisation is therefore considered irrelevant by most. Of course, there are a few residents, particularly in Matero where there are no strong community structures, who have not illegally extended for fear of state reprisal. However, many residents in both neighbourhoods have made illegal additions to their home when they have had the economic opportunity to do so. There are also others who have not extended because they do not have the financial means, not because they are awaiting state permission.

In Matero, illegal extensions speak strongly to the absence of the state: while legally the state can discipline this illegal building, in practice residents effectively do what they like because the state has few powers of surveillance or reprisal (although the latter is debatable). As Mrs Dzonzi said, “Renovations – those have to be approved by Council – they don’t want any building happening without them knowing. But in Matero, they can’t see everything, so people just do their own thing”. She went on to say that “If possible, I would like to extend it – but there is no cash”: for her and many others, home investment is dependent on her and her household’s financial circumstances. In Valhalla Park, illegal home investments, particularly by tenants on Council property, bear witness to long-term *de facto* claims to these houses, and their protection through community structures and in some instances, personal relationships with Council officials and local politicians. Aunty Gerty explained that:

“People are even building on [...] they’re doing just what they like as if they’ve already bought the place, they don’t mind [...] Before they [Council] used to [demolish] [...] but as I said, we’ve got a lot of say now.”

In spite of the illegality of these home investments, Valhalla Park residents have little fear of demolition of renovations or of eviction by the state. As such, home investments are a physical testament to residents’ perceptions of rights to their houses as well as their economic histories, more than evidence of any state authorisation or a particular tenure status.

In Valhalla Park, community structures and mobilisations are another site through which ownership is claimed and enacted. Mobilisations are not so much claims about individual properties (although at times specific

interventions around evictions have been organised), but function more largely to assert ownership over the collective neighbourhood and decisions about its future. These mobilisations have also been mythologised to some extent, like the creation story of the neighbourhood: residents remember and refer to past interventions such as occupying the bathrooms of public buildings when the state did not provide water, illegally reconnecting residents' electricity connections at night, and staging lengthy sit-ins and blockades at the homes of evictees. These memories serve to reinvigorate activists and shore up their claims to these houses and streets: 'we built this neighbourhood, we fight for its citizens' rights, ergo we claim ownership of this place'.

Through strategising around customary sanction in Matero and around the invocation of rights to council property in Valhalla Park, security of tenure is complicated: it is not simply a matter of title deeds and legal approval. Family leaders' permission, neighbours' and community collective solidarity as perceived owners, for instance, overshadow technical legal rights in these contexts.

### **Comparative ethnographies: a lens on women's everyday negotiation of ownership**

Women's tenure security and claims to ownership are not straightforward functions of legal title, customary approval, or economic liquidity in a household. Simple dual categorisations of 'owner' or 'non-owner' fail to capture lived experiences in either place in this study. For titled, untitled and tenant women, rights to houses are not embodied neatly in legal documents, because practices and performances of property are shaped by shifting economic realities and lived through relationships – in households, with relatives, in community, and between residents and state officials, in Valhalla Park especially. Legal recognition of ownership does not automatically and exclusively translate therefore into a sense of tenure security and any assumed notions or performances of ownership.

Through a comparative conversation between Matero and Valhalla Park's resident women's narratives, multiple and blurry relationships to property emerge: owners and tenants are not neatly defined by their *de jure* legal status, sense of tenure security or economic status. Rather, *de facto* experiences speak to how perceptions and performances of property are shaped by relational, political and economic dynamics. Available funds, family dynamics, political mobility, and memory all mediate women's relationships to homes and



property. The women we visited also act on their perceptions of entitlement or ownership discursively, collectively, and materially via the ‘family house’, investing in the home, and community mobilising.

As such, the assumed benefits of legal, individual ownership (as proposed by De Soto (2000) and colleagues) are challenged by everyday practice in Matero and Valhalla Park. Rather, as Gilbert (2002), Fernandes (2002), and Blomley (2004) argue, perceptions and performances of ownership and claims to property are not solely shaped by an individual’s legal tenure status. A sense of ‘ownership’ quite outside the law can be engendered by social and kin networks and their sanction; available economic means to assert property claims; pervasive narratives of rights to a place; and community mobilisation to stake out those claims. It is only by approaching gendered and generational negotiations of housing and property at the “scale of experience” (Masuda and Crooks, 2007: 258), that we are able to explore these dynamics.

Women’s negotiation of housing and home-building in both contexts reflect the “situated material practices, the constitution of identities and relations of power in the multiple, inter-connected arenas of everyday life” (Hart, 2002: 818). Such “critical ethnographies” are important “*not* as case studies of the ‘impact of globalisation’ but as windows on constitutive processes, and as a means for reconfiguring understandings and practices” (Hart, 2004: 97). Through ethnographies of ‘understandings and practices’, feminist analyses can:

“reject [...] simplistic generalizations that cast globalization [and privatisation] as either totally victimizing or completely liberatory and [...] illuminate [...] the subtle ways in which power relations, interdependencies, negotiated constructions of femininity and masculinity, and multi-layered politics of difference constitute the everyday politics and realities of globalization” (Nagar et al., 2002: 275).

Ultimately, women’s everyday negotiations of home ownership in Matero and Valhalla Park challenge us to engage with the gendered *de facto* everyday realities in Southern African cities such as Lusaka and Cape Town.

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## Endnotes

1. Article title in *The Economist*, April 19th, 2009. Notably, this article actually questions the argument that home ownership is necessarily positive in the wake of all the foreclosures and relocation necessitated by the recent economic recession.
2. In 1996, President Chiluba issued various proclamations in which city councils were to offer sitting tenants of 20 or more years the chance to buy their homes for extremely low prices, in a bid to "empower" Zambians through home ownership (*Times of Zambia*, 1996).
3. This policy has been re-launched multiple times and in different forms over the last two decades. See Parnell (1991) for more on the earliest version, the Great Sale in the 1980s.
4. Criteria for this include: tenancy from before 1994; no previous housing subsidy from government; and most importantly, no outstanding arrears, either in rent, water or electricity if they wish to access the full subsidy (National Department of Housing, 2005).
5. Interviews were conducted in November and December 2007 by the first author and Milumbe Kapopo, a Zambian University of Cape Town honours student whose research also focused on Matero. Multiple visits and an in-depth interview

were conducted with women in a small area of Matero. Interview contacts in the area were initiated through Dr Schlyter's introduction to two of her research informants from her research on housing privatisation in Matero (2002).

6. A community activist, Gertrude Square (Aunty Gerty) facilitated meeting and interviewing women residents from various sections of Valhalla Park in the first part of 2008. A formal interview was conducted with each resident by the first author, with other informal visits after.
7. All participants' names, except for Aunty Gerty's, have been changed for confidentiality.
8. 'K' stands for Zambian Kwacha, the name of the currency unit. At that time, 90,909 Zambian kwacha (K) was equal to \$1 USD (December 1995).
9. In November 2007, K550=R1.
10. Despite the assumptions in some de Soto-inspired literature, the interviewees did not discuss their houses as an asset through which to access finance, primarily because loans require not only the house as collateral, but also a stable income flow.
11. See UN-Habitat (2005) and Arnfred (1996) on gender, customary law and property in Zambia.
12. We use this term 'community' as it is invoked by residents in Valhalla Park, not to claim any kind of reified status for this group of people in terms of their collective identity in sharing this space and its politics.



# "Marobot neMawaya" – Traffic Lights and Wire: Crafting Zimbabwean Migrant Masculinities in Cape Town

Netsai Sarah Matshaka<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Since 2000, Zimbabwe's multiplex challenges linked to interlocking political and macro-economic dynamics have generated economic hardship, perpetual uncertainty and vulnerability. Amongst other things, these conditions have produced a new wave of emigration from Zimbabwe, particularly to neighbouring countries such as South Africa. In the post-Apartheid context, migrants have met restrictive immigration regulations and those from other African countries experienced social hostility towards them<sup>2</sup>. Although Zimbabweans from all levels of society have joined the post-2000 wave of migration and face widely varying experiences, for many, the often marginalising context of migration has been aggravated in South Africa by limited access to socio-economic opportunities, curtailed further by struggles for legal recognition in South Africa<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, like other African migrants in South Africa, many Zimbabweans seek alternative livelihood avenues to adjust to the new and changing circumstances of their lives.

In this paper, I focus on young Zimbabwean men relocating to 'working class' townships on the Cape Flats<sup>4</sup> in Cape Town and who make a living from street trade and craft, predominantly the making and selling of wire and bead art at traffic lights in the affluent suburbs of Cape Town. Drawing from narratives derived from qualitative research, I discuss the ways in which the current wave of young Zimbabwean traders imagine and negotiate their gendered identities in this new space. I examine how the young men juggle the complex gendered and gendering experience of migration and relocation, and the centrality of the making and trading of wire and bead craft in shaping how they position themselves within prevalent discourses, through which they make sense of themselves in this marginalising context.

To consider the changing identities of migrant men who are part of the post-2000 migration wave from Zimbabwe to South Africa, I contextualise this research in the literature on gendered identities and migration. After a brief methodological discussion, I examine work as a marker of manhood and how the alternative livelihood option of craftsmanship is constructed within this context. I then discuss the competing and shifting versions of masculine ideals that these young men juggle with. In the final section, I argue that the migration experiences of these young men present them with the opportunity to recreate and construct ideals of masculinity that eventually allow them to cope with the marginalising and often hostile context. At the same time, I demonstrate that reconstructed masculinities allow them to meet other markers of adult manhood which play a key role in shaping their migration experience.

### **The gendered experience of migration**

Literature on social identity suggests that identities are flexible and malleable, arguing that the multiple aspects of 'cultural' and self-identity are fluid and shaped by lived experiences (Ghaul, 1994 – cited in Mtebule, 2001). Feminist theorists of identity have also demonstrated how notions of gendered identity are negotiated and performed differently across historical and spatial contexts, intersecting with other axes of social difference such as age, ethnicity and citizenship status. In parallel, a growing body of 'critical men's' studies has shown that like femininities, masculinities are diverse and dynamic, and should not be considered as belonging in one fixed way to one group of men (Mtebule, 2001; Morrell, 2001). Robert Connell's 1987 and 1995 work for instance, has been seminal in authoritatively developing an approach that understands masculinities as personal and social constructs (Morrell, 2001; Reid and Walker, 2005). His work pointed to the multiplicity and variation of masculinities, the ways in which they encompass issues of race, class, sexuality, and geographic location, among other social aspects (Mtebule, 2001).

In recognition that the process of social identity construction is context-dependent and situation-specific, there has been increasing cognisance within scholarly work that the experience of moving from one geographical context to another is central to identity construction (Camino and Krulfeld, 1994; Adibi, 2003), an observation critical for migration studies. Migrants find themselves renegotiating and at times, reinventing identities and meaning in their lives as they respond to the culture and conceptions of the dominant



society where they have resettled (Camino and Krulfeld, 1994: VIII). Central within these transitional processes of forming, retaining, negotiating and regenerating identity (Adibi, 2003), are changes to gendered scripts of performance and relationships. The experience of migration brings about opportunities, and sometimes drives change as migrants negotiate different conceptions of masculinity, femininity and appropriate gender roles across spatial contexts (Krulfeld, 1994: 72). Also useful in understanding these young Zimbabwean men's experiences is work on the ways in which gender identities are 'performed' in everyday life. Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) work points to the performativity rather than the fixity of identity (Nash, 2000). Her theory of performativity stresses practices which enact identities that are set apart by gender, class, sex and 'race'.

While post-structural work on identity provides a dynamic and innovative set of debates in which to frame young Zimbabwean men's experiences in Cape Town, in the migration literature, the inclusion of women in the study of migration made evident the ways in which men's experiences and differences in masculinities historically had not been explained nor theorised in the context of migration (Morrell, 1998). Men's experiences of migration have generally been treated in essentialist terms and have often not been explored as gendered experiences. In the Southern African context, although work has been carried out on male gender identities in the historical contexts of internal and cross border labour migration<sup>5</sup>, there has been silence on the gendered nature of contemporary male migrant experiences in the region<sup>6</sup>. There is an extensive body of work on post-Apartheid migration to South Africa and literature that focuses on the experiences of informal women cross-border traders (Muzvidziwa, 2001). Little has however been done to investigate the particular ways in which migration is breaking down, recreating (Morrell, 2001) and articulating masculinities for this recent wave of mostly male African migrants<sup>7</sup>.

It is against this backdrop that I bring together theories of masculinities and gender identities with an existing body of literature on gender and migration to explore Zimbabwean migrant men's negotiation of identity in Cape Town. I analyse the relationship between the transitional experience of migration and socially-constructed and shifting identities of masculinity, and I argue that the migration experience surfaces shifts in existing conventional masculinities (Morrell, 1998). Exploring the particular conditions under which masculinities are formed in the context of migration highlights the gendered implications of

changing socio-economic climates brought about by population movements. Varying experiences and shifting gendered identities offer key insights into the everyday lived realities of migrant men, in which gendered scripts of performance are constructed and negotiated, offering through this analysis new ways of imagining masculinity (Ouzgane and Morrell, 2005). Through discussion of the experiences of this particular group of Zimbabwean men as migrants and traders, I explore in the following discussion how they performatively produce and reproduce gender in the context of their everyday crafting and trading of wire and bead art in Cape Town.

### **Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa: a changing history**

The long history of migration between Zimbabwe and South Africa dates back to pre-colonial times and reflects changes in the regional political economy. Sisulu *et al.* (2007: 554) posit that “the labour needs of the South African industry ensured that in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it was virtually a rite of passage for young men in colonial Rhodesia to have a stint in South African mines”. This labour migration, mostly by men as contract mine workers and migrant workers on commercial farms, decreased after Zimbabwe became independent (Southern African Migration Project, Public Opinion Survey Project 1997 – cited in Dodson, 1998). In the post-Apartheid period however, female cross-border traders oscillating between the two countries constituted the largest number of migrants (Southern African Migration Project Public Opinion Survey Project, 1997<sup>8</sup> – cited in Dodson, 1998). In addition to this regular flow of cross-border traders, migration from post-independent Zimbabwe to South Africa has also been described in waves. The first wave consisted of white ‘Rhodesians’ who left the country after the first majority elections in 1980, followed by the wave of Ndebele immigrants who fled the massacres that took place in the south-western parts of Zimbabwe between 1983 and 1987 (Sisulu *et al.*, 2007: 554; Pigou, 2004). The multi-layered crisis in Zimbabwe in the last decade has changed the character of Zimbabwean migration to South Africa, with increasingly large influxes from the different spheres of Zimbabwean society

There are no reliable figures for the number of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa given the circulatory migration process, the high level of undocumented and ‘unauthorized’ cross-border entry, as well as the reliance on deportation figures. The media and advocacy groups estimate of three to five million people, as opposed to the approximately one million legal and

illegal migrants, suggested by the few scientific studies that have been carried out (Makina, 2007). Others estimate that three to four million Zimbabweans have left the country in the last decade for different destinations (Sisulu *et al.*, 2007). These wildly varying figures are accompanied by often sensationalist headlines such as “*Zimbabwe: Refugee Crisis as Citizens Rush to Leave Their Country*” (Nyathi, *The Nation*, 2007) and “*Zimbabwean Refugees pour into SA*” (Hawker *et al.*, *Cape Argus*, 2007).

Nonetheless, the increasing number of Zimbabweans migrants reflects the interlocking political and economic challenges facing the country, including a shrinking economy, hyperinflation, widespread shortages of goods as well as local and foreign currency. As a result, many Zimbabwean businesses have closed, leading to retrenchments and contributing to an increasing high level of unemployment<sup>9</sup>, and the increasing impoverishment of the Zimbabwean populace. The condition of the large proportion of structurally unemployed people, who are earning their living from insecure informal sector activities such as petty and currency trading, has been further compromised by continual government clampdowns<sup>10</sup> and harassment by state agents. It is in this context that migration to other countries through regular or irregular channels has become the most practical option for a significant proportion of Zimbabweans. The politicisation of the crisis makes it difficult to distinguish between economic and political motivations for migrating. Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa no longer fall under the rubric of itinerant traders, labour or professional migrants. They now include overlapping categories of those ‘seeking economic relief’, fleeing from a deteriorating social situation (which includes declining health, sanitation and other key services), and those fleeing politically motivated organised violence and torture in the post-2000 period<sup>11</sup> (Pigou, 2004).

A significant fraction of this current wave of migrants to South Africa are young men who are moving to the South African context in larger numbers and for more prolonged periods than previously recorded in post-Zimbabwe’s independence (Makina, 2007). Studies carried out by the Affirmative Action Project at the University of Zimbabwe reported that young men at the University found “themselves increasingly marginalised in the economy and polity of Zimbabwe”, and that their alienation resulted from growing un- and under-employment which has led to their economic marginalisation (Gaidzanwa, 2001: 3). Masculinity “bears the marks and characteristics of the history which formed it”, and it is in this context of the economic decline

in Zimbabwe and negative attitudes towards African immigrants in South Africa<sup>12</sup> that the masculinities of young Zimbabwean migrant's masculinities are challenged (Ouzgone and Morrell, 2005). The remainder of the paper examines the nuances that shape the way that gendered identities and interactions are being played out for young Zimbabwean traders in Cape Town.

### **Researching gender identities and building “masculinity-narratives”**

Like many other Zimbabwean migrants, the men that took part in this research are in South Africa because of the political crisis and economic downturn in Zimbabwe. By describing themselves as ‘stationed’ in South Africa, these long-term migrants distinguish themselves from other Zimbabwean handicraft traders in South Africa who oscillate between both countries<sup>13</sup>. However they still conceive this to be a temporary migration situation, regularly referring to a future date when they will return home. They ranged in age from 19 to 30 years and had lived from six months to over five years, mainly in the working class townships located on the fringes of the Cape Town. Central to all was their identity as workers, particularly as street traders. Attaining this traditional marker of manhood of work has become possible in Cape Town through the crafting and sale of wire and bead art.

The primary field site for the research was a major intersection in a well-off suburb in Cape Town where many Zimbabwean traders sold goods, wire and bead art in particular. Field work comprised of participant observation which involved “hanging out” (Bhavnani, 1994) and casual conversations with the young men, sharing their work environment, as well as informal group discussions. In addition, individual interviews were carried out with identified key informants to discuss more fully personal histories of migration and experiences in Cape Town, their entry into and experiences of trade, their living space and household composition in Cape Town, their social lives and relationships, as well as future plans. This qualitative approach allowed me to engage with the fluid and transformative nature of the lived experiences and gendered identities of these migrant men. The research process allowed me to observe how the young men negotiated and articulated their gendered identities among peers as well as with other men and women (positioned differently in the South African context by class, ‘race’, nationality and geographical location). In addition, my own position as

a Shona-speaking young Zimbabwean, occupying a gendered body different from my informants<sup>14</sup>, proved to be an interesting site for data generation and co-creating knowledge with my informants. My gendered female body was often used as site for constructing and co-constructing masculinities, facilitating construction of “masculinity-narratives” and a relational analysis of gender and identity.

In the remainder of the paper I discuss the experiences of migration and relocation in Cape Town of these Zimbabwean migrant men. I consider some diverse versions of masculine ideals that emerged and how they used these to assert themselves while coping and countering negative stereotypes.

### **Workers and achievers: The ‘marobot’ [traffic light] street traders**

Robert Morrell (1998) has demonstrated how colonialism “created new and transformed existing masculinities” within the African context, as work in mines and in service jobs became an important marker of masculinity of the newly created African working class. Over time African urban life and black masculinity incorporated work as a central feature of its identity, constructing formal paid employment as an empowering ideal which is now an integral part of adult male experience, closely linked with the achievement of other valued forms of adult masculinity.

However, the centrality of salaried employment as a marker of adult masculinity in the region has been increasingly countered by limited opportunities for employment. Economic downturn in Zimbabwe, characterised by deindustrialisation and high unemployment, has meant that a significant number of young men have been left in a lurch. When describing their history, a number of the young men discussed how they were unemployed over extended periods due to limited opportunities for employment after completing high school. Those who had managed to secure employment in the formal labour market also pointed to the limitations of formal employment. These they discussed in relation to job insecurity due to increased downsizing and company closures, as well as meagre and declining salaries in a context of hyper inflation as one young man described during an interview:

“the money was insufficient considering that things are going up on a daily basis. But your salary does not increase, it is unwavering [...] but prices will be going up so your money decreases in value and you end up unable to buy anything” (K.C., 12 August 2007).

Young men experience a disjuncture between the dominant patriarchal discourses which construct men as bread winners with access to a steady income and their lived experience. Like other young men on the African continent, they identify and utilise alternative forms of livelihood mainly in the informal sector to access opportunities to earn an income and to secure financially and socially adult manhood (Turner, 1999). Besides involvement in street commerce and crafts, the young men also explored various art forms, such as music as well sports, through which they pursued their passions and attempted to make a living. Before migrating to Cape Town, two of my informants described how they had explored the option of playing soccer at professional club level. When they did not yield the expected results and due to family pressure to find more 'lucrative' and 'secure' livelihood options, these options had been abandoned for migration.

In Africa as elsewhere, men have historically gone "to great lengths to meet the cultural expectation of work" and in parts of Southern Africa, migration for work in mines, farms or 'professional' occupations has been commonplace (Barker and Ricardo, 2005). Prior to migration to Cape Town, many young men's histories included migration to other countries within the region for short-term informal trade (in goods ranging from tobacco, alcoholic beverages, to second-hand cell phones). This alternative livelihood practice has increased among Zimbabweans since the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs in the 1990s (Muzvidziwa, 2001). With worsening economic conditions in Zimbabwe in the last years, long-term migration for employment in the formal labour market or involvement in the South Africa urban informal sector, has become increasingly popular. A number of the young men involved in this study indicated that they migrated with the specific intention of joining the informal sector based on information received from kin and non-kin networks. A trader explained:

"the person I had been communicating with while I was still in Zimbabwe had been telling me that selling stuff is better. So I already had plans to come and trade. I never had any thoughts of working or anything like that." (D.M., 27 August, 2007).

Through crafting and selling wire and bead craft, and trade in other wares, this group of Zimbabwean migrants enter the informal sector as a way to cope with economic marginalisation in both their home and host countries (Barker and Ricardo, 2005; Lekogo, 2006).

## Craftsmanship and street trading: emerging masculinities?

Lekogo (2006) suggests that due to migrant networks, people from the same country usually follow the same trades. Similarly through established networks, the young men explained how on arrival in Cape Town they were introduced, advised and guided into informal street trade by both non-kin and kin support networks. The informal street trade activities involve the buying and selling of goods from Chinese shops which include car cell phone chargers, toys, rugby jerseys, and other sports paraphernalia that are currently 'hot' on the market; what they refer to as the "latest 'disc'". Informants also explained that during the initial period, many of the newcomers also learnt the craft of wire and bead art from seasoned craftsmen. Entry into wire-craft trade among this group of young men is a more esteemed trade, a more masculine domain<sup>15</sup>, through which they are able to demonstrate artistic skills and produce uniquely distinguished crafts.

In explaining their craft the young men present wire art as distinguished, more valuable and sustainable than other street trade, such as the periodic selling of fruit or fresh flowers engaged in by some local women. Selling fresh flowers is seen as a female domain and is often disparaged by comments such as "these people are making money off nothing, selling flowers they have just picked illegally" (these seasonal blooms are picked along river banks and some reserved parks). The few men, who at times partook in the non-masculine arena of fresh flower sales were often subject to ridicule and described as "lazy men" looking to make a "quick buck" for alcohol or a "fix". The attainment of masculine ideals often requires the denigration of what are perceived to be feminine qualities, which in this case is defined as selling wares that do not involve any effort or demonstrable skill (Silberschmidt, 2005). In this case, the distinguishing of wire-bead crafts as innovative, artistic, durable and therefore valuable is demonstrated through the marketing of the crafts to customers as "everlasting" and "unique". Even the trade in wares from Chinese shops, which the young men engage in intermittently or concurrently, is not regarded with the same esteem, and is often derided as petty and not worthwhile because it does not involve the same intricate effort as crafting wire art.

The skill and effort involved in the crafting of wire art was often emphasised in descriptions of the long nights they spent producing them, and through comments on each other's crafts. The crafting involves different stages: constructing a wire frame, and 'plastering' this frame with tiny beads. This particular group of traders in the Southern suburbs of Cape Town have

distinguished themselves through the craft of different indigenous South African Cape Fynbos flowers, of which they have developed an intimate knowledge through familiarity with their official names and their local symbolic significance. These flowers are not a common feature of wire and bead trade in other parts of South Africa, which is dominated by the craft of animals and other figures. One informant explained that: “other people will be selling worthless things [...] but the South African flowers we are making, these are things you can market at any place” (K.C., 12 August 2007). He adds that, “wire art is unique. You can’t go into Spar [supermarket] and get it”.

The craftsmanship involved in the production of wire and bead art is also a key site for masculine pride for these young men where they compete to demonstrate their artistic skills and through which they demonstrate innovation, a conventional masculine ideal (Silberschmidt, 2005). Day-to-day banter often includes comments about each other’s crafts: direct disparages or self-praise. Occasional skirmishes emerged over claims to the ownership of innovative designs, with comments passed such as “you traffic light people, all you are good at is copying”.

Through distinguishing their wire and bead crafts, the young men not only construct themselves as innovative economic agents, but also claim this form of street trade as an innovation unique to their ethnic and national group. A trader explains:

“most of the people who sell by the traffic lights are Zimbabweans. [...] If you get to a traffic light [...] there will be ten Zimbabweans and only one South African.” (D.M., 27 August, 2007).

Another trader adds:

“All the people who sell this end [the suburbs] are Zimbabweans. It’s us and the Coloureds. The Xhosas don’t come this side. [...] They are afraid to come [this end], unlike us Zimbabweans who go everywhere.” (J, 8 August, 2007).

The young men identify self-employment as more attractive than paid work in the formal sector, the common traditional marker of masculinity for working class men. Common rhetoric I encountered during the informal group discussions and the individual interviews valued “working for yourself”, “at your own pace” and “not being exploited”. As one young man observed: “I don’t think I will ever work for anyone else [...] I am used to doing my own things” (T.M., 17 August, 2007).

Despite the instability of informal trade – characterised by seasonal low



sales, occasional raids and confiscation of wares by law enforcement agents – street trade was preferred to formal work. This preference was often linked to the absence of relationships of exploitation, in the form of poor remuneration and working conditions, which are deemed to be present in the formal sector construction, service and private security jobs that are open to the young men and their contemporaries (Sisulu *et al.*, 2007; Makina, 2007). Traders also made reference to a company in Cape Town which was employing Zimbabwean men to produce wire and bead crafts for the European market, described as a site of exploitation “for those who are desperate”, as the pay was described as pittance. Craft and street trade presents these men with a platform not only to construct themselves as entrepreneurial but to also be autonomous agents.

For this group of young men, self-employment and informal trade is not just a stopgap while they look for wage employment, but an innovative stepping stone which they use to accumulate capital for what they describe as better or “bigger” things. Through street trade, many men hope to establish business ventures (formal or informal) such as setting up a shop to sell wire crafts, other enterprises like a landscaping company, or entering the parallel market of foreign currency trade in Zimbabwe. Street trade also provides an avenue to ownership of fixed assets and property, such as a house in Zimbabwe.

The alternative livelihood option of wire and bead craft is central to these young migrant men’s masculinity. Beyond an income, the young men construct a positive self-image and attainable and ‘successful’<sup>16</sup> masculine ideals. Central to these ideals is demonstrable earning power, closely linked to financial autonomy and the possibility to successfully provide. Intertwined in work and everyday social life, other diverse and at times competing versions of masculinity are built around craft and trade.

### **Individuality versus collectiveness: competing versions of masculinities**

In addition to the marker of socially accepted manhood of ‘work’, constructed around craft and trade, other versions of masculine performance found salience among this group of young men. In this section, I highlight the competing masculine ideals of individualism and collectivism, examining the ways in which young men negotiate and shift between these notions of masculinity.

A recurring theme in the discourse of the young men was the emphasis on autonomy linked to the masculine value of individuality. This ideal resonates with broader conventional or 'traditional' masculinities in a global, urban context, which stress autonomy and consumerism (Yoddumnern-Attig, 1992 – cited in Curran and Saguy, 2001). However, the rhetoric of self-reliance and autonomy exemplified by such statements as "I didn't come to Cape Town to make friends" or "friends are not good, they distract from what you came to do", contrasts with the collectiveness, dependence, cohesiveness and guidance which sustained traders' craft and lives in practice.

Young men are initiated by more experienced friends or relatives into the street trade, as well as the training to make wire and bead crafts. One trader recalls:

"We were told that they sold stuff and we also started to sell stuff from Chinese shops [...] we got a little money from that friend who was already here. He gave us some basic guidelines to help us start out." (D.M., 27 August, 2007).

Another trader explains what happened when he met a former school mate:

"He then told me that he was making wire crafts. [...] He said it's a good trade and it has good money [...] When he came here he didn't know how to do this wire craft, but one of the friends he was staying with was doing wire art [...] this friend is the one who started teaching him, and then he also taught me. So from then I can make [the crafts] and I can now teach others." (K.C., 12 August 2007).

Previous work on migration has emphasised the importance of both kin and non-kin networks, that in the early days offer needed assistance, such as helping one find a job (Curran and Sugay, 2001; Muzvidziwa, 2001; Lekogo, 2006). Similarly in this case, non-kin networks are important in the migration experiences of these young men. The nurturing and caring ethic that is occurring in practice among these young migrants is not limited to introduction into the trade but extends to day-to-day practical support such as helping find accommodation, as well as sharing meals. An informant describes his experience:

"All my friends are here, so I just came straight here and they helped me [...] while I sorted out things, considering that I had not started working [...] Those guys are the ones who found the place [for me to stay]." (T.M., 17 August, 2007).

### Another trader explains that:

"When you are coming from Zimbabwe we do not expect anything from you because you will not have any money, we know that. If we cook, you will eat and if you feel hungry and there is food, you will cook it without waiting for anyone to give you permission." (R.M., 20 September, 2007).

These networks continue as a platform for collectiveness, with a number of the young men sharing living spaces and other resources with non-kin members. Collectiveness in this migration context is drawn on as a means to support each other, and to maximise the accumulation of capital and fixed assets in what they consider a temporary migration situation. There is a disparity however, between these practices of collectiveness and supportiveness and how traders place importance on individuality and autonomy.

Popular discourse dismisses friendship as unimportant and potentially disruptive, as illustrated by the following statement made during an informal group discussion:

"your friend, even if you both have the same flower, if a customer comes and picks yours he will get angry [...] he will only lighten up when he also manages to sell his. [...] If you need friends it shows that you do not have self-esteem." (L, 14 September, 2007).

Light-hearted camaraderie seems like the acceptable surface ideal, evident in occasionally going out to places of leisure, a chance for young men to display autonomy and spending power by paying for entertainment or alcoholic beverages. Despite the central role of non-kin friendship networks, they are down-played because of the nurturing ideals and collectiveness they represent. The supportive role of non-kin networks accentuates an undesired position of dependence, thus contradicting the masculine ideal of independence. Kin networks are presented as more acceptable and described as more reliable because of the ties of obligation, but in practice these are less available in the Cape Town context. Close or key non-kin networks are then often re-appropriated as being like kin relationships, for instance, migrants described key support as "he is like my brother".

Though suppressed and denied, the nurturing or caring ethic among men collectively demonstrates the redefinition of masculine ideals and performance in the context of migration for these young men. The marginalising migration experience presents these young men with a situation that necessitates a move from individuality and autonomy to collective performances that help maximize opportunities and livelihoods in Cape Town.

## Asserting self: coping with and countering the negative

Thus far, I have focused on some of the ways in which these young men construct their sense of self and community in the migration context. These practices however take place in an often hostile and difficult host society. Zimbabweans like other African migrants are particularly alienated and stigmatised by media and public discourses which construct them negatively, labelling them as threats to South Africans seeking employment, and in which they are seen as poor, desperate, purveyors of disease, and as involved frequently in anti-social activities (MacDonald, 1999; Landau, 2006). Coping strategies that counter these negative stereotypes are thus critical and central to the ways in which migrant men negotiate, construct and assert their masculinity.

To counter negative stereotypes about themselves, traders in this group often 'other' locals by drawing on collective stereotypes about Capetonians and about township and city spaces. These stereotypes are gendered<sup>17</sup> and often tied to ethnicity as well as urban space, with Xhosa men and women living in the townships constructed as the 'other', unlike Xhosa or other black South Africans living in the central city or suburbs, whom they construct positively and identify with as progressive and educated. In the process, traders also construct and reinforce positive stereotypes about themselves.

Through their livelihood option of street trade in wire-bead crafts and other wares, the young men see themselves not only as innovative economic agents, but also as industrious and responsible: using their earnings to accumulate fixed assets, saving for future ventures, as well as sending remittances back home. Images of focused crafters and traders working hard to earn a living emerged in relation to rhetoric about time-wasting. Traders repeatedly emphasised: "we came here to make something of ourselves", a statement common among Zimbabwean migrants. When asked about leisure activities one informant said, "since I came to Cape Town I have never had time to rest [...] I spend my time indoors because of my work" (T.M., 17 August, 2007). In discussing relationships in this migration context he added that "because I am looking for money, I don't think it's okay for me to be going around looking for friends so we can spend the day fooling around".

Through this image of 'industrious entrepreneurs', which emphasises autonomy and the work ethic even in this informal context, these young men distinguish themselves from local Xhosa men living in the townships, whom they stereotype as 'lazy criminals'. In doing so they are feeding into

the public discourse and dominant narratives, which present the majority of South African young men in the townships as economic victims who embody hyper-masculinities of survival (Mtebule, 2001; Morrell, 2001). For instance, one informant made the following observation: “these Xhosa men I don’t know how they think because they don’t work [...] the ones in the location [township]. All they think of is robbing [people]” (G.M., 19 September, 2007).

By describing themselves as ‘hardworking’, these young men contrast themselves with dominant ‘street masculinity’ – represented by the ‘tsotsi’ [gangster] and ‘amagents’ masculine identities – which prevail in the Cape Town townships where they live, using this to counter negative stereotypes that migrant men are criminals or needy public wards (Landau, 2006). They also separate themselves from the violent and other illicit attributes of this street masculinity. As one young man explained: they occasionally are stopped by police for random searches for drugs and weapons, but, once the law enforcement agents realise that they are foreigners they ask for documentation and “let you go on your way”, because “they know you are not mixed up with drugs or violence” (D.M., 27 August, 2007).

In everyday contexts, young men negotiate prejudiced discrimination from ordinary citizens by constructing themselves as better financially positioned than local South Africans in the townships. Migrants interviewed repeatedly referred to how “foreigners make money”, compared to the local working class people living in the townships of Cape Town, whom they often described as “being dried out” financially. For example, one young trader in describing socialising explains:

“In the Smoke rooms [taverns], Zimbabweans are the ones who get V.I.P. treatment because they know they buy a lot. [...] Imagine a foreigner being given a seat on the sofas. They know the makwerekweres [the African foreigners] buy. Even in the bars in town it’s the Zimbabweans who will be buying [...] the Xhosas don’t have money.”

Images of ‘industrious entrepreneur’ work in tandem with some traders’ projection of themselves as financially ‘well-to-do free-spenders’. This image was often invoked during lull period conversation, as young men described their conquests pointing to their ability to provide materially for girl friends, demonstrate spending power by purchase of latest fashions or trendy gadgets (such as the latest cell phone), or buying alcohol for friends. Prioritising leisure and consumption activities in a foreign land may be understood as

another layer to masculinity used to counter the popular construct of African immigrants as poor and struggling to survive, particularly those involved in the informal sector (MacDonald, 1999; Peberdy, 2000). The insistent assertion of self-worth, professional and otherwise, through gendered notions of their own capacity as workers and providers illuminates the construction of non-violent heterosexual masculinities that are socially responsible in contrast to their view of masculinities in working class townships of Cape Town.

In most studies on migration to South Africa<sup>19</sup>, xenophobia and harassment are central challenges described by respondents. In this case, my informants did not name these but instead offered explanations such as ‘they assume we are Xhosas’ (in the case of random searches by police) or explanations which counter any practices of prejudiced discrimination through reinforcing positive stereotypes of themselves. These explanations are made in ways which position themselves as achievers of ‘successful’ masculinity. These practices were striking in men’s narration of their migrant and street trading experiences.

### **Concluding remarks**

Young Zimbabwean street traders conceive, negotiate, and create, their gendered identities, influenced by both the transitional migration context as well as by the macro and micro factors in the context from which they migrate. These young men have constructed the craftsmanship of wire and bead art as well as street trading by traffic lights as an innovative Zimbabwean domain. This domain becomes key to how they construct themselves in this context, presenting their manhood as innovative, creative and skilful, in a context of high local male unemployment.

Although on the surface, these young men present appear to draw from conventional and essentialised constructions of masculinity (built on notions of worker and provider), close analysis of this migration experience and practice shows how the ways that these notions of masculinity are constructed and performed, are reflective of the situated and specific experiences of being young migrant men. At the same time, despite their efforts to separate themselves from the local constructions of masculinities and relational femininities dominant in the townships they live, they remain linked to them. These local constructions, which they experience as marginalising, are the focal point from which they develop their own countering and often, oppositional masculine ideals.

Although the traders are reluctant to acknowledge these practices publicly, there is also evidence of an emergence of unconventional constructions of masculinity that highlight the nurturing, caring, collective masculinities essential to these young men's livelihoods and lives in Cape Town. The shifting masculine ideals that these young men draw on demonstrate that the 'something' constituting male gender identity is not unitary or consistent. Rather what it takes to 'be a man' changes from one context to another and within contexts as well. Nuanced research that examines the constructions of masculinities by different groups of men in particular places and how these change in the context of contemporary migration is important for informing future 'careful' concerted efforts to bring about the positive constructions of masculinity and esteem they deserve.

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## Endnotes

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2. In South Africa, notions of class and the intersections with racial and migrant identities are complex, politically and culturally salient, with African foreign nationals particularly vilified as 'Makwerekwere' strangers, and working class

African migrants often the targets of xenophobic tendencies (Njomah 2007).

3. There is continuing debate on whether Zimbabwean migrants are economic immigrants, escaping poverty and destitution, rather than political refugees.
4. An extensive body of work documents the range of evolving masculinities within South African townships, e.g. the volumes by Morrell (2001) and Reid and Walker, (2005). The term Cape Flats is used to refer to the former dormitory suburbs of Cape Town, areas which Salo (2006) describes as the “black periphery” of the city.
5. Moodie and Ndatshe (1994), Elder (2003) – This work looked at changing notions of gender and sexuality in male migrant labour hostels and mine compounds.
6. The exception is recent work that reflects the direction of a broader body of men’s studies in the Global South, which focuses on migrant men’s sexuality and the implications for HIV transmission (see, for instance, Lurie *et al.*, 2003).
7. Although some of the work on post-apartheid and post-2000 waves of Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa present gender disaggregated data on patterns of migration and describe the different aspects of these migration experiences (the Southern African Migration Project series, the Human Rights Watch reports), with a few exceptions (for instance, Lefko Everett, 2007), there is a failure to discuss the implications of these gendered transition experiences.
8. The Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) Public Opinion Survey Project of 1997 showed Zimbabwe to have the lowest number of migrants to South Africa.
9. Although no official unemployment figures have been released since 2001, different quarters including the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, estimate unemployment to be over 80 per cent.
10. The most notable of these clampdowns was the urban ‘cleanup’ Operation Murambatsvina in 2005, aimed eradicating parallel market activities in the informal sector among other things (Tibajjuka, 2005).
11. Politically motivated violence heightened during pre- and post-election periods of 2002, 2005 and 2008. These periods have been associated with peak migration waves in media and other reports.
12. A number of studies and reports point to the growing xenophobia in South Africa (SAMP Series and agency reports produced by bodies such as Human Rights Watch and Refugees International). The increasing levels of intolerance of the presence of African foreigners in South Africa is evidenced by the May 2008 outbreaks of xenophobic violence across the country which left 162 dead and resulted in the displacement of an estimated 80,000 people.
13. There is history of Zimbabwe traders who travel in the region for limited periods buying and selling various curio/handicrafts. Examples of work that document the experiences of these cross-border traders are Peberdy (2000) and Muzvidziwa (2001).
14. Prior to conducting fieldwork I realised that my identity as a black Zimbabwean woman, positioned differently in terms of access to the South African political economy to the group I worked with, would be key to the research process and

outcome in relation to how I was perceived and therefore received. Initially I was concerned about how my gender would prevent the camaraderie that may have taken place with a male researcher, but during the research process I identified this as an important site to generate different forms of knowledge about masculinities from what has been produced by male researchers.

15. During the course of my research I only encountered two women who were involved in the sale (not the making) of the crafts through kin networks and when I helped with some of the craft activities such as helping to bead wire, I was often reminded to be careful of 'feminine' hands.
16. Woods and Jewkes (2001) put forward the notion of 'successful' masculinity which they describe as the prevailing masculinity as defined and admired by the dominant peer culture in a particular context (2001: 317).
17. Migrants' relationships with local and Zimbabwean women are important and complex. This paper does not focus explicitly on these relationships.
18. 'Tsotsi' identity, an oppositional street masculinity associated with Apartheid struggles is said to still be alive especially in black urban townships with the 'amagents' seen as the evolving version of this identity (Glaser, 1997 – cited in Xaba, 2001; Mtebule, 2001). This 'street' masculinity is usually associated with gang membership and violence.
19. For instance, the Southern African Migration Project.



# Nurturing Researchers, Building Local Knowledge: The 'Body Politics' Project

Sophie Oldfield and Elaine Salo

Narratives about cities and about social change in Southern Africa often are framed by the pervasive effects of globalization and neo-liberalization. Development, cities, life experiences are interpreted in these contexts in relation to economic processes, to structural adjustment, to the challenges in the South African context to rework Apartheid legacies. In these stories, the state, the international community and financial context loom large. Our literature and the popular press reporting on Southern African cities thus highlight structural processes, enacted on a national and regional scale, bound up in the geopolitics of global processes.

Although important, these sorts of depictions of development and urban change are partial. In their dominance they efface and write over the intimate, regular, and local processes that constitute the everyday body politics central to Southern African urban experiences. On the one hand, politics within households, in homes, in the community-based processes that flesh out the urban, remain unaccounted for. On the other hand, the messy realities that characterize the ways in which the state works and engages appear cleaned up in these modernist linear accounts. In consequence, durable binary stories about power that depict victims and losers are reproduced. Yet, these types of narratives do not take account of how differently gendered bodies engage with and act on state policies and through state and economic and spatial processes, and the ways in which individuals, families and communities shape everyday life and, in these processes, our cities.

The 'Body Politics' project, from which this issue has been produced, takes these imperatives seriously. In doing so, we grapple with ways to substantiate how ordinary individuals and families have some agency to shape everyday processes, and in these actions, to challenge city and broader development processes. In their own meanings, these practices challenge what often appear as predetermined structural processes, city flows and spaces. This sort of

research is immersed in politics itself: in the intricacies of the field and the politics of method, all central to the knowledge we produce.

In this short Profile piece, we reflect on the project and the processes that have helped us build a community of young scholars committed to this type of research. In doing so, we highlight the intimate connections that link together the theoretical direction of body politics work, gendered readings of urban space, and the merits and richness of a regional conversation, all central to our own political and theoretical commitments.

### **The Body Politics Project<sup>1</sup>**

Beginning in 2006, the project has been anchored in the Body Politics post-graduate course entitled 'Gendered and Cultural Readings of Home, Citizenship and Cities'. As the course progressed, we built the conceptual foundation, a place and the process through which we generated a trans-disciplinary conversation to read, research and reflect on identities, gendered subjectivities and agency, explored through ideas and practices related to home, struggles for citizenship and a reading of cities from this rich, diverse local base.

We actively recruited gender studies, geography, and development studies students into the course and into the project. In doing so, we have worked hard to bring together students working on, and residing in, Cape Town and Lusaka, and who were of diverse nationalities – Zambian, Zimbabwean and South African – and willing to research their home towns and cities further afield. The students' needs to initiate their research in these diverse Southern African sites were two-fold. Zambian and Zimbabwean students already had access to research networks in their sites at home, but required financial assistance. South African students had relatively easier access to financial assistance but required an opening to research networks in Zambia. We thus actively supported Zambian and Zimbabwean students with field research. Funding was provided by the National Research Foundation (NRF) to work in Lusaka and Cape Town, and through Ann Schlyter's and the University of Zambia's contacts. This provided South African students with the opportunity to work in Lusaka and to gain the rich insight generated in comparative projects.

Building a supportive and intimate place in which to unpack the theoretical debates and in which to demystify the process of fieldwork has been very important. Central to the project and the development of student research, we have regularly met as a community, sharing our research experiences,

filling in the gaps between proposal and fieldwork, thinking carefully about the practice of research methodologies, discussing the complexities of the field, and developing the links between field research and the theoretical conversation in which field stories have been framed.

### **Grounding the research in the seminar room: fiction, theory, field notes**

A jointly taught post-graduate course has helped us integrate questions of theory, fieldwork, everyday life and research practice. Our seminar class has focused on rigorous readings of Southern African and Southern literature on gender, home, citizenship and the city. Feminist readings of globalization and modernity cogently read the local in relation to the global and modern (Nagar *et al.*, 2002; Mbembe, 2001). Research in the spaces that women predominate – for instance in homes and neighbourhoods of our Southern cities, in the informal rather than the formal economy – reveals globalization and modernity not as seamless or singular all-powerful processes, but partial, contested, and fragmented in the everyday lived experience (Gibson-Graham, 2006). The prioritization of everyday spaces and practices as critical sites in our work and knowledge production challenges notions of women and the economically marginalised, of local spaces and practices, as ‘homogeneous victims’, as power and powerlessness constituted in some uni-dimensional way in relation to development and modernity.

Analysing gendered everyday practices in Southern African cities produces a more complicated understanding of material and social processes in the interstices of which women negotiate their agency. These contexts lead us to question and complicate the ways in which global notions of modernity play out at a local scale, inhabited by particular gendered, raced and aged bodies, in turn producing multiple, overlapping, often conflicting interpretations, narratives and experiences of space and socio-economic change. The making of ‘modernity’ and ‘development’ and its projection on the city in post-colonial contexts is thus messy, complex and exclusionary (Myers, 2006). Both feminist critiques of globalisation and post-colonial readings of modernity direct us to record and understand the everyday and to theorise from this base, opening up a theoretical terrain that is embodied: one that is peopled, gendered and placed in time.

We have combined this traditional set of academic practices with conversations with locally-based activists, and by holding workshops and

seminars in different sites in Cape Town beyond the university campus. These sites ranged from up-market coffee shops in De Waterkant and a pizza restaurant in Cape Town's upmarket Atlantic seaboard, to a buy-and-braai butcher/restaurant – Mzoli's – in Gugulethu, the Manenberg People's Centre and the Manenberg women's food gardens, sites in townships. Our journeys to these places provided students with opportunities to experience the relative value of their own taken for granted cultural mores, linguistic codes and norms beyond their socio-spatial comfort zones, and to talk about the diverse racial, economic, gendered and sexual meanings of place imbricated in the physical dislocation as we traversed the urban landscape.

At the same time, we have actively encouraged students to bring their fieldwork into class, to make central to our conceptual discussions our collective engagement in these complicated contested sites. Part of our critical engagement with the 'everyday' has included student journals that bridge the discourses of theory and academically produced knowledge with everyday popular and vernacular conversations and debates about our cities in newspapers, magazines, popular media and through our own individual negotiations of these spaces, flows and experiences. In these journals, students built bridges between the theoretical, the political, and the personal, interrogating in their own lives the 'everyday-ness' of experience that they deliberated on with research respondents in 'official' field sites.

While facilitating the processing of fieldwork and developing a more nuanced and empowered approach to sometimes obtuse conceptual work, as importantly, these diverse sites and sources of 'knowledge' combined in our seminar to challenge our notions and assumptions about ordinary working people's lives in so-called 'peripheral' parts of Lusaka and Cape Town.

### **Scaling up the body politics conversation**

Two opportunities to share our research and to participate in broader gender and city conversations have been important in the development and articulation of the collective work we have produced. The first in 2007, was a workshop collaboratively developed with the Department of Gender Studies at the University of Zambia. This workshop provided an opportunity to bring South African and South African-based Zambian students together with University of Zambia students and academics in Lusaka. The second was the organization and hosting of the Gender Justice and Body Politics conference, an international academic meeting held in Cape Town in February 2009.



### *Walking and talking in Lusaka*

The experience in Lusaka drew on two parts: a formal workshop at University of Zambia and just as important, an opportunity to explore and engage with the realities of Lusaka. The first two days thus consisted of fieldtrips and walking tours around Lusaka. We grew increasingly hot, sweaty and dirty as we walked between different types of neighbourhood – from the dire poverty of George, through the differentiated privatized housing of Matero and between the old and technically informal, but very established areas of Matendere, the old home of the ANC in exile. And throughout these meanderings, we were constantly reminded of how safe we were, as women and men, strangers in this city, even in the dark of night, in comparison to ‘home’ in Cape Town, South Africa. Walking home in pitch dark on pot-holed dirt roads, laughing at our South African collective physical intake of breath, and Zambian laughter at our in-built response and bodily reactions built on our assumptions about safety. Our responses were also influenced by the realities of ‘in-your-face’ South Africa – in-Africa, marked by the economic presence of South African brands in glam malls ranging from pizza takeaways, burger joints, banks and supermarkets; of the trans-national presence of Toyota and Range Rover, four-wheel-drive recreational motor vehicles sitting cheek-by-jowl alongside the social proximity, textures and colours of local market places. These fieldtrips gave us a sense of the smells and ‘feel’ of Lusaka, a city on the move between the disappointments of the old welfarist, post-colonial nationalist state project and its tentative explorations in brave, bold neo-liberalism. These impressions remain of course, superficial.

The workshop itself focused on the presentation of research papers reflecting work in Lusaka and Cape Town. The conversations generated between Zambians and South Africans helped us think more carefully about the assumptions and contexts that underpin what is embodied in more formal conversations about development and gender, and our conversations about urban citizenship and critical thinking about home. Our initial explorations of Lusaka and attention to discussions of method and context in the discussions, helped ground the notions of peripherality, of informality, of housing and concepts of the inter-linkages between physical environment and the economics and politics of shelter – all central to our project conversations.

### *The Cape Town conference – gender justice and body politics<sup>2</sup>*

Our project officially culminated in February 2009 with the Gender Justice and

Body Politics Conference which brought together 65 researchers from South African universities (Pretoria, Cape Town, WITS, UKZN, Fort Hare, Stellenbosch and Monash), Southern and Western Africa (Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Kenya, Mali), Brazil, India, North America, Germany, as well as a large delegation of Swedish researchers from the Gender and Development Network Sweden, extending our Swedish-South African partnership with Ann Schlyter.

Cumulatively, the conference focused critically on the negotiation of citizenship, social justice, and body politics in the South. Panel papers and discussions focused on: Negotiating the Politics of Citizenship; Re-reading the State and Neoliberalism; Women's Networks and Livelihoods; Gender and Terrains of Struggle; Ascetics and the Politics of the Body; Contesting Identity and Public Discourse; Disciplining Spaces; and the Politics of Knowledge Production in Southern contexts. Debates were framed by two key note addresses: the first by Richa Nagar, a globally renowned Indian feminist scholar based in the United States, on the politics of knowledge production in feminist fieldwork and collaborative practice (*Sangtin* writers and Nagar, 2006); and the second, by Elaine Salo, one of the authors of this piece, on current debates in contemporary South African feminism (Salo, 2009). The conference provided an open context to embrace the contradictory and challenging realities that frame our work and the critical questions that we ask about justice, the gendered nature of power relations, state-society relations, and the imperative for rigorous, locally-grounded, globally-informed research.

The workshop in Zambia and the international Gender Justice and Body Politics organized and hosted at University of Cape Town, exposed our students to an interesting and challenging set of conversations and provided opportunities for students to present their research and to engage in debate – processes invaluable for the later development of student work into publishable papers, some of which are included in this issue.

### **Engaging the everyday: nurturing researchers, building a project**

Through the Body Politics Project we have nurtured a committed group of student researchers, able to engage rigorously with theory, with methodology, and the politics of our research practice. In doing this in a project community, we have brought debates to life, integrated these conversations with the

challenges of fieldwork, and, perhaps most importantly, supported each other and built friendships.

In the increasingly iniquitous social and political contexts that characterize urban Southern Africa, we face an imperative to produce knowledge that reflects these complexities with integrity. This project has worked towards this goal: nurturing skilled student researchers, who are aware of the myriad social complexities that characterize the Southern African region; informing our own development as activist-scholars; and producing new knowledge about our own social contexts, evident in this issue. These collaborations emphasize that knowledge production does not occur out of context, in sterile isolated institutions, or with lone researchers. Research conversations and theoretical innovation happen through engaging multiple voices and different types of research products and producers. The combination of rich analytical and ethnographic detail could only come about because in and outside of the academy we assumed boundaries are porous, negotiated, and fluid and we celebrated negotiating these borders and building relationships.

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## Endnotes

1. The project has been funded by two South African National Research Foundation grants: from 2006 to 2008, the Swedish-South African Links Programme and from 2008 to 2011, an Institutional Research and Programme Development Grant.

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2. The Gender Justice and Body Politics Conference was funded by the Swedish Vetansksapsradet, the South African National Research Foundation, and the University of Cape Town Research Committee and was hosted by the African Gender Institute (AGI) and the Department of Environmental and Geographical Science (EGS), and affiliated with the African Centre on Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town.

# Fieldwork Stories: Negotiating Positionality, Power and Purpose

Lynsey Bourke, Sian Butcher, Nixon Chisonga, Jumani Clarke, Frances Davies and Jessica Thorn

*“Die wit vrou met die wit kar kom ingery en sy ry weer weg sonder dat ons enigiets weet.”*

*“The white woman with the white car comes in and out [of the settlement], and we don’t know anything that is going on.”<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

Fieldwork in the social sciences is, by its nature, a messy and complicated process. Human relationships established between researcher and participants must be forged and maintained across social boundaries. Notions of difference, perceived through our bodies as they interact with other bodies, can often complicate these experiences in the ‘field’. Because of this, it is important that we remain aware of the effects our own positionalities can have on our research, as demonstrated in the experiences described in this article. Coming to terms with our own privileged identities, be it class, race, gender, nationality or educational background, in peripheral contexts, has demanded a degree of introspection from each of us. Many of us have often questioned our own legitimacy in the field and find ourselves wondering what right we have to enter communities and write about lived realities that we ourselves often do not experience.

In seminar groups, hallways and coffee rooms of UCT<sup>2</sup>, we often interrogate our positionality as young researchers in the field. This ‘identity crisis’ is partly because we are conscious that, in the context of the field, the researcher is continuously challenged with the implications of what her/his body represents – difference and privilege. For some, this discussion may be dismissed as middle-class, guilt-ridden, self-involved drivel. However, the topics addressed in this collective piece continue to be unresolved in terms

of how we, as up-and-coming researchers, rationalise the “body politics” of our own work. Here, we reflect on and respond to this real and permeating challenge which continues to emerge in our experiences and lives as global citizens and academics. The notes which we kept during our ‘fieldwork’, as a method to track and reflect on these issues in our research experiences, were key sources for the article.

This is not a discussion that will necessarily bring new insights into the various themes we explore, but it does provide a critical forum in which we can collectively highlight some of the internal tensions we grapple with in the field as we interact with different and not so different communities. It might also intimate ways of tackling how we may transcend these challenges by moving towards a communicable purpose for those involved in the research process.

This article threads together stories of language, nationality, gender, class and race, exploring how they feed into our individual and collective research experiences. These reflections also make use of Elaine Salo and Sophie Oldfield’s core course and its analytical ‘toolbox’ – a course in which all of us were participants between 2007-8. Moving from the narrated experiences of obvious outsiders to those included in some ways, and not in others, to an experience of doing research ‘at home’, the piece weaves together various experiences of difference. Perhaps these experiences of difference are linked to something more than just overt identity markers – that of simply being a researcher in the first place.

## Descriptions of experiences

### *Who are you?” questions about identity in the research process*

Siân Butcher is a Zimbabwean/South African national who recently completed her MA in Human Geography. Her work compared women’s lived experiences of home ownership in Lusaka, Zambia and Cape Town, South Africa. This involved travelling to Lusaka with a Zambian colleague to meet with residents in a particular neighbourhood. However, a young, tall, white woman with blonde hair stands out in predominantly black Zambia and makes an impression. Siân describes a couple of encounters that stand out for her:

“walking back from the bus across a large dusty field, a young man called to us: ‘Hey whites, are you here to re-colonise Zambia?’ I am taken aback, caught off-guard, my tongue thick in my mouth and unable to reply. I turn it over and over in my head all the way back to my room.”

A few weeks later, at a new shopping centre with its indomitable South African franchises – Spar, Ster Kinekor, Pep, Subway – we ran into a friend of my colleague's. He asked us what we were up to, and smiled when she told him about my research project. "So, who are you experimenting on next? Who is your guinea-pig?" It is a joke and it is also not a joke. He adds me, it seems, to the list of foreign development workers and researchers who have flown in and out of Zambia, taking photos and stories with them, leaving little behind.

The politics of this body I inhabit are thrown open everyday here: a body that stands for so much more than just me. Race, gender, class, nationality are constant points of negotiation, justification, positioning. Positionality they call it: the unique identity coordinates of your particular constellation of markers. Marked – that is an apt phrase. Skin marked visibly by privilege, minds marked less obviously by memories of prejudice and exploitation. There is no escaping the GPS-coordinates of positionality and people's responses to it. "Take me on my own terms" you ask. Impossible.

The way in which many communities have experienced research is often associated with white-skinned foreigners and their short-term visits. For Siân, this created conflicting emotions in terms of her research: what was she doing in this context, as one of those short-term outsiders "experimenting" on Zambians?

While in the above, "difference" is read visibly and starkly (by race and gender most obviously), researchers interrogating their own contexts can experience difference more subtly, through language, ethnicity and class dynamics. In the case of Jumani Clarke, a Masters student in Development Studies, he found himself often defending his "Zambian-ness" during the course of his fieldwork:

Mrs Nyambe says to me "Are you Zambian? You are not South African?"

"No, I am from Zambia. I grew up in Zambia. My mother is Zambian."

"Oh. Okay. Where is she from?" was Mrs Nyambe's next question.

"Well, she is from Malawi really, because that is where her parents' villages are. But she has spent her whole life in Zambia."

"So she is Tumbuka<sup>3</sup> then?" Mrs Nyambe asked.

"Yes she is," I replied.

"Do you speak Tumbuka?"

"No I don't. But I can speak Chinyanja<sup>4</sup>," I replied.

Then she asked me "*muli bwanji*<sup>5</sup>?"

"*nili bwino*<sup>6</sup>," I replied.

Hitherto I had gotten little conversation out of Mrs Nyambe. However, after I had convinced Mrs Nyambe of my Zambian traits, she was quite forthcoming about her business of buying clothes and bags in Johannesburg for resale in Lusaka.

By appearances and speech, Jumani does not come across as a fellow national to most Zambians. His father is white and speaks like an Englishman. This has rubbed off on both his complexion and speech, which mark him as foreign and different. To Mrs Nyambe, a participant in his study of cross-border traders between Zambia and South Africa, Jumani inhabited an identity that was separate and disconnected. Once he had demonstrated his '*Zambian-ness*' however, by speaking Chinyanja, he was recognized as a fellow citizen. He was granted friendly and open camaraderie as well as information about her business of buying clothes and bags in Johannesburg for resale in Lusaka.

While Jumani was able to "code switch", effectively proving his "Zambian-ness" to his respondents, it is not always that simple. Jessica Thorn recently completed her Honours in Geography at the University of Cape Town. Her own research centered around everyday experiences of contesting eviction to the urban periphery. While Jumani was able to use his nationality as an entry to discussions, Jessica found that her own perceived "difference" within South Africa acted as a barrier to her research rather than an aid:

"My mode of transport, my skin and my language are barriers that assumed a space between *us* and *them*. I found certain aspects of my external social construction mattered to varying degrees in different fields<sup>7</sup>. What emerged was a potent consciousness of my race – embodying the oppressor who evicted the parents of this generation to these outskirts of the City fifty years ago. Moreover, my skin seemed to represent some kind of social standing – a City official or a legal representative. "Why else would I be there?" My skin demands and incites respect, resentment, anger, dismissal, distrust. I find myself necessitating justification."

Do people from very different backgrounds have a right to research in contexts foreign to their own? In contrast, Nixon Chisonga did his fieldwork in the place he calls home, the neighbourhood where he attended primary and secondary school. However, through the workings of class dynamics, he found his own 'insider' status questioned by research participants. What then, does it mean to research one's own 'community'? Nixon explains:



"One of my respondents was a hardware trader who did not want to reveal his name, and in following with my research ethics and ensuring confidentiality, it was up to the respondents to authorize the use of their names or not. He was very uncomfortable on the initial contact, for obvious reasons. For over a week, I would go to Matero Market to observe as he went about his trade. Like in all cases, I did the observations at different times; very early in the morning, mid-morning, at noon, and in the afternoon to mark any variations. After a period of one to two weeks of observation and discussions, I would ask to interview the marketeers. If they accepted, we would then agree on the time and day. After my relentless pursuit and desire to build trust, he gave in. However, he wanted to know where I came from. He was very surprised that I would sit at a good distance from him making notes for three to four hours interspersed by reading newspapers. I told him I had chosen to do research at Matero market because I had lived in Matero for a long time. He asked for my national registration card, the official ID document in Zambia. On this occasion, I did not bring it with me. Then, he asked if I had a passport, and luckily I had carried the passport. After checking, he went on to ask why I was at a university in South Africa. The question implied a perceived 'difference', since attending university outside Zambia is mainly associated with being rich, an embodiment of power. But I was simply grateful he accepted to be interviewed."

These descriptions illustrate how, whether situated in your 'home' country, or in a place one was not born in, our position as researchers automatically calls into question our authentic and personal knowledge of place.

### *Questions about purpose and research*

Identity and difference not only affect access in the research process, but also inform questions around legitimacy, voice and purpose. In the following section, some of the young researchers reflect on how they grappled with these questions of responsibility and positionality.

As part of her work with a local NGO and as fieldwork for her research at the University of Cape Town, Lynsey Bourke, a young female American researcher worked daily at Youngsfield Safety Site, a camp set up for black foreign nationals displaced in the xenophobic violence which erupted across various South African townships in mid May of 2008. In this context of crisis and conflict, where long hours were spent with research participants and

intimate friendships forged, differences in identity, resources and mobility became powerfully salient. Reflecting on this in the poem below, Lynsey says:

You become jaded.

Safety Site space: babies, deadly diarrhoea, complaints consume the inadequacy of, food and facilities. Violent attacks, police arrests, port 'a' loo sexual encounters – all become commonplace, happenstance.

No longer surprised; numbingly desensitized, was I. One cold, cool morning...

Safety Site: a young Rwandan man arrives; blood stained shirt, gaping wound.

Midnight molestation: Wynberg Main. Raw, real, raw: red representation of *the* conflict.

Token tears twisted: turning behind my eyes. I refused release. Persistently, passively, stunned, was I.

Identity embodied as researcher,

this status allows me free travel in and out of *their* spaces.

Freely, I move, weave and move: code switching, within the contexts of Cape Town metropolis.

Le Rwandais,

accosted au Wynberg simply cannot.

From an attempt to secure stolen seconds of *liberté, fraternité et égalité*,

he paid the price.

*He*, so cool and calm in the recount of his attack:

irrespective of incessant, intermittent acts of violence acted out against *his* body.

In light of the pain experienced by those displaced, it felt selfish to allow myself to grieve.

I saw so much suffering,

yet I would leave the Safety Site to a warm home.

The privilege afforded by my North American background, and spatial location in Rondebosch allowed me not to be targeted in the xenophobic violence of May 22, 2008.

Normalized notions of refugee life/cast in the camps,  
 conflicted instinctual response:  
*through my own worried expression, his face clenched tighter.*

The ways in which people respond to traumatic events is varied through individualized experiences. Sometimes emotional responses to another's tragedy can only make the seriousness of situations more painful for respondents. As in this sort of research, researchers remain largely on the outside of the communities they work with, yet become part of the daily community life in which complex relationships are created and formed.

These privileged, mobile researchers also risk creating false expectations amongst participants who may believe that perhaps through the research, their own situations will improve. For Frances, working through these expectations and class differences, and the guilt associated with that, was difficult. A young, white South African woman, she worked in 8<sup>st</sup> Laan, a relatively new small informal settlement on the 'Cape Flats'. All of the participants she worked with were young women who had moved out of family homes that were too crowded and restricted. The small space they carved out in 8<sup>st</sup> Laan provided them with the space to establish a home for themselves and their young families. She explains:

"You are here for a reason, you are going to get me out of this shit, I know you are going to help me.' I would leave in the bitter of the cold winters evening, leaving women beaten, blue puck marks all over her face. Her husband having walked away to socialise in the community as if nothing had happened. Children were hungry. Bare feet wondered around in icy rotten water lining the streets. I had to walk away, over and over again. I had to go home. I went home time after time. I could only handle so much, enough of today, this week, this research, this abuse. And of being a woman [...] a privileged woman. I had another life in lit-up suburbia, with a hot shower and a flat with security guards: this was my world."

I finished my research, I thanked my participants. I explained what happened next and that I would come back to see them. I wrote up my thesis and got my Honours degree. I went back a number of times, finding it more and more harrowing every time. The guilt overwhelmed me, driving around Cape Town with me. Everywhere I went there were more people who needed help and I couldn't change their situations in life.

I didn't change their lives. I didn't change anything for them. The research changed my own life, but that didn't matter. The participants live exactly the same way they did before.

The idea that research is more beneficial to the researcher than the researched is a challenging and troubling notion. Who are we researching and writing for? Despite the good intentions of research methodology and scrutinizing how research may impinge on or contribute to participants, time and time again we find that in order to contribute, we require a trade off. *You allow me to interview you and I will assist by giving you a lift to the clinic, or helping you fund-raise for a community event [...] and so on.*

For example, in the case of Zille-raine Heights where Jessica was working, the research facilitated legal assistance for a legal trial and provided legal evidence of the relevant circumstances of the community. Despite these indirect contributions, we ask how the research in itself directly assisted the community? And moreover, how do we openly and clearly communicate the direct purpose of such work? The opening comment of the piece: "Die wit vrou met die wit kar kom ingery en sy ry weer weg sonder dat ons enigets weet" illustrates that the impact of research is not always clear or relevant to the majority of the community.

## Analysis

The reflective narratives above have shared some individual experiences linked to positionality, power and purpose in the research process. Frances and Nixon, situated on very different sides of the 'insider/outsider' binary, dig deeper in the next section to get at what being an 'outsider' and 'insider' may mean for knowledge production, and its politics and purpose.

In reflecting on her and other 'outsider' experiences, Frances says:

"The socio-political history of South Africa drew strict racial divides into the geography of our city, divides which have not been bridged in many places post-1994. The presence of privileged 'outsiders' in peripheral contexts is noticed, questioned, threatened by the local members of the community or, on the other hand, is seen as the solution to a problem.

The point is that our presence as researchers 'in the field' will always have an effect on the situation in which we find ourselves. We are outsiders, and can never be insiders. The situation will change as soon as we walk into that space; that space that will be forever unknown to us. What is important to realise then is that we become part of that space for that

fleeting moment of time. For those privileged moments of sharing, we are part of that space and influence that space. And this is what must be recognized."

We as researchers cannot separate ourselves from the space. Who we are, how we are on that particular day and all that, has moulded us into that person that now sits 'within' the ethnographic space will influence the outcome of whatever material we produce. Whatever difference we make, whatever story we write, we as researchers need to acknowledge our influence on the insider.

From the other side of the 'insider-outsider' spectrum, Nixon comments:

"My research was guided by the desire to get at situated knowledge in an African context, in a place I call home. It focussed on gendered spaces of home, citizenship and the city. In Haraway's writing, "feminist objectivity is about situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn to see [...]" (Haraway, 1988 quoted in Bhavnani, 1994). By adopting this view point, there was a responsibility of accepting that I could not separate who I am from the subject of the study. This meant acknowledging that who I am, what I think, who I believe I am, what I write and where I come from, affect the conclusion of my research study. This is what Haraway called feminist objectivity. As an 'insider' on some levels, I thought being Zambian and from the same local area would make the research process easier. But I also knew that shared nationality and language should not be taken for granted. By situating myself as a Zambian who had lived in Matero, I hoped to dispel any particular assumptions that would be constructed about my identity. However, I could not completely bridge the gap created by my educational status and perceived higher socio-economic level. A university education in the compounds<sup>9</sup> shores up the binary of 'us' and 'them' – 'if they have university degrees, what can we say'. I was an outsider in a place I call home. I also realised that I had the privilege of interpreting my informants' struggles and voices in a manner of my choosing. That meant that I held power to shape those voices based on the questions that I asked and the responses I got. This became complicated because the reasons why these participants chose to speak, and spoke, were important in the study.

Overall, this whole process placed me at the centre and periphery of the research process. I was half insider as a Zambian male, in the same age

bracket as the youngest participant, and with a life experience of Matero. However, I was half outsider as well because any level of university education is held in high esteem and represents a higher status. The fact that I was also from a foreign university outside the country meant my socioeconomic status was interpreted as even higher."

In our spaces of research across various academic fields and identities, we are constantly negotiating our right to be in those spaces. Whether or not our negotiations and explanations are satisfactory to ourselves or members of the 'community', it is important to acknowledge these tensions, for the research, the researcher and the 'researched'. However, this acknowledgement can, and has often led to an impasse, or an abandonment of fieldwork altogether – a result which Nagar (2002) and others question. In moving beyond this impasse, Nagar and Geiger (2000) suggest that we ask the following critical questions:

"First, how can feminists use fieldwork to produce knowledge across multiple divides (of power, geopolitical and institutional locations and axes of difference) in ways that do not reflect or reinforce the interests, agendas and priorities of the more privileged groups and places? Second, how can the production of such knowledge be tied more explicitly to the material politics of social change in favor of the less privileged communities and places?" (Nagar & Geiger, 2000: 2 – cited in Nagar, 2002: 183).

It is not enough simply to abandon empirical work: we need to accountably work at these issues of power and purpose in our written products.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the tensions between insider/outsider, centre and periphery, positionality and representation, process and purpose are part and parcel of what it means to grapple with being a researcher. This is not to argue that other identity markers (of race, class, gender, nationality, etc.) do not shape these experiences and relationships in the 'field', but to add the marker of 'researcher' to the set of positionalities that powerfully shape knowledge. Whether we are 'foreigners' or 'at home', our very task as researchers moves us both to the center (in terms of the power to represent and write) and the periphery (in terms of belonging) of a community. In acknowledging these tensions which arise across identity and the body politics, we may reconsider the ways in which we offer an exchange in which the research purpose is

understood and meaningful for all involved in the process and ask what can assist in bridging these gaps of partnership in the research process. As Nagar (2002) reminds us: “[I]t is critical that such knowledge be produced and shared in theoretical languages that are simultaneously accessible and relevant to multiple audiences *here and there*” (Nagar, 2002: 184), within the academy and the community, the centre and periphery, the North and the South.

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## Endnotes

1. A comment by a young adult male made to a community activist, referring to a UCT student doing fieldwork in an informal settlement on the Cape Flats addressing life experiences surrounding contesting eviction to the urban periphery.
2. University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa.
3. This is one of Zambia’s identified ethnic groups with its associated language, Tumbuka. People who identify themselves as Tumbuka are from or are descendents of people from the eastern parts of the country near Malawi.
4. Chinyanja is a language widely spoken across Zambia, across ethnic groups and 70 other language groups. It is similar in grammar to Chichewa.
5. Chinyanja greeting: “How are you?”
6. Chinyanja reply: “I am fine.”
7. Age and gender, which so often I am aware of in other forums such as corporate environments, did not surface. We may ask why certain markers of identity vary in different fields.
8. The local word often used for township neighbourhoods in the Zambian context.





# Collaborative Research in Conversation

Koni Benson

At a recent workshop of feminist activists, Lorraine Heunis introduced herself like this:

"I have lived in an informal settlement all my life. In 2005, I helped backyard shackdwellers to set up their homes on the field in front of my house because they could not afford to pay rents and the government was taking too long with their promises of building houses. We have been confronting ever since. [...] I have met amazing people through this struggle. But I became involved in feminist activism through a misunderstanding. Koni called me up and said she wanted to come and speak to me about housing struggles and she would bring a fryer. I thought, wow, I need a fryer, mine is broken. She came with other housing activists and we sat and exchanged our situations. All the while I was wondering when I would get my fryer. But as they were leaving, she handed me a flyer. It was an invitation to a workshop with all the informal settlements they had met with. And so I had to laugh and tell her that I thought I was getting a fryer, not a flyer. That meeting launched me into a whole other world and I don't regret it, but I still remind her that I am waiting for my fryer!" (Heunis, 2009).

This piece draws on an ongoing conversation that started when a co-worker, Ronald Wesso and I decided to prioritise a feminist interpretation of collaboration in our work on housing struggles in Cape Town. This perspective has been at the centre, on the side, or lurking underneath many interactions amongst ourselves as NGO workers and housing activists, evident from the "fryer incident" onwards. Part of aspiring to solidarities that are critical of the various power dynamics at play, that centralise anti-hierarchical, and process-centred principles of feminism, have been evident in the continual dialogue about how we work together, who is involved, from what position, and for what ends. Here, I share some reflections made by four people: two housing activists involved in the establishment and defence of Zille-raine Heights land

occupation, Lorraine Heunis and Eleanor Hoedemaker, and two NGO workers doing research and popular political education with the International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG), myself, and Ronald Wesso. This is a snapshot of a conversation over time that has unfolded in the process of working together to begin to think through what it takes to create and sustain a way of collaborating that does not reproduce the very power dynamics we claim to aim to abolish.

In early 2007, the terms 'land invasion' and 'illegal occupation' made their presence felt in the media with articles appearing on 109 land occupations, 'mushrooming' 240 informal settlements in Cape Town, proposals of new legislation to make eviction easier and to 'eliminate slums', cuts to processes of community consultation, and new police units to demolish illegal shacks<sup>1</sup>. Over 50,000 people were earmarked for 'relocation' to the outskirts of the city, where the state suggested they be given four poles and a tarpaulin, and wait in 'temporary relocation areas' for their turn on the housing waiting list. At that stage, the list consisted of 400,000 families whereas about 11,000 units were built each year (Hartley, 2007)<sup>2</sup>. ILRIG spent the first half of the year doing an exploratory and very informal survey of the experiences of shackdwellers who had taken matters into their own hands, and were now under threat of removal. We wanted to know how and why people chose to 'occupy' land, their perception of the situation, their experiences, as well as the possibilities of fostering solidarity across segregated geographies of animosity and competition over waiting lists. Most importantly, we wanted to know what it would mean to take a feminist collaborative approach to this work.

We thought that the research and political education process could be useful to the participants and support resistance movements if experiences and strategies were shared. Our approach was informed by the feminist literature of collaboration that questions the power dynamics between the researcher – and the researched, as well as the possibilities of working across divides so characteristic of housing struggles in Cape Town<sup>3</sup>. We decided to invite housing activists and researchers to participate in the process. We also proposed that representatives from each area we would work in, accompany us on research visits and that community organizers/leaders we met across the city be invited to a collective workshop to discuss issues further<sup>4</sup>. In an interview about the proposed ILRIG research process, Ronald responded:

"I think anybody could have done it in the sense that whoever would have come with a similar idea I think people would have been open to

it – because people were ready, they had been involved in their struggles for some time, and everybody was very aware that although they were fighting and standing on their own, there were other people facing similar problems and it would be a good idea to communicate with those people and try to work together. It was a question of how to do that given the geography and all of those kinds of obstacles in Cape Town, and given the fact that most of the people lack resources to do that, I mean it is poor peoples' movements, so the organizations are also poorly resourced.

But there are specific reasons why we did it, and why nobody else would. I think the activity and struggles of people in informal settlements was not high on the priority list of any number of organizations that one expected to be interested. I don't understand the reason behind that except that it is difficult work to do. There are other things that an organization that would be interested in working on, that easier to accomplish. Working with unions is much easier. Working with people in communities who have been organizing for some time and where there is an existing structure of organizations is much easier. So you often find that the informal settlement struggles fall through the cracks. Also generally, if you are looking at social struggles, it is useful to draw attention to what you are actually trying to do – whether you are fighting for higher wages or for fair access to electricity. But when you defy the law, when you are labeled as an unlawful occupant or land invader, then it is perhaps in your interest, at particular points in time not to draw too much attention to yourself, until you are established and until you are under threat of removal, so that may also play a role." (Wesso, 2007).

We found that people setting up shacks on open spaces of land never considered themselves as 'invaders'. They said that their problems, not they or the communities they had built, needed to be 'eliminated'. More importantly, there was no uniform policy, plan, or response from the state or from the residents living in adjacent formal settlements to their plight. Some dwellings had been demolished and some residents faced immediate eviction orders. Others had electricity connected and had even constructed brick houses in the areas where they resided. It was clear that people achieved what they had organised to gain. Aunty Gerty Square's description of the role of women, requiring the constant confrontation needed to establish, defend and secure 7<sup>de</sup> Laan was common:

"There were no new houses built here since I moved in when my children were small, now I am a grandmother. So we started 7<sup>de</sup> and 8<sup>ste</sup> Laan land occupations. I spoke to the city year in and year out, about the housing backlog. Meetings. Years. So we organized and said, "fine, you have no money but land, we'll mobilize backyarders and take land and build". It was not easy. People were desperate, sick, living in overcrowded conditions with high rates of TB. We built shacks in the field. Once shack was complete, in came the army and the city police and every kind of law enforcement. As if we were [...] murderers on that field! The police demolished, used rubber bullets – all for that half-built structure. So we formed a circle and said "People are living there, you won't touch it!" When they left in the evening, we started to build again. A month later we got a summons to court. Then there was a court case for three years. Before we won, there was no water or toilet facilities and the city says "No money for water or toilets and besides you invaded the land and are illegal." One day I woke up and said, "I'm going to get 7<sup>de</sup> Laan and get people to get buckets and washing powder and we are going to the civic centres and property of the city and we'll take water from there". We told women to mostly bring panties and hang the washing on the wires so all the city workers can see and we said, "Call your boss so they can see what we are doing because if there are no toilets on that field, we'll be here using water everyday, and we won't let the guard close the gate because we will need the toilets tonight." The very next day they laid pipes and put in 18 toilets. They gave us nothing with a smile. Everything we have to take." (Square, 2007).

As well as exchanging stories and strategies, the role and relationship to NGOs, especially creating collective ways forward, was intensely debated at the meetings that followed the site visits and workshop. In particular, a conversation around creating an umbrella organisation to unify struggles against forced relocation initiated much discussion on who could and would anchor the process and supply necessary resources to so that people met regularly. Issues of control, direction, and agendas were crucial to these debates. Lorraine's response was:

"We are poor, but we are not stupid. We don't need you to take decisions for us just because we live in informal settlements and you have skills and resources. But we can use your help. It is better to raise these issues here today, instead of sitting here and then we leave and have a lot to say." (Heunis, 2007).

**In an interview last year, Eleanor explained what work with this organisational solidarity had enabled:**

"When we occupied land, we didn't know anything. I think the more support you have, the more information you have, people can't just evict you. [...] Myself and Lorraine went blindly into this and we didn't know our rights, nothing. By trial and error we came to know all our rights. With all the organizations we came to know more. I think it is because we had all the organizations behind our court case, that we were not evicted from here." (Hoedemaker, 2008).

**ILRIG wasn't building houses, wasn't paying legal fees, wasn't even giving fryers, yet when I asked Eleanor what motivated them to work with us, she responded:**

"The workshops gave us knowledge and power, to know our rights. To know we were right to defend ourselves. But it was also that you walked with us. From morning till afternoon [...] We walked about looking for an advocate for months. We used your resources, like phones and computers which other organisations did not allow. We were encouraged, but the decisions were always for us to make. Some activists want to work with NGOs and some not. When we first met you, it was with the AEC (Anti-Eviction Campaign). But then they said we should stop going to the Community House, because "these people want to use you". Lorraine and myself said "No, there are good and there are bad NGOs and this one is helpful for us." You are honest with us. We say we need 1, 2, 3 and you say you are able to do 2 and 3 with us. The AEC gave us the choice of ILRIG or the AEC. But the AEC works with academics who also take their life stories and write books and things and get paid. Without all this knowledge and support, we would not still be busy with our struggle and Zille-raine would be over. Being a housing activist is too much pressure for one person and I need support wherever I can get it. There are only a few women who are consistently here, and the men – this is where patriarchy comes in – they come and go and are not interested. [...] We need time and encouragement and we got it from you and Ronald and then Jessica. Now we joke with the AEC that we are waiting for them to come put up their shacks on our site." (Hoedemaker, 2009).

**An umbrella body was not born of these meetings, but rather an agreement to (a) work together, (b) to resist relocation and, (c) find alternative land and housing close to where we lived. The idea of situated solidarities, of asking**

what each person/organisation in the room was best positioned to do to contribute to this broadly defined goal, resulted in a small range of creative and strategic interventions in Cape Town, and also nationally. The group analyzed and wrote a response in preparation for a representative to attend an Anti-Slum Bill coalition meeting in Durban called by the shackdweller movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo ([www.abahlali.org](http://www.abahlali.org)). Women were asked by the Legal Resource Center to take statements and by activist organizers in Joe Slovo to speak to other women resisting relocation from Joe Slovo to Delft (Hawker, 2007). For the most part, we focused on creating media and doing research that would support the upcoming legal battle to prevent eviction from Zille-raine Heights. We called on media activists from Indymedia to support the production of newsletters to resentful neighbours residing in brick houses in the area, to explain the case, experiences, and analysis of 'land occupiers' (ISIS, 2007). A distribution strategy and support petition were designed, linking issues of water cut-offs in formal settlement houses due to bill arrears, with the shackdwellers' situation. We photographed the living conditions in the proposed relocation area – Happy Valley – to illustrate the slogan "not from bad to worse". We sent briefs to the mainstream media, created photo map banners that would attract the mainstream media to the courts, and staged a teach-in outside the courts (Oliver, 2007; Prinsloo, 2007). We also drew on Legal Aid advice that we conduct research examining the 'relevant circumstances' to support our case against the proposed evictions. Assisted by Professor Sophie Oldfield, we designed and collectively carried out a household survey in Zille-raine Heights to show that the community's circumstances were defined within the 'vulnerabilities' criteria set out in post-1994 laws preventing evictions<sup>5</sup>.

The process of making a plan of action based on who needed and could do what, made for an intensive year of learning and lobbying where people from across movements, organisations, institutions, and segregated spaces worked together with a sense of politics that was about more than just Zille-raine Heights. In Ronald's assessment:

"I think this has also been a good example of collaboration between different kinds of people and organizations, community-based organizations and NGOs and individual academics. In South Africa at the moment, it is a usually controversial and difficult, painful issue, in that people you would expect to logically work together do not, and spend lots of their time fighting one another across these fragmentations:

NGOs versus social movements, different social movements versus one another – because they have different relationships to (each other) NGOs, etc. So any kind of good example that is appreciated by both sides is [...] potentially very important. We'll see. The achievements are important for what they make possible. Right now we have not won anything. Forced relocations are still on the cards [...] but we are forging the means [...] the people [...] the spirit that would carry the struggle." (Wesso, 2007).

These conversations reflect some of the critical issues that have framed this work on women and housing activism in Cape Town and its NGO-social movement collaborative elements. They expose the implicit power dynamics embedded in the relationship between NGO workers and social movement activists on the front line whilst also critiquing these. Careful examination of the multiple obstacles to moving forward, and the answers to the difficult questions raised about what it would take to build movements free of the vexing NGO-social movement dynamics, certainly needs more time and attention than has been given here.

Each re-telling of Lorraine's fryer tale works to both make people laugh (and me blush), and to surface shared politics as well as tensions, needs, expectations and power that emanate from our different positions. This, we agree is an important place from which to start, and made an important mark on the work of collective action across difficult boundaries we have done together. Although still contested and pending an appeals court ruling, Zille-raine Heights remains standing today. In the midst of many fall-outs between social movements and NGOs the work continues, taking its shape as people and organizational support enter and exit the process – leaving much to be done, and many conversations to be continued.

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## Endnotes

1. (Benson (2007), Gophe (2006), Huchzermeyer (2007), Kassiem (2007), Legassick (2007) Williams (2007).
2. For the gap between policy and practice, see Chapter 3 of Mercy Brown-Luthango's *Our Struggles, Our Stories, Our Rights: Reflecting on Women's Access to Housing Rights*.
3. This included publications, for example, by Ballard, Benson and Nagar, Dreze, Gluck and Patai, INCITE, Kerr, Kruzynski, McKinley, Mohanty, Nagar and Geiger, Roy, and the Sangtin Writers.
4. This included Zille-raine Heights, Civic Road, Hangberg, Imizamo Yethu, Kabaskraal, Khoisan Heights, Huguenot Community Center in Belhar, 7deLaan, 8steLaan, Happy Valley, Delft, QQ Khayelitsha, Montagu Village, Hillview/Lavander Hill (Overcome Heights, Military Heights, China Town, Mitchel's Heights, China Town 2, and Cuba Heights).

5. According to the Constitutional Court, the Prevention of Illegal Eviction (PIE) was adopted with the objective of over-coming abuses and ensuring that evictions take place in a manner consistent with the values of the new constitutional dispensation. The mere establishment of unlawful occupation and structures that are unauthorised, unhealthy and unsafe, does not require a court to make an eviction order. Rather, the court must take account of all “relevant circumstances” of the people under threat of removal – such as length of stay, income, disability, number of children, women-headed households, and so on.  
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# A Regional Conversation on Southern African Cities and Towns: The Gender, Urbanisation and Everyday Life Research Project, 1992–2005

Matšelisó 'Ma-Tlali Mapetla and Ann Schlyter

## Introduction

In 1992, the GRUPHEL network was formed to bring together researchers across the region to document and analyse the rapid change underway in cities and towns across Southern Africa. Within one generation, the lives and living conditions of people in Southern Africa have undergone far-reaching transformation through urbanisation. This network drew together senior and junior scholars to work together to invigorate the substantive analysis of the gendering of the urban everyday-experience in the Southern African region. At the same time, this focus demanded that we engage with qualitative methodologies, that we work carefully and contextually to engage with change, its social negotiation, and its manifestation in the physical and built environments.

This initial project inspired a collaboration spanning thirteen years, involving more than sixty researchers in universities and research institutes across Southern Africa, and a long-term collaboration between Swedish feminists and Southern African feminists. This Profile piece reflects on the GRUPHEL network, first on the body of literature it has produced and secondly, on its development – through a conversation with its coordinators – Matšelisó 'Ma-Tlali Mapetla and Ann Schlyter.

The programme provoked a debate on gender, women and feminism in research and practice, examined through qualitative methodologies that attempt to engage carefully with social context to acknowledge people's experiences and to build a rigorous body of knowledge on Southern African social and urban change. The programme has consistently funded and supported empirical research, and thus has built up an extensive body of

primary materials, generated by and for regional scholars.

Reflecting on GRUPHEL research highlights the ways in which the research programme has responded to gaps in the analysis of gender and African cities and towns, as well as the ways in which some urban challenges – those connected for instance to housing – have persisted and others developed responding to the consequences of HIV/Aids in the past two decades.

The first volume, published in Zimbabwe in 1995 highlights women and men as actors in a gender system which functioned according to the principles of separation and subordination at household as well as at community level. Anita Larsson frames this debate theoretically in the volume, drawing on Swedish historian Yvonne Hirdman. While open to different disciplines and perspectives but also providing inspiration to the participating researchers, this piece helped structure the earlier discussions and the volume of research produced. Housing was already a dominant theme in this publication, with papers that explored how women managed to make a home in negotiations with male heads of households (Gwagwa), or with landlords (Sithole-Fundire), or as live-in nannies with employers (Macwan'gi). But there were also papers on women's livelihoods: women in mines (Chiwawa), in trade (Zhou) and micro-business (Nachudwa). Many GRUPHEL researchers participated in a conference resulting in a second volume in 1996. In this volume, and particularly central to later GRUPHEL work, Mulela Munalula reflected theoretically and methodologically on women's rights to property, a paper that became one of the basic readings for participants in the following phases of the programme.

The next publication (1998) drew together a rich qualitative analysis of the struggles for homes and livelihoods in places as diverse as Durban, Maseru, Mbabane and Lusaka, analysing: women street vendors and their access to housing (Fadane); gender relations in the taxi industry in Durban, South Africa (Khosa); exploring the gendered nature of Lesotho urban migration (Kimane and Ntimo-Makara) and the inter-linkages between women's domestic work and housing struggles in Swaziland (Miles). Collectively, this work demonstrated that access to urban housing remains a critical problem in Southern Africa, presenting huge challenges for human settlements that reflect the politics of changing gendered social structures and broader gendered socio-economic inequalities. The research reveals that access to and control over housing are embedded in gendered power relations, in which men and women actively negotiate relationships, access to resources, and

the nature and structure of everyday life (2003). This phase of the GRUPHEL research drew together, amongst others, a regional conversation and analysis of: Home-ownership schemes in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (Gwebu); self-help housing projects in Lobatse, Botswana (Kalabamu); gendered insecurities in new low-income housing projects in Zomba, Malawi (Kishindo); analysis of black women builders in Mpumalanga, South Africa (Radebe); and examination of the exclusion of women in the privatisation of public housing in Lusaka (Schlyter).

Reflecting the onset of the Aids pandemic, the 2005 GRUPHEL publication speaks to this crisis and the ways it has reshaped not only Southern African social structures, but also the gendered and generational negotiation of urban housing and livelihoods. Bless explores the livelihood strategies of girl- and boy-headed households in Maseru, while Gwebu considers the ways in which HIV/AIDS has reworked gendered household dynamics in Gaborone. The final volume in 2007 not only critically reflects on the gendered nature of the crisis but on the severity of its remaking of generational expectations and practices in our region. Kamwengo and Schlyter scrutinize the generational support systems in Zambia, Kimane and Mohale work through the legal implications and practices that shape orphaned children's access to their parent's properties in Lesotho, and Nyanguru draws into our debate the ways in which elderly women in Lesotho emotionally cope with the devastation the pandemic has wrought on their children and grandchildren.

As a sustained, regional research network, GRUPHEL has produced an extensive and crucial body of primary research. At the same time, it has brought together regional researchers from Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Through extensive capacity building, the network drew senior and junior researchers together to research, write and to build a rigorous conversation on gender and its negotiation in cities and towns across our region.

*Feminist Africa* asked Matšelis Mapetla and Ann Schlyter to look back and share some of their experiences of the GRUPHEL network.

**Matšelis Mapetla:** I am a Senior Research Fellow and Coordinator of Gender and Development Research in the Institute of Southern African Studies, National University of Lesotho. For over a decade I coordinated the regional project GRUPHEL in Southern Africa. It has been about fourteen years since the undertaking of the gender research programme that brought Ann Schlyter and I together into a regional feminist/gender network researching and

interested in issues of gender relations in urbanization, planning and everyday lives of women in Southern Africa. The programme ended almost four years ago, but informal networking has continued.

**Ann Schlyter:** I am an Associate Professor working with gender studies at the School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg. I have been working with urban studies in Africa since the late sixties and with a gender perspective since the mid-eighties. In GRUPHEL I was privileged to be a scientific advisor and at the same time a participating researcher on the same terms as the other participants. It was always a pleasure to work with you.

**Matšelis:** My institute focuses on research issues in Southern Africa, and gender studies became one of its agenda programmes that I had personally initiated. I saw the need for documentation and knowledge in my own environment. But Ann, how did you come to engage in Africa and in gender studies?

**Ann:** I came to Zambia as an architect student in the sixties. In addition to studies of the post-colonial situation, I was prepared by being an activist in the anti-Apartheid movement. I was appalled by the housing situation in the squatter area we studied, but also impressed by the strength women and men showed in building a home and a life for themselves. There was in George compound a development optimism that I shared.

I was a child of the Swedish welfare state optimism of the time. As a working class child, I had been raised in a one-room rented flat. The shortage of housing did not allow for a change to a bigger flat, but the family's economic situation gradually improved and we could later afford a car and even to build a small summer cottage. As a student I chose to study housing. In Africa, I found a great need of housing and a great need of knowledge about housing conditions of poor people. I became aware of the discrimination of women when studying an urban upgrading project in Zambia in the seventies. Women who were heading households somehow disappeared in the process, so that in the end only men-headed households benefited from subsidies and appeared as owners of the homes.

I continued to study the housing situation of women-headed households in both Zambia and Zimbabwe, and then of married women. Legally, married women were in a delicate situation: they benefited from the property of their husbands, but in cases of separation, divorce or death of the husband, they most often lost all rights to their home. Thinking back, I can see that I was in the company of most of the first generation researchers on women in

development who largely focused on single women and the women-headed households. I think this focus became dominant because these women were the ones who were most visible in statistics.

**Matšelis:** In her article in this issue of *Feminist Africa*, Elaine Salo refers to the debates on power relations in the production of anthropological research. What has been your experience of being a “musungu” researcher in Southern Africa?

**Ann:** Just by having the training and the resources to travel from Sweden and do research in Africa, although always on very limited funding, I have certainly been part of the global power relations in the post-colonial era. But within the academic world, I have not been confronted personally for using this power or accused for misusing it. Perhaps this has to do with disciplines. The reflexivity among researchers in the field of urban studies, a male-dominated area with a close connection to planning, may not be as well developed as among anthropologists.

Much more is to be said about being a woman and a “musungu” in the fieldwork situation. In George in the 1960, we (my husband and I) first became known for supporting the residents’ struggle for recognition and legalisation and based on that goodwill, I developed a long-term relationship with a number of families. It was as if categories such as class and gender became less important because I was white and from Europe. Class attitudes were otherwise strong. If I had a Zambian student as interpreter, we often met hostile attitude, totally different from the way we were received if I had employed a resident woman to interpret.

There were some positive consequences of being a total outsider; I could ask stupid, personal and private questions and I was excused for not knowing how to behave. Of course, as an outsider I had to rely heavily on my local assistant for interpretations not only of the language but also of conceptions and attitudes.

**Matšelis:** At the National University of Lesotho, we have quite a number of international contacts and projects. But with the GRUPHEL programme I had the opportunity to develop long-standing and working relationships with feminist colleagues in the region. With a large well-funded programme, it was also easier to get acceptance for the gender perspective.

**Ann:** That definitely marks a shift. It was initially not easy to get acceptance for the gender perspective. In the first phase, we found no university institution willing to host the programme. Therefore an NGO – the Zimbabwe

Women's Resource Centre and Network – became the first coordinator. Even the representative of Sida/SAREC (the funding agency of GRUPHEL) for Southern Africa in the eighties advised me not to use the concept of gender, arguing that it was not understood by the scientific community. Of course, he was narrow-minded; African feminist researchers were active and supportive, but ignored by many of their male colleagues.

The distinction between sex and gender has later been contested, but initially the parallel to the distinction between race and ethnicity was useful in arguing for the legitimacy of the gender studies. We argued that sex and race were biology, while gender and ethnicity were socially constructed and could be changed. To meet critique from male colleagues, we added that both racists and sexists defended inequalities with reference to biological differences.

**Matšelisio:** It must also be said that we had, unintentionally, just a few but very good male researchers within the project. They turned out to be strategic because they have in fact, become some of the best promoters of feminist scholarship in universities, as well as gender activists.

**Ann:** Yes, over the years more and more men in Africa have shown an interest in gender studies. In contrast, it seems to be more difficult to get Swedish male researchers interested in gender issues.

**Matšelisio:** The GRUPHEL project put strong emphasis on qualitative methodology; it grounded theoretical generalisations in empirical evidence, and related evidence to theoretical discourses. The idea of a constant dialogue between a theorising exercise and the use of data as developed in the grounded theory approach was applied within GRUPHEL as well as in some other regional research networks in Southern Africa.

In the beginning, there was a struggle to find acceptance and legitimacy for this approach, both for the gender perspective and for the qualitative methods. There was quite another climate by the end of the project. Sometimes, though, endless discussions with some of the male researchers in the programme felt like regressing the gender struggles that the programme was trying to overcome. A few men and women felt intellectually challenged when they initially did not understand the general objectives and particularly emphasis on the use of qualitative (presenting a human dimension) versus the conventional quantitative (without a human face) methodologies. Therefore our research was criticized by my male colleagues for being unscientific!

**Ann:** Many of our colleagues within GRUPHEL were eager to produce direct



useful results as in applied research, while the programme aimed to enhance research capacity within the field, partly in opposition to the shallow ways of understanding often accepted in applied research, and its often underlying assumptions of linear modernization processes.

**Matšelis:** Therefore Ann, in a way, it is not surprising that the research got criticized from the applied research perspective for being weak in its value in changing lives in the South, and also from the feminist perspective for the researchers' failure to give something back to the researched communities.

**Ann:** It is an eternal dilemma, isn't it? We had no solution, but at least it was continuously debated within the programme. How did we as researchers handle the knowledge entrusted in us by our informants? I often had to argue for the value of academic knowledge, although not always directly useful for the communities concerned.

**Matšelis:** Our emphasis on qualitative methodology allowed us, as feminist researchers, to hear women's voices from below through our exploration of the lived experiences of women and men of different generations. This approach to research afforded the research informants an opportunity to express their needs and to define their situations, experiences, and the concepts and theories of governing that gave meaning to their everyday lives.

GRUPHEL's multi-disciplinary style also opened up various types of theoretical approaches. Individual and collective strategies to use participatory research and consolidated collaborative and consultative methodological research processes were utilized. At the same time, we drew on and of course accepted that the qualitative analysis could be supported by quantitative data found in the literature, or as a result of a quantitative sub-study undertaken by the researcher.

Through the network, there was a continuous debate about concepts and theories. Even the basic concept of gender, though commonly defined and understood by the researchers, had to be contextualized in the location, culture and socio-economic environment of each studied country.

**Ann:** Notably, Caroline Moser had a great influence on gender researchers in planning. Her identification of women's needs as related to production, reproduction, and community work informed many studies in the late eighties and early nineties. Based on her writings, we had lengthy but seldom fruitful discussions about the distinction between practical or strategic needs; the latter defined as improving women's position.

Some GRUPHEL researchers – I among them – found the concept of a

gender contract a helpful and stimulating way of thinking. With reference to Hirdman, it was defined as an unwritten social contract prescribing what proper behaviour is for a woman and for a man respectively. However, our results in the end could have been reached and presented without the concept, and in some cases it was misunderstood and confused with personal contracts such as legal marriage contracts. At the same time, identity studies and discourse analysis came as strong trends within gender research which influenced the GRUPHEL research network, but the material and spatial emphasis in our studies situated us somewhat on the side of the dominating theoretical trends within feminist studies.

**Matšelisio:** Not only were theories and approaches changing during the years of the programme, but so were the global economy and the situation for people in Southern Africa. The later phases of the research brought to light the effects of entrenching poverty and the devastating impacts of HIV/AIDS on economic relations within households, and weakening of their asset bases either because they have to save the lives of relatives or because of their vulnerable status as orphans and child-headed households for example.

**Ann:** I think it is impossible to do social research in Southern Africa without taking the pandemic into consideration. Certainly, it cast a dark shadow over my own last study about ageing and inter-generational support systems in Zambia. But it is also clear that the global economy and the globalised policies continue to affect large parts of the Southern African population negatively. Over the decades I have seen an ongoing impoverishment of the people in George compound on the edge of Lusaka; one that is so different from my own experience.

**Matšelisio:** Let us conclude this dialogue by summarizing the outputs of the programme for us personally as researchers and in terms of publications. For me, the research has expanded my understanding of gender relations and generated empirical knowledge on local issues and concerns in developing Southern Africa. The case studies have uncovered and made accessible knowledge about socio-economic problems experienced by women in urban areas due to the process of urbanization itself, poor planning and inadequate housing, framed in unbalanced gender relations and a broader lack of access to resources. Through this substantive research, we have built theory and constructed and reconstructed concepts.

**Ann:** For me, the programme was rewarding as it meant regular interaction with researchers from eight countries in Southern Africa. As a guest in Africa,

I have always been aware of limitations in my understanding of underlying meanings when studying the everyday life of women and men, and my research has benefited a lot through the dialogue with Southern African researchers within the programme.

**Matseliso:** Each of the programme's phases ended with a publication. There are six main publications from the programme, with four published in Lesotho by the Institute of Southern Africa (which can be ordered directly or accessed through [www.isas@isas](http://www.isas@isas)). ISAS has also published many individual research reports. Furthermore, many GRUPHEL researchers have used material from their GRUPHEL studies when writing articles for international, peer-reviewed journals.

The GRUPHEL publications fill a literature gap, contributing immensely to literature and reference material production for scholars. The empirical evidence makes visible issues of gender, gender power relations, roles and social justice in the main. The material is also used widely in the teaching of gender studies and urban studies. The reviews have generally been positive demonstrating that through GRUPHEL work, Southern African research and reality is moving in the right direction, towards addressing systematic barriers that surround aspects of women and men's negotiation of urban lives (Matashane, Review of Southern African Studies 2007, Vol 3 # 2: 268-273). At the same time, they have highlighted that the resourcefulness of GRUPHEL has been its method of capturing the voices of the researched, adding the human dimension to grounded issues that could have otherwise too easily become lost in academic discourse

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## In Conversation: Gendered activism of a black woman writer in post apartheid South Africa

Elaine Salo speaks with *Sindiwe Magona*

**Elaine Salo:** Why do you think it is important for you to be identified as a black woman writer in South Africa?

**Sindiwe Magona:** I became aware of how few black women writers there are in this country in 1990, when my first book *To my Childrens' Children* was published. I attended a writers' conference at the University of Cape Town shortly after the book was released. There I learned that there were only five – can you imagine – only five black African women authors published in South Africa. There were Noni Jabavu, Miriam Tladi, Ellen Kuzwayo and Maggie Resha. It is unlikely that there were any others. I knew that there were only a few of us, but that it was so bad [...] it was shocking! (In 1990) there were other women writers, but they were white and mostly from privileged backgrounds. In 2010 I will celebrate my twentieth year as a writer. In relation to these other women writers and the legacy they come from, I still consider myself as a 'new' writer. However amongst my own people, I would consider myself as an experienced writer.

**ES:** At what point did you consider writing?

**SM:** The 1970s and 1980s were times of great turmoil in the country. At that point I examined myself. I experienced incredible anger about others writing about us. I asked myself "How dare they write about you?". I told myself, that shouldn't stop me from writing about myself. At that time I was a teacher of History and isiXhosa at a high school and I was reading such painful things – about the (then) government's attempts to attract immigrants from Poland and other places in Europe to come here to beef-up the white [population's] numbers. They described us as 'a large reservoir of cheap labour'. I thought to myself, "This cheap labour was my father, my mother, my people!". I realized that the large reservoir they spoke of, were people's lives that were

being put up for sale on the market like slave labour – emotionally, it was the same thing. The outcomes were the same as slave labour. At that time, the day you died, you did not even manage to own a bicycle. That was my father's experience. A lot was being written about us but not written by us. We may not be for example, a professor of anthropology or history, but there is value in those like me writing about our experiences, who did not study Apartheid but lived it. That is why my first book is entitled *To my Children's Children*. This is my legacy to the next generation. This is my way of telling them 'this is who we are from our point of view'. I remember an old idiom that says 'the story of the hunt is never complete, until the lion tells its tale'. I am a black woman and I am writing from a black woman's perspective. The gatekeepers to publication are white people. Yet if a white person writes about black people, who will pick up the errors? Sometime, even in the best of books about black people, I find myself saying "How can they say that?". For example, there is a children's book showing a black child in the rural areas watching TV. Now tell me where do you find ordinary black people with TVs in the rural areas? But the author felt that she had to put it in the story about a rural child. These are the false representations I am speaking of.

**ES:** What difference do you think your perspective would make to the reader?

**SM:** The value in my story is the authenticity of my voice, of me bearing witness. This is my truth that I write, of what matters to me. You know living in the Western Cape, I am constantly aware of the great natural beauty surrounding me. I would also like to write of the beauty of this natural environment, of the beauty of daffodils; but then I think of the children deprived of seeing this beauty, of the ocean, of the mountains – who live here but who have never enjoyed it. Natural beauty is also accompanied by pain of those who, because they have never enjoyed it, are blind to the importance of its protection. Until people are able to experience, fall in love with nature, they will never know why it is important to look after it. Unless we make this beautiful natural environment accessible to most South Africans, we will not bother to protect it. We have caused alienation and now, in this new South Africa, we want wholeness without mending what is broken. Before the advent of colonialism and Apartheid, the rural areas were healthy for people and animals. With the coming of the West to Africa, the unequal relationship between these two cultures has not been kind to the indigenous people here or to the colonialists and their offspring. People now live with want, where

there never was want before. We have moved from an indigenous culture of collaboration between each other and with nature to one of competition. Unlike the old saying, “it takes a village to raise a child”, the modern village can never raise children, because competition has no harmony. Competition is about wanting to thrive at all cost, about the survival of the strongest over the weakest. It places children, women, men and animals in jeopardy. In the past, amongst the Xhosa-speaking people, we had a practice called *Inqoma*. When you have had enough, you give to the less privileged. If you have cattle and have ploughed your land, you go and plough the lands of those without cattle. Then everyone will have a harvest and no-one will steal your harvest! The dictum was “if I had, others would not go hungry for as long as I had”. It is not like that anymore. That harmony has been broken and needs to be restored.

ES: How do you address the theme of chaos or of disharmony in your work?

SM: In the book *Beauty's Gift*, I examine who we are at this moment. I say that we are looking at death and devastation of intimacy between couples, of relationships in families, of faithful women being betrayed, of these women dying of AIDS. I am asking how much further intimate and therefore how much more vulnerable can you be? In the past, betrayal of intimate relationships was considered a wrong against the person you cared for. Now betrayal of intimacy means murder, killing the person you love. Yet we are still having unprotected sex and killing. In the era of HIV/AIDS, you may not be holding a gun, but you are still capable of killing a person, because sex has become a deadly weapon. Black masculinity is corroded and we must address it by naming the crisis, by examining what a black man is now to a black woman.

ES: Are you more hopeful about our future as South Africans now in the post-Apartheid moment?

SM: We must move on from condemnation of each other as South Africans, and as black people especially if we choose to move out of the townships. You must remember that the Cape Flats<sup>1</sup> were forced upon us. Now we have a choice to move out or to stay. But many people who don't have a choice to move out of the townships are still disenfranchised. In 1994, I wrote a poem called '*Fear of Change*' which is all about the disappointment that will come after the honeymoon is over, and about coping with still being disenfranchised in an economic sense. I am also addressing white South Africans who are asking about black South Africans: “What's the matter with them now? Why can't they just get on with it now that Apartheid is over?”. But there are all

these social ills, there is the deep psychic wounding and I am asking each one of us: “What are you doing about it?”. The new dispossessed in this country who are the poor, are also asking: “But where is our freedom?”. It’s like the dispossession of African Americans in the South that the aftermath of (Hurricane) Katerina revealed. The psychic wounding of African Americans in the U.S. and of black South Africans live on, and then we wonder why people are not making it.

**ES:** What about our relationship with the rest of the continent? Can we look to other African countries for new direction?

**SM:** Tell me where in Africa have we found healing? Show me where in Africa and I will go there tomorrow. We have local traditions here that we should look to. If Africa had healed itself, then we would also be healed. This charade of African leaders we call the African Union – how long have they hoodwinked us? I don’t see South Africa forming a union with another country on the continent until each of our countries has put its own house in order. Then we can form a union. Its like marriage – first individuals mature by themselves and then they come together in a union. We must first mend what is broken in our own local contexts. Africa needs good, honest leadership and governments. What Africa does not need are killers in all their manifold disguises. No, I do not want Gadaffi as a leader!

**ES:** So how do we address these issues? How do we challenge these abuses of leadership?

**SM:** Writers and musicians must address these issues in our creative work, but politicians need to follow this advice, listen to the critique that arts and culture offer them. But these politicians, they don’t read. We, the general populace, need to force them to read – we must write cinema, theatre and music. If Steve Biko could conscientise a nation on Black Consciousness, we can do it as a real true form of African Renaissance, a rebirth of tradition that has been sifted, cleaned of what is not necessary any longer. But we do need to fetch the good of traditions that we left behind in our haste to be ‘civilized’. Now is the time for Africa to be truly African through critical self-examination, self-healing, to a wholeness that we can hold up. We want African nations that hold all of its citizens dear – a child that is safe within a family in all its diverse forms, where adults are shepherding them, nurturing them, from childhood to adulthood. It is not enough, for example to snip off the foreskin of a young boy and then claim that he is a man<sup>2</sup>. We need these rites of passage to be accompanied by teaching him the values, attitudes of



respect for himself, for the women in his life, for the environment. These days we snip off the foreskin and he comes back worse than before – treating women badly, disrespecting himself and his family. Those new clothes he wears have become the standard; not the values that he should have been taught. He still needs to become someone who knows responsibility; who needs to learn self-respect; to respect and protect those weaker than he is, to respect women and the environment. If you respect yourself, then you will respect others because you will see yourself in others. Wholeness starts with the self and radiates outwards. This self-respect is all about the wholeness of healing and the wholesomeness of being. In the past, the time of seclusion was watched over by a man of stature in the community. Now for some, initiation is about a license to self-destruction. Now only those men who earn wages are respected.

ES: How, do you think this lack of respect is linked to the abuse of women?

SM: The abuse of women is linked to our broken-ness, our de-basedness. I don't know why we thought that just because we could vote in 1994, the de-basedness would vanish. The psychological wounding of racism and of the accompanying sexism will take a long time to heal. But we have to begin that journey.

ES: I know that one of your passions is making books more accessible to South Africans through publication in many of the indigenous languages. Tell us more about this.

SM: To translate a book means writing another. The publishers here have made small noises about translation. I have applied to the National Arts Council and the Heritage Foundation of South Africa to translate *Beauty's Gift* into isiXhosa because the survival of indigenous languages is close to my heart. I am also looking for a film producer – the film script based on the book is completed. But the film must create a buzz around books and creativity. A film based upon *Beauty's Gift* can also be a part of the 2010 Soccer World Cup. The film's message can encourage us to test, protect, love, survive and don't kill. Not just about sex. We can communicate a message that being intimate with each other does not just imply the physical side of things, but the other, richer, more nuanced, nurturing aspects of relationships too.

ES: Tell us about the project you started to nurture new writers.

SM: I began the writers group in Langa, Cape Town in about 2006, to nurture new writers, most of whom are women, to tell their stories. There was the odd man, but we did not turn him away. Our first book of short stories, entitled

“*Umthi agmnye unentlaka yawo*” (Every tree bears its own resin/fruit) was published in 2007. One of the women, Mrs Memani, who is nearly eighty years old, will have her first novel published by Oxford University Press later this year. She said to me that she always wanted to write; she would start something, but would never complete it. She has never even written a letter to the newspaper in the past, and now she is a published writer! We will also be publishing at least five children’s books in this group with publishers Room to Read and Maskew Miller. I have also launched a series of school readers in isiXhosa, for children in the various school-age categories, built around ordinary, everyday characters that they can relate to. Hopefully, this project will continue to nurture many new writers in indigenous languages.

E.S.: Thank you Sindiwe for this time and for sharing your insights on the importance of women’s writing with us.

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## Endnotes

1. The area on the periphery of Cape Town city centre and southern suburbs, where all black people who resided in the inner city, were forcibly moved to during Apartheid.
2. Sindiwe is referring to the rites of passage to manhood amongst the Xhosa-speaking peoples of South Africa. During this process, adolescent men, usually in the late teens or early twenties, are expected to undergo the rites of seclusion in the wilderness, accompanied by circumcision and then followed by a triumphal re-entry to society as a man. The young men are provided with a new set of clothes associated with their adult statuses and expected to keep the company of men only.

# Review

Salma Ismail

*Sangtin* writers and Nagar, R. 2006. *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

The stories in this book will agitate your heart and energise your intellect, and stimulate and open up your imagination to the possibilities of women's agency and endurance. The book was first published in Hindi as *Sangtin Yatra* (a journey of solidarity, reciprocity and of enduring friendship). The English version *Playing with Fire* appeared as a response in defence of the first book. *Sangtin Yatra* gives us hope that women can move from individual empowerment to form a collective countervailing power bloc. In the Foreword, Chandra Talpade Mohanty captures the theme and spirit of the book. She acknowledges the book as a gift 'which enacts and theorises experience, storytelling and memory work as central in the production of knowledge and resistance'.

*Playing with Fire* was conceived and researched by nine women<sup>1</sup> but portrays the lives of seven village-level activists from diverse castes and religions. The seven activists are: Anupamlata, Ramsheela, Reshma Ansari, Shashi Vaish, Shashibala, Surbala and Vibha Bajpayee. These women have worked in seventy villages in the Sitapur District in rural India. The women work for the Nari Samata Yojana – a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) which seeks to empower rural women of the Dalit castes (lowest castes). Eight of the women started an independent organisation, Sangtin, that befriends poor rural women.

## What the book offers

This is one of the few intimate books in the development and gender field that presents the stories and perspectives of village-level fieldworkers. Very often fieldworkers do not get to tell their own stories as the seven women reflect, 'so often we have asked other women to share their personal stories

but no one has ever asked us to tell our own' (2006: 15). It is in these personal and collective journeys that we are given intricate and in-depth pictures of the power structures in the Indian family, which 'are often difficult to observe and record', and as another fieldworker writes, 'many fieldworkers are unable to effect change in their own homes and quietly endure family violence – but outside the home in a collective and in the community they are towers of strength' (Krishanmurty, 1999: 118). These are the stories that often feminist researchers or even activists hesitate to intervene in, the stories of individual oppression in the family. The reflective stories tell how women negotiate these multiple oppressions and strategically challenge them. The collective stories become a 'chorus' as they inform us how their personal consciousness developed and changed. The vivid and compelling stories tell us how personal issues get intertwined with the political and social and rescue that long forgotten feminist slogan that the 'personal is political'.

Their autobiographical journey done through collective writing and reflection is underpinned by the women's dreams, starting from children through to youth to marriage, to becoming mothers and then facing the world of work. Throughout their journey, they question and challenge power and their life stories show how working and learning result in changing people's lives and that learning can be subversive. The book also gives us insights into how NGOs operate in rural India and questions assumptions about poor women's oppression. The women argue that NGOs should work with all women as women from all castes and classes suffer different forms of oppressions and also have prejudices that require critical questioning.

## Content

The stories offer us analyses into how the different layers of the social unit oppress women; first at the unit of family life; then at the community level and then the wider social and global level. Their reflections illustrate how people imbibe the dominant ideologies that imprison women and illustrate how the different oppressions are interconnected and that it is difficult to tackle one oppression at a time. The women write that each social unit is filled 'with poisons of casteism, classism, communism, and sexism' and 'how these blend into one another [...] that their bitterness remains intact on our tongues even after all these years' (2006: 16).

Their journey takes the reader through the sufferings that many Indian women endure. It is called 'dukh' in the Indian language and is often

considered as the 'tragedy of womanhood' in India (Krishnamurty, 1999: 115). Some of the biggest tragedies or burdens are often associated with respectability of families, clans and communities which include demands for dowry, purdah, forced marriages and humiliations such as those encountered by women without husbands. These burdens are carried by women since childhood and are seldom escaped. I quote some of these heart-wrenching reflections: 'we are so intertwined in the grief of not realising our dreams that we fail to identify the flashes of happiness'. These were locked, but the collective writing of the journal has opened up issues and allowed for more analytical discussions to fight battles against oppressions and find the desired notes to 'sing and scream' (2006: 67).

## Methodology

The reflective method of journal writing is transformative as women write their biographies in a dynamic way to 'convey the idea that human beings are active agents in making meaning of their lives rather than being singly determined by historical and social factors' (Merrill and West, 2009: 4). The book tells us and opens the spaces that feminist research has for such a long time wanted to record – the way people give meaning and create their world in the family, community and in the wider world. The collective methodology of writing, reflecting, of producing knowledge using its starting point as women's lives, the accountable and reciprocal nature of the writing and disseminating the research is set out in the introduction and in the first chapter. In addition, in these chapters and in a postscript, the writers detail the challenges presented when their parent NGO tried to silence them and claim ownership of their voices. In these chapters, we are given some insights into how NGO's reinforce class, caste and power hierarchies. It is laudable that this project carried through all the necessary steps of transformative feminist research as so often we are tempted to skip a few steps on the way either for logistical or egotistical reasons.

The strength of the book is in the collective methodology of writing and reflecting, and the wonderful prose makes your heart really want to sing or cry depending on the passage. The book is very compelling and the reader is under the spell of the journey of emancipation and every instance of recollection, of the release from the burden of their socialisation, from class and casteism, is not so much felt as a release of a structure or even a category, but something that happens in human relationships. The biographies show us how

actively they “learn” their world and their place in it as well as how they have challenged centuries old rules.

## Conclusion

In the spirit of *Sangtin Yatra* (of enduring friendship), I believe that all development workers, adult educators, gender activists and field workers would welcome and salute this book from rural India. In South Africa, we have similar stories and as women in rural South Africa say, ‘you have lit the fire now bring the fuel’. We need to hear more voices of women in development contexts to keep the fire burning and to build on the collective spirit of the *Sangtin* writers. The book is testimony to the critical and powerful role that reflection on our life journeys can play in overcoming poverty, the reflections will ring true for many women who tirelessly and courageously try and follow their dreams.

## Endnotes

1. The nine women include the seven village-level women activists, Richa Nagar who was the only English speaker and did the actual writing, and Richa Singh who was the co-ordinator of the Nari Somata Yojana Project (NSY) and one of the founders of the Sangtin organisation.

# Review: Calling for feminist solidarity, vigilance and accountability in the fight against gender inequality in contemporary South Africa

Relebohile Moletsane

Ruiters, G. (ed.) 2008. *Gender Activism: Perspectives on the South African Transition, Institutional Culture and Everyday Life*. Grahamstown: Rhodes University Institute of Social and Economic Research.

The fact that South Africa boasts one of the most progressive constitutions in the world and that the post-Apartheid policy environment is geared towards enabling a socio-political environment that is governed by principles of equality and social justice for all, has almost become a cliché. Yet, the country is also notoriously known as the crime capital of the world, particularly as one of the most unequal (in terms of race, class and gender) and the most violent for women and girls. Many scholars and activists have concluded that the situation has reached crisis and epidemic proportions and in response, have written and lobbied government and other concerned agencies, groups and individuals to develop and implement ameliorative interventions. However, the crisis shows very little or no sign of abating. Why?

The essays in the edited volume reviewed here: *Gender Activism: Perspectives on the South African transition, institutional culture and everyday life* not only identify the reasons for this crisis, but also develop ideas for ameliorative interventions informed by gender activism. The essays seem to suggest that this contemporary crisis (or crises) that South Africa is grappling with requires a total revolution if it is to be adequately addressed. The book, divided into four parts, is a collection of papers from proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> Rosa Luxemburg seminar held at Rhodes University in 2008. The seminar brought together academics and activists to “share and compare local and international experiences of various sites of women’s oppression...” (p.2).

The first part of the book locates the feminist (and Marxist) debates on South African women's struggles in a global context. Depressingly, the contributors seem to conclude that when it comes to women's oppression, the struggles have remained the same over time and geographical space, suggesting that decades of gender and feminist activism have not succeeded in addressing them. The highlight of this section seems to be the underlying question: what can women in South Africa (and elsewhere) learn from exploring the contributions of historical feminist champions such as Rosa Luxemburg (the seminar being named in her honour and memory)?

The second part of the book contains contributions that explore women's rights in post-Apartheid South Africa, highlighting the mismatch between the policy framework and the realities of women brutalised by, among others, gender inequality, gender-based and sexual violence, HIV and AIDS, and poverty. On one hand, the essays in the volume acknowledge some of the major strides that women in South Africa and elsewhere have made, particularly in the public sphere (for example, through significant increases in representation in elected political office). On the other, they unanimously lament the continuing struggles women confront in the social and private sphere (in the family), where they continue to be violated through sexual violence, sexual harassment and marginalisation. As such, they are not able to access and benefit from the rights they are guaranteed in the country's constitution. In particular, the essays identify several battles feminists still have to fight, some old, and others new. To illustrate this point, firstly, contributors such as de Nobrega (pp. 72-97) refer to the democratisation of the public sphere, while the private sphere (family in particular) remains neglected, particularly in terms of gender equality. This, they argue, results from programming such as gender mainstreaming and affirmative action, which is often interpreted as simply requiring an increase in the number of women (in parliament, in employment) without significantly changing the institutional cultures within which they have to work or the power relations between men and women within these, as well as within communities and families.

Secondly, the book highlights the continuing policing of women's bodies within communities and families using culture and religion (and therefore, morality), and the resultant gender-based violence against women (and gay and lesbian groups). For example, evidence from media and research reports suggests that culture and tradition inform the ways in which an unprecedented number of individuals and groups construct and perform their identities. As



Magwaza (2006: 2) warns, culture is often “superimposed on many aspects of society, particularly those that deal with [girls’ and] women’s rights [and sexuality]”. It is through such notions of culture and religion that society (men and boys, and women) are able to excuse, justify and condone the violation of women in families and communities.

The third part of the book focuses on women in the workplace and bemoans the precarious working conditions which they face (e.g. in farms, as sex workers, domestic workers, in education, health and even public office). In particular, this section highlights the intersectionality of race, class and gender and points to the ways in which these interact to impact negatively on the lives of women in the workplace as well as of those kept outside by gender inequality and its associated gender-based violence.

The fourth section of the book explores the representation of women and girls in the media. The essays in this area identify the constructions of gender in the public sphere (e.g. women and men and girls and boys in the media), especially the constructions of women and girls as lacking agency and in need of guidance (including punishment) from men and boys, and of boys and men as capable and naturally able to provide it.

The strength of the book lies mainly in the diversity and depth (of intellectual activism) among the various local and international essay contributors informed by feminist and Marxist theories and drawing on empirical, policy and personal/individual evidence to celebrate the strides made in women’s struggles and to highlight the many miles we still have to travel to reach true gender equality. These include, among others, local and international feminists such as Jacklyn Cock, Desiree Lewis, Wendy Isaack, Nomafrench Mboho, Elaine Salo, Jeanne Prinsloo and Sara Rein. It is heartening to see a collection of essays that respond to the criticism of academia and academic institutions as ivory towers oblivious to the needs of ordinary people (women) and often paralysed by inaction when it comes to addressing such needs (Moletsane and Lesko, 2004). In fact, this book is testimony to the power of academics and activists coming together to exchange ideas and ideals about developing interventions aimed at addressing the continuing struggles women and girls face in our society. From asking us to reflect on the contributions of feminist champions from bygone eras, to imploring us to join in feminist solidarity (for example, Desiree Lewis) and to speak in one radical voice so as to transform “private patriarchies” (de Nobrega, citing Gouws, 2005), the essays motivate feminists and others concerned with gender equality to stand

up and act on behalf of women and girls. However, the contributors also warn that such activism cannot be informed by business as usual and instead, requires feminist vigilance to challenge the insidious nature of what Nadia Sanger refers to as 'heteropatriarchy'. Such vigilance includes holding the state accountable for poor service delivery that impacts negatively on families and communities, particularly on women, and for its failure to implement policies meant to ensure the human rights of women in society, including the right to safety, the right to health, and the right to equality. It involves holding each other (as feminist scholars and activists) accountable to the women and girls we speak and act on behalf of and together with, so that we can speak in solidarity with the radical voice the contributors in this collection are calling for. The fruits of such solidarity, vigilance and accountability will only be seen when our voices are no longer conspicuously muted when one of us is raped and violated and the perpetrator is never punished; when we hold to account those of us who burn underwear and shout violent and sexist slogans in protest against one of the few women who are brave enough to take their cases in front of a judge.

## References

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## Contributors

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**Lynsey Bourke** is currently completing her MPhil in Criminal Justice at the University of Cape Town. Her current research interests include policing of public violence, migration, gender and peacekeeping.

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**Nixon Chisonga** worked as a researcher specialising in social and economic policy at the National Institute of Public Administration in Zambia for a number of years, working closely with local and international NGOs and public service organisations. He is now pursuing post-graduate study at the University of Cape Town with research interests in issues of gender, housing and HIV/AIDS.

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**Ann Schlyter** is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Global Gender Studies, University of Gothenburg. Once trained as an architect, she has for many years worked through gender studies on housing and urbanisation in Africa.

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**Salma Ismail** is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Cape Town. She convenes and teaches both undergraduate and post-graduate programmes in Adult Education. Her doctoral research focussed on poor women's learning in a housing social movement. Salma's work in academic staff development has been in diversity, equity research and institutional transformation.



## Call for contributions: *Feminist Africa* 14 and 15

The theme for *Feminist Africa* 14 and 15 proposes a focus on issues of sexual and reproductive rights, with special interests in three main areas. The first has to do with the ways in which the term “sexual and reproductive rights” has developed within African contexts, and how vital areas of work (such as the on-going battles on violence against women or questions of the right to termination of pregnancy) have been both strengthened and – in some cases – threatened by new formulations of violence and social justice. The tensions between different constituencies (‘rape survivors’, ‘men’, ‘LGBTI groups’, ‘MSM’, ‘teenage mothers’, ‘sex workers’) deserve complex theorisation, within African contexts, and we hope to explore this as one area of concern for *Feminist Africa* 14 and 15.

The second area of interest involves notions of pleasure, agency, innovation and exploration within the terrain of sexuality. This area arises from the need to address an overwhelming sense that African contexts involve only ‘victims’ within the sexual and reproductive zone, and that work around ‘sexual and reproductive rights’ is a matter only of addressing discriminations and prohibition. This second area of interest will lead *Feminist Africa* to include considerations of film, media, music, ICTS and text (fiction, poetry and drama) as well as to explore the complex meanings of ‘pleasure’ and their implications for a feminist theory of sexualities.

The third area of interest involves the need to explore African-based engagements with sexual and reproductive rights with those from the global South. *Feminist Africa* 14 and 15 will include at least one feature article written by Latin American writers, seeking to build linkages between work done through feminist lenses in African contexts and that done within Argentina, Chile and Mexico. There are powerful similarities between some Latin American and some African countries, and alliances between feminist writers within the South can strengthen our perspectives in interesting ways.

*Feminist Africa* 14 and 15 will also include a focus on NGO (and other) work where strategies for advocacy and activism around sexual and

reproductive rights drive projects and programmes. Here, we will be especially interested in writing that illuminates recent achievements and innovative strategies.

Pieces for consideration (articles, profiles, book reviews, proposals for 'In Conversations') should be sent to [agi-feministafrica@uct.ac.za](mailto:agi-feministafrica@uct.ac.za) by the end of March 2010.

All pieces sent will be acknowledged.